

# AMBEDKAR'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ELLIPSIS OF THE 'DALIT' FROM INTERNATIONAL ACTIVISM<sup>1</sup>

*Suraj Yengde*

## Introduction

'Strange, isn't it, that the first common sense on the subject, strongly and publicly enunciated by a political leader of stature, comes from a spokesman of the Harijan Caste.'<sup>2</sup>

United States National Urban League leader, civil rights activist and labour organizer Lester B. Granger, while reflecting on global foreign policy programmes, invoked B.R. Ambedkar to describe the failing policies of peaceful coexistence and neutralism famous in the 1950s. This essay explores the historical intersectional struggle of Dalit rights in global politics. In order to understand it better, I suggest looking at the ideas of Ambedkar, one of the founding figures of modern Indian democracy, on national state formation. Various studies have commented on the international political imagination of Indian nationalist leaders, namely, Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru and M.K. Gandhi, alongside a stream of other privileged-caste leaders, M.N. Roy included. However, there is not a single study that analyses the international outlook of Ambedkar. The reasons have to do, perhaps, with ignorance about Ambedkar and the prejudice of the dominant privileged-caste academia.<sup>3</sup> The Brahminical historiography of India as well as the country's national narratives bears the responsibility for the egregious omission. This essay attempts to shed light on the global thinking of subalterns. With the story of Ambedkar, I wish to present the geopolitical thought process of marginalized groups to understand how under-represented groups envision(ed) their location in

the international movements of human rights athwart civil and political representation.

In the post-Independence period, the Indian democracy bureaucratized the modus operandi of the social order. In the area of foreign policy especially, the Brahminical class was overwhelmingly appointed to the coveted posts of ambassadors, emissaries and experts, and in the state delegations to various committees of international government bodies. Foreign policy is the international mediation of a country's domestic policies with the rest of the world. It is an arena that guarantees global dialogue on mutual terms. Therefore, by promoting the Brahminical class, the postcolonial Indian state ensured strict control over the global scrutiny of its internal policies.

Extrapolating from this, we may ask what it means to look at the world through the lens of the marginalized. How do we reconcile the vision of the most oppressed under the hegemonic exclusionary theories of foreign policy? Or, simply put, do subalterns think of the global? By determining the position of the marginalized in the policy structures, close attention to Ambedkar's political philosophy illuminates the implications of such a global policy dialogue. This focus could help establish the citizenry of the marginalized community in terms of social, civil, cultural, economic and political human rights which are predominantly internationally influenced, globally inspired and in conversation with other countries. This will also help critically examine how the postcolonial Indian state, which was essentially inherited from the colonial regime, kept the foreign policy stance the same by excluding the marginalized community from its deliberations. It ensured that the internal strife between the majority and minority communities remained muted on international platforms.

### Internationalist Ambedkar

Ambedkar has been primarily confined to the emancipatory politics of the Scheduled Caste (SC) community of India, along with being bestowed with other laurels such as Constitution maker. However, little is spoken of his role in the colonial and postcolonial Indian foreign policy make-up and in international human rights movements. Ambedkar was a keen observer of India's foreign policy and it constituted one of the cornerstones of his political visions. The All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF), in its election manifesto in 1951 authored by Ambedkar, had a column titled 'Problems of Foreign Policy', referring to the collapsing state of the Indian foreign programme. In it, Ambedkar made suggestions about the Kashmir

issue that had been plaguing the South Asian region. He had also proposed India getting permanent membership of the United Nations Organization way back in 1951, making him perhaps the first person who considered India had a legitimate and rightful place in the international body.

Nationalist histories as well as the organized Left's counter-narratives overlooked these facets of the internationalist Ambedkar. Vernacular writings in India, which are rich in the narratives of the Ambedkar movement and the Dalit movement's 'counter publics',<sup>4</sup> also blatantly overlooked the Dalits' interface with international rights movements. Foreign policy was very dear to Ambedkar. He observed 'foreign affairs' to be the 'most important subject from [a] social, political and financial point of view'.<sup>5</sup> By taking a keen interest in foreign policy, Ambedkar was perhaps trying to extend his political constituency beyond India. This enthusiasm is seen in his efforts to communicate with other political movements, such as his famous letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, N. Sivaraj's<sup>6</sup> visit to the Pacific Relations Committee conference in Quebec as a representative of the AISC in 1942 and the Buddhist country diplomacy with South East Asian countries, which he thought of in terms of potential solidarity to help the emancipatory struggle of the Dalits. Despite the eventual failures of all these measures, they serve as testimony to his international outlook. However, even though he led one of the world's most important civil rights movements, Ambedkar fell short of unifying it with other civil and political rights movements the world over. He confined his approach to state-sponsored organizations like the United Nations. This singular focus isolated the Dalit movement from other global social justice movements.

