

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Nationalism, Freedom and Nation

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Abstract:

The Indian freedom struggle has often been portrayed as a unified movement against British imperialism, starting with the Revolt of 1857 and culminating in independence in 1947. However, the struggle was not a monolith, and different leaders had varying priorities and visions for the nation. While leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Indian National Congress emphasized freedom from British rule as the primary goal, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar approached nationalism and freedom from a broader and more inclusive perspective. For him, the liberation of India could not be meaningful unless it encompassed social and economic justice for the oppressed, particularly the untouchables, who had been systematically marginalized under the caste hierarchy.

Dr. Ambedkar's understanding of nationalism was deeply rooted in liberal democratic principles. He distinguished between "nationality"—a consciousness of kinship—and "nationalism"—the desire for a separate national existence. For Ambedkar, true nationalism was the dynamic aspiration to build a state and cultural home for a united people. Unlike many contemporaries, his conception of freedom was inseparable from equality and justice; political independence alone was insufficient if the social and economic inequalities in Indian society persisted. He believed that the caste spirit and the oppression of the marginalized would undermine India's national unity and democratic stability, making the struggle for freedom incomplete without first addressing these systemic inequities.

This vision of nationalism often brought Dr. Ambedkar into conflict with the mainstream national movement. While the Indian National Congress focused primarily on ousting the British, Ambedkar emphasized the need for social and economic empowerment of the underprivileged. He rejected the notion that political independence would automatically bring equality. He was concerned that in a free India dominated by caste Hindus, political power would remain concentrated in the hands of privileged castes, leaving the depressed classes unprotected. This pragmatic realism informed his decisions, including his willingness to work within the British administration to secure rights for the marginalized, and his participation in the Simon Commission and the Round Table Conferences, even as he faced criticism for being labeled a British stooge.

Ambedkar's work in these positions was not self-serving but aimed at practical reforms. As a member of the Governor-General's Executive Council during 1942–46, he facilitated labor legislation, welfare initiatives, and industrial development projects. His founding of the Independent Labour Party and later the Scheduled Castes Federation reflected his commitment to political empowerment for the underprivileged, as he recognized that freedom and democracy would remain hollow unless all citizens, especially the marginalized, could exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in governance.

His approach to constitutional safeguards and minority rights further highlights his deep nationalistic concern. Ambedkar critiqued proposals like the Cripps Mission and the Cabinet Mission Plan for failing to protect the interests of the depressed classes and minorities, demonstrating that his loyalty to the nation included vigilance against internal oppression as well as foreign domination. Even during the debates in the Constituent Assembly, he insisted that true freedom required not only independence from the British but also justice, equality, and protection for all communities.

Dr. Ambedkar's perspective on India's independence and national unity extended to pragmatic suggestions, such as reorganizing states on linguistic lines while preserving national cohesion, advocating a strong central government, and emphasizing symbolic gestures like a second capital to foster national belonging. Even his conversion to Buddhism in 1956 reflected his careful balancing of personal conscience, social reform, and cultural nationalism, as he chose a religion indigenous to India to avoid alienating the nation.

Finally, his own words in the Constituent Assembly before India became a Republic epitomize his nationalist vision:

"On 26th January 1950, India will be an independent country. What would happen to her independence? Will she maintain her independence or will she lose it again? ... Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? ... We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood."

These reflections reveal a patriot who understood that India's freedom was not merely the end of colonial rule but the beginning of a new responsibility: to build a just, equitable, and united nation. Dr. Ambedkar's nationalism was grounded in realism, liberalism, and compassion for the marginalized, making him one of India's most profound patriots, whose contributions to the country's freedom and constitutional framework deserve full recognition.

Keywords: Nationalism, Freedom, Social, Economic, Inequalities, Political Power, Depressed Classes

Introduction:

The so-called "Sepoy Mutiny" of 1857, also remembered as the First War of Independence, is widely regarded as the opening chapter of India's long struggle for freedom. Yet, it was not the first expression of discontent, for Indian soldiers had already risen in open mutiny against their British officers at Vellore in 1806, in Bengal in 1842, and in Sind in 1844. The Revolt of 1857 was crushed mercilessly, but it compelled the British Crown to take over the administration of India from the East India Company. This transfer of power, however, did little to quell the growing nationalist sentiment. Policies such as the Subsidiary Alliance, the Doctrine of Lapse, the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act, and the Ilbert Bill deepened Indian resentment. Later, Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal (1905) further ignited nationalist passions, paving the way for the rise of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The Congress itself soon gave rise to two distinct streams of leadership—the moderates, represented by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and the extremists, embodied by figures like Subhas Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal.

