Socio-Political Perspective of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the Emergence of the Indian Republic

Dr. Harsh Vardhan

Assistant Professor Department of Sociology S.N. Sinha College,Jehanabad, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

*****Corresponding author:** Dr. Harsh Vardhan

Assistant Professor Department of Sociology S.N. Sinha College,Jehanabad, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

Abstract

India is a democratic country and she is a result of rigorous efforts of many leaders who fought not only for her independence but also for making her a place where everyone has equal rights of existence. Mahatama Gandhi and Dr. BhimRao Ambedkar are two towering figures in this respect whose ideas shaped modern India. Mahatma Gandhi fought not only for free India but also for swaraj through his ideas of non- violence and trusteeship. where Dr. Ambedkar fought for emancipation of underprivileged classes of the country. They both are visionary of their time and space and advocated to make Indian society free from social evils. Before independence, India as society was divided in many segments and there were many atrocities among them. Caste and gender was some of them and life of a person was guided by age old traditions which were very much exploitative for many groups in the society. Mahatama Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar tried to address these issues not only by their writings but also by their actions. Based on available literature this paper tries to understand that what are the views of these two socio-political thinkers with reference to the existing structure and what different perspective for the future of India envisaged by both of the thinkers so that the country can become a place where everyone live with dignity and freedom.

Keywords: Gandhi, Ambedkar, National integration, Dalit empowerment, Nation building.

Introduction

India in her current shape is the result of the dreams of many great men, martyrs, thinkers, and other individuals who wanted to see India as a symbol of socio-cultural tolerance on the world stage. India has been the birthplace of some of the world's oldest civilizations. The Harappan civilization, the arrival of the Aryans, the Vedic civilization, the Mauryas, Guptas, Kanishka, Harshavardhana, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, the Portuguese, and the British rulers, among others, have contributed to the mixed

cultures that have established India as a cultural melting pot. Many races have made their home here, and the present Indian population is a blend of these races. This socio-cultural and racial mix has given rise to India's composite culture, which presents a unique example in itself. Many great men dedicated their lives to nurturing this composite culture and preserving its existence, and they worked tirelessly throughout their lives to maintain this unique characteristic of India. The contribution of two great men, Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, to the formation of present-day Indian society, which can also be called the Indian republic from a political perspective, is unparalleled. These two socio-political thinkers have made a unique contribution to the making of India. From the emergence of the Indian republic to the present, the decisive influence of their socio-political philosophies can also be seen in their respective approaches.

Looking at the history of India, it can be easily inferred that its historical trajectory has undergone numerous transformations. Many external cultures arrived in India and became integrated into its fabric. Under their influence, India was sometimes united and sometimes fragmented. Emperor Ashoka gave India a unified form, but over time it fragmented again. Even in ancient India, we find descriptions of sixteen mahajanapadas (great kingdoms). Later, we can see how India was divided into numerous princely states and British-ruled territories. Through the efforts of the Congress party and later Gandhi, a new India began to emerge, one that awakened as a nation in its political ideology. Gandhi traveled throughout India and recognized the essence of Indianness among the Indian people, and it was for this reason that he was able to unite India. Ambedkar, on the other hand, took the reins of the marginalized masses in this composite culture of India and instilled in them the belief that India's independence was not limited to only a few privileged classes, but that they too were equal partners. He showed the downtrodden, suffering from the scourge of the caste system, a glimmer of hope and dignity. He fought for the upliftment of the dalits throughout his life. He ensured the participation of all in the Indian republic, irrespective of religion, caste, language, gender, region, etc. His sense of nationalism envisioned the participation of every single person. They advocated for freedom and equality for all, which culminated in the form of the Indian Constitution.

Before understanding the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar's political philosophy in the rise of the Indian republic, it is essential to understand India itself, and in this regard, it becomes relevant to consider these lines by Jawaharlal Nehru: "It is possible that we may not fully understand the great forces at work in the world, but we must at least understand what India is and how this nation has developed its composite personality, what are the various aspects of its personality, and where its strong unity lies. No community living in India can claim a monopoly over the entire mind and thought of India. Countrymen from every part has contributed to shape India as one can see today. If we do not understand this fundamental point, we will be unable to understand India. And if we cannot understand India, then all our feelings, thoughts, and actions will remain incomplete, and we will not be able to render any service to the country that is substantial and effective."(Dinkar 2016)

As mentioned above, it is clear that India is built on diversity, where every individual or group has sense of existence, and this is also strength of this nation. This diversity is where the unity and social culture of India lie. Against this backdrop, it is relevant to understand the political philosophies of Gandhi and Ambedkar, which laid the foundation for a strong republic in India.

