

## Women's Liberation for Social Justice through the Perspective of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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### ABSTRACT:

The people are aware of constant efforts to improve women's status in Indian society. These are a few of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's lesser-known sayings, concepts, ideas, and writings about the empowerment of women. Celebrating Women's Day without honoring the efforts of Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, and Savitribai Phule is dishonorable and hypocritical. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar launched two periodicals, Mooknayak and Bahiskrit Bharat, both of which focused mostly on issues related to women's empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar has always been concerned with women's empowerments. In a letter written to his father's friend while he was still in New York, the young Dr. Ambedkar expressed his belief that progress would be accelerated and better times would soon come if education for both genders was promoted. On 18 July 1927, Dr Ambedkar spoke to a crowd of more than 3,000 women from lower socio-economic classes, "I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved." Empowerment is the process of increasing one's own or a community's spiritual, political, social, or economic power. Women's empowerment and autonomy, along with advances to their political, social, economic, and health status, are not only a very important aim in and of themselves, but they are also necessary for the accomplishment of sustainable human progress. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's achievements as the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee have shaped India's socio-political environment and left a lasting impact on the social fabric of the country long after independence. India most likely would have been a very different, unfair, and unjust place without him. He put a lot of effort into building a constitutional democracy that has a political system that is considerate to the poor, regardless of whether their circumstances are the product of current social relations or historical legacies. In addition, he worked to provide India new social and moral underpinnings. Dr. Ambedkar had the highest educational credentials of any Indian at the time and was widely acknowledged for his learning and erudition. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is widely acknowledged as the father of the Indian Constitution. But reading

several volumes about his life and work and his ideas about India's future will show that, beyond being a serious scholar, he was also a formidable debater, an effective teacher, a capable lawyer, a devoted writer, a renowned educationalist, a social rebel, and a multifaceted genius. He was an ardent supporter of human rights, an accomplished statesman, a liberal liberator, a strong proponent of constitutionalism, a fearless defender of the downtrodden masses, and a first-rate administrator.

## KEYWORDS:

Women, Liberation, Social justice, Empowerment, Emancipation, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's.

## Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar emerged as a powerful voice for the oppressed, advocating for the rights and dignity of illiterate and underprivileged women in Indian society. He fiercely opposed regressive practices such as child marriage and the Devadasi system, encouraging women to speak out against oppression. Ambedkar believed that women's rights must be firmly embedded in India's political discourse and constitutional framework. While issues like feminism, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and systemic gender-based oppression continue to persist in various forms, the collective consciousness and activism against these injustices remain limited. In many cities, even today, prostitution is indirectly supported, and legal action against exploitative practices is often absent. In such a patriarchal structure, Ambedkar's efforts were revolutionary he sought not merely to challenge the system but to reconstruct it. This paper explores Ambedkar's vision for women's upliftment, and his relentless efforts to promote gender equality, democracy, and human dignity. particular emphasis on women's empowerment through political, socioeconomic, and intellectual accomplishments of Bharat Ratna Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's. A meticulous emphasis on women's liberation and empowerment.

## Scope and Limitations

This study takes a biographical approach, focusing exclusively on the life, work, and philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in relation to women's emancipation. It examines his contributions without chronological constraints, covering events and reforms from the 19th and 20th centuries. Geographically, the study encompasses women's empowerment across India.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To evaluate Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's role as a social reformer and architect of the Indian Constitution in the liberation of women.
- To analyze the status of gender justice in India, past and present.
- To interpret Ambedkar's vision, ideas, and policy recommendations on women's rights within his broader social and political philosophy.

### **Research Methodology**

**This study employs both primary and secondary sources.**

- Primary data includes speeches and writings by Dr. Ambedkar, original government documents, and records from Parliamentary Debates.
- Secondary data comprises scholarly articles, journal papers, books, and reviews.

The research method is largely descriptive and analytical, relying on a socio-cultural framework rooted in Ambedkar's ideology. The study also draws from archival resources including autobiographies, historical records, and media articles.