Within this narrative of the freedom struggle, the role of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has often been overlooked or misunderstood. While his lifelong mission is usually associated with the uplift of the downtrodden, his contributions to India's independence and his patriotism were equally significant. Ambedkar himself repeatedly affirmed his love for his motherland, but his methods and priorities often differed from those of the mainstream nationalist leadership. Consequently, his role in the freedom movement did not receive the recognition it deserved. This study, therefore, seeks to re-examine Dr. Ambedkar's sincerity as a patriot and his distinctive contribution to India's struggle for independence.

Ambedkar's Conception of Nationalism

The Indian freedom struggle was rooted in *liberal democratic principles*, yet few leaders grasped the meaning of nationalism in its truest sense as clearly as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. For him, nationalism was not merely a political slogan but a moral and social ideal anchored in the dignity of individuals and communities. Ambedkar distinguished between two psychological states of the human mind: *nationality* and *nationalism*. Nationality, he explained, was the "consciousness of kind"—an awareness of kinship and shared identity—while nationalism was

“the desire for a separate national existence for those who are bound by this tie of kinship.” In his view, nationalism was thus the dynamic expression of the will to create and sustain a territory that serves as both a political state and a cultural home for the people.

Ambedkar also recognized that nationalism was an inescapable historical reality—a force that could not be eluded or denied. History, he observed, demonstrated that nationalism, whether as an irrational instinct or a potent ideal, had the power to disrupt empires and reshape societies. Yet, unlike many nationalist leaders of his time, Ambedkar insisted that nationalism must be grounded in justice. For him, true nationalism began with resistance to exploitation, whether imposed by foreign rulers or perpetuated internally through caste oppression. This ethical foundation set his conception apart: Ambedkar’s patriotism was inseparable from his struggle against social inequality.

It was precisely this stance that often distanced him from the mainstream freedom movement. While other leaders prioritized political independence from British rule, Ambedkar emphasized that without social and economic emancipation, nationalism would remain hollow. His uncompromising focus on the liberation of the downtrodden meant that he was denied the recognition and fame usually bestowed upon freedom fighters. Nevertheless, his vision of nationalism was profoundly democratic, inclusive, and modern—one that sought not only the end of colonial rule but also the transformation of Indian society itself.

Ambedkar’s Vision of True Freedom

For leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Muslim League, independence primarily meant liberation from British imperialism. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, however, conceived of freedom in far more radical terms. For him, political independence from colonial rule was necessary but insufficient. Real independence required a *complete transformation of India’s social and economic order*. Unless Hindu society became a casteless society, Ambedkar argued, it would never possess the moral or social strength to defend *Swaraj*. Without social reform, political freedom would merely replace foreign domination with domestic oppression, turning *Swaraj* into “only a step towards slavery.”

Ambedkar regarded the caste spirit as a fundamental menace to national unity and a grave obstacle to the growth of genuine nationalism. To secure rights and liberties for the poor and oppressed, he sometimes accepted positions within the British administration during the freedom struggle. This pragmatic choice was frequently misunderstood, earning him severe criticism in the nationalist press and among political leaders, who accused him of opportunism. Yet the truth was that Ambedkar’s acceptance of such posts was never for personal gain; it was a strategic step to fight entrenched social evils and create opportunities for the marginalized. His patriotism and concern for the neglected were never in doubt.

Ambedkar’s commitment to national integration was eloquently expressed in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 4 April 1938, during the debate on the formation of a separate Karnataka Province out of the Madras Presidency. He declared that he would never allow Indian loyalty to be divided by competing allegiances of religion, culture, or language. His vision was unequivocal: Indians must be “Indian first, Indian last, and nothing else but Indians.” For him, true nationalism meant transcending communal identities and fostering a shared sense of belonging that placed the nation above all sectarian divisions.

