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Perspective Of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar On Global Governance: Economic Relations And Foreign Policy

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Abstract: The vision of Dr B.R. Ambedkar of international economic relations and foreign policy demonstrates a pragmatic and multidisciplinary approach to addressing the national and global challenges of India. This study explores his emphasis on aligning international relations with national interests, highlighting his views on the critical role of foreign trade in fostering economic growth. It examines his economic policy insights, particularly regarding agriculture, and his approach to sensitive issues like relations with Pakistan and Kashmir. The principles of the foreign policy of Ambedkar reflect his commitment to justice, strategic foresight, and national sovereignty. The paper also critiques the foreign policy of Nehru, analysing their broader implications, including the Chinese invasion, the Kashmir conflict, and the *Panchsheel* agreement. The perspectives of Ambedkar offer a nuanced understanding of the strategic vulnerabilities of India, such as the delayed integration of Goa, and emphasise the need for a policy framework grounded in realism and long-term national interests. This multidisciplinary study underscores the enduring relevance of Ambedkar in shaping the international economic and diplomatic strategies of India.

Keywords: Dr B.R. Ambedkar, International Economic Relations, Foreign Policy, Critique of the Policies of Nehru

Introduction

Dr B.R. Ambedkar was a multifaceted thinker whose contributions included economics, social reform, politics, and moral philosophy. Although he initially focused on economics, his intellectual pursuits later extended to broader issues such as social justice, political reconstruction, and governance. The thoughts of Dr B.R. Ambedkar on international economic relations and foreign policy reflect his commitment to national interests, equality, and justice. He believed that the policy of India in these areas should not only focus on economic growth but also uphold morality and human values. After independence, India faced significant challenges in its relations with neighbouring countries like Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka, and Burma. Ambedkar analysed these issues critically and emphasised the importance of foreign policies that align with national pride, self-respect, and the principles of freedom, equality, and fraternity.

Ambedkar was vocal against exploitative policies pursued by global superpowers and opposed ideologies like communism when imposed without moral considerations. He believed that communism and consumerist values, rooted in greed and power, could harm societal well-being and national development. According to him, economic policies and foreign relations must prioritise human dignity, morality, and social equality. Ambedkar argued that no country could achieve true progress by abandoning these values, and any compromise on morality would cripple the foundation of society.

Unlike his contemporaries, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad, Ambedkar had a distinct approach to foreign policy and international relations. While others often emphasised ideological stances or political alliances, Ambedkar focused on practical measures that protected the national interests of India and promoted global peace. He believed that foreign policy should serve as a tool to maintain economic justice, ensure world peace, and uphold the values of morality and humanity. For Ambedkar, national pride and the welfare of the majority were more important than power politics or expanding influence.

Ambedkar also addressed the role of international economic relations in shaping the development of nation development. He believed that the foreign trade policies of India and relations with global powers should protect its sovereignty and avoid exploitation. He argued for a balanced approach that fostered cooperation without compromising national dignity or values. His vision extended beyond narrow political ideologies, emphasising a clean democratic system free from corruption and consumerist influences.

This paper aims to explore the ideas of Dr Ambedkar on international economic relations and foreign policy. It focuses on his critique of exploitative global practices, his emphasis on morality and justice, and his vision for the role of India in global politics. The thoughts of Ambedkar remain highly relevant today, it offers a framework for fair, ethical, and value-based international relations that prioritise human welfare while safeguarding national interests.

Method and Materials

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the vision of Dr B.R. Ambedkar of international economic relations and foreign policy. Primary sources, such as his speeches, writings, and legislative contributions, were analysed to understand his perspectives. Archival materials, including historical records, government reports, and debates from the Constituent Assembly, provided context for his approach to economic policy, agriculture, and international relations. Secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, books, newspapers, and critiques of his views, were used to supplement and expand on the primary data. This combination of sources enables a comprehensive exploration of the multidisciplinary approach of Dr Ambedkar, his critique of the foreign policy of Nehru, and his principles of foreign trade and diplomacy.

The Vision of International Economic Relations of Ambedkar

International economic relations refer to the economic interactions between a country and other nations, influenced by various factors. In the competitive and interconnected world of today, these relations play a crucial role in national administration, shaping development, policies, planning, and trade. The complexity of such relations has grown since the Second World War with the establishment of institutions like the IMF and World Bank and policies formed through GATT and UNCTAD conferences, which have influenced global trade and economic strategies. These interactions drive the economy of the nation, aiming for prosperity. For India, a well-structured economic policy is essential to address its challenges through international relations effectively.