Ambedkar's international outlook matured during his stay in the US and the UK in pursuit of his education in the early decades of the 20th century. Eleanor Zelliot<sup>7</sup> argues that his vision towards the US had taken cues from non-Brahmin movement leaders like Jotiba Phule, who was inspired by America's initiative to abolish Black slavery. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad had introduced the American education system after his visit to the US in 1893. The students who were being educated in Marathi, Hindi and English read about George Washington and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* instead of British-centred education. This benefited the anti-caste movement to draw inspiration from other parallel examples in the US and not the British empire.<sup>8</sup> Due to this American influence, Ambedkar was selected for a scholarship by the maharaja of Baroda to go to a university in the US and not the UK—then a general practice among Indians. Ambedkar's arrival in the US coincided with the era of the American Dream. It was

a vibrant time for the US economy and appeals for social and political equality to ethnic groups like the Irish, Italians and Jews in New York were gaining momentum. The vibrancy of the Harlem Renaissance permeated the academic and social circles of New York, where Ambedkar was staying. Zelliott suggests that these observations helped Ambedkar build a theory of cultural unification as a prerequisite for the political and social unity of a nation.<sup>9</sup>

Upon Ambedkar's arrival in 1913 at Columbia University, which was in its 'Golden Age', the US was undertaking major reforms in the finance and banking system and management. Frederick Winslow Taylor had revolutionized management thinking with the publication of his book *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). The Federal Reserve System was established in 1913. The Ford automobile company was increasing its production. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson officially declared his neutral position in the European conflict that led to the First World War. The communication gap was shrinking when Graham Bell telephoned San Francisco from New York in 1915, while 1916, Ambedkar's last year in the US, coincided with Wilson's second-term victory. Along with this, the Harlem neighbourhood in New York was expanding the artistic and cultural articulations of immigrant communities—Black and non-Black. The Black figures deliberated and presented their struggle through their experiences. This emphasized the emergence of a stronger identity movement that helped export the literary and musical creativity of African Americans to the world. The art-based movement offered an internationalist identity to the Black figures, who acted as ambassadors of Black culture, advocating for their rights. World famous figures such as Louis Armstrong, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Marcus Garvey, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson and Claude McKay were the leading names that popularized their struggles in the literary canon, in newspapers and in performances on stage. It is unlikely that Ambedkar was ignorant about these developments. However, there is no direct evidence that he took interest in the social upheavals in his locale, and it is neither reflected in his early writings or speeches nor in the Dalit rights movement he launched in India.

Following his stint at Columbia, Ambedkar moved to London to pursue his DSc at the London School of Economics in 1916 and returned to India in 1917. His five years of education in Europe and America became one of the cornerstones of his grand public life, and was to shape the course of his struggle against the millennium-old oppression of Untouchables. Even after

assuming his responsibility as a civil rights activist and as the leader of India's Untouchables, he had many occasions to travel overseas.

### Asserting the Indian Sovereign Right

In their attempts to construct an Indian image for the world, various works have been published that project the Brahminical classes (the Congress, socialists and communists) as anti-imperial. The 'Nehru doctrine', for example, receives enormous commentary, and almost every biographer of Nehru lauds his ingenuity towards strengthening Third Worldism.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, Ambedkar is completely ignored as someone who had important insights to offer in international politics. However, he observed the dismal relationship among the former English colonies in the Commonwealth and demanded the 'status of equal partnership'—an equal share and role in its activities. If not, warned Ambedkar, it would herald the invocation of a new master–slave relationship; he rhetorically stated, 'No new masters, please!'<sup>11</sup> In the expanded thesis, 'India and the British Commonwealth', Ambedkar had pivotal observations on building a strong identitarian international character. The thesis also measured India's position in the Commonwealth, with Ambedkar denouncing its unfair representation, which had to do with India's negligible role in 'the making of events that bring on war and . . . in the making of terms which often instead of ending war only adjourn war'.<sup>12</sup> Ambedkar was trying to find ways to operate in the imperial government that was leading the First World War efforts by subordinating Indian interests.