I.

Mahatma Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, Gujarat. His ancestors belonged to the Vaishya caste, but instead of engaging in business, they served in various positions such as Diwan in the princely states. In his autobiography, Gandhi recounts that in his childhood, he had the opportunity to read Hindu religious texts from his father's library and also became acquainted with other major religions of India. It was during this time that he was influenced by the Jain philosophy of non-violence. After studying law in England, he returned to India and, after practicing law for a short period, went to South Africa. The events in South Africa left a profound impact on his life, and it was there that Gandhi's life of struggle based on truth and non-violence began. After returning from Africa, Gandhi traveled throughout India, understanding its culture, and after three local experiments, he emerged as a leader. Through the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement, he organized the entire nation, which ultimately became the main reason for India's independence and the rise of the republic in India. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence, Swaraj, Satyagraha, anarchism, ideal governance, etc., is significant from the perspective of political philosophy, which can be briefly reviewed. Truth was the supreme principle for Mahatma Gandhi. In Young India, he said, "What is truth? It is a difficult question, but for myself, I have resolved it by saying that whatever your conscience tells you is truth. I want to tell you with true humility that a person who is not overflowing with humility cannot attain truth. If you want to swim in the ocean of truth, you must completely efface your own existence."(Prabhu & Rao 2011) In another article in Young India, he writes, "Only he can have a direct vision of the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth who can love the humblest of creatures as much as he loves himself." (Prabhu & Rao 2011) Gandhi accepted truth as god and for the attainment of truth, he adopted the path of non-violence. In yet another article in Young India, he says, "I know only one path – the path of non-violence. The path of violence is against my nature." (Prabhu & Rao 2011) According to Gandhi, non-violence is the law of humanity, and it is far greater and superior to brute force. For this, one must have faith in God. Non-violence completely protects human dignity and self-respect. Furthermore, individuals and nations following the path of non-violence should be prepared to sacrifice everything except their honor. Gandhi did not consider Buddhism and Jainism separate from Hinduism and considered the expression of non-violence in Hinduism superior to that in other religions.

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on truth and non-violence are not only for the individual but he also advocated them at the collective level. He attempted to build a national character based on the ideas of truth and non-violence. Through his principle of non-violence, he attempted to awaken the entire nation. For the establishment of a republic in India, it is essential that it incorporates tolerance. This tolerance is only possible through non-violence. Can a republic based on falsehood and violence be imagined? Clearly, the answer is "no," because the foundation of the republic's edifice can only be laid on the spirit of tolerance. Another example of this tolerance can be seen in Satyagraha. Gandhi also called Satyagraha "passive resistance," and he believed it could melt even the hardest of hearts. According to him, it is not a weapon of the weak. It requires

more courage than physical resistance. He cited the examples of Jesus Christ, Daniel, Latimer, and Socrates, who best represented this principle. Socrates himself willingly accepted the death penalty imposed by the conspiracies of the Sophists in ancient Greece. He too only sought to establish the truth. In Young India, Gandhi wrote about Satyagraha: "Satyagraha does not seek to humiliate or intimidate the unjust. Its sole purpose is to persuade and convince the mind and heart of the opponent with love, thereby bringing about a change of heart." (Prabhu & Rao 2011) The rise of the Indian republic benefited from Satyagraha not only ideologically but also practically. Firstly, it tested the impact of Gandhi's concept of non-violence on the Indian psyche, and secondly, it brought together people from various classes and castes. Beyond religion, caste, and gender, the only goal of the satyagrahis was the attainment of freedom. But as an unintended consequence, it bridged the centuries-old divisions among the people of India. It also attempted to reduce the old caste-based distances and gave rise to an ideology that helped secure a just place for everyone in the Indian republic.

The idea of Mahatma Gandhi's 'Swaraj' as an expression of nationalism is also significant. In the context of India's freedom movement and democratic political process, this idea emerged as a means of social leveling. The principle of Swaraj provided a dynamism to the Indian psyche despite its social, political, and cultural diversity. Gandhi's vision of swaraj reflects the attempt to unite the then fragmented Indian society into a single nation. It's important features include national independence, individual political freedom, individual economic freedom, and individual spiritual freedom. Explaining the individual spiritual freedom of swaraj, Ramchandra Gandhi (1984) said that, "Gandhi's swaraj is a reaffirmation of the advaita (non-dualism) of philosophy. It is a state where the 'self' rules, and in truth, this self is based on the principle that you and I are not separate from each other." In this sense, in Gandhi's swaraj, all Indians are one. It is a grave mistake to view Gandhi's swaraj solely from a political perspective because its spiritual significance is immense. Imagine a swaraj where the ruler and the ruled are integrated into each other, or rather, all individuals are integrated into one another; there would be a wonderful confluence of social solidarity and tolerance. To achieve political and economic swaraj, Gandhi advocated for the decentralization of power and envisioned an India that is not limited to just its cities. He asked for understanding. He wanted to improve the condition of villages in India so that social evils could be eradicated.

