

Ambedkar's Agonism, Sovereign Violence and Pakistan as Peace

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On December 16, 1946, in his initial response to Jawaharlal's Nehru's famous Objectives Resolution that had declared India a sovereign republic, B. R. Ambedkar found the prospective claim on India's future form as 'uncontroversial' if 'disappointing'. Asked to respond to it by Rajendra Prasad who was chairing the freshly formed Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar recognized Nehru's proclamation as akin to the Declaration of Rights of the French Constitution as it focused on 'rights' to the exclusion of 'remedies' and chose in return to invoke and cite the French revolution's fiercest critic and the figurehead of British conservatism, Edmund Burke. Pirating figures from the canon of modern politics either as evidence, caution or for insight into the future political formation of India had been one of the striking signatures of Ambedkar's wide-ranging writings. This was not, however, to seek the preservation of an old order or even to right remedies that he indeed instituted by drafting the Indian constitution. But by invoking Burke, Ambedkar alerted to the dangers of war and violence in its force and ability to degrade, waste and even consume the very object of contest. Drawing attention to the Muslim League's absence from the Assembly, Ambedkar clarified that the stakes of Hindu and Muslim relations portended war and peace with a potential of perpetual war that could render the object of recovery – namely India – becoming entirely consumed by violence. Ambedkar concluded his short intervention by warning his assembled political peers of their own fantasies,

If there is anybody who has in mind the project of solving the Hindu-Muslim problem by force, which is another name of solving it by war, in order that the Muslims may be subjugated and made to surrender to the Constitution that might be prepared without their consent, this country

would be involved in perpetually conquering them. This conquest would not be once and forever.¹

While his warning was met with silence on that occasion, Ambedkar's views ought to have been familiar given that only a few years prior to this Assembly and in 1940 he had published his disquisition on the prospect of Pakistan. The reaction in the Assembly conformed to the reception of this earlier explication of his ideas on Pakistan. In the second edition of *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, published in 1945, Ambedkar reprised what was by his own admission the 'singular' nature of his enterprise. In the second edition of his *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, published in 1945, Ambedkar reprised what was by his own admission the 'singular' nature of his enterprise. His book was 'disowned by the Hindus and unowned by the Muslims', which only emboldened his claim to non-partisanship regarding a viscerally divisive idea and history.²

Although much belated, Ambedkar's book on the idea of Pakistan is today enjoying a new kind of attention. Above all, the book stands, as demonstrated in Faisal Devji's *Muslim Zion*, as a testament to the triangulated history of the formation of Pakistan in that it was conditioned by the caste question inasmuch as by the internationalization of the minority, thus refreshingly enabling the understanding of the formation of Pakistan as an idea that cannot be exhausted by or fully equated with the question of religion.³ For the more literal minded, it continues to be marshaled -- much as it was in the defining decade of its initial publication -- as evidence that functions as proof in a lawyer's case prosecuted by the historian for or against partition.⁴

¹ B. R. Ambedkar in the *Constituent Assembly of India Debates*, Vol. 1 (16 December 1946), accessed online at: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol1p6.htm>. On Jawaharlal Nehru, see Purushotham, 'World History in the Atomic Age'. On Ambedkar and caste, see Rao, *The Caste Question*, and on his political ideas especially on equality Kumar, *Radical Equality* and Cháirez-Garza, 'Touching Space', to cite selectively from a growing body of works. On the context and causes of Ambedkar's membership of the Assembly see Bandyopadhyay, 'Orchestrating a Signal Victory'.

² Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*; Mood (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* [hereafter BAWs], Vol.8, 2.

³ Devji, *Muslim Zion*.

⁴ Dhulipalia, *Creating A New Medina*, 123-93.

In focusing primarily on Ambedkar, this article will reconstruct and interpret the work of hostility and antagonism that was central to his political thought and writings. As a thinker, Ambedkar remained singular in taking account of the full and potential measure of violence predominantly in caste relations but beyond in the comparative contexts of revolutions and formations of nation-states in the modern world. As I have elaborated elsewhere, Ambedkar's idea of the political radically appraised the question of social antagonism and converted inherent hostility and the potentiality of violence into institutionalised competition, thus converting antagonists into adversaries.⁵ In this sense and in short, Ambedkar's idea of the political converted antagonism into agonism, a central theme of this article. The political here refers to the consideration and the domain of power, conflict and antagonism rather than to either the institutional management or representation of 'interests' commonly understood as 'politics' or even as the domain of deliberation and freedom associated with a wide range of traditions from classical liberalism to Hannah Arendt.⁶

Strikingly, Ambedkar's book on Pakistan recognised such a distinction between the political and politics. At one register, it documented the detail of contentions that have gone down in history and historiography as 'bargaining counters' between dominant protagonists and parties ranging from a piece of territory to institutional mechanics and representation. Suffused as these were with the instrumentality of interest, and even as Ambedkar assiduously recorded the contentious views and issues of all parties, he rightly asserted that the book was not simply 'the X, Y, Z of Pakistan.' In a related register, Ambedkar's book sought to provide an analytical and conceptual framework for the issue of Muslim nationality in relation to the political with the sub-title of the book *The Indian Political What's What* indeed betraying its intentions in as many words. In his own words then the 'analytical presentation' of the book intended 'to explain the A, B, C of Pakistan.'⁷ The following discussion will engage primarily with the

⁵ Kapila, 'Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political'.

⁶ Mouffe, *On the Political*. But see Lukes, *Power* that integrates power with deliberation or aims to stitch the registers of the political with politics.