Ambedkar’s Constitutional Nationalism

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s commitment to national unity was evident in his views on the reorganization of states, the question of language, and the structure of governance. He argued that states should be reorganized on the principle of “*one state, one language*” rather than “*one language, one state*.” This distinction was crucial, for it ensured that linguistic identity would not become the basis for separatism, thereby safeguarding the unity and stability of the Indian nation.

Ambedkar's nationalism was also reflected in his approach to the language question. While he preferred Hindi as the official language of India, he was pragmatic enough to recommend the continuation of English until the nation was ready to fully accept Hindi. For him, language was not merely a medium of communication but an instrument to forge cultural unity. Similarly, his insistence on a *strong central government*—which he incorporated into the Indian Constitution—was rooted in his conviction that only a robust centre could bind together India's diverse linguistic, religious, and cultural communities under a common national identity.

Ambedkar even suggested the idea of a *second capital* for India to foster a stronger sense of belonging among people across regions and to enhance administrative efficiency. Such symbolic gestures, he believed, could nurture national sentiment and consolidate the spirit of unity. These proposals reveal Ambedkar's clear appreciation of the national spirit and his farsightedness in designing institutional mechanisms to strengthen the fabric of Indian nationhood.

Ambedkar's Nationalism in Governance and Labour Reforms

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's deep love for the nation became particularly evident during his tenure as a member of the Governor-General's Executive Council (1942–46). At a time when joining the colonial administration was widely criticized, Ambedkar took this step with a clear sense of purpose: to use his position as an instrument of social transformation. Far from seeking personal power, he used his authority to uplift the Indian masses, especially the working class.

During his tenure, Ambedkar was instrumental in securing the passage of key labour legislation in areas such as workmen's compensation, welfare and social security, housing, health insurance for industrial workers, and the uniformity of labour laws. These measures reflected his unwavering concern for labour welfare and his conviction that social justice was the foundation of true nationalism. He also advanced plans for large-scale multipurpose river projects, including the Damodar Valley Project, which became a model for India's development strategy after independence. For Ambedkar, independence was not merely about political freedom but about ensuring "*good government and a good society*" capable of uplifting all sections of the people.

As Labour Member, Ambedkar also emphasized the need for institutional machinery to address industrial disputes. At the first session of the Plenary Labour Conference in New Delhi (September 1943) and the sixth Tripartite Labour Conference (October 1944), he underlined the importance of dialogue between government, employers, and employees. He argued that labour welfare problems could not be solved without mutual respect, responsibility, and a spirit of give-and-take. His initiatives helped to establish a system of structured negotiation, laying the groundwork for industrial relations in independent India.

Ambedkar's Vision of Labour and Nationalism

At the sixth plenary session of the Tripartite Labour Conference, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar suggested structural reforms to strengthen its functioning. He proposed dividing the agenda into two lists: **List I**, covering general subjects such as terms and conditions of employment, labour legislation, and social security, and **List II**, dealing with labour welfare and the administration of labour laws. This proposal reflected his pragmatic approach to addressing organizational weaknesses and ensuring effective deliberation on labour issues.

Ambedkar's concern for labour rights stood in sharp contrast to the priorities of the national movement led by Gandhiji. While Gandhi mobilized the masses in the Quit India Movement, Ambedkar used his position to secure tangible protections for workers. His understanding of the relationship between labour and nationalism was articulated in a radio broadcast, where he declared: "Labour's creed is internationalism. Labour is interested in nationalism only because the wheels of democracy—such as representative parliaments, responsible executive, constitutional conventions, etc.—work better in a community united by national sentiments. Nationalism to labour is only a means to an end. It is not an end in itself to which labour can agree to sacrifice what it regards as the most essential principles of life."