Gandhi also envisioned an ideal state system in India. Although, in his pure ideological form, he was an anarchist and viewed the state as an evil. He always emphasized the purity of means and ends and sought this in the system of governance as well. He described three essential conditions for an ideal state system: the all-round development of the people, a government based on non-violence and love, and a government free from class exploitation. Gandhi's ideas have influenced the development of the Indian republic.

In fact, the Indian republic, in its present form, is the product of the ideas of many individuals such as Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Rajagopalachari, Maulana Azad, etc. The influence of Gandhi's ideas is clearly visible among them. Through truth and non-violence, Gandhi revived India's ancient tradition. At the same time, through Satyagraha, Swaraj, and the ideal state system, he advocated for human welfare. He had already determined the form of the Indian republic with his idea of "reaching the benefits of resources to the last person in the line." According to him, the cooperation of all sections of society was necessary for the all-round development of the nation, and for this reason, he continuously strived for the upliftment of the particularly neglected sections of society.

II.

Many people have worked for the upliftment of the untouchable castes in India. Jyotiba Phule, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar), Bhimrao Ambedkar, etc., are some of the prominent leaders who strived for the upliftment of the lower castes. Among all of them, Ambedkar emerged as a universally accepted leader of dalit upliftment, accepted by the people of almost all of India.

Bhimrao Ambedkar was born in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh, on April 14, 1891. He was the youngest of his father's fourteen children. Ambedkar's childhood name was 'Bhima Ramji Ambavadekar'. In honor of a teacher named Ambedkar at his school, he adopted the name Ambedkar and remained grateful to him throughout his life. Due to being born into the Mahar caste, he faced disrespect at every stage of his life. He grew up enduring the sting of untouchability. Being forced off a train on the way to Goregaon, being kept at a distance by other students at school, his teachers refusing to check his notebooks, barbers refusing to cut his hair, and many other such incidents are found in his life, which illustrate the ill effects of the caste system on him. In college in Bombay, Ambedkar faced slightly less discrimination based on caste, but those who knew about his background still kept their distance. Despite these adverse circumstances, Ambedkar completed his undergraduate studies. Later, he went to Columbia University for higher studies. The egalitarian environment of the university brought such circumstances which elevated his intellectual thoughts to new heights. In 1916, Ambedkar enrolled at the London School of Economics and Political Science to study law and completed his studies despite adverse circumstances. Following this, Ambedkar emerged as a leader of the untouchables in India. The influence of three great men on his ideas has been acknowledged. Ambedkar considered three great men as his sources of inspiration: the first was Kabir, the second Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and the third was Mahatma Buddha. Kabir provided him with devotion, Jyotiba Phule inspired him to oppose Brahmanism, and from Buddha, he received the nectar that quenched his intellectual and philosophical thirst. (Kuber 2013) Ambedkar skillfully utilized the teachings he received from these three great men in his life. Despite facing all adverse circumstances, he is known in India as a renowned constitutional expert, a brilliant scholar, and a legal expert with profound knowledge of law. Besides this, he is also recognized as a universally accepted leader of the underprivileged classes. Through his work in India, he not only secured the rightful rights of the underprivileged classes who had been deprived for centuries but also played a significant role in establishing the shape of the present republic of India.

Based on his early bitter experiences with the caste system, he resolved to uplift the untouchables. He was a harsh critic of Hinduism and he vehemently opposed the caste system in Indian society. It is noteworthy that the success of the Indian Republic could not be ensured until the participation of all was guaranteed, and Ambedkar always strived for this. Dr. Ambedkar led numerous movements aimed at improving the social status of hindu dalits and untouchables, which further enhanced his reputation as a leader of dalit consciousness. It is often said that the place Gandhi holds in