### **Dr. Ambedkar and Women's Emancipation**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a enormous leader from the marginalized Dalit community, strongly condemned the oppressive practices faced by women and emphasized the urgent need to liberate them from these age-old chains to ensure their progress and dignity. He did not confine his activism to speeches alone—he personally visited underprivileged neighborhoods, engaged directly with women, and shared knowledge and guidance with compassion and wisdom. He recognized that sex work and feminism are often wrongly conflated in Indian society, revealing the deeply entrenched social biases. Dr. Ambedkar's study of the caste system highlighted the systemic division between upper and lower castes, a divide that severely impacted women, particularly those from the lower strata.

This statement becomes particularly relevant when reflecting on the condition of women in India. Consider the brutal tradition of Sati—a practice where a widow was expected to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre. In cases where women resisted such practices or dared to remarry outside their caste, they were condemned for violating societal and caste morals.

Dr. Ambedkar posed a critical question: Why was the Hindu society so cruel toward its women? His answer lay in the recognition that mere advancements in education and economic status are not definitive indicators of progress. He warned that unless women's dignity, freedom, and equality are ensured, these material gains remain hollow. Ambedkar emphasized that even with the outward signs of modernization, women continue to face patriarchal violence and oppression. Real emancipation, he argued, demands a transformation of social norms and power structures.

He also addressed issues related to marriage customs—such as Bethai (female marriage), caste endogamy, and clan-based restrictions. One significant event took place on June 16, 1936, at Damodar Hall, Poya Bavadi, where Dr. Ambedkar delivered a speech at a public gathering of caste-reformists and god-worshippers. His powerful words moved the women in the audience deeply, sparking an emotional and empowering reaction. (Janata Daily, July 1936) “A society that does not recognize the rights of women can never be considered civilized.” A direct call to acknowledge and uphold the fundamental rights of women.

### **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision of Women's Emancipation and Modern India's Reality**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a powerful advocate for the liberation of women from all castes, sharply criticizing the Hindu religion and caste system for perpetuating social inequality. He firmly believed that the caste structure and religious orthodoxy in India are among the greatest obstacles to women's empowerment. According to Ambedkar, true progress demands that all women, including sex workers, be allowed the freedom to work, grow, and live with dignity. He stressed that equality between men and women is essential, but it cannot be achieved by challenging patriarchy alone. Without confronting the oppressive caste-religious framework, the fight for women's freedom remains incomplete.

Ambedkar argued that political, educational, and economic opportunities are necessary, but insufficient by themselves to bring about gender parity.

- “Women are the real architects of society.”
- “The progress of any nation depends on the progress of its women.”
- “Justice has always evoked ideas of equality... it is equity for the weak and equality for the strong.” – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's

Even with advancements in these areas, societal attitudes towards women remain largely unchanged. A deep-rooted social revolution is essential for real and lasting change. In present-day India, women are experiencing upward mobility, gaining better education and financial independence compared to past generations. They have more personal freedom and are increasingly vocal about their needs and rights. However, this progress is met with resistance from traditional societal norms that continue to define women by outdated values such as fear, silence, and restraint.

Elderly women are still expected to conform to submissive roles, and independence in women is often viewed as a threat to the existing order. Violence and harassment are used to reinforce these archaic boundaries. The narrative of progress becomes hollow when society continues to be hostile toward women despite technological and educational advancement. To truly understand progress, we must recognize that it goes beyond economic growth—it requires dismantling the deep cultural hostility towards women and embracing true gender equality. Only then can modernity be meaningful and inclusive.

#### **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on women's liberation**

- 1919 – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's participated in special conferences for women and said that for the Dalit community to be free, the women of the Dalit community must be freed first.
- 1921 – Males express caste names by attaching them to the back of their names. But, girls avoid such names after their name. At the same time, women are in a situation where they have to emphasize caste consciousness through events like marriage. To overcome this, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's said, to overcome this women should be given sufficient opportunity to come to the public platform.
- 1921 – When Gandhi invited Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's to speak, his wife Ramabai advised Ambedkar to definitely meet Gandhi. Ramabai told Ambedkar that instead of seeing Gandhi as an enemy of the Dalit people, we should see him as a representative of the caste Hindus we have to meet. Ramabai participated in all Ambedkar's struggles during his lifetime.
- 1927 – Simon examines women's education and women's emancipation in detail in his recommendations and evidence to the Committee.

