

Dr. Ambedkar's views on Islam and Indian Muslims

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After Gandhiji, Doctor Ambedkar is probably the most revered icon for Indians. The Dalits especially regard him as another Buddha. But it is unfortunate that his opinions on various issues are being quoted selectively. For example there appears to be a hush-hush about what he had written about Islam and Indian Muslims. But the fact remains that when he decided to quit Hinduism along with his followers, in spite of several appeals and enticements by Muslim and Christian clergy and leaders, he chose to embrace Buddhism, another dharmic faith. No one seems to bring this fact to the attention of the public.

Unlike most Hindu leaders, both pre-Independence and post- Independence, Dr. Ambedkar was very clear about the danger posed by Islam and Muslims to this country. He clinically examined the nature of Muslim psyche and society and the role that will be played by them after independence. He clearly foresaw that Hindus and Muslims cannot co-exist and hence British India had to be partitioned *after* an exchange of population into two separate Hindu and Muslim nations . He has developed this thesis in his well known book, 'Pakistan or The Partition of India' ¹. We give below a few excerpts from this book to show that Dr. Ambedkar was well aware of the various problems posed by Islam and Muslims to the Indian society and polity.

But even before he wrote this book he had written about this problem. During 1927- 29, Dr. Ambedkar owned a Marathi newspaper called '*Bahishkrut Bharat*'. In it he maintained that the dispute in this country is not between two societies but between two nations. He was very critical of the Nehruvian plan of separating the Sind from the Bombay province and not giving equivalent minority rights to Hindus where they were in minority. He was quite worried about the fact that in undivided India the Muslim majority provinces were on the border. He felt that due to this the borders were not safe in case of any threat to our security by a Muslim power as the Indian Muslims had no loyalty for Hindusthan. He also strongly condemned the pardah system in Islam.

Coming to his book, in Chapter Four he has traced the history of Muslim invasions and the butchering, forced conversions and rape of Hindu women and the destruction of Hindu temples and monuments. He has clearly brought out the truth that the invaders were not interested merely in looting, but also in conversion of the 'kafirs'. He is very forthright in his description of the atrocities committed by the Muslims and has extensively quoted from historical records. He has quoted scholars who state that the Hindu peasants had to part with half of their produce as Jiziya as well as pay a large tax on their cattle. (P.62)

Chapter VII

“ It is a notorious fact that many prominent Hindus who had offended the Muslim susceptibilities of the Muslims either by their writings or by their part in the Shuddhi movement have been murdered by some fanatic Musalmans ... But Mr. Gandhi has never protested against such murders. Not only have the Musalmans not condemned these outrages but even Mr. Gandhi has never called upon the leading Muslims to condemn them” (P. 156)

“ But there are others who ... believe in the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity. This belief of theirs seems to rest on two grounds. Firstly they believe in the efficacy of a Central Government to mould diverse set of people into one nation. Secondly, they feel that the satisfaction of Muslim demands will be a sure means of achieving Hindu-Muslim unity”. (P. 187). Dr. Ambedkar subsequently shows that both presumptions are not valid.

Chapter X:

In this chapter titled as ‘Social Stagnation’, Dr. Ambedkar has analysed the social evils amongst Muslims and comments as follows:

“ One may well ask if there is any social evil which is found among the Hindus and is not found among the Muslims? ... Take child-marriage ... [quoting from 1931 census statistics] Can the position among the Musalmans so far as child-marriage goes, be considered better than the position among the Hindus?” (P. 225-6)

“ Take the position of women. It is insisted by Muslims that the legal rights given to Muslim women, ensure them a greater measure of independence than allowed to other Eastern women ... the Muslim woman is the most helpless person in the world ... her fate is ‘once married, always married’. She cannot escape the marriage tie, however irksome it may be. While she cannot repudiate the marriage, the husband can always do it without having to show any cause. Utter the word ‘*Tallak*’ and observe continence for three weeks and the woman is cast away ... This latitude in the marriage in the matter of divorce destroys that sense of security which is so fundamental for a full, free and happy life for a woman. This insecurity of life, to which a Muslim woman is exposed, is greatly augmented by the right of polygamy and concubinage, which the Muslim law gives to the husband” (P. 226-227)