national politics, Dr. Ambedkar holds in dalit movements. He attempted to narrate the history of the shudras through several books, such as "Who Were the Shudras?" and "The Untouchables: Who Were They? and Why They Became Untouchables". He struck at the very ideological foundation of the Hindu social system and advocated for fundamental changes within it. He considered the Hindu scriptures to be the root cause of the Hindu caste system, and for this reason, he symbolically protested against this system by burning the Manusmriti, which advocated inequality. It is important to note that Dr. Ambedkar's political life revolved around the development of dalit consciousness, and perhaps this is why many scholars and thinkers want to confine him to dalit politics. This is not truly doing justice to Ambedkar. Historically, India's caste-based divisive system never allowed the development of a unified national identity. Foreign invasions continued, and India's divided population remained enslaved. Dr. Ambedkar wanted to change this system of caste division and emphasized the unity of India. He was opposed to the evils prevalent in the hindu social system, not to India itself. For whom was he fighting in the Poona Pact? If viewed in a narrow sense, he would appear to be fighting for the dalit castes, but if viewed from a broader perspective, it can be seen that his fight was for the future of the Indian republic. Is it wrong to ensure the participation in democracy of a particular group that has been neglected for centuries? And if there is no participation from everyone, then what kind of democracy is it? Therefore, understanding Ambedkar requires a new and broader perspective. Dr. Ambedkar's political ideas on equality, liberty, and democracy are significant. Although the scope of his entire political philosophy is quite broad, all authors tend to limit themselves when interpreting his ideas. Presenting his views on equality, he states that, "A person suffering from inequality will destroy this political democracy which this constituent assembly has painstakingly created." (Singh 2009) He was a supporter not only of political equality but also of social and economic equality. He wanted to ensure liberty through individual rights. Ambedkar believed that the spirit of liberty, equality, and fraternity alone could ensure individual freedom. Regarding the rights that ensure freedom, he said, "Rights are protected not by law but by the moral conscience of society. If the moral conscience of society recognizes the rights, then the rights are secure. But if society opposes fundamental rights, then no law, parliament, or judiciary can guarantee their protection." (Chakraborty & Pandey 2009) Dr. Ambedkar was a jurist and understood the importance of fundamental rights in individual liberty. This is why he included the provision for fundamental rights in the Constitution of India. This ultimately contributed to the development of the Indian Republic.

Regarding democracy, Dr. Ambedkar believed in constitutional democracy. He was a supporter of economic and social democracy along with political democracy. In this, he accepted democracy as a way of life and interpreted it in terms of equality, liberty, and fraternity. He did not consider these three sentiments separately and suggested that the absence of any one of them renders the others meaningless. Equality is incomplete without liberty, and both are incomplete without fraternity. They believe that all individuals are equal before constitutional law and that everyone should receive equal protection under the law. Their democratic ideology emphasizes inherent equality, which is contrary to the hierarchical system of the Hindu caste ideology.

Dr. Ambedkar's views on gender inequality are also commendable. He was a supporter of women's empowerment and was saddened by the low status of women. This is why he drafted the 'Hindu Code Bill'. This bill was opposed by proponents of traditional culture, and it was due to this opposition that Dr. Ambedkar resigned from his position as law minister. The provision in the Indian Constitution prohibiting gender-based discrimination is also his contribution. Dr. Ambedkar's role in the rise of the Indian Republic appears crucial. His political philosophy ensured a place for all sections of society. He is often perceived as an opponent of the hindu upper castes, but it is worth considering that his demand was simply for the upper castes to grant appropriate rights to the lower castes. Should a particular class have dominance over India's resources? Is not the ancient Indian culture, which preaches the message of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), harming a particular section of its own people? In this context, Swami Vivekananda's statement, made in Chicago while attending the parliament of religions, is also relevant: "When I look at the Indian religion in the context of brotherhood, I feel there is no more beautiful example, but when I see my countrymen crushing their own brothers by stepping on their necks, I feel there is no religion more despicable." (Rolland 2011) Thus, Vivekananda was also saddened by the contradictory words and actions of the Indian Hindu religion.

III.

The contributions of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar's political philosophies were absolutely crucial in shaping the true character of the Indian Republic, and both shared the same goal of nation-building. However, these two thinkers also had several disagreements. Gandhi's vision of Swaraj and Sarvodaya reflects his concern for the Dalits. He wanted the upliftment of the untouchables and social-economic development of underprivileged class.He sought a solution through inner revolution. In contrast, Ambedkar's ideas reflect an extremist view of Dalit upliftment, which, in reality, does not even consider hinduism a religion. Gandhi was a follower of the sanatana tradition, while Ambedkar advocated for a rational interpretation of this sanatana dharma. However, the ultimate goal of both thinkers was to end untouchability and other evils arising from the caste system within hinduism. But while Gandhi supported a socio-humanitarian approach for the eradication of untouchability and dalit development, Dr. Ambedkar chose political empowerment as the means to achieve this. This was the reason for the differences between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhi. Another reason for the disagreement was Gandhi's disbelief in untouchability and his belief in hinduism and the caste system. He accepted the existence of the caste system for the integrity of Indian hinduism.