This perspective underscored his belief that nationalism must serve social justice, not override it. In fact, Ambedkar sought to organize labour independently of mainstream political movements. His founding of the **Independent Labour Party (ILP)** in 1936 was a bold attempt to consolidate workers under one banner to fight simultaneously for economic justice and national freedom. Yet, when the ILP failed to gain significant ground, Ambedkar turned to the **Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF)**, recognizing the entrenched caste barriers that denied lower castes political leadership and influence. The formation of the SCF was both a strategic and symbolic move: it was Ambedkar's acknowledgement that caste realities could not be ignored in India's democracy and that genuine empowerment required confronting social hierarchies directly.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's understanding of nationalism and democracy set him apart from other leaders of the Indian National Movement. Guided by the principles of true liberalism, he saw nationalism not merely as the struggle for political freedom, but as *"not only the liberation of every slave country but also the freedom for all subjects and subjugated masses even in free countries."* His conception of democracy was equally expansive: *"A form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed."* For Ambedkar, political democracy could only be meaningful if social and economic democracy coexisted, forming the tissues and fiber of political democracy. The stronger these foundations, the more resilient the nation. Having experienced the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination, he considered equality the essence of democracy. Therefore, his priority was to address social and economic inequalities first. This belief also motivated his pragmatic acceptance of posts under the British, which he used as avenues to combat injustice and make India's struggle for freedom truly meaningful.

A Critical Assessment

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar assessed British rule in India with a dispassionate and realistic perspective. While he was critical of colonial exploitation, he acknowledged the positive contributions the British had made: they *"improved roads, constructed canals on scientific principles, developed transport by rail, carried letters by penny post, transmitted messages by lightning, improved currency, regulated weights and measures, corrected notions of geography, astronomy, and medicine, and resolved internal quarrels, effecting some advancement in material conditions."* Moreover, the British introduced education and a strong central government, fostering social and political awakening among Indians. Yet, Ambedkar never allowed these acknowledgments to overshadow the fundamental question of India's freedom. Echoing the Irish leaders Curran and Daniel O'Connell, he remarked, *"no man can be grateful at the cost of his self-respect, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity, and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty and honour."* This statement reflects his unwavering commitment to national dignity and the principle that gratitude should never come at the expense of fundamental rights or freedom.

With the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, India's freedom struggle gained significant momentum, ultimately achieving its goal in August 1947. However, the National Movement largely failed to recognize the contributions of Dalit leaders. While relatively few Dalit leaders participated directly, it is also true that caste Hindus were often unwilling to share the struggle with them. Dr. Ambedkar's priorities—his insistence on protecting the rights of the oppressed, promoting social equality, and his pragmatic decision to retain posts under the British—led some detractors to brand him anti-national. His non-cooperation with certain aspects of Gandhi's movement further fueled such misunderstandings.

It was unfortunate that Dr. Ambedkar was widely misunderstood by caste Hindus during India's freedom movement. A born fighter for liberty, equality, and fraternity, he devoted his life to securing the dignity of every individual and ensuring freedom for all. Yet, despite his unwavering commitment, he was often branded anti-national and accused of being a stooge of the British—claims that were entirely baseless. In reality, Dr. Ambedkar frequently became the target of unfounded allegations. A careful and objective examination of his role in India's

liberation reveals his deep patriotism and clarifies his approach to the nation's freedom struggle, allowing one to appreciate his enduring commitment to justice and equality.

Dr. Ambedkar was a true nationalist, primarily concerned with combating social inequalities perpetuated in the name of religion. His central aim was the abolition of these inequalities, for he feared that India's independence would be meaningless if deep social injustices persisted. He was acutely aware that such inequalities could continue—and even be reinforced—under a Hindu-majority rule. He believed that under such a system, the life and property of minorities, including the depressed classes, would remain insecure. Consequently, he argued that political freedom alone would be insufficient unless social inequalities were addressed. Unlike other national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Sardar Patel, who prioritized independence from British rule before addressing social reform, Ambedkar, as a realist and liberal, placed social justice at the forefront. For him, real freedom meant not merely ousting the British but also liberating the deprived and neglected from the entrenched structures of inequality.

While studying in America, Ambedkar was approached by Lala Lajpat Rai, who tried to persuade him to join India's freedom movement. Dr. Ambedkar, however, politely declined, explaining that as a student he had a responsibility to complete his studies without betraying the sacred trust of the Maharaja who had sponsored his education. This decision highlights Ambedkar's strong sense of duty and responsibility. Although India's independence remained a priority for him, he understood that, as a serious student relying on state support, he needed to maintain clear priorities and honor his commitments.