“ Take the caste system. Islam speaks of brotherhood. Everybody infers that Islam must be free from slavery and caste. Regarding slavery nothing needs to be said. It stand abolished now by law. But while it existed much of its support was derived from Islam and Islamic countries ... But if slavery has gone, caste among Musalmans has remained ” (P. 228). Dr. Ambedkar then quotes the 1901 census report for Bengal to show that Muslims there have several castes including Arzal or untouchable castes with whom no other Mohamedan would associate and who are forbidden to enter the mosque to use the public burial ground. He also quotes from the same Report about the panchayat system of each caste which extends to social as well as trade matters resulting in castes which are as strictly endogamous as Hindu castes. He concludes, “the Mohamedans observe not only caste but also untouchability” (P. 230)

“There can thus be no manner of doubt that the Muslim Society in India is afflicted by the same social evils as afflict the Hindu Society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the social evils of the Hindus and something more. That something more is the compulsory system of *purdah* for Muslim women”. Listing all the implications of *purdah* he concludes “they are usually victims to anemia, tuberculosis and pyorrhea. Their bodies are deformed, with their backs bent, bones protruded, hands and feet crooked. Ribs, joints and nearly all their bones ache. Heart palpitation is very often present in them. The result of this pelvic deformity is untimely death at delivery ... the process of moral degeneration must and does set in. Being completely secluded from the outer world, they engage their minds in petty family quarrels ... The physical and intellectual effects of *purdah* are nothing as compared to its effects on morals ... a social system which cuts off all contacts between the two sexes produces an unhealthy tendency towards sexual excesses and unnatural and other morbid habits and ways ... It is responsible for the social segregation of Hindus from Muslims which is the bane of public life in India ... Not that *purdah* and the evil consequent thereon are not to be found among certain sections of the

Hindus ... But the point of distinction is that among the Muslims, *purdah* has a religious sanctity which it has not with the Hindus.” (P. 230-32)

“The Muslims have no interest in politics as such. Their predominant interest is in religion ... Muslim politics is essentially clerical and recognizes only one difference, namely, that existing between Hindus and Muslims. None of the secular categories of life have any place in the politics of the Muslim community and if they do find a place - and they must because they are irrepressible - they are subordinated to one and the only one governing principle of the Muslim political universe, namely, religion.” (P. 232)

“The existence of these evils among the Muslims is distressing enough. But far more distressing is the fact that there is no organised movement of social reforms among the Musalmans of India on a scale sufficient to bring about their eradication ... The Hindus have their social evils ... and a few of them are actively agitating for their removal. The Muslims on the other hand, do not realise that they are evils and consequently do not agitate for their removal. Indeed, they oppose any change in the existing practices.” (P.233)

Dr. Ambedkar then goes on to analyse the reasons for this attitude. He feels that it is due to “the fundamental assumption made by all Muslims that Islam is a world religion, suitable for all people, for all times and for all conditions ... that this uniformity is deadening and is not merely imparted to Muslims, but is imposed upon them by a spirit of intolerance which is unknown anywhere outside the Muslim world for its severity and its violence and which is directed towards the suppression of all rational thinking which is in conflict with the teachings of Islam.” (P. 234) Although its rigidity is being challenged elsewhere in the world, the Indian Muslim community is still clinging to it. The reason for this is due to the peculiar position he occupies in India as he is placed in a predominantly Hindu social and political environment which he feels is encroaching on his existence. The Muslims think that the Hindus and Muslims must perpetually struggle.

“How Muslim politics has become perverted is shown by the attitude of the Muslim leaders to the political reforms in the Indian States. The Muslims and their leaders carried on a great agitation for the introduction of representative government in the Hindu State of Kashmir. The same Muslims and their leaders are deadly opposed to the introduction of representative governments in other Muslim States. The reason for this strange attitude is quite simple. In all matters, the determining question with the Muslims is how it will affect the Muslims vis-a-vis the Hindus ... The dominating consideration is how democracy with majority rule will affect the Muslims in their struggle against the Hindus. Will it strengthen them or will it weaken them? If democracy weakens them, they will not have democracy.” (P. 236-7)