⁷ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 2.

second aspect elaborating the horizons of hostility, the potentiality of war and the promise of Pakistan as peace.⁸

Ambedkar was a preeminent nonviolent thinker precisely because he understood the full measure, potential and consequences of violence. Crucially, unlike his global and historical interlocutors whether it was constitutional experts or Karl Marx, the nation became the identified container of the political in the form of an agonistic and radical democracy. As opposed to cosmopolitanism for which 'humanity' is the basis of political ethics and universal horizon, for democracy 'the people' or popular sovereignty remains the basic unit of politics. Ambedkar's agonism was constitutively elaborated and attached to the question of nationality in this crucial sense rather than to any universalistic framework or human rights and is most clearly elaborated in his book on Pakistan inasmuch as it was by his disquisitions on caste. Moreover, unlike his political rival Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar's political vision was staked on the reproductive capacity of political ideas through an institutional design in which the subject -- national and dalit -- was embedded in popular sovereignty. Agonism or the recognition of hostile distinctions as opposed to their violent eradication or willful neglect, in effect became the nonviolent condition for the life of the Indian nation and democracy.⁹

While cognizant of extant discussions on agonism in relation to democracy and liberalism, this essay departs from those perspectives in its focus on modern India. For the modern West, the question of agonism has re-emerged after its initial reckoning by Nietzsche to dislodge the coercive emphasis of consensus in the so-called 'post political' era of globalization and late-capitalism, enabling the recognition of distinctions and promising to renew liberal

⁸ Dhulipalia, *Creating a New Medina* deploys Ambedkar's book precisely in the first register and to the exclusion of the conceptual stakes and elaborations, without which it is rendered a mere record and as superficial proof for partition.

⁹ Mouffe, *Agonistics*; for related discussions of agonism see Connolly, *Pluralism*, and Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*. My argument is also in opposition to multiculturalism and equally its Nehruvian rendition of a 'unity in diversity' that recognizes but renders distinctions to the cultural domain. For the contemporary consequences of this debate and Indian democracy see Shruti Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', *Social Text* (Periscope digital issue on 'Politics under Modi'), February 27, 2015, https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-majority-of-democracy/.

democracy.¹⁰ By contrast, the considerations of distinction --especially in their potential for and forms of antagonism and hostility --framed the political foundations of India. In short, whether it was a Gandhi or an Ambedkar the consideration of violence in the context of distinctions whether of caste or religion remained pre-eminent and constitutive rather than one that emerged as an after-effect of a history of consensus. Moreover, and significantly, the question of enmity or even antagonism was defined by intimacy and familiarity rather than the externality of the category of the foreigner -- however fabricated or invented -- as the potential enemy or oppositional figure that has animated modern political thought elsewhere and primarily in the modern West.¹¹

Nevertheless, the resurrection of the controversial works and ideas of Carl Schmitt on the dimensions of the political in the contemporary appraisal of both democracy and Communism on a global stage is undeniable. To clarify, for Schmitt antagonism oriented the political horizon that was staked on the distinction of the friend and the enemy with the possible and real destruction of the enemy as its condition. While the salience of antagonism for the political domain is integrated but the departure with Schmitt lies here primarily as for him homogeneity and unity are not only inter-changeable but are also the ultimate ends of order and sovereignty. He concluded his famous book *The Concept of the Political* quoting Virgil's verse 'ab integro nascitur ordo' ('from unity/integrity/homogeneity order is born').¹² The Indian political by its very conditions of heterogeneity and division militated against the mounting of sovereignty towards a homogenous end while retaining a focus on unity. Ambedkar's agonism became a salient precept and his critique of Vinayak Savarkar's *Hindutva* in this context, discussed below, remains instructive. Precisely because Ambedkar's political thought was animated by questions of antagonism in relation to sovereignty or even unity, Pakistan and its consideration proved to be inescapable.

¹⁰ Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner*; Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*; and Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, especially Volume II.

¹¹ Kapila, 'A History of Violence'.

¹² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 96.

A Belated Discovery of Sovereignty

The difference comes to this: a community has a right to safeguards,
a nation has a right to demand separation.¹³

B. R. Ambedkar

Ambedkar's intervention was exemplary in noting that Pakistan was premised on the power of the idea itself; this quality made it not only inevitable but also charged with a force of persuasion that could not be contained by discounting it. Yet he was precise in dating the idea of Muslim nationality to the very recent past. Emphasizing the somewhat belated 'philosophical justification' for Pakistan, Ambedkar noted that the imperial constitutional parleys of the interwar period that had structured political settlements and representation of Hindus and Muslims in the language of 'majority' and 'minority' could not, however, exhaust let alone take a full account of the 'political sentiment' of Muslims.

As is well known, initial if piecemeal representation for Indians in the opening decade of the twentieth century instituted 'separate electorates' for Hindus and Muslims that were amplified in periodic constitutional discussions ranging from the future nature of franchise to local body governance. It was however, the Round Table discussions held at the highest imperial table in 1930-32 and in London with the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald heavily involved that brought the question of the minority to a heady if divisive head.¹⁴ Ambedkar at that point raised the question of the untouchable to be officially identified as a 'minority' in the manner in which it been designated for Muslims. This led to Gandhi's open debate with Ambedkar with the Mahatma declaring a fast unto death until Ambedkar dropped this demand altogether. This defining difference was ultimately staked on two issues: the boundaries and ends of what Hinduism might be and secondly, what might be the best measures to affect the end of untouchability. Gandhi won then and an entente between the two men was established through the Poona Pact (1932) with Ambedkar dropping the

¹³ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 327.

¹⁴ Sarkar, *Modern India* a socio-historical account written from a Marxist perspective of nationalist politics remains a most exhaustive account.

idea, at least for that moment. Gandhi's was a pyrrhic victory. By 1950, Ambedkar had instituted not only radical remedies on caste but decisively also prove to be more influential as both a thinker of Muslim nationality while also bequeathing the institutional architecture of Indian democracy.¹⁵

The interwar period marked however, as it was also by strife and unprecedented majority-minority talk had crucially caused a breach in Muslim history. Their 'philosophical' discovery of national sentiments had irrevocably transformed the political language of their self-understanding and in their interface with others.