From 1930 to the 1950s, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) formed by him made important interventions in asserting India's sovereign right. During the Second World War, the ILP critically commented on India's losing stand. It rejected outright Nazi Germany's proposition of the mono-race rule, that is, the idea of the Nordic race dominating over other races. It took serious offence to this position, considering it 'obnoxious' to the people of India.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign policy was among Ambedkar's principal grievances with independent India's general policies, leading to his frustrated resignation from the portfolio of law minister in Nehru's cabinet.<sup>14</sup> Ambedkar's relationship with the Congress and Gandhi was set on ambiguous lines. His criticism of Gandhi was followed by his acceptance of a position in the Constituent Assembly, and later, his standing by the Congress's policy of country first, and winding up with his resignation. There

are various readings of this moment. Gail Omvedt argues that it was Ambedkar's commitment to a strong, centralized state that paved the way for his taking up the post in Nehru's cabinet, which came with no strings attached.<sup>15</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay argues that owing to the AISC's defeat in the 1946 elections, Ambedkar had few avenues in which to confront Congress. Thus, a hostile attitude would have alienated and further marginalized the Dalit constituency. This was an after-effect of the power struggle among the Dalit leadership that begun in 1917, leading to a fragmented version of Dalit political discourse. It was so shaken that Dalit politics was threatened with 'extinction' by the hegemonic Congress in the late 1940s.<sup>16</sup>

Anand Teltumbde sees it as Gandhi's strategic masterstroke to obligate Ambedkar by inducting him at his desperate moment into the Constituent Assembly and also the first all-party cabinet headed by Nehru. The former extended to making him chairman of the most important committee in the Constituent Assembly, giving him the epitaph of the maker of the Constitution. The strategy was to make the lowest strata of Indian society emotionally attach itself to the Constitution through its icon, Ambedkar. It was an ideal political choice.<sup>17</sup> Two years before Independence, in 1945, Ambedkar had 'wholly opposed' the proposal of the Constituent Assembly. He regarded it as the 'most dangerous project' which had the potential to incite 'civil war' in the country should it follow the upper-caste Hindu and Muslim dominance as decided by the Sapru Committee (Hindus and Muslims were offered fifty-one reserved seats each of the total of 160. This would have given them a larger footing in incorporating a majority in the Constituent Assembly).<sup>18</sup>

Ambedkar had indirectly created a space for himself in the elite circles of the Constituent Assembly by rejecting it outright in the first instance. In his rejection, he emphasized that the responsibility of the communal problem could not be entrusted to it. He believed it would not be a true representative body of the minorities who were to be chosen in joint electorates that were wholly dependent on caste Hindu votes and disproportionate sharing of seats between Hindus and Muslims.

Notwithstanding this, I argue that it was Ambedkar's best rhetorical tactic wherein he gestured to the Indian government that he was exploring the possibility of taking India to the United Nations. This move could have caused serious embarrassment to the Indian government as India was presenting itself as a nation that stood against racism and other forms of oppression, a tactic that worked for both Ambedkar and the Congress.

However, this relationship was short-lived. Nehru persisted in consciously ignoring Ambedkar, right from withdrawing his support to the Hindu Code Bill, to the important deliberations offered in various memorandums on the situation of minorities. On the other hand, Ambedkar couldn't build strategic alliances with other oppressed groups using his powerful political portfolio. And his radical strategy to take India to the United Nations remained a statement without any developments from the AISCF. Ambedkar chose instead to resign in protest from Nehru's cabinet.

The resignation made headlines the world over, with even the *New York Times* reporting the incident. Ambedkar stated in his resignation letter dated 10 October 1951:

It may be said that my resignation is out of time and that if I was dissatisfied with the Foreign Policy of the Government and the treatment accorded to Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes I should have gone earlier.

Additionally, India's 'colossal' expenditure on building defence capabilities, Ambedkar suspected, was owing to the grim foreign policy that was directed by the postcolonial elite Brahminical class, which participated in the framing of casteist policies in the deliberations in the United Nations. The recent unearthing of archival materials confirms this.<sup>19</sup>

The mid-20th century was divided by two ideologies that were racing to establish their dominance in the world—the imperialist division amongst capitalist countries on the one hand and the communism-inspired nationhood on the other, both of which had created a bipolar opposition. Ambedkar sympathized with India's 'dislike' for capitalism, but he feared that taken to its extreme it could lead to communism. His concern was that while avoiding capitalism, parliamentary democracy should not be weakened; if care were not taken, it would be 'like throwing the baby out of the bath but in emptying it of dirty water'.<sup>20</sup> This was also an outcome of his worries with communism which he found to be too dictatorial and violent and thus unsuitable to India's fragile democracy.<sup>21</sup>

He chose to not align with any 'isms' as stated in the AISCF election manifesto:

the policy of the Party is not tied to any particular dogma or ideology such as *Communism, or Socialism, Gandhism, or any other ism*. The Party will be ready to adopt any plan of social and economic betterment of the people

irrespective of its origin and provided it is consistent with its principles. Its outlook on life will be *purely rational and modern, emperistic and not academic* [emphasis added].<sup>22</sup>