Views on National Interests in International Relations

The perspective of Dr. Ambedkar on international economic relations was shaped by his understanding of the socio-political and economic situation of India in the post-independence era. Dr Ambedkar stressed that the international economic relations of a nation should primarily serve its national interests, which he believed were

tied to economic development, the elimination of poverty, and reducing inequality. His economic policies were pragmatic and sought to protect the autonomy and self-respect of India in the global arena, especially given its economic backwardness and the challenges of post-independence reconstruction.

He emphasised that the national interests of India were paramount when forming economic relations with other nations. For India, national interest was defined by the need to:

1. **Maintain harmony with neighbouring nations:** Ambedkar believed that the geographic and strategic position of India required strong, peaceful relationships with its neighbours to ensure security and facilitate trade. Good economic relations with neighbouring countries like Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan were essential to maintain stability and promote regional trade.
2. **Reduce dependence on food imports:** At the time of independence, India faced a severe food crisis and relied heavily on food grain imports, particularly from the United States. Ambedkar proposed that India work toward self-sufficiency in food production to avoid over-dependence on foreign nations. This was crucial not only for the economic stability of the country but also for maintaining national pride and independence.
3. **Minimise dependence on foreign aid:** Although foreign aid was necessary for the early development of India, Ambedkar recognised the dangers of over-reliance on external assistance. He believed that excessive foreign aid could undermine the sovereignty of India. Thus, his vision focused on reducing dependence on external support by fostering internal economic growth and self-reliance.
4. **Pursue self-reliance in agriculture and industry:** Ambedkar stressed the need for self-reliance in both agriculture and industrial sectors. He recognised that industrial development was critical to the future of India but also emphasised that this should be complemented by agricultural reforms that supported local needs. He believed in the balance between agriculture and industry, where agriculture would provide raw materials for industrial growth while industrialisation would help in increasing employment opportunities.

The Role of Foreign Trade in the Economic Vision of Ambedkar

Dr Ambedkar understood that India, being an agricultural and economically backward country, needed to participate in global trade. However, he cautioned against unbalanced foreign trade relationships that could lead to dependency. India, according to Ambedkar, should strive to create an economic system where its national interests are aligned with its foreign trade policies.

The early trade relationships of India were predominantly with Western countries, particularly Britain and the United States. While Ambedkar accepted that these ties were necessary, he cautioned that they should not compromise the sovereignty of India. He supported establishing trade relations with nations that could assist India in its economic reconstruction but urged that these relations should be based on mutual benefit rather than exploitation. Ambedkar recognised the importance of protecting nascent Indian industries from foreign competition. He advocated for policies that would foster the growth of indigenous industries while reducing reliance on imports. This would also reduce the economic vulnerabilities created by dependency on foreign countries.

The Foreign Policy Approach of Ambedkar

Dr Ambedkar resigned from the Union Cabinet on 27 September 1951 and clarified his reasons on 10 October 1951. Among the reasons was the foreign policy adopted by the Indian government at that time. He observed a sharp shift in the international relations of India after independence. Initially, every country in the world was a friend of India. However, soon after, India found itself isolated. No nation supported the proposals of India at the United Nations, and the country had no allies to rely on.

Dr Ambedkar referenced the ideas of Bismarck and Bernard Shaw to emphasise the shortcomings of the foreign policy of India. Bismarck had said, 'Politics is not a game of realising an ideal. It is a game of realising what is possible.' Similarly, Bernard Shaw cautioned that being too idealistic could be dangerous. Dr Ambedkar argued that the foreign policy of India ignored such wisdom, focusing on lofty ideals that made the impossible seem achievable. As a result, India had to spend a significant portion of its income on military and defence. Dr Ambedkar pointed out that a large part of the national income, approximately one billion eighty crore rupees, was allocated to defence, which he believed was unsustainable.

Dr Ambedkar proposed a more practical approach to foreign policy. He believed that India should focus on strengthening its own position and stop chasing unattainable ideals. He also criticised the government for failing to recognise the importance of cultivating international alliances. Regarding Kashmir, Dr Ambedkar took a pragmatic stance.

Economic Policy and Agriculture

Dr Ambedkar also emphasised the importance of addressing poverty and hunger in India. While industrialisation was crucial for the prosperity of the country, he argued that food security should be the first priority of the nation. He suggested that India needed to become self-sufficient in food production and focus on improving agriculture. Ambedkar believed that rather than redistributing existing land, the government should work to make non-cultivable land productive and give it to landless individuals. The vision of Dr Ambedkar for the development of India was grounded in practical solutions that addressed both economic and social challenges, calling for a balance between defence, international relations, and economic growth.

Relations with Pakistan and Kashmir

Dr B.R. Ambedkar had a distinct perspective on the foreign policy of India, especially in relation to Pakistan and the Kashmir issue. He believed that the hostile stance adopted by Pakistan since its creation was rooted in communal animosity, stemming from the two-nation theory espoused by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Ambedkar was deeply dissatisfied with the situation, noting that the anti-India position of Pakistan led to border violations, espionage, and sabotage. The Kashmir issue, along with the condition of Indians in East Bengal, further exacerbated the strained relations between the two nations.