The 'national feeling' prevalent among Muslims, Ambedkar wrote, though recent was nevertheless so powerful that Muslims were above all no longer 'content to call themselves a community.'¹⁶ The 'fundamental difference' between this conception of community versus that of nationality as Ambedkar identified was the category of the people, -- popular or general will or sovereignty itself. Hitherto, he argued 'political philosophers' had been satisfied, if not complacent, in recognizing 'communities' as differentiated but integral to the political unit of the 'governed'. Yet under conditions of distress, 'communities', he noted, had the natural right to 'insurrection' but were limited to a search for changes in the modalities of government. Thus, critically, insurrections remained internal to a given political dispensation.

Underlying this distinction of a right to 'insurrection' towards a given political order and a 'disruption' oriented towards a separation was a consideration of self-preservation as fundamental to 'natural rights' rather than as a moral principle alone. Though Ambedkar in this context would lengthily and approvingly cite the British moral philosopher Henry Sidgwick, he was nevertheless pointing to the limits of coercion and force in maintaining unity and underscored that 'disruption' or separation even in historically bounded units of territory held together under even patriotic conditions, had potentialities for

¹⁵ Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*.

¹⁶ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 37.

peace if destinies had become divergent so much so that the ‘true interests of the whole may be promoted by disruption.’¹⁷

Moreover, as elaborated below, Ambedkar was equally fixated on the question of violence both in the maintenance of sovereign order – as it had emerged in relation to caste – and in its force for disorder, especially in relation to Hindu and Muslim relations in the twentieth century. As part of his understanding on natural rights, however, Ambedkar understood the generative power of violence. If too few, in short, had means to violence, as in the case of upper caste Brahmins, it would militate against the formation of and/or destroy the social order. Conversely, if there was widespread violence, that too would destroy the social order, a condition he described at length as the state of affairs between Hindus and Muslims in interwar India and as testified by his first intervention to the Constituent Assembly and will be further elaborated below.

The point of emphasis here is that Ambedkar, unlike natural rights theorists such as Hugo Grotius and even the arch foundational thinker of sovereignty Thomas Hobbes, was not seeking an Archimedean point of equilibrium on the question of violence.¹⁸ Instead, he was making explicit the altogether radical potential for discovering and instituting sovereignty anew and brooked no squeamishness towards either the question of separation or indeed violence. In such a perspective, Ambedkar is less amenable to be cast out as a ‘communitarian liberal’ or a proponent of ‘group rights’.¹⁹ Instead, he can more accurately be approached and understood as a thinker of modern sovereignty.

For Ambedkar, only the ‘nation’ has the ‘right to disruption’ and ‘secession’, he argued, which went far beyond any right to insurrection. This distinction, while being ‘fundamental’, could only be determined on the basis of ‘ultimate destiny’ or goals. It is in this vein, Ambedkar concluded, that both ‘prudence and ethics demands that bonds shall be dissolved’, so that the potentialities are ‘freed’ in such a manner so as to ‘pursue its [own] destinies.’ The nation, as opposed to community, Ambedkar realized, was the crucible of the

¹⁷ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 327, citing Henry Sidgwick’s *Elements of Politics* [1929], 648-49.

¹⁸ Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign*; Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*; and Skinner, ‘Hobbes on Sovereignty’.

¹⁹ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*; and Bajpai, *Debating Difference*.

idea of the people, or more precisely it was the nation that converted 'the people' into a political category and dislodged it from 'community'. This transformation was categorically – according to him and as recognized later by historians of nationalism – the work of imagination.

Ambedkar noted a distinct anticipatory resoluteness in Muslim political thought on the question of Pakistan. Noting surprise and even perplexity that Muslim leadership 'did not press for Pakistan' at the Round Table negotiations between empire and its 'minorities' in 1930, he nevertheless apprehended the interwar period as the defining moment of departure in Muslim political aspirations.²⁰ Whether it was the official designation of majority-minority or the status of Indian Muslims as a 'community', neither of these, according to Ambedkar, could exhaust the will to a political and distinct entity that, however belated it had nevertheless become salient. In a further note that was not generally accepted by his contemporaries --or indeed --by the received historiography that considers the arrival of Pakistan as a last-ditch and tragic outcome of brinksmanship, Ambedkar turned the conventional terms on their heads.

While official discussions focused on the colonial census that had corralled subjects into politically constituted 'groups' rather than considering them as people, this move had an overwhelming power in determining the terms of the debate that had repeatedly discussed nationality as no more than a function of demographics.²¹ Its most powerful effect was that the national question was considered through the prism of ideas of 'majority' and 'minority'. Strikingly, Ambedkar argued that once separate electorates had been recognized, the recognition of 'minority' had, in effect, created a 'statutory majority'.²² To be sure, Ambedkar dismissed the claims of the 'majority' to constitute an actual political unit, recognizing that such aspirations were associated with Hindutva. He dismissed these claims partly because he recognized Hindutva's then political body Hindu Mahasabha as a mirror image of the Muslim League and believed rather presciently that both would disappear with the recognition of Pakistan.

²⁰ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 326-28 and 334.

²¹ Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination'; and more recently Devji, *Muslim Zion*, 49-88.

²² Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 107.

More importantly, as argued here, caste militated against any imagined unity within the Hindu social. Instead, the emphasis fell on the question of the 'minority', and Ambedkar understood the 'minority' not only in the terms ordained by colonial rule but related centrally to hostility and violence. In the first instance, however, he recognized that the national question was of salience to Muslim political aspirations themselves.