CHAPTERS XI and XII

Dr. Ambedkar discusses the causes behind the behaviour and political aggression of the Muslims in these chapters. “How the Muslim mind will work and by what factors it is likely to be swayed will be clear if the fundamental tenets of Islam which dominate the Muslim politics and the views expressed by prominent Muslims bearing on Muslim attitude towards an Indian Government are taken into consideration ... Among the tenets the one that calls for notice is the tenet of Islam which says that in a country which is not under Muslim rule, wherever there is a conflict between Muslim law and the law of the land, the former must prevail over the latter and a Muslim will be justified in obeying the Muslim law and defying the law of the land.” (P. 292). He quotes the Muslim leader Maulana Mahomed Ali, “the only allegiance a Musalman, whether a civilian or soldier, whether living under a Muslim or under non-Muslim administration, is commanded by the Koran to acknowledge is his allegiance to God, to his

Prophet and to those in authority from among the Musalmans ... But the unalterable rule is and has always been that as Musalmans they can obey only such laws and orders issued by their secular rulers as do not involve disobedience to the commandments of God who in the expressive language of the Holy Koran is 'the all-ruling ruler'." (P.293)

“According to Muslim Canon Law the world is divided into two camps, Dar-ul-Islam (abode of Islam) and Dar-ul-Harb (abode of war). A country is Dar-ul-Islam when it is ruled by Muslims. A country is Dar-ul-Harb when Muslims only reside in it but are not rulers of it. That being the Canon Law of the Muslims, India cannot be the common motherland of the Hindus and the Musalmans. It can be the land of the Musalmans - but it cannot be the land of the 'Hindus and the Musalmans living as equals'. Further, it can be the land of the Musalmans only when it is governed by the Muslims. The moment the land becomes subject to the authority of a non-Muslim power, it ceases to be the land of the Muslims. Instead of being Dar-ul-Islam it becomes Dar-ul-Harb. It must not be supposed that this view is only of academic interest. For it is capable of becoming an active force capable of influencing the conduct of the Muslims. It did greatly influence the conduct of the Muslims when the British occupied India. The British occupation raised no qualms in the minds of the Hindus. But so far as the Muslims were concerned, it at once raised the question whether India was any longer a suitable place of residence for Muslims. A discussion was started in the Muslim community, which Dr. Titus says lasted for half a century, as to whether India was Dar-ul-Harb or Dar-ul-Islam. (P. 294).

He then points out another injunction, Jihad (crusade) by which it becomes "incumbent on a Muslim ruler to extend the rule of Islam until the whole world shall have been brought under its sway ... Technically, it is the duty of the Muslim ruler, who is capable of doing so, to transform Dar-ul-Harb into Dar-ul-Islam ... there are instances showing that they have not hesitated to proclaim Jihad. The curious may examine the history of the Mutiny of 1857 and if he does, he will find that, in part, at any rate, it was really a Jihad proclaimed by the Muslims against the British, and that the Mutiny so far as the Muslims were concerned was a recrudescence of revolt which had been fostered by Sayyed Ahmad who preached to the Musalmans for several decades that owing to the occupation of India by the British the country had become a Dar-ul-Harb. The Mutiny was an attempt by the Muslims to reconvert India into a Dar-ul-Islam ... Not only can they proclaim Jihad but they can call the aid of a foreign Muslim power to make Jihad a success, or if the foreign Muslim power intends to proclaim a Jihad, help that power in making its endeavour a success. (P. 295-6)

He then draws attention to the third tenet “that Islam does not recognise territorial affinities. Its affinities are social and religious and therefore extraterritorial ... this is the basis of Pan-Islamism. It is this which leads every Musalman in India to say that he is a Muslim first and Indian afterwards ... To the Muslims a Hindu is a Kaffir. A Kaffir is not worthy of any respect. He is low-born and without status” (P. 301). Dr. Ambedkar goes on to show that this concept of Kaffir was extended even to Mahatma Gandhi by quoting his comrade-in-arm in the Khilafat movement, Mr. Mahomed Ali who said, “ However pure Mr. Gandhi’s character may be, he must appear to me from the point of view religion inferior to any Musalman, even though he may be without character” and “ Yes, according to my religion and creed, I do hold an adulterous and fallen Musalman to be better than Mr. Gandhi.” (P.302)

Dr. Ambedkar also quotes prominent Hindu leaders who were alive to the problem. For example “Mrs. Annie Besant says ... The world has gone beyond such so-called theocracies, in which God’s commands are given through a man. The claim now put forward by Musalman leaders that they must obey the laws of their particular prophet above the laws of the State in which they live, is subversive of civic order and the stability of the State ... Malabar has taught us what Islamic rule still means, and we do not want to see another specimen of the ‘Khilafat