This approach makes a case for Ambedkar's strategic political pragmatism—aligning with socialist ideals<sup>23</sup> and at the same time not discarding capitalism. However, his socialist idealism was totally different from that of the socialists of privileged classes and castes—he kept them at arm's length in deciding strategies for reclaiming the rights of the Depressed Classes. This was a shift from his earlier position, when he had declared capitalism as one part of the Dalits' enemy duo, the other being Brahminism.<sup>24</sup>

### Ambedkar and the United Nations

Founded in 1920, the League of Nations preceded the formation of the United Nations. Ambedkar wanted it to be concerned with the issue of untouchability. In an interview to the *New York Times* in London on 30 November 1930, he centred untouchability as a global problem affecting the social and economic well-being of the world. He sought to bring it under the ambit of the League of Nations in the same vein as slavery and drug trafficking. He believed that the international standpoint on untouchability could bring about enough pressure for it to be eradicated. Ambedkar said, 'Nothing less than the aroused opinion of the world can do it.'<sup>25</sup>

The dealings between the United Nations and Ambedkar date back to the early years of its formation. He sought its intervention to address the problems faced by SCs by stating that the United Nations had jurisdiction over 'eight crore Scheduled Castes'. The working committee of the AISC, under the chairmanship of N. Sivaraj, adopted a resolution on 17 January 1947 to submit a memorandum prepared by Ambedkar to the United Nations Assembly to highlight 'the sufferings of the Scheduled Castes in India against the Hindus for their acts of social, economic and political tyranny'.<sup>26</sup> The working committee instructed the president of the AISC to ensure the delivery of the memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General and advised sending an AISC delegation to the United Nations to present their grievances.<sup>27</sup> This was eventually halted as Ambedkar 'did not submit it'. He 'felt that it would be better to wait until the Constituent Assembly and the future Parliament was given a chance to deal with the matter'.<sup>28</sup>

Ambedkar perhaps chose to consciously oversee the potential of the 'upper-caste' state that was coming into being in postcolonial India. There were ample evidences of it during the parleys with the Cabinet Mission, the heat of which he had himself experienced. With all his compromises with the Congress to get into the Constitution and his ultimate prominent role in writing it, he could not go beyond the writ of the party. He realized his folly within two years when in 1953 he said the following words during a Rajya Sabha debate: 'Sir, my friends tell me that I made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody.'<sup>29</sup>

Facing the liberal as well as Hindu orthodoxy of the Congress at every turn, Ambedkar explicated that his alliance with the party was not amicable and not without conflict. Taking from this experience, he chose to induct an international lobby rather than overtly relying on the Indian government. Thus he started corresponding with other affected groups who were fighting for recognition in the United Nations (see p. 96 for the recorded communication with W.E.B. Du Bois). Ambedkar drew parallels with the Black population in the US, Indians in South Africa and SCs in India.

The efforts to draw inspiration from these groups and engage them in conversation reflected the working style of the Ambedkarite leadership. N. Sivaraj, in his presidential address at the AISCN conference in 1942, drew parallels with the world atrocities committed by colonizers and White men upon non-White peoples. Talking about the atrocities upon the 'Australian Bushman by the Colonizers, that of the Negroes by the Ku-Klux-Klan and of the Jews by the Nazis', Sivaraj submitted that these were comparatively 'less heinous than the suffering . . . subjected to Depressed Classes in the name of religion, caste and the like by the Hindus'. He remarked that it was 'slow poisoning'.<sup>30</sup> This remark came at a time when the League of Nations had acknowledged the issue of racism.

Post-Independence, the Indian government took on the White apartheid government in South Africa on the issue of racism that was affecting the rights and dignity of Indians in the country.<sup>31</sup> Almost twenty-four resolutions were passed by the United Nations in Nehru's presence.<sup>32</sup> In the fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September 1949, India sought the intervention of the United Nations to offer justice to the South African Indian community.<sup>33</sup> In the midst of the diplomatic deadlock over India's stand on racism, Ambedkar drew attention in Parliament to the situation of the SCs, arguing that the 'tyranny and the

constant and shameless resort to violence by Hindus . . . [was] far worse than the position of Indians in South Africa'.<sup>34</sup> He went on to add that the experiences of apartheid in South Africa were akin to the condition of Indian Untouchable groups. To impress upon the situation, he said that 'South Africa is replicated in every Indian village' as segregation was sanctioned in India.<sup>35</sup>

Even though he acknowledged the segregation, he did not make a conscious effort to establish links with the colonized groups of South Africa to make an international united front. In spite of the Dalit diaspora's vast presence in the British empire, Ambedkar did not reach out to these Indian groups striving for freedom from the colonial regime in their respective countries. Indian delegations would visit India to solicit support for their movement in the 1940s, meeting elite members of the Congress in New Delhi. As Ambedkar was part of the colonial government, it is difficult to imagine that he missed noticing these activities as they were part of the Indian state policy.