Ambedkar argued that 'the delay in discovering the philosophical justification for Pakistan is [precisely] due to the fact that the Muslim leaders had become habituated to speaking of Muslims as a community and as a minority.' To him this 'terminology' had taken Muslim aspirations in a 'false direction and had brought them to a dead end.' Moreover, he argued that while this recent philosophical discovery of Pakistan represented 'a complete transformation' amongst Muslims, it was 'brought [about] not by any criminal inducement but by the discovery of what is their true and ultimate destiny.'²³

Staked on a futurity rather than as the belated expression of a repressed ideal in the subcontinental script, Pakistan as an idea was not possessed by the past. This was precisely because the future by definition cannot be 'observed' or 'checked' let alone 'experienced' and futurity is thus, a feat of the imagination that 'breaks free' from 'spatial controls'.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, given the density of imperial negotiations and settlements, the territorial moorings and debates over Pakistan have held sway in received histories and dominant accounts. Ambedkar was distinctive in recognizing that more than even a spatial idea or territorial telos, Pakistan was staked on the reckoning of temporality that was entirely future-oriented. Such a futurity was both a break in historical time as it was a departure from imperium -- both Mughal and British -- that ultimately conditioned the inadequacy if not the destruction of prevailing categories whether of 'community' or 'minority' that had hidebound Muslim aspirations.²⁵

In its most recent appraisal by Faisal Devji, Pakistan as a political idea is

²³ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 336-7.

²⁴ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 87, and Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, for two very different treatments on temporality and political utopias.

²⁵ I argue for the centrality of Mohammad Iqbal's' philosophical discovery of Muslim republicanism that is premised above all on the rejection of both global Islam and the Caliphate and the idea of the 'minority' in Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*

here too best understood as the apprehension of the future. Radical in its capture of an untold future, the formation of Pakistan was only possible, as he argues, by the rejection of dominant political languages in which putative attachments to soil, blood and even history are forsaken for the negation of both Indian nationalism and imperial endgames. For Devji, though, the emphasis lies on the postwar reconstitution of the world order: a *Muslim Zion* or Pakistan operates as a fitting if contrasting pair to Israel as the 'minority' form acquired the historical destiny of the national.²⁶

In the identification of destiny or even the future as the vantage point of Pakistan, Ambedkar would however, reprise contemporary and comparative history and equally ancient Indian history to discover and uncover the basis of sovereign power and its effects. In short, in separate disquisitions on caste Ambedkar sought to explicate the historical and Indian sovereign order especially in relation to violence. Such an uncovering was ultimately directed towards securing new and nonviolent political foundations for India with direct consequences for his considerations of Pakistan and thus these must be apprised here.

For Ambedkar, caste portended the historical horizon of both extreme separation and deep sovereignty. Unlike dominant discussions on caste and Ambedkar that take the figure of the dalit or untouchable as central, the focus here is on the Ambedkar's rendition of the Brahmin as a dispersed monarchy shrouded in violence, and in the policing of separation between Brahmins and others that he sought to not only uncover but undo.

The Sovereign Order of Caste

The Nazis had indeed a great deal to learn from the Hindus. If they had adopted the technique of suppressing the masses devised by the Hindus they would have been able to

²⁶ Devji, *Muslim Zion*. See also Zaman, *Futurity and the Political Thought of North Indian Muslims*, and Hussain, *Legal Antagonism and the Making of Muslim Political Thought in India*.

crush the Jews without open cruelty and would have also exhibited themselves as humane masters.²⁷

B. R. Ambedkar

In the mid-twentieth century world-historical context of Nazism and the holocaust, Ambedkar elaborated the nature of violence that premised and had made perpetual the power of the Brahmin. Designating the Brahmin as Superman, the Hindu social for Ambedkar was, 'nothing but Nietzsche's Gospel put in action.' In tackling the issue of violence and power, Ambedkar uncovered the Brahmin as sovereign but importantly not in the form of a king or monarch. In other words, in Ambedkar's rendition of caste, the Brahmin had emerged as the Superman, a figure who could kill but not die. In so doing, he elaborated the question of violence as historically systemic by pointing out to its means, instruments and ends.

In showing the intersection between Nietzsche's idea of the Superman and the Brahmin, as well as the catastrophe of violence that this idea entailed, Ambedkar starkly articulated the position of the untouchable. 'As against the Superman,' the untouchable, 'has no right to life, liberty or property or the pursuit of happiness. He must be ready to sacrifice everything for the sustenance of the life and dignity of the Superman.' The question of sacrifice here was understood in terms of life itself. In fact, the untouchable was inculcated, as he wrote, with the belief that he should 'respond to such call for sacrifice in the interest of the superman as his supreme duty.'²⁸

The ability to take life, in other words, was at the core of the Brahmin as sovereign. By contrast, as he wrote, 'The Untouchables are the weariest, most loathed the most miserable people that history can witness. They are a spent and sacrificed people.'²⁹ Whereas Nietzsche was interested in creating a brave new 'race', the Hindu order of things was, as Ambedkar argued, 'interested in maintaining the privilege' of the Brahmin who had 'come to arrogate to itself the

²⁷ Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites of Communism* [n.d. published posthumously] in *BAWS* Vol. 3, 127.

²⁸ Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 116 and 123.

²⁹ Ambedkar, 'Frustration' in 'Miscellaneous Notes', *Unpublished Writings*, in *BAWS* Vol.12, 733.

claim of being Superman.³⁰ While it is out of bounds for this discussion, it is important to point out that Ambedkar had repeatedly dismissed caste as a form of race and had disputed colonial ethnographers and emerging anthropological debates on the same.³¹ Equally, for Ambedkar, caste was unique to India and a formation that as he pointed out ‘marks off Hindus from other peoples.’³²

The arrogation of the Brahmin as sovereign was an outcome of a regicide. In the depth of India’s antiquity lay the origins of the Brahmin’s power that had, in the first instance, emerged through the killing of a Buddhist king.³³ This turn to history by Ambedkar was not an antiquarian interest or a recuperative exercise. Like other ideologues of the period, be it B. G. Tilak or Jawaharlal Nehru and indeed Savarkar, history was the template through which political futures were imagined. Importantly, as he explained, this history of regicide is ‘even more than a past [but] of the present. It is a ‘living past’ and therefore as really present as any present can be.’³⁴

It is striking that Ambedkar interprets India’s past and the destruction of Buddhism in particular as constitutive of the violent power of the Brahmin as sovereign. With rhetorical flourish and considerable conviction and in contrast to Hindutva narratives of history and their focus on the oppressive nature of Muslim rule Ambedkar wrote,

‘[T]he effects of Muslim invasions on Hindu India have been really superficial and ephemeral. The Muslim invaders destroyed only the outward symbols of Hindu religion such as temples and Maths etc. They did not extirpate Hinduism nor did they cause any subversion of the principles or doctrines which governed the spiritual life of the people...To alter the metaphor the Muslims only stirred the waters in the bath and that too only for a while. Thereafter they got tired of stirring and left the

³⁰ Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 116.