After completing his education, Dr. Ambedkar dedicated himself to the abolition of social inequalities. His efforts included securing for the untouchables the right to draw water from public tanks and to enter temples—important steps toward social equality undertaken during the broader course of India's freedom struggle. When he realized that changing the rigid attitudes of orthodox Hindus was extremely difficult and that his movements had limited success, he advocated for constitutional safeguards for the depressed classes and minorities. Although the British Government granted Separate Electorates as one such constitutional measure, Dr. Ambedkar, respecting Gandhiji's fast unto death in protest, ultimately relented and gave up this demand.

Gandhiji's life and well-being were clearly important to Dr. Ambedkar, reflecting his deep love for the nation. He once declared that he would take a vow to "lay down his life in defense of his land" and emphasized that whenever a conflict arose between his personal interests and the country's interests, he always placed the nation first. Yet, he harbored serious concerns about India truly being a nation. He abhorred social inequalities, viewing them as significant barriers to the realization of India as a unified nation. In the Constituent Assembly, while discussing the term "the people of India," he remarked, "the sooner we realise that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us." In August 1931, speaking to Gandhiji in anger and frustration, he stated that he had "no homeland because of the injustice inflicted on the Untouchables, and if at all he had rendered any national service to the patriotic cause of this country, it was due to his unsullied conscience and not due to any patriotic feeling in him." This statement should be understood as an expression of Dr. Ambedkar's indignation at the exploitative character of Hindu society toward his people and not as an anti-national remark.

Dr. Ambedkar's demand for the Partition of India reflects his pragmatic and realistic approach to addressing the communal problem in the nation. His consent to the creation of Pakistan was not a rejection of national sentiment; rather, he believed that, after partition, India could become more homogeneous and vigorous. He also thought that the nation's stability and cultural unity could be better maintained. This highlights Dr. Ambedkar's farsightedness: he recognized that if a separate Pakistan could allow religious communities to live peacefully and safely, it should be accepted, even if it meant dividing India. Dr. A.M. Rajashekharaiiah explained Dr. Ambedkar's view, stating, "Ambedkar's objective was to point out that Hindustan will be a stronger and more peaceful country after partition. His main concern was to ensure that independent India, once established, would

be a more homogeneous entity capable of progressing and prospering. He envisaged a free India in which justice—social, economic, and political—would be ensured for all.”

While converting to Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar was careful to demonstrate his love for the nation by not choosing an alien religion. He stated that he would select the least harmful path for the country, and by embracing Buddhism, he remained a true Indian, as Buddhism is an integral part of Bharatiya culture. He ensured that his conversion would not disrupt the traditions, culture, or history of the land.

Dr. Ambedkar faced harsh criticism, being labeled a British stooge, a tool of the British, and a political mendicant. These accusations were unfair and baseless. Like many other national leaders, he had acknowledged certain positive aspects of British administration, but this did not indicate support for British rule in India. In fact, he was sharply critical of the British, particularly regarding the rights and status of the depressed classes. He once remarked, “The British government did not energetically and enthusiastically work for the restoration of the rights of the depressed classes and did not exercise its power to strike at the undemocratic denial of elementary human rights to the Untouchables.” Dr. Ambedkar firmly believed that unless political power was secured by the Indian people—and concentrated in the hands of the socially suppressed sections—it would not be possible to completely eliminate the social, legal, and cultural disabilities suffered by the downtrodden.

After completing his education, Dr. Ambedkar joined the service of the Baroda State but soon resigned in protest against the practice of untouchability. Recognizing his exceptional potential, the British allowed him to join their administration. Dr. Ambedkar entered British service not for personal gain, but with the ambition of serving the people of the country. He remained fully aware of his responsibilities, particularly in the context of India’s freedom struggle. He acted wisely and courageously, ensuring that his patriotism was never compromised.

However, his intentions were often misunderstood. The Indian National Congress and other leaders doubted his patriotism, misinterpreting his collaboration with the British administration. Orthodox Hindus viewed his position as slavish, branding him a stooge and a tool of British imperialists. As a result, Dr. Ambedkar occupied a unique position—actively participating in India’s struggle for justice and reform, yet simultaneously facing severe criticism and suspicion.

Indian opinion on the Simon Commission was largely opposed, with widespread calls for its boycott. Dr. Ambedkar, however, chose to appear before the Commission and presented his views on the social and political conditions in India. This action was unacceptable to many nationalists, who disparagingly labeled him a political mendicant. Yet, Dr. Ambedkar’s contributions must be appreciated for their depth and foresight, reflecting not only the perspective of a liberal but also of a patriot deeply concerned with the broader interests of the nation.