Dr Ambedkar argued that the foreign policy of India, particularly concerning Pakistan, was flawed and impractical. He believed the fight over Kashmir had become symbolic, with both sides seeking to uphold justice, but he criticised the ongoing conflict as being built on religious grounds. He suggested that the region should be divided based on the religious composition of the population. In his view, the Hindu and Buddhist areas of Kashmir should belong to India, while the Muslim-majority region should be given to Pakistan. He also suggested that Kashmir could be divided into three parts, with the plebiscite held only in certain regions. Ambedkar emphasised that resolving the Kashmir issue based on religious lines was inevitable, given the deep-rooted communal tensions. This, he believed, would resolve the Kashmir issue and prevent future conflicts.

Principles of Foreign Policy

Dr Ambedkar was a firm believer in the importance of principles when formulating foreign policy. He drew comparisons with European political leaders like Lloyd George and Clemenceau, who, while drawing borders in post-World War I Europe, had been criticised for ignoring moral principles. Ambedkar stressed that the foreign policy of India should not be shaped solely by political expediency but by clear and just principles. He was particularly concerned with maintaining the dignity of India on the global stage and critiqued the lack of a principled approach to its foreign relations of the country.

The Multidisciplinary Approach of Ambedkar

The vision of Dr Ambedkar for politics, including foreign policy, was informed by his diverse academic background. He was not only an economist but also a sociologist, political scientist, and jurist. His knowledge of ethics, philosophy, sociology, and political science provided him with a well-rounded perspective, allowing him to analyse the foreign policy of India from a broader lens. He emphasised that foreign policy should be guided by principles rather than political convenience, ensuring that the actions of India in the international arena were consistent with its moral and ethical standards.

In his lectures, Dr Ambedkar elaborated on his views regarding the foreign relations of India, stressing the importance of parliamentary democracy and the need to prioritise the welfare of the citizens of India. He believed that the approach of India to foreign relations should be pragmatic, grounded in principle, and focused on securing the future of the nation while addressing its internal issues.

The Critique of Foreign Policy of Nehru: The Chinese Invasion and Broader Implications

Dr B.R. Ambedkar critiqued the foreign policy approach of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, particularly during the period of increasing global tensions in the post-World War II era. He acknowledged that the foreign policy of Nehru was grounded in three main principles: peace, the coexistence of socialism and independent democracy, and opposition to SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization). However, Ambedkar raised several concerns regarding the effectiveness and practical application of these principles in the context of geopolitical challenges in India, particularly regarding communism and the growing influence of Russia. Dr Ambedkar argued that the principle of peace, as espoused by Nehru, was dangerously idealistic in the face of global realities. Ambedkar noted that peace, while universally desirable, came at a high cost when it involved tolerating the expansionist tendencies of communist regimes, particularly the Soviet Union. He pointed out that Russia had annexed several European states, including Finland, Estonia, and Poland, and extended its influence over other countries, such as Germany and Austria. He criticised the growing 'monster' of communism, which, in his view, subjugated nations under the guise of liberation.

Ambedkar raised concerns that the pacifist approach of India towards Russia would eventually backfire. He warned that by appeasing Russia and tolerating its expansion, India could one day find itself in the path of this expansionist ideology, leaving it vulnerable to potential aggression. He urged India to reconsider its stance on peace if it meant sacrificing the sovereignty of other nations and ultimately endangering its own security.

Ambedkar expressed doubts about the principle of Nehru of combining socialism with democracy, particularly with regard to communism. He believed that communism was inherently incompatible with democratic systems, likening it to a 'forest fire' that would inevitably destroy everything in its path. While Nehru and some international leaders advocated for peaceful coexistence between communist and democratic systems, Ambedkar dismissed this as naïve. He argued that countries like Canada and England, situated far from the epicentre of communism, might be able to entertain such ideas, but India, located close to China and the Soviet Union, was at greater risk of being engulfed by the 'fire of communism'.

The critique of Ambedkar extended to the opposition of Nehru to SEATO, which was established to contain communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Ambedkar suggested that the hostility of Nehru towards SEATO was rooted in personal animus towards the United States and a desire to distance India from Western alliances. However, Ambedkar believed that India, surrounded by communist threats from China and Pakistan, would benefit from such security arrangements. He criticised Nehru for his decision not to join SEATO, seeing it as a missed opportunity to strengthen the security posture of India in the face of growing international tensions.