³¹ See for instance ‘Brahmins versus Kshatriyas’ in *BAWS* Vol.3, 419, whereby Ambedkar argues that Aryans were not a race. He also argued that there were no racial differences between Brahmins and untouchables. Ambedkar, *Who are the Untouchables* in *BAWS* Vol.7, 242, 303-7.

³² Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 141

³³ Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in India* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 269-70.

³⁴ Ambedkar, ‘Manu and the Shudras’ in *BAWS* Vol.12, 719.

water with sediments to settle... [In contrast] ...Brahmanism in its conflict with Buddhism made a clean sweep. It emptied the bath with the Buddhist Baby in it and filled the bath with its own waters and in it its own baby.'³⁵

The question of Hindus and Muslims was not necessarily an antagonistic one for Ambedkar, primarily due to their common historic experience as rulers; this tied them symbolically, at the very least. More significantly, caste and especially the power of the Brahmin had remained intact despite the change in imperial dispensations. Unlike the Hindutva thinker Savarkar, in turning to history the aim was not to forge antagonisms anew but rather to explain the source, preservation and perpetuation of sovereign power. It is in this context that Ambedkar identified Buddhism rather than Islam as the critical point of antagonism in relation to Hinduism.

'The history of India', Ambedkar wrote, 'is nothing but a history of mortal conflict between – Buddhism and Brahmanism.' The regicide of the Buddhist king Pushyamita and the destruction of the Buddhist state in the classical past were understood by Ambedkar as the originary moment of the installation of the Brahmin as sovereign. A key consequence was the promulgation of caste laws and taboos as enshrined by Manu that had made untouchability permanent. Ambedkar delineates and details several features of this problem in which Brahminism was deemed the 'counter-revolution' to the Buddhist 'revolution' in India. Equally he raises the problem of the historic conflict between Brahmin and Kshatriyas (the warrior caste) especially on the question of kingship and power. Three related issues that emerge from Ambedkar's disquisitions are pertinent here.

In the first instance, and as a consequence of the regicide, taboos and codes between castes were redistributed especially in relation to the rights to bear arms. According to Ambedkar, the taboo on Brahmins to bear arms and hold kingly power was lifted.³⁶ Moreover, the Brahmin was made immune from

³⁵ Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in BAWs* Vol.3, 274.

³⁶ Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in BAWs* Vol.3, 267, 269-71 and 276-7.

capital punishment, regardless of the crime he had committed.³⁷ The right to bear arms and to rule was further amplified for the Brahmin by the rights to regicide and rebellion. Critically, however, these rights were circumscribed by the condition that they could only be invoked when the (*kshatriya*) king or ruler had failed to uphold the social order.³⁸ Thus the king or ruler became, as Ambedkar put it, 'liable for prosecution and punishment like a common felon.'³⁹ With the destruction of Buddhism, codes and taboos enshrined and embedded the sovereignty of the Brahmin and consequently made the question of direct ruler-ship or kingship not irrelevant, but more precisely subordinated the king to the Brahmin.

Secondly, a separation was forged between Brahmin and non-Brahmins. Through the principles of 'graded inequality', the foundational source of separation and its outcome was the disarming of the Shudra, who was not only deprived of means to violence by the restriction on the right to bear arms, but was effectively barred from any form of self-protection.⁴⁰ A division not only of labor or occupation held isolation and fixity that had formed the nature and principles of the Hindu social but ultimately was vested in violence as a fundamental aspect of sovereignty. With nuance and complexity, Ambedkar outlined how the erstwhile hostility between Kshatriyas and Brahmins was converted into an 'entente' that ultimately closed off the ranks of power to the lower orders and the shudras in particular.⁴¹

In short, this originary regicide, with the consequent redistribution of ritual and sacramental power, had two enduring effects. While it diluted the sovereignty of the king, it also made the king dependent on the Brahmin.⁴² Equally, it totalized and controlled the instruments and means of violence against others and in the end made a group (or varna) into the untouchable (caste). For after all, as Ambedkar argued, the shudras were once warriors and

³⁷ Ambedkar, 'Manu and the Shudras' in *BAWS* Vol.12, 722.

³⁸ Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 277.

³⁹ Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 124-5.

⁴⁰ Ambedkar, *India and Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 26, and *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* in same volume, 308-20.

⁴¹ Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 392-415.

⁴² Ambedkar describes the difficulty of Shivaji's coronation and the conflict of Kshatriyas and Brahmins in *Who are the Shudras*, *BAWS* Vol.7, 175-85.

through internecine warfare and as an outcome of the banishment of Buddhism were reduced to the lowest and the most abject subjects of Hinduism. The Buddhist commitment to nonviolence had nevertheless produced new norms for the Brahmin, especially in relation to meat-eating, which were projected outward and deployed against the untouchable.⁴³ So the Brahmin incorporated principles of nonviolence from the very regime of Buddhism that he displaced, with strict taboos on vegetarianism. This allowed for the Brahmin to emerge sovereign, but without killing, or indeed, dying, and was ensured as an immortal rather than a sleeping sovereign.