He argued before the Commission that, “in any democratic form of government all communities must be treated as of equal political importance, and there should be no room left for any one community to claim that it is *uber alles*.” His commitment to the nation was further evident when he advocated for the “rapid Indianisation of services.” Responding to critics who branded him a “British stooge, a Judas, a ghoul, and a traitor,” Dr. Ambedkar boldly declared that he had “always upheld the task of the people. But, if the power in the hands of the people is being misused, then he will support the present government.”

The Indian National Congress, under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru, prepared a report in 1928, which came to be known as the Nehru Report, as a response to the Simon Commission. The report proposed that the future Constitution of India should be modeled on “the Constitution of the self-governing dominions.” It rejected separate electorates in favor of joint electorates, recommended a federal government with a bicameral legislature at the center, and an executive collectively responsible to the legislature. Additionally, it called for the establishment of a public service commission, a supreme court, and provisions for fundamental rights.

Although the Nehru Report was grounded in liberal principles, Dr. Ambedkar criticized it, arguing that its provisions were designed to preserve “the upper class hegemony and Brahminical rule in society.”

The British Government held three Round Table Conferences in London between 1930 and 1932 to discuss "India's question." Dr. Ambedkar was invited to participate in these deliberations. Subhas Chandra Bose criticized his participation, claiming that leadership had been thrust upon him by a benign British government because "his services were necessary to embarrass the nationalist leaders." The Indian National Congress, which boycotted the first Round Table Conference, wanted no Indian to attend, reflecting the assumption that patriotism during the freedom struggle was the monopoly of the Congress.

Undeterred by his critics, Dr. Ambedkar played an active role in the conferences, serving on the Minorities Sub-Committee, Franchise Sub-Committee, Service Sub-Committee, Defence Sub-Committee, and Federal Structure Sub-Committee. Throughout, he remained mindful of his nationality and responsibility to his motherland. In the plenary session of the fifth sitting on 20th November 1930, he declared: "We must have a Government in which men in power, knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for. This ROLE the British Government will never be able to play. It is only a Government which is of the people, for the people and by the people that will make this possible." He further emphasized that only under a Swaraj Constitution could political power be truly placed in Indian hands, without which salvation for the people was unattainable.

These statements clearly demonstrate that Dr. Ambedkar was a true son of India and not a British stooge. Mahatma Gandhi himself praised him as "a patriot of sterling worth." Following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Gandhiji withdrew the Civil Disobedience Movement and attended the second Round Table Conference, with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Malviya representing the Indian National Congress. At the conference, Dr. Ambedkar advocated for a responsible government in which the legislature was genuinely representative and the executive fully accountable, ensuring the protection of minorities and all communities in Indian society.

Dr. Ambedkar's proposals to safeguard the interests of minorities and other neglected sections of society were timely and well-conceived. He called for the Indianisation of services, ending the monopoly of power held by certain communities, and promoted the idea of common citizenship. As W.N. Kuber rightly observed, "the evolution of the conception of a united India and definite emergence of the depressed classes in the political picture of India were the achievements of Ambedkar's eloquence." Even newspapers that had previously been hostile to him were compelled to acknowledge and commend his patriotic commitment.

Dr. Ambedkar had to contend with two major challenges during the Freedom Struggle. On one side, he had to confront the entrenched hegemony of caste Hindus, and on the other, he had to oppose British rule. He was acutely aware that "it was entirely wrong to concentrate all his attention on the political independence of his country forgetting the foremost serious problem of social and economic independence. It was suicidal to imagine that political independence necessarily meant real all-sided freedom." Initially, the Indian National Congress emphasized social reform, but over time, their focus shifted primarily to political freedom. To achieve this, they adopted programs such as non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and fasting, assuming that social and economic freedom would naturally follow once India attained independence.

Dr. Ambedkar, however, understood the conservative and orthodox nature of Hindu society. He believed that mere political freedom could allow the establishment of a "Hindu Raj," in which the governing class would be dominated by Bania and Brahmin elites, with lower-class Hindus as their enforcers—all of whom had historically oppressed the Untouchables. Consequently, he rejected the Congress's approach, insisting that social and economic freedom for the marginalized must come first. This principled stance led him to remain aloof from Congress-led movements like non-cooperation, which critics used to wrongly brand him as anti-national.