During the events leading up to the Poona pact, Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for the untouchables, similar to those granted to Muslims. Many thinkers mistakenly equate this with the Communal award of 1909, which provided for separate electorates for Muslims and threatened national unity. It is important to note here that the 1909 award was imposed by the British, while the 1932 demand was made by the oppressed. The former had the intention of fragmenting the nation, while the latter aimed at securing a place for the dalits in the mainstream politics of the nation. This event not only established Dr. Ambedkar as the foundation of dalit liberation in India but also led to the recognition of them in the mainstream political discourse of India. Despite some fundamental points of conflict between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, such as Gandhi's central concern being the liberation of the nation and Ambedkar's being the liberation of the

Dalits. Gandhi's approach to Dalit upliftment being limited to the abolition of untouchability and Ambedkar's approach being through the attainment of power. Gandhi's advocacy of village self-rule and Ambedkar's opposition to the village system etc. The philosophies of both envision an Indian republic based on equality, liberty, and fraternity. Gandhi accepts the concept of sarvodaya (upliftment of all). Dr. Ambedkar, however, wanted to ensure the upliftment of the downtrodden within Gandhi's concept of sarvodaya. Gandhi envisions advaita (non-duality) in swaraj (self-rule), where there is no distinction between individuals. Dr. Ambedkar wanted to include the untouchables in Gandhi's concept of advaita. Superficially, differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar are apparent, but at a deeper level, their ideas show similarities. The Indian republic appears to be the result of the ideas of these two great men. While Gandhi played a crucial role in its formation before independence, Ambedkar's role in its stability after independence seems decisive.(Singh 2018) In fact, both thinkers have nurtured the Indian republic with their respective ideas.

Conclusion:

It is a strenuous task to document the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar's political philosophies to the Indian republic. The lives of both personalities were simple, but their philosophies were extraordinary. Their importance remains relevant even today. Gandhi is a symbol of truth, non-violence, and peace, while Dr. Ambedkar is a symbol of equality, liberty, and fraternity. For the strength and stability of the present Indian republic, the integration of these ideals into Indian society is essential. Although India gained independence from the British but not from social evils. Casteism, communalism, regionalism, discrimination based on language, criminalization of politics, corruption, and many other problems have begun to erode the very fabric of this country for which many sacrificed their life. It is important to revisit the ideas of these two national figures to make India a place where equity counts. Also there is a need for reflection with a spirit of religious harmony and a sound political perspective. At the same time, it must be ensured that everyone respects and preserves the republic for which Gandhi, Ambedkar and others worked tirelessly.

References:

1. Chakraborty, V. & R.K. Pandey (2009). Modern Indian Political Thought. Sage Publications.
2. Dinkar, R. S. (2016). Sanskriti ke char adhyaya. Lokbharti prakashan.
3. Gandhi, R. (1984). The Swaraj of India. Indian Philosophical Quarterly, XI(4).
4. Kuber, W.N.(2013) Bhimrao Ambedkar. Publications Division.
5. Prabhu, R. K., & Rao, U. R. (2011). Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. National Book Trust.
6. Rolland, Romain (1931). The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel. Advaita Ashrama.
7. Singh, P.N. (2018). Indian Voltaire and Marx: B.R.Ambedkar. Lokbharti Prakashan.
8. Singh, S.B. (2009). Contribution of Ambedkar and Lohia. Aryan Publication.

Bibliography:

1. Chakraborty, V. & R.K. Pandey (2009). Modern Indian Political Thought. Sage Publications.

2. Dinkar, R. S. (2016). Sanskriti ke char adhyaya. Lokbharti prakashan.
3. Gandhi, R. (1984). The Swaraj of India. Indian Philosophical Quarterly, XI(4).
4. Kuber, W.N.(2013) Bhimrao Ambedkar. Publications Division.
5. Prabhu, R. K., & Rao, U. R. (2011). Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. National Book Trust.
6. Rolland, Romain (1931). The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel. Advaita Ashrama.
7. Singh, P.N. (2018). Indian Voltaire and Marx: B.R.Ambedkar. Lokbharti Prakashan.
8. Singh, S.B. (2009). Contribution of Ambedkar and Lohia. Aryan Publication.