Finally, unlike other versions of kingship (Western and Islamic) that derived some of their status from the divine, the laws of Manu, as interpreted by Ambedkar, had made *caste* divine but crucially *not* kingship. Caste, he wrote, 'is sacred, not open to abrogation, amendment and not even to criticism.'⁴⁴ Through this three-tiered approach, where the Brahmin had the capacity to punish and even kill the king, with no means of violence or rebellion left to the lower orders and with caste as the dispensation of the divine, the Brahmin emerged as sovereign though not singularized as the monarch. This made the power of the Brahmin perpetual with the responsibility of the social deposited on the king. Significantly, the 'social' was not only isolated and separate in nature but incorporated the diffused monarchy of the Brahmin.

Such an interpretation, while it was directed towards the problem of untouchability in India, nevertheless helps explain the context of the formation of the republic in India. As argued elsewhere, the republic would not be a question of simply displacing the various kings and princes or monarchy. It would require another equally ambitious task, namely the creation of the 'people' or a fraternity that could only be possible under democratic conditions. For a fraternity to be constituted, Ambedkar identified the antagonism and violence between the Brahmin and the untouchable as the crucible of sovereignty in India. Indeed, according to Ambedkar, Brahminism was the counter-revolution to the revolution of Buddhism that had enshrined equality and nonviolence. This identification of a dispersed sovereign order rather than

⁴³ Ambedkar, *Who are the Shudras* in *BAWS* Vol.7, 318-55.

⁴⁴ Ambedkar, *India and the Pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 127.

the figure of the king or monarch explained the perpetual and systemic power of the caste system which was bounded in violence.

Ambedkar, with polemical flourish wrote that this system was perfected to the extent that the Nietzschean doctrine of 'Realize the ideal and idealize the real' had been actualized in India.⁴⁵ As a 'permanent difficulty', caste cut through time's arrow of the present and the past.⁴⁶ Historically understood, the question of caste (Brahmin) as sovereign power and its perpetuation was thus, neither a doctrine of 'social utility', nor of 'individual justice'. In short, caste was understood as political in the stark sense as it was preoccupied with and cohered by the question of violence and power. This is precisely why he compared caste, how so ever heuristically, with Nazism. The critical point of departure was, as pointed out in the epigram above, that the violence of caste was at once hidden as it was obvious. Deploying the modern triad of politics in relation to caste and Hinduism, Ambedkar denounced it as 'inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity.'⁴⁷

Systemic, with ritual and sacrament as legitimacy, comprising the denial of freedom of opportunity and knowledge and, above all, the right to bear arms, caste was not only a 'cruel wrong' but was also the 'most shameless method of preserving the established order' and power.⁴⁸ While the lower and subjugated orders experienced this powerful order of things as 'fate' there was indeed nothing random about caste. Delinking the arbitrariness of fortune and fate that is inherent to the understanding of violence and power, Ambedkar instead denaturalized the familiar, accepted and consensual understanding of caste.⁴⁹ Through a study of the classical past or what he termed the 'exhumation of debris', of Ancient Indian history, Ambedkar understood that violence was not necessarily equal to power. Instead, in so doing he uncovered an argument that if means and instruments were the categorical condition of violence, then caste was not a social, but a political doctrine that controlled and monopolized violence.

⁴⁵ Ambedkar, *Philosophy of Hinduism* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 67.

⁴⁶ Ambedkar, *Who are the Shudras* in *BAWS* Vol.7, 16.

⁴⁷ Ambedkar, *Philosophy of Hinduism* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 71 and 66.

⁴⁸ Ambedkar, *India and the pre-Requisites* in *BAWS* Vol.3, 126.

⁴⁹ On fortune and the arbitrary nature of violence, see Arendt, *On Violence*, 4-5.

The past, in this sense, for Ambedkar, most overtly carried revolutionary potential. Above all, this allowed Ambedkar to identify that the source of sovereignty in India lay with the Brahmin. Precisely because caste militated against fraternity and also because the Brahmin was dispersed, yet located above the monarch, the discovery of the 'people' became essential to Ambedkar's political project. This was because, unlike the French revolution, there was no automatic replacement of the singular monarch or sovereign with the general will.

A revolutionary discovery of the people or the commitment to the idea of the republic premised on popular will was expressed more forcefully and fully on discussions of nationality. The question of nationality renewed the question of the recognition of difference that had marked the infamous hostility of relations between Gandhi and Ambedkar. The entente between the two political rivals was not only short-lived but destroyed and made redundant in the making of a new and powerful political language of both nonviolence and nationality especially in relation to Muslims. Significantly, it was not only a question of the nation but of the 'people' or popular will and sovereignty itself. This question entailed not only the question of the historic source of sovereignty but also demanded the recognition of a new nationality and its 'people,' namely Pakistan.

Pakistan and Peace

If Pakistan has the demerit of cutting away parts of India, it has also the merit of introducing harmony in place of conflict.⁵⁰

B. R. Ambedkar

If Ambedkar's discussion of caste uncovered the violent source of sovereignty in India, then it is striking that the question of Pakistan, on the contrary, opened up for him the possibility of peace between Hindus and Muslims. While considering the respective 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' cases for and against Pakistan, Ambedkar reprised the recent history of relations between the two and their

⁵⁰ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 220.

representatives. Armed with a battery of statistics of killings, Ambedkar noted that the interwar period had seen Hindus and Muslims 'engaged in a sanguinary warfare'. The high nationalist era or the decades from 1920-40, despite Gandhi's efforts to 'bring unity', Ambedkar argued, had been an era of 'civil war between the Hindus and Muslims of India' that was only 'interrupted by brief intervals of armed peace.' By the critical moment at the end of the Second World War, 'the 'depth of antagonism' had ensured that the 'mirage' of Hindu-Muslim 'unity' had vanished and was both 'out of sight and also out of mind.'⁵¹ With this context before him, Ambedkar examined the question of unity and separation once more, setting out the relationship in terms of the social and the political in the same manner in which he had posed the question of caste.