Experiencing repeated failures at the hands of the Indian government, Ambedkar sought to fight the battle on his own. Thus he started communicating with the leaders of the African-American struggle. He told the press in India that he was in conversation with African-American leaders in the US, mentioning W.E.B. Du Bois in particular, the foremost Black intellectual and civil rights activist 'who was fighting for political, economic and social rights of Negroes in that country'.<sup>36</sup> The two activists had famously exchanged letters, discussing an appeal to the United Nations to build a coalition to unify the struggle against dominating oppressive groups in their respective societies. Ambedkar wrote to Du Bois explaining his position:

I have been a student of the Negro problem and have *read your writings throughout*. There is *so much similarity* between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary.

I was very much interested to read that the Negroes of America have filed a petition to the UNO. The Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit. Will you be so good as to secure for me two or three copies of this representation by the Negroes and send them to my address. I need hardly say how very grateful I shall be for your troubles in this behalf [emphasis added].<sup>37</sup>

Du Bois promptly replied to Ambedkar and said that he too had read his works and was aware of him and 'of course have every sympathy with the Untouchables of India', expressing to offer 'any service . . . if possible in the future'.<sup>38</sup> After this exchange, there is no evidence of these two figures communicating with each other. There is also no record that the African-American community took the cause of the Untouchables' struggle to the United Nations alongside the topic of racism. However, Martin Luther King, Jr, after his India visit in 1959, 'sought to making a study of untouchability' and started collecting the relevant materials in this regard.<sup>39</sup> This effort too did not see the light of day.

The Indian Untouchable and the American Black connection can trace its provenance back to the 19th century when Phule sought to bring attention to the plights of the Sudras and Ati-Sudras to the world. Dedicating his book *Gulamgiri* (1873) to the abolitionists, referring to them as the 'Good People of the United States', Phule observed the condition of Negroes in America as a defining moment in the universal recognition of suppressed groups. Thus, the cause of Negro slavery was seen as similar to that of India's Untouchables.

Following this, several efforts were made to draw parallels between the two marginalized groups,<sup>40</sup> with Ambedkar himself stating that the struggle of Black Americans was similar to that of the SCs, that like 'Negros were "tyrannized by the white Americans"', Scheduled Castes were tormented by the Caste Hindus'.<sup>41</sup> This departs from his earlier argument about the caste system being devoid of racial proliferation. In his two major works, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1917)<sup>42</sup> and *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946)<sup>43</sup> Ambedkar rejected the racial logic of differentiation among caste groups. He argued in a 1917 paper that it was the 'imitation' of endogamy that was practised by the dominating Brahmin community which strengthened the purist tendency of the caste system and resulted in social inequality in society, caste being one of the leading factors.

The Black-centric magazine the *Crisis*, started by W.E.B. Du Bois and later edited by Roy Wilkins, carried stories of the 'Negroes of India' in its 1942 and 1943 editions, explaining the resonance between Indian Untouchables and the Negroes in the US. It credited Ambedkar for being 'one of the finest scholars of the country' and a 'single leader of sixty million untouchables'.<sup>44</sup> Ambedkar's stellar foreign policy acumen received accolades in African-American circles. Granger described Ambedkar as 'the best known leader of India's Harijan caste' in the established African-American newspaper the *New York*

*Amsterdam News*, and as the ‘first Indian voice of authority to challenge Prime Minister Nehru’s dream-eyed policy of “neutralism” for South Asia and “peaceful co-existence” with a rapaciously aggressive China’.<sup>45</sup> He also praised Ambedkar’s statement and hoped that people like him, invoking a plural denomination as the ‘Ambedkars’, would be more successful with Nehru than ‘Negro leaders have thus far been with President Eisenhower, Truman, or Roosevelt and their advisors’.<sup>46</sup>

### The Pragmatic Internationalist

The book *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* was primarily an international statement of an internationalist Ambedkar who was now turning to the world to seek justice for his community, a shift from his earlier stance of reliance on the Indian government. This was mainly the outcome of the political battles between the Congress and Ambedkar. Both were fighting to claim an ‘exclusive space’ for Dalit polity in India. The former, however, under facile intentions, chose to plot the subservient Dalits to ‘represent’ rather than lead the Dalit struggle. Thus, time and again, Ambedkar had to face obstacles that pushed him to initiate strategic steps which at times did not succeed.<sup>47</sup> He had to confront enormous barriers at the hands of ‘Congress–High-class Hindu rule’<sup>48</sup>—a triumvirate of the Indian Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi.<sup>49</sup>