Dr. Ambedkar was acutely aware that once the British left, political power in India would fall into the hands of the privileged classes. His concern was that those wielding immense influence over millions of underprivileged people would continue to oppress them even in a free India. For Dr. Ambedkar, true salvation lay in ensuring that the untouchables themselves enjoyed political power. He wanted the British to guarantee that

political authority would be accessible to the untouchables. While he doubted the sincerity of Congress leaders who assumed that social inequalities would vanish after independence, he was careful to clarify that the untouchables' refusal to join the Congress-led freedom struggle did not signify opposition to liberation from British rule. Rather, they demanded not just the exit of the British but genuine freedom—where India would be a country “safe for democracy.”

Such was Dr. Ambedkar's conception of freedom—markedly different from the views of other leaders of the National Movement, who saw India's liberation from British rule as the ultimate goal of nationalism. While the Indian National Congress advocated democracy, it lacked clarity on how the underprivileged sections of society would be protected from the potential tyranny of a Hindu communal majority. The minorities and the disadvantaged needed special safeguards and rights, which the Congress was reluctant to accept for fear of dividing the nation. As a true liberal, Dr. Ambedkar regarded the oppression of minorities by the communal majority as a more serious threat to political democracy. This was the primary reason for his reluctance to participate in the Congress-led Freedom Movement. To label him anti-national or deny him the status of a true nationalist would be a grave injustice. His nationalism pursued objectives distinct from those of others, and anyone who appreciates his concern for the millions of oppressed people would recognize Dr. Ambedkar as a profound patriot and a nationalist in the truest sense.

Dr. Ambedkar's support for the British during the Second World War was grounded in his commitment to democracy and faith in democratic values. When India was made a participant in the War without the consent of its people, he expressed “wholehearted agreement” with this course of action, recognizing the anomalous position India was in—under British rule, the country had no voice in its foreign policy or in the declaration of war. He argued that India should have a greater right than other British Dominions to participate in Britain's foreign policy, as the nation had been dragged into the conflict without its consent. Dr. Ambedkar held the British responsible for the proper defense of India. He noted that the Second World War differed from previous conflicts in two significant ways: first, it was a clash of ideologies concerning the forms and systems of government under which humanity was to live; second, it was a revolution demanding fundamental change in social organization and the terms of associated life. For these reasons, he termed it a “people's war,” or at least a war that should be made into one. Dr. Ambedkar believed that success in this war was essential for India's self-government and self-determination. His concept of nationalism began with the principle of self-determination—“the principle of self-determination expressing the desire of a people united by common ideals and common purposes,” to decide, without external compulsion, their political status, whether independence, interdependence, or union with other nations. Since Nazism did not allow for self-government or self-determination, he saw no value in opposing the British in relation to the Nazis.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that greater emphasis should be placed on building a “New India” rather than merely pursuing the Quit India movement, as the promise of a New India—with liberty, equality, and fraternity for all—was more compelling than the mere attainment of independence. As a member of the Executive Council, he supported Britain's war efforts, believing that a victorious outcome would enable the people to enjoy true liberty, equality, and fraternity. Dr. Ambedkar criticized Gandhiji's Quit India Movement during the war as “irresponsible and insane, a bankruptcy of statesmanship, and a measure to retrieve the Congress prestige that had declined since the war began.” He added, “It would be madness to weaken law and order at a time when barbarians were at the gates of India for mastery of the subcontinent. If democracy prevailed, no one would obstruct India's independence.”

This perspective highlights Dr. Ambedkar's unique understanding of national freedom. He argued that a “New order in a New India” would greatly strengthen India's determination to achieve freedom. In his assessment, India's independence was not threatened by external enemies but by disunity among Indians themselves. Unfortunately, Dr. Ambedkar stood largely alone in this interpretation of war objectives and priorities. He was

also acutely aware of the motives of caste Hindus in opposing British rule, identifying three key tendencies in their approach:

1. They sought to concentrate all political power in their own hands.
2. They were unwilling to base political institutions on principles of justice.
3. Wherever they were forced to surrender power, they would yield only to coercion and brute force, never to the dictates of justice.

