
Comparison Of Gandhi And Ambedkar

The essay Gandhi and Ambedkar irreconcilable differences by the author Akash Singh is a very apt and curious look into the politico history of India. In this essay, he attempts to draw the attention of the reader to the irreconcilable differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi. The essay is complete with anecdotes, historical event descriptions and the arguments taken by some of the illustrious historians of modern India namely D R Nagaraj, Ramachandra Guha, Thomas phantom and Partha Chatterjee. The author states that all these authors attempt to reconsolidate the life and works of Ambedkar and Gandhi.

In the first subsection of the paper, the Gandhi Ambedkar dispute is highlighted. How Ambedkar wanted emancipation of the Dalits by allotment of separate constitutions for them but Gandhi was opposed to it and advocated their empowerment through the process of spiritual cleansing. Thomas phantom attempts to bridge the two barristers through homogenization. He quotes many instances where the two came together to forge a unity against though they were at loggerheads when it came to the question of untouchability. Ramachandra guha takes through the tapestry of history to recon ciliate the two giants of the Indian freedom. He quotes many instances wherein the Mahatma was very accommodating and full of compassion towards Ambedkar's anger and hatred, towards the hindu majority. The partha chatterjee's attempt to reconsolidate Gandhi and Ambedkar is dialectically through the homogeneity and heterogeneity that existed between the two

Ambedkar, represents the radical intellectual, the revolutionary mind and of the deprived 'other class'; whereas Gandhi looks like liberal comprador spokesman of the Hindu upper caste mainstream of self-contradictory nature. What that needs to be taken care of while interpreting the historical figures is that we should try to keep the 'idealisation' of those figures in check and must not simplify the 'events' to focus on the people. To replace Gandhism with Ambedkarism is also a self-contradictory alternative, as the Dalit upsurge of the post-Ambedkar phase. The creamy layer of Dalits stands assimilated by the mainstream in the form of reserved category of the middle and lower middle classes and in sted of the revolutionary desire of Amedkar for a 'separate homeland for the untouchables', several new Dalit leaders control a large chunk of voters to be in power as Chief Ministers of some states, leaving behind the pertinent question.

A growing number of prominent intellectuals have been attempting to give both Gandhi and Ambedkar due credit and respect for their lifelong struggles and attempting to find the numerous and profound ways that they worked toward the same goals and in a similar spirit. Gandhian and Ambedkarian discourses were not antithetical. Both were fundamentally concerned with emancipation, despite their different approaches and areas of concentration.

Mahatma Gandhi called them 'Harijans' or people of God. He not only supported them in their struggle for equality by calling them the people/children of god but also he embraced them. Gandhi used to practice what he spoke, and he would live among Harijans, doing the same work they had to do, cooking & eating with them. His work was important in getting them respect and self-respect, in getting them equal access to social facilities. He was self-sufficient.

Dr Ambedkar never agreed with Gandhi's actions, in fact used to accuse him, accusing him of dramatizing the issue. But that never created a rift between them, both of them were very mature and they gave space to the others for having different views. And Nehru, who was a follower of Gandhi, invited Ambedkar to author the Constitution. But both of them wanted an Indian society based on social justice and fraternity, but differed on the manner to achieve it.

According to Gandhi, if the caste based discrimination is purged from the caste system, the latter can work perfectly fine with. According to him, village should act as self-sufficient units of the economy, which he thought was possible by the demarcation of works under the caste system. The reason for his self-sufficiency of villages proposition was that the enormous population of India could not be fed through just the industries or agriculture alone. At the same time, to bring a sense of pride to the supposedly lowest rung of works, he, as an example, used to advocate cleaning of one's own latrine in homes and used to practice this himself. During an outbreak of plague in the city, he even used to clean the latrines in the homes of the so called untouchables in the affected areas.

Ambedkar, on the other hand, was concerned with the complete annihilation of the caste system. According to him, untouchability would exist as long as the caste system exists. He encouraged his followers to leave their homes in villages and go to cities. He might saw it as a way to get better economic opportunities and education which, to an extent may help in uplifting the lower castes.