In the book, Ambedkar delineates the way orthodox Hindu groups dominated by Brahmins undermined every effort to genuinely eradicate the menace of untouchability.<sup>50</sup> He found no genuine concern in Gandhi or Congress-affiliated organizations like the Social Conference established in 1887 in Madras. The Social Conference focused on eradicating the social injustices imposed on Untouchable groups in India. According to Ambedkar, the ‘Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high-caste Hindu family’.<sup>51</sup> It did not believe in agitating for the abolition of caste and had no special interest in it as much as it did in child marriage and enforced widowhood. This was because the latter occurred in elite Brahmin families, thus making them personally invested in their eradication. Contrastingly, every attempt to include the issue of Untouchable emancipation was suppressed by the same band of caste elites. This suppression continued in important foreign policy interventions too, where the Depressed Classes were not involved in deliberating over the future of the country. This led to an irresponsible international outlook in the post-Independence phase and resulted in India’s position with ‘no

friends, if not actual enemies'.<sup>52</sup> The AISCF observed three reasons for such incapacitation: one was due to the Kashmir issue, the second was the admission of communist China in the United Nations Organisation (UNO), and the third was its intervention in the Korean War in the 1950s.

On permanent membership to the UNO, the AISCF in its election manifesto of 1951 ridiculed India's position to 'fight the battle for' China's permanent membership in the UNO when China was self-sufficient. Instead it argued for India's permanent membership in the UNO.

India is spending herself in fighting the battle of Mao as against Chiang Kai Shek. This quixotic policy of saving the world is going to bring about the ruination of India and the sooner this suicidal foreign policy is reversed the better for India.<sup>53</sup>

The manifesto also questioned the intentions of the Indian delegate fighting the battle for communist China, which had irrevocably caused antagonism between India and the US. During parliamentary proceedings in 1954, Ambedkar contended that Nehru was hostile towards the US due to the conflict of ideology which had fostered feelings of distaste in Nehru for anything that came from there.<sup>54</sup> The US, in those days, was an important ally to have on one's side because it had significant control over technology and global finance. Postcolonial India partially relied on US aid in terms of technical and financial assistance for reconstructing the economy via industrialization. Ambedkar was a proponent of industrialization as he foresaw it as an ideal way to improve the low productivity caused by archaic agricultural technologies.<sup>55</sup> He was leading infrastructure projects that relied on US technical expertise,<sup>56</sup> including the colossal Damodar Valley project. As a labour member in the viceroy's cabinet, Ambedkar established the Department for Irrigation and Navigation Commission (which was later renamed the River Control Board, Central Water Power Commission) to control the river and flood situation, advance irrigation and produce energy.<sup>57</sup> A team of four engineers from the US was invited to establish a 'technical team' to advise on the design and construction of the first two dams in India.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, there was a wise suggestion to seek every aid possible in order to strengthen the 'self' first before 'championing the cause of Asiatic countries'. This was a time of apotheosis for the Third Worldism that was gaining significant attention among the postcolonial elite who wanted to imagine their future void of Western interference. The Ambedkar-led

party, however, had an alternative to offer to the enthusiastic objective of becoming an Asian power.<sup>59</sup> Ambedkar observed that the norm of 'Asia for Asiatics' was good insofar as colonialism was concerned but in the postcolonial condition this was a farcical principle where war and strife amongst Asians was turning the region towards totalitarian statehood; the Korean War, the China–Japan conflict and South East Asian instability were cited as examples. Ambedkar was also critical of India's policy on non-alignment. He held the view that non-alignment understated important American contacts that would strategically assist in development projects critical for an independent nation.<sup>60</sup> In the Rajya Sabha, he led a charge against Nehru's policy of peaceful coexistence, contending that it did not fare well, especially in the cases of Tibet, Indo-China and Korea. Ambedkar is reported to have rebuked this policy as purchasing peace 'at the price of portioning countries' to which he maintained strong objections.<sup>61</sup> Ambedkar warned Nehru that too much affection with communist Russia could be a harmful antidote to the politics of regionalism that was decided in the South East Asia Treaty Organization conference. Ambedkar had reservations about Russia's expansionist tendencies and said that Nehru's foreign policy ought to be examined in this context. The *Canberra Times* reported this news as a headline in its 28 August 1954 edition, as did another Australian paper, the *Armidale Express*.<sup>62</sup> Ambedkar again endorsed his commitment to pragmatism by overlooking the ideological imbalances his views had favoured. He preferred an alliance with the burgeoning imperial power America as long as it brought benefits to Indian development projects.