Dr. Ambedkar was also aware that certain Hindu leaders, through clever propaganda, had garnered support from foreign sympathizers for their vision of freedom, while neglecting the cause of the untouchables. They tried to portray Dr. Ambedkar as someone indifferent to India's freedom struggle. The differences between Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar became evident at the Second Round Table Conference, revealing Dr. Ambedkar's distinct perspective on nationalism and social justice. His criticism of Congress programmes under Gandhiji contributed to the perception of him as anti-national. Yet, Gandhiji himself acknowledged and appreciated Dr. Ambedkar's stance, admitting that "Congressmen were not with him in many of his beliefs and doings."

Dr. Ambedkar viewed the War Cabinet's proposals, also known as the Cripps Proposals, as a "sudden volte-face and Munich mentality" on the part of the British government. According to him, the proposals contained three main points:

1. A Constituent Assembly was to be established with full authority to draft India's Constitution, allowing the majority in the Assembly to decide its provisions.
2. The new Constitution would not automatically include all provinces of India; only those willing to participate would be bound by it. The provinces could decide their participation through a plebiscite, with a bare majority determining the outcome.
3. The Constituent Assembly was required to enter into a treaty with the British government to safeguard the rights and security of racial and religious minorities. Once this treaty was signed, the British would withdraw their sovereignty, and the Constitution framed by the Assembly would come into effect.

Dr. Ambedkar did not consider the proposals regarding the Constituent Assembly as novel; in fact, the Congress had put forth a similar proposal at the outbreak of the war. He rejected these proposals due to their failure to safeguard the interests of minorities and the depressed classes. He stated, "we are absolutely convinced that the proposals were calculated to do the greatest harm to the depressed classes and were sure to place them under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule." He described the proposals as a surrender of the minorities to the majority. The Cripps Proposals sought to uphold the Congress demand for a Constituent Assembly while conceding the substance of Pakistan to appease the Muslim League, effectively "tying down the hands and feet of Untouchables and throwing them at the doors of Hindus."

Dr. Ambedkar was also dissatisfied with the proposals made by the Cabinet Mission. While the Mission stipulated that Parliament must ensure safeguards for minorities before transferring power, it did not clarify the machinery for examining these safeguards. There was no indication of whether a Joint Committee of the two Houses would be set up or if His Majesty's Government would exercise independent judgment on the adequacy of the safeguards. Dr. Ambedkar considered these omissions critical, recognizing that the provisions were afterthoughts intended to appease minorities rather than integral to the original proposals. He feared that a Constituent Assembly dominated by caste Hindus could render the safeguards for untouchables and minorities a mere formality, undermining their very purpose.

It is clear that Dr. Ambedkar had a distinct and well-defined perspective on both nationalism and freedom, shaped by the social realities of India. His disappointment at not seeing his vision fully realized is evident from the debates of the Constituent Assembly. After India gained independence, he had to make compromises, focusing on securing stronger safeguards for minorities and untouchables through constitutional means. This spirit of compromise, coupled with hope for a better future and confidence in contributing to it, exemplified the core of his

liberal philosophy. For Dr. Ambedkar, the freedom of the nation was inseparable from the freedom of all classes, particularly those treated as servile.

The true patriotic spirit of Dr. Ambedkar often went unnoticed, and at times, there were wrong and mischievous interpretations that sought to sideline him from the mainstream national struggle. Yet, there can be no doubt about his love for his country and his commitment to its freedom. Only someone with profound patriotic fervor and a deep sense of national responsibility could have defended so many freedom fighters in the courts of British India. Koenraad Elst rightly described Dr. Ambedkar as “a sincere patriot.”

Dr. Ambedkar's deep concern for India's independence is clearly reflected in his statement to the Constituent Assembly just before the country became a Republic. He said:

"On 26th January 1950, India will be an independent country. What would happen to her independence? Will she maintain her independence or will she lose it again? ... Will history repeat itself? ... Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? ... We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood."

These words demonstrate Babasaheb Ambedkar's profound nationalistic spirit. The questions he raised and the anxiety he expressed at the possibility of India losing its independence again show the clarity, foresight, and seriousness with which he approached the problem of freedom. They reveal that, for Ambedkar, true nationalism meant vigilance, responsibility, and placing the nation above all sectional or communal interests.

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