Gandhi, being an ardent follower of satyagraha, called for the same to plead to the conscience and reason of the upper caste Hindus. He thought that the responsibility of removing untouchability should lie on the upper caste Hindus. In the pursuance of this policy, he organized numerous campaigns and fasts some of which led to many temples being thrown open to the supposedly lower castes. This also won him enmity from various sections of the orthodox Hindus.

Ambedkar, claimed that satyagraha was a useless tool in this respect. His argument was that pricking the conscience of the caste Hindus was impossible since they were under the ideological spell of religious sanctions to caste plus also getting material benefits from the caste order. So he sought solutions through the aid of the state. This somewhat made him a political opponent of the congress as well as Gandhi ji. This was seen in 1932 when the Viceroy proclaimed the communal award which provided for separate electorates for the lower castes in addition to the Muslims and Christians, Gandhi ji undertook a fast to abolish the separate electorate for that would have meant the acquiescence of lower castes as a different community than the caste Hindus and would have rendered their social re-integration impossible. Ambedkar, at that time was a proponent of separate electorate which suggests that he did see the upper and lower caste Hindus as distinct communities with divergent set of interests.

Gandhi also looked at the problem from the broader perspective of national unity against a foreign government and believed that the congress represented the whole population including the lower castes while Ambedkar advocated for organizing the lower castes in separate blocs as different party so as to more effectively articulate their interests in the electoral politics.

On the whole, Gandhi believed that abolition of untouchability was imperative to save Hinduism while Ambedkar saw a solution outside the boundaries of the dominant Hindu religion in the country, which is probably why he converted to Buddhism.

Ambedkar was a highly trained, scholarly lawyer, something that later made him to be the chairman of the Constitution drafting committee. The Baba Saheb was absolutely clear that the emancipation of the depressed classes was essentially their own duty and task. Others - like the well-meaning Mahatma, for example - could help the depressed classes in the struggle but could not take over their struggle for their emancipation. Consequently, the Baba Saheb viewed the Mahatma calling the depressed classes as Harijan (the children of Hindu God Hari) with great contempt and suspicion as an attempt at diluting the struggle of the depressed classes and keeping them suppressed and depressed for ever. The Baba Saheb didn't doubt the sincerity of the Mahatma; he just wanted him to concentrate on the task of the struggle for Independence and leave the depressed classes alone to solve their problems by themselves. The Baba Saheb sincerely believed that the struggle for Independence should be carried out within the bounds of the existing laws framed by. Consequently, the absolutely unorthodox methods that the Mahatma chose - the salt struggle, quit India Movement, promoting khadi, and so on - were completely unacceptable to the Baba Saheb.

Gandhi was a strong believer in the Orthodox Hinduism. He held prayers with unfailing regularity. But the Baba Saheb had become wary of the Hindu religion, having suffered the ill effects of Hinduism in his own life. Towards the end of his life, in 1956, having come to the conclusion that the depressed classes could not receive salvation in Hinduism, he and some of his followers embraced Buddhism as being egalitarian. There were many other differences like between the Baba Saheb wearing the standard dress always - just like Jinna - whereas the Mahatma was like a fakir to be close to the mass of poor Indians. Gandhi advocated that the upper cast Hindus conscience should be attacked as his satyagrah theory suggested. Ambedkar banished the theory of satyagrah for this issue as who would like to give up the benefit of exploiting others. Gandhi advocated that this problem should be sorted on society level while Ambedkar wanted the state to take the issue into notice. In 1932 when lower caste were provided separate electorates Gandhi went on a fast unto death to oppose this motion as he viewed this move as a conspiracy to further divide Hindus.

Ambedkar on the other hand supported the move thinking that separate electorates is only possible way to bring equality to the oppressed. But he had to give in against Gandhi and reservations became the solution. Gandhi wanted congress to represent all of India regardless of various communities, Ambedkar however always seemed to be concerned about lower caste Hindus. Thus the two powerful men of Indian history collectively shaped India in some or the other way despite being very negative to each other.