The issue of the social and political – especially as it was couched in terms of the possibility of union and separation on the issue of Pakistan – emerged in Ambedkar's book in direct contrast to the case of caste. As we have seen, caste for Ambedkar was a political union bound in graded sovereignty marked by the divine dispensation of social separation. By contrast, Hindus and Muslims had maintained a complex social union through their long history. Yet in the contemporary era of the nation-state, their social relationship defied being translated into a political union.⁵² And what is equally staggeringly singular, but which generally goes unnoticed is that Ambedkar marked out M. A Jinnah --so often seen as the arch manipulative leader of the times --as entirely 'incorruptible.'⁵³ The question of Muslim nationality as a politically separate force was, in Ambedkar's eyes, not an outcome of cynical machination or bad faith.

Since the days of the Poona Pact at least, the concept of separation did not in itself cause anxiety or squeamishness in Ambedkar. In the context of the Round Table Conference and the Pact, he had certainly argued that Hindus and Muslims, unlike Dalits, were estranged, but not imperatively separate. He did not revise this position or argue in the imperial mode that Hindus and Muslims were

⁵¹ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 184 and 186-7.

⁵² Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 26-35.

⁵³ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 328. He further dismissed Gandhi's claim that Jinnah did not represent all Muslims of India and went as far as to say that 'Never before was Mr. Jinnah a man of the masses.' *Ibid.*, 407.

primordially distinct and separate so that the newly articulated Muslim demand for the nation state simply enabled Muslims to fulfill their separate historical destiny.

In contrast to the caste question, Ambedkar recognized that Hindus and Muslims had a long history of what he termed social union. Whether it was language, 'race' or custom, he argued that there was considerable commonality between Hindus and Muslims and in several social and cultural respects, their relations were 'honeycombed.' Yet it was history and particularly the 'inability to forget' that militated against a political union between Hindus and Muslims. Building on the insights once more of the French experience – and in particular the nineteenth century philosopher Ernest Renan's works on nationality and nationalism – Ambedkar posited the necessity of forgetting the past to constitute a national union.⁵⁴ Unlike other nationalists, whether a Nehru or a Savarkar, who turned to history to testify to India's credentials for modern nationality, for Ambedkar the hold of history had become an impediment to any union between Hindus and Muslims.

'The crux of the problem', Ambedkar wrote, was that 'common historical antecedents' were difficult to 'share together.' Whether it was shrouded in violence or past ruler-ship, history had become the insuperable obstacle. 'The pity of it is', he wrote 'that the two communities can never forget or obliterate their past.' He cited Renan who had argued that 'deeds of violence have taken place at the commencement of all political formations', even those whose 'consequences have been most beneficial.' Yet, as Renan wrote, and Ambedkar repeated, it was 'forgetfulness and I shall even say historical error, [that] form an essential factor in the creation of a nation.'⁵⁵ The Hindus and Muslims, Ambedkar surmised, had 'no such longing' whereby the past and its antagonisms could be forgotten in the forging of a union.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 32-6.

⁵⁵ Ernest Renan cited in Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 35-7. See Balibar, *Violence and Civility*, for a recent appraisal on originary violence and its conversion to political order, historicity and civility.

⁵⁶ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 37. Here he cited the question of 'invasions' and the fear of becoming mere subjects as critical to Hindu and Muslim anxieties that were rooted in history, see *ibid.*, 49.

The implication was that in the case of caste, history had obfuscated and repressed the true nature of sovereignty that Ambedkar assiduously revealed. By contrast, for Hindus and Muslims, the past was ever-present and constantly articulate, allowing little or no capacity for its own repression. Such repression and forgetting, had it existed, would have enabled the suturing of violent past events and the creation of a new relationship of unity. But this was now not to be.

The power of history coupled with the 'tyranny' of numbers had rendered the Hindu-Muslim relations hostile and antagonistic. The 'communal problem' was not a matter of disposition, whether this was the much-rehearsed polemics of 'insolent' demands and 'meanness' on the part of either Muslims or Hindus. Instead, Ambedkar directly addressed the question of majority and minority and the potentiality of violence and through it, peace.

It [the communal problem] exists and will exist wherever a hostile majority is brought face to face against a hostile minority. Controversies relating to separate vs. joint electorates, controversies relating to population ratio vs. weightage are all inherent in a situation where a minority is pitted against a majority. The best solution of the communal problem is not to have two communities facing each other, one a majority and other a minority, welded in the steel frame of a single government.⁵⁷

As this extract clarifies, the coercion or 'steel frame of a single government' could not on its own resolve the depth of antagonism nor the powerful will to nationhood which was present on both sides. In fact, the political mechanisms described by Ambedkar as 'controversies' would only create conditions in which hostility would be perpetuated.

In Ambedkar's reckoning, these relations between Brahmins and untouchables and Hindus and Muslims were mirror opposites. A separation founded on and preserved in violence had constituted the order of things for caste. The work of the republic, then, would be to ensure that even though castes could not be 'dissolved' a relationship, however competitive and adversarial,

⁵⁷ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 111.

could be established between castes that had hitherto been marked only by separation. By contrast, while a density of social relationship indeed existed between Hindus and Muslims, their antagonism when encountered could not be sublimated but only expressed in violence. From his work on Pakistan, it is clear that political separation for Ambedkar offered the possibility of peace. 'Integral India', he concluded was 'incompatible with an independent [India] or even with India as a dominion.'