### Ambedkar's Spectre Haunts Brahmin Savoir Faire

Pondering over the current situation, one can see the Indian government's conscious suppression of caste dialogues at the United Nations. Post-Independence governments continued to maintain their hostility to engage with the issue on international forums. In 2001, at the World Conference against Racism in Durban, a delegation led by Omar Abdullah, then minister of state for external affairs in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, strenuously rejected a resolution on caste.<sup>63</sup> Seventy-six paragraphs that mentioned caste were removed by the Indian government.<sup>64</sup> Their logic declared caste to be an internal matter which was adequately covered in the Indian Constitution. This is the excuse offered by the Indian government on every discussion of caste. The same applies to non-governmental discussions on Dalit human rights. Many international non-government

organizations (NGOs) are barred by the Indian state from getting the affiliation of the Economic and Social Council, an executive body of the United Nations that endorses NGOs to deliberate in its proceedings. The Indian government's consistent blocking of Dalit solidarity groups focused on working towards caste-based issues gives it the notoriety of the 'longest pending NGO application' in United Nations history.<sup>65</sup>

Another glaring example is the Indian government's continuous disfavouring of UN-appointed independent experts' findings on caste. On 28 January 2016, Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Rita Izsák-Ndiaye presented her report to the UN. The Indian representative dismissed the report, noting that it was unclear why 'minority status' had been applied to the caste system.<sup>66</sup> Izsák-Ndiaye had to clarify her position—she explained that the interpretative meaning of 'minorities' could easily cover the complex issues facing victims of caste discrimination throughout the world, saying it thus fell under her mandate.<sup>67</sup> This can be contrasted with Ambedkar's description of the situation of Scheduled Castes as much worse and vulnerable than the existing Indian minorities in 1947. He argued that SCs were more than a minority and that 'any protection given to the citizens and to the minorities will not be adequate for the Scheduled Castes . . . [they] would require special safeguards (against) the tyranny and discrimination of the majority'.<sup>68</sup>

### Dalit Movement's Blind Spots of Internationalist Vision

Given the ongoing theatrics between the Indian state on the one hand and the United Nations and civil society on the other, it arguably makes a stronger case to constitute a separate mandate on the issues of caste-based discrimination by having an independent body within the United Nations and other regional bodies like the European Union that exclusively concentrates on the rights and dignities of caste subjects. Currently, there is not a single organization that actively engages and consistently follows up with the international community on caste-related issues. It was, after all, Ambedkar's desire to work with the United Nations, which he was unsuccessful in achieving. Governments across various parties that express admiration for Ambedkar overlook the important Dalit intervention in the United Nations forum, including those who claim an affinity with his ideology.

The Bahujan Samaj Party formed the government in Uttar Pradesh four times and was also an active partner of the ruling powers at the centre. In

spite of this, it did not consider launching an international policy-specific programme for developing alliances with other oppressed groups in the world. Barring Kanshiram's visit to the first International Dalit International Conference held in Kuala Lumpur on 10–11 October 1998, there have been no significant efforts to create an international outreach programme by the political Dalit leadership.<sup>69</sup> The visit of Kanshiram was not aimed at launching cross-border solidarity initiatives and efforts in that direction never took place.<sup>70</sup>

The post-Ambedkar leadership became severely disengaged with the issues of socialist policies like those concerning land, control over resources and production, which could have given them the desired platform to connect with other postcolonial countries' socialist movements fighting for a similar cause. A progressive Dalit socialist block would certainly have fit the Dalit struggle; it would not have remained an isolated bubble and instead become a global concern. By overlooking such political solidarities, the Dalit movements were unable to fix the fault lines of Ambedkar's misplaced pragmatic political solidarity projects that rejected untimely ideological anchors. While Ambedkar's approach helped India build its post-Independence development projects and increase its industrial capability in terms of technology and knowledge sharing, it also created a huge vacuum for the Dalit identity, which is now at the helm of NGOs, which, by virtue of their international presence, are privileged to describe Dalit identity to the rest of the world. International NGOs have been persistent in raising the issue of caste-affected citizens at the United Nations and on other international government and non-government platforms. Their understanding undermines the ideological categorization of the Dalit identity that emerges from the Dalit movement. The extraneous affirmation to identify caste within ambiguous frameworks of 'descent-based discrimination' has undermined an 'autonomous' categorization of caste violence and discrimination, and thereby its accountability in South Asia, Africa, Japan and other countries with Indian diaspora.