Raj' in India ... there is no place in a civilised land for people who believe that their religion teaches them to murder, rob, rape, burn, or drive away out of the country those who refuse to apostatise from their ancestral faiths ... Such 'Laws of God' cannot be allowed to override the laws of a civilised country ... In fact, *Muslim sects are not safe in a country ruled by orthodox Muslims* [italics ours]" (P. 274-5)

He also quotes Lala Lajpatrai expressing apprehensions about Hindu-Muslim unity and also an interview with the poet Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, "another very important factor which, according to the poet, was making it impossible for Hindu-Mohamedan unity to become an accomplished fact was that the Mohamedans could not confine their patriotism to any one country ... The poet said he had very frankly asked many Mohamedans whether, in the event of any Mohamedan power invading India, they would stand side by side with their Hindu neighbours to defend their common land. He could not be satisfied with the reply he got from them. He said that he could definitely state that even such men as Mr. Mahomed Ali had declared that under no circumstances was it permissible for any Mohamedan, whatever his country might be, to stand against any other Mohamedan." (P. 276)

Dr. Ambedkar has also written, "Hinduism is said to divide people and in contrast Islam is said to bind people together. This is only a half truth. For Islam divides as inexorably as it binds. Islam is a close corporation and the distinction that it makes between Muslims and non-Muslims is very real, very positive and very alienating distinction. The brotherhood of Islam is not the universal brotherhood of man. It is brotherhood of Muslims for Muslims only ... The second defect of Islam is that it is a system of *social* self-government and is incompatible with *local* self-government, because the allegiance of a Muslim does not rest on his domicile in the country which is his but on the faith to which he belongs ... In other words, Islam can never allow a true Muslim to adopt India as his motherland and regard a Hindu as his kith and kin." (P. 330). Also "The Muslims are howling against the Hindu Maha Sabha and its slogan of Hindudom and Hindu Raj. But who is responsible for this? Hindu Maha Sabha and Hindu Raj are the inescapable nemesis which the Musalmans have brought upon themselves by having a Muslim League. It is action and counter-action. One gives rise to the other." (P. 359)

From this book it is not clear if Dr. Ambedkar had studied the Islamic scriptures since he does not quote from them. Hence one can only speculate what he would have written in this book about them and which passages he would have quoted from them. Perhaps he would have strengthened his case for partition considerably! As it is he believed that the solution to this problem lay in the partition of British India along with a *systematic exchange of population*.

The first part of his proposal was ultimately hurriedly carried out in spite of vehement denials of the Congress leaders. Unfortunately no action on the second part i.e. the exchange of population was undertaken by our leaders. Their (criminal) negligence is clearly reflected in the census figures released by the Pakistan census which show that according to the 1941 census the proportion of dharmic faiths in Pakistan was steadily increasing since 1900 and was 19.7% in 1941. The 1951 census figures for this group show a figure of 1.6% implying a massive genocide and/or deportation of Hindus and allied faiths in the 1947 carnage which accompanied Independence. In comparison the Muslim decrease in India was quite mild - from 13.4% in 1941 to 10.4% in 1951. In India the Muslims who remained were also given full constitutional rights as well as concessions in several fields. And what they have lost in 1947 has been fully made up by now since their proportion in the 2001 census is again 13.4% and is likely to increase further in the 2011 census. The Indian census data also shows that they are present in large numbers in several border regions of the country and whispers of further

partitions are frequently being aired. Dr Ambedkar's observation in this book that Muslim and Hindu societies cannot coexist together in turning out to be uncannily accurate!

It is also very surprising that when Dr. Ambedkar was so clear about Islam and Muslims, his present followers are bending over backwards to appease this community for its votes, instead of using their influence to educate them and bring them within the national mainstream. Nor have our nationalist leaders, even after partition, asked the Muslims to give up their outdated theology and concepts. In this context it may be mentioned here again that when Dr. Ambedkar decided to make Buddhism his religion after much deliberation, and in spite of several inducements, he refused to embrace Islam or Christianity and instead chose another dharmic faith. When will his followers understand his logic behind this decision?

REFERENCE

ⁱ *Pakistan or The Partition of India*, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Vol.8, Education Dept, Govt of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1990