The antagonism between Hindus and Muslims, as Ambedkar interpreted it, was not of the same kind or even degree of the antagonism between Brahmins and the untouchables. Their antagonism existed on the surface, was ambient and given to easy mobilization, Hindus and Muslims were thus in a state of civil war. This called for some form of separation of historical brotherhood that had taken on a murderous logic. While the violent antagonism steeped in separation of castes was so complete that it became both obvious and invisible. Caste antagonism thus could only be managed if not overcome through a facing of different caste groups within the same political horizon and the recognition of a historic sovereign order that had to be displaced. Whether it was Muslim nationality or caste, Ambedkar's influential political pursuit would be thus overwhelmingly agonistic and zealously nonviolent.

Read together, Ambedkar's interventions on caste and Pakistan were, though diametrically opposed, a matter of the recognition of separation. For caste, the principle of separation remained a deliberate blind spot, which he undertook to illuminate, summoning up history, social practice and the issue of deeply embedded violence. By contrast, Hindus and Muslims were often described as and recognized as a union or a fraternity, but according to him this was merely 'display'.⁵⁸ A sense of mutual 'antagonism,' he concluded, was the essential form of this relationship, which would constantly come to the surface in a 'common theatre.' 'It is the common theatre' – that is, united India itself – he argued, 'which calls this antagonism into action.' 'Pakistan' thus had the 'advantage' of 'defanging' the antagonism by excluding the possibility of a common platform that was both the site and the cause of deadly confrontation.

⁵⁸ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 339- 341.

Pakistan offered the possibility of removing this 'disturbance of the peace' and ensuring an enduring 'tranquility' through the separation of the antagonists.

Critiquing the Hindutva ideologues' hostility to the creation of Pakistan, Ambedkar directly reintroduced the question of caste.⁵⁹ Dismissing Har Dayal, whom he categorized not as an anarchist or a revolutionary but as part of the ideological world of Hindutva, he chastised him for his views on Muslim conversion or what was termed as '*shuddhi*' [reconversion/purification].⁶⁰ In other words, he dismissed the Hindutva desire to incorporate the Muslim as Hindu on the basis not of religion but of caste itself. The Hindutva idea of 'assimilation', he reminded Har Dayal and others, was an affront to Hinduism itself since 'caste is incompatible with conversion.' More stridently, he ironically identified Savarkar's claims to be compatible with the idea of Pakistan itself. If, according to Savarkar's assertion, 'Hindus are a nation by themselves,' Ambedkar argued that 'this of course means that the Muslims are a separate nation by themselves.'⁶¹ In fact, precisely because of their belief in the existence of the Hindu and Muslim nations in India, Ambedkar surmised that Jinnah and Savarkar, were alike and in agreement. The key difference was separation and violence, once again. Jinnah, he averred, wanted separation. Of the Hindutva proponents, on the other hand, he wrote,

Mr. Savarkar...wants Hindus and the Muslims to live two separate nations, in one country, each maintaining its own religion, language and culture. One can understand and even appreciate the wisdom...because the ultimate aim is to bring into being one nation... One can justify this attitude only if the two nations were to live as partners in friendly intercourse with mutual respect and accord. But that it cannot be, because Mr. Savarkar will not allow the Muslim nation to be co-equal...he wants the Hindu nation to be the dominant nation and the Muslim nation to be the servient [sic!] nation. Why Mr. Savarkar, after sowing the seed of enmity between the Hindu nation and Muslim nation should want that

⁵⁹ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 336-43 and 129-33.

⁶⁰ On Hindu nationalism see Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, and Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*.

⁶¹ Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 130 and 141.

they should live under one constitution and occupy one country is difficult to explain.⁶²

These were not stray or hapless remarks. Through a discussion of territory and nationality, Ambedkar had taken full account of raging polemics, party positions and constitutional considerations. The separation of caste though immanent had rendered the Hindu social as an asocial body politic. Confronting that fact and ensuring the proper relation between castes had the potentiality of converting a separation that was singular to India into a political union. 'Unity' or 'the people' or popular sovereignty, Ambedkar astutely realized, was contained within the national form.⁶³

The central issue was the problem of hostility and antagonism and its correct recognition for a nonviolent and even peaceful emergence of a new politics. His recognition of Pakistan was constitutive of an agonistic politics that took two mutually constitutive directions. Whether it was the antagonism of caste or of religion, he sought to convert that relationship, without the erasure of those fundamental differences, into an adversarial relationship, which would become peaceful. One dimension required the recognition of separation, namely Muslim nationality, and the other, the end of separation namely a compact between castes. The overall concern that emerges in the totality of Ambedkar's writing is the making of 'people' as the subject of politics. More precisely, he sought the correct 'container' for an expression of popular sovereignty and as such his was a radical republican project.

In a major departure from the subject oriented-political thought and practice of Gandhi, or even Tilak, that had located sovereignty in the individual subject, for Ambedkar its rightful place was with the general will. Ironically, the work of separation, in its full measure, enabled the philosophical discovery of the general will or a true popular sovereignty.⁶⁴ Both the nature of caste and the recent but deadly antagonism between Hindus and Muslims called for the

⁶² Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 144. He further warned that the international examples such a Turkey, Czechoslovakia and Austria that were approvingly cited by Savarkar only illustrated the problem of separation.

⁶³ Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 38-43, critically examines Carl Schmitt's work on antagonism and parliamentary democracy.

⁶⁴ Devji, *The Impossible Indian*; and Kapila, 'A History of Violence'.

recognition of violence and hostility. But in Ambedkar's case, this was not for an ethical resolution or personal transformation, but for the institution of nonviolent politics. The existence of enemies and antagonists, in distinction to Gandhi, offered for him not the opportunity for self-transformation, but the conversion of those relations into agonistic politics.

As such, the destruction of the dispersed monarchy of the Brahmin and the recognition of Muslim nationality were two sides of the same political consideration. The conversion of violence and hostility into the nonviolent separation of historical brothers and the assumption of a new fraternity -- though not entirely recognized today as Ambedkar's political thought and work -- above all laid the foundations for the assumption of not one *but two* agonistic republics.

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