The impetuous refusal of the Indian state to acknowledge the issue of caste has led Dalit diaspora groups across the world to recognize the obnoxious state of affairs in the intransigent caste Hindu society. As caste-related incidents continue to occur in different countries, Dalit associations organize regular activities to raise awareness, making it a global concern. Groups inspired by Ambedkar across North America, Europe, the Middle East and the Far East are known as Ambedkar International Missions and Ambedkar International Associations.<sup>71</sup> These are run by professional

expats who make a stronger case to theorize the shibboleth of caste among the diaspora.<sup>72</sup> There are also groups in the name of Ambedkar, Ravidas and Valmiki along with Dalit Christian churches that single-handedly inspire the diaspora movement of the marginalized.<sup>73</sup> Using advancements in technology and social media, these groups—whom I refer to as the ‘Millennial Dalit diaspora’—place their activities in conversation with the Indian situation.

Annual lectures, gatherings on the important days of Dalit calendars and regular collections of funds to sponsor education-related projects in India explain the nature of these overseas Dalit groups. These are remarkable activities that remain unknown due to the organizational limitation of publication incentives and lack of interest within the scholarly world about such epochal activism. In addition, marginalized caste diaspora groups internalize the inter-group behaviour, thus ending up functioning as subordinate groups among the existing ethnic minority diaspora groups calling for a separate identity. This complex diversity hinges towards the reification of independent identities moving away from the common ethnic clubbing of divergent identities.<sup>74</sup> In spite of this and the efforts to establish a separate Dalit identity under the purview of ethnic diversity, there have been limited efforts by Dalit diaspora to make common cause with other oppressed groups.

## Conclusion

Ambedkar's engagement with African-American groups to solicit support for the Dalit cause at the international level and his simultaneous overlooking of African and other colonized spaces as potential partners hint at some of his shortfalls. His belief in pragmatism over ideological singularity—that is, relying entirely on one ideology—resulted in benefiting post-Independence Indian development programmes and policies. However, this came at the cost of his unfulfilled promise of creating international Dalit solidarity. As time passed, after two decades (1930 to 1950) of active political engagement on Indian foreign policy matters, he had to cede his interests in the area owing to the predominance of Nehru's overshadowing presence as the prime minister. Ambedkar confirmed that he had ‘ceased to take the same degree of interest in the foreign affairs of the country which I used to take at one time’.<sup>75</sup>

Various policies and committees of the Indian foreign services have an inadequate representation of Dalit-nominated representatives. Ambedkar-

inspired activism in foreign countries strives towards political intervention. The exclusion of historically marginalized communities from important interventions in India's foreign policy matters adds to the casteist make-up of the postcolonial bureaucratic order. Ambedkar's story as a staunch critic of postcolonial nationalism demands a critical appraisal of the postcolonial conditions in the global South countries. Dalit diaspora activism is yet to take a radical stand against the Indian state, which remains a passive agent in the face of persistent Dalit atrocities.

Ambedkar's famous statement to the Pacific Relations Committee detailed ten demands.<sup>76</sup> He was quick to add that athwart imperialism, racism, anti-Semitism and free traffic (refugees) there was an issue of untouchability which faced a larger risk of being ignored.<sup>77</sup> Ambedkar took a particularist view of the question of untouchability by withdrawing its notional international significance with other oppressed groups. This reaction was perhaps in response to the false propaganda of the ruling castes in India on the question of the problems of Dalits and untouchability. Nehruvian foreign policy ensured that race could be used as an important intervention to determine India's commitment to anti-imperialism. At the same time, it gave India an upper hand to not disclose its own fallacies of caste oppression and untouchability.

The global Dalit appeal as part of the world's oppressed communities was established by the Dalit Panthers, a radical Ambedkarite outfit in Maharashtra that not only marshalled an international solidarity initiative but aimed to connect across race, caste and national boundaries. They presented themselves as an inclusive category—the Dalits—with the worldly oppressed. As they declared in their manifesto:

The Dalit Panthers aspire to join hands with the Dalits (oppressed) of the world which includes the oppressed and the exploited people in Cambodia, Vietnam, Africa, Latin America, Japan and even in US (specially with the Blacks).<sup>78</sup>

However, this effort has largely remained confined to literary rhetoric and is not an action-based programme. The Dalit Panthers, disabled by state oppression, could not seek out active collaboration with the aforementioned movements. While in politics, in later years, too, the leaders of the Dalit Panthers did not utilize their offices to build active partnerships with social movements around the world.