Ambedkar also expressed concern about the geographical threats surrounding India. He highlighted the dangers posed by Pakistan, which had aligned itself with other Muslim-majority countries, and the growing proximity of Chinese territorial claims to the borders of India. Ambedkar was particularly alarmed by the

concessions made by Nehru to China, including the ceding of Tibet (Lhasa and Swaminathan). He feared that such policies could invite Chinese aggression and leave India vulnerable to attack.

The Kashmir Issue and Strategic Vulnerabilities

Ambedkar was very concerned about how Nehru was managing the Kashmir issue. He warned that the failure of India to resolve the problem could lead to serious consequences. He considered the plan to construct a tunnel connecting Kashmir to India as dangerous and poorly conceived, similar to the English Channel Tunnel between England and France. Ambedkar pointed out the vulnerability such infrastructure would create, as an enemy could use the tunnel to quickly invade northern India, including New Delhi itself. He argued that Nehru's handling of the Kashmir situation lacked foresight and posed significant strategic risks for the future security of India.

Discussion on Panchsheel

The Prime Minister is likely relying on the *Panchsheel* principles, as outlined in the Tibet Agreement, where no country should adopt an aggressive policy. *Panchsheel* is deeply rooted in Buddhism, and if the Prime Minister truly believed in it, he would have treated the followers of Buddhism in his country differently. *Panchsheel*, however, has no place in politics, especially not in communist countries. Communist nations follow two key principles: first, their morality is fluid and changeable, and what is considered moral today may be discarded tomorrow. Secondly, when Russia enters into agreements, every action is taken as an isolated unit. They neither act out of goodwill nor express gratitude at the end. He suggests that the Prime Minister will realise this when the situation matures.

The idea of 'Asia for Asians' propounded by the Prime Minister is valid when referring to colonies. Yes, Asia should be for Asians, but is Asia united today? The continent is divided, with more than half of its countries being communist while the rest follow different political ideologies and systems. Can there be unity among Asian nations under these conditions? The lack of unity makes the notion of Asia for Asians unrealistic. If we genuinely believe in freedom, we must support free nations.

Attitude towards Goa

Dr Ambedkar supports the stance of the Prime Minister on the freedom of Goa but regrets that the Prime Minister did not show an active interest in the issue earlier. Had he done so, Goa could have been taken over by India through a minor police action. Dr Ambedkar recalls sending a proposal to the Prime Minister about the issue of Goa post-independence, but the Prime Minister did not take significant steps at the time. Despite some nations supporting the stance of Portugal on Goa, Dr Ambedkar believes that Goa is part of India and will always remain so, irrespective of the treatment its citizens receive from the Portuguese.

Dr Ambedkar proposes two solutions for Goa: First, to adopt a strategy similar to the annexation of 'Louis Siená' by the United States, where a price was paid to end foreign domination. Goa is small in comparison to the land involved in that transaction. Second, Goa could be taken on lease, like Berar was leased to the British in 1853. Both of these solutions, Dr Ambedkar argues, could persuade Portugal to relinquish control over Goa. Dr Ambedkar also refers to the failure of disarmament movements and the appeasement of Hitler as examples of how failing to stand firm in foreign policy can lead to disastrous consequences. He urges the Prime Minister to avoid such mistakes.

Conclusion

The approach of Dr Ambedkar to foreign policy was marked by pragmatism, emphasising the importance of balancing ideals with realpolitik. For Dr Ambedkar, the protection of sovereignty and national interests was paramount, and the foreign policy of India should be built on a foundation of both ethical values and the practical realities of international power dynamics. In this way, India could ensure its security, promote global peace, and protect the interests of its people.

The views of Dr Ambedkar on foreign policy reflect significant policy differences with Pandit Nehru. While both agreed on safeguarding national interests and opposing imperialism, colonialism, and racial discrimination, Dr Ambedkar believed that the foreign policy of India should be dynamic and adaptive to changing global realities. He criticised the reliance on principles like peace, coexistence, and *Panchsheel* without understanding the complexities of global politics. He stressed that a foreign policy based solely on ideals can lead to weakness, as seen in the failure of India to deal with issues like Kashmir, Goa, and Tibet.

Dr Ambedkar argued that peace and coexistence are essential but must be balanced with power and influence to protect national sovereignty. He believed that without these factors, India would be unable to maintain its values and interests in a world where nations, especially communist ones, often violate agreements and principles. The principle of *Panchsheel*, while noble, was rendered ineffective in the face of global political realities, as evidenced by the betrayal of China of its agreement with India over Tibet.

Dr Ambedkar also critiqued the approach of the Prime Minister to foreign policy as overly idealistic and one-sided. The vision of India must be broadened to protect its sovereignty and to contribute effectively to global peace. He emphasised that India cannot rely solely on non-violence or idealistic principles but must also maintain the power and influence necessary to ensure its security and global standing.

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