- 1930 – 31 – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's emphasized the participation of women at the Round Table Conferences held in London.
- 1931 – Representation of “Samar” and “Mahar” women in Hidakarini Sabha.
- 1931 – A detailed article on the condition of Dalit women and its solution was published in “Mook Naik”.
- 1935 – At the Eola Conference, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's made a Brahmin recite the words of Manusmriti and set it on fire. It mostly contained lines in which Manu spoke disparagingly of women.
- 1942 in Nagpur

In 1942, at a historic women's conference in Nagpur attended by over 40,000 women, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made a powerful declaration: “The progress of society can be measured only by the progress of women.” This landmark event marked a turning point in the fight for women's rights, especially those from marginalized communities. Several vital resolutions were passed during this conference:

1. Women should have the legal right to annul their marriages.
2. Polygamy should be curbed through legal reforms, as it is deeply unjust to women.
3. Working women must be entitled to the same leave, bonuses, and pensions as men.
4. State governments must provide free and compulsory advanced primary education, scholarships, hostels, and other support for Scheduled Caste girls.
5. Female supervisors should be appointed to oversee women workers in factories.
6. Provisions must be made for women's reservation in legislatures to promote the development of Scheduled Caste women.

In his speech, Ambedkar urged women not to rush into marriage, calling it a serious responsibility. He emphasized that a woman must stand equal to her husband—not as a slave but as a friend. From this conference emerged his iconic slogan for women's empowerment: “Teach, Unite, Fight.”

- Teach! – Educate others about your struggles and how you overcame

them.

- Unite! – Unite with others for a shared cause, not for power or position.
- Fight! – Stand up for your rights. Collective struggle brings attention and leads to real change.

Ambedkar boldly noted that women themselves, when not awakened, could become bigger obstacles to emancipation than men. His slogan became a guiding force for women's liberation.

This movement also pushed the public discourse around the degradation of women into the spotlight. Ambedkar sought to reform Hindu personal laws to ensure justice for women and personally appealed to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru supported Ambedkar's vision, agreeing to introduce the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament. Ambedkar saw this bill as a critical tool for women's complete emancipation.

Between 1947 and 1950, while drafting the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar made sure it enshrined the principles of equality, eliminating caste and gender discrimination. Importantly, he excluded the word "God" from the Constitution, arguing it had long been used to justify caste and female oppression.

Though no longer a Hindu, in 1951 Ambedkar took up the task of framing the Hindu Code Bill to protect Hindu women's rights. His progressive recommendations included:

- Maternity leave for women
- Flexibility in office hours for mothers to breastfeed
- Childcare facilities at workplaces
- Women's right to property
- Maintenance rights after divorce
- Legal protection from marital rape
- Making dowry-related offenses non-bailable

### **Ambedkar Idea On Equality**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar famously stated that political democracy cannot survive without a foundation in social democracy. He defined social democracy as a way of life based on the core values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. On January 26, he cautioned that without bridging the gap

between political and social structures, “we shall be living in a contradictory society—politically equal, but socially and economically unequal.”

In politics, we uphold the ideals of “one person, one vote” and “one vote, one value”, yet in our social and economic realities, these principles are often denied. To resolve this contradiction, Ambedkar emphasized the need to uphold the following principles:

Equality before the law

Guarantee of equal civil rights

Equal access to public institutions

Freedom to live and work anywhere in India

Many of these ideals have been enshrined in the Indian Constitution, particularly in Articles 14 to 18, which reflect Ambedkar’s vision of equality and justice. These provisions especially safeguard the rights of women and marginalized communities, forming the backbone of India’s commitment to social justice.

#### **Key Elements of Ambedkar’s Idea on Equality:**

Annihilation of Caste

Gender Equality

Economic Equality

Political Equality

Social Justice

Constitutional Framework

Self-Respect and Human Dignity

#### **Conclusion**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s vision of women’s emancipation was deeply rooted in his unwavering commitment to social justice. In society, women play a vital role in every aspect of life. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar firmly believed that empowering women through higher education is essential not just for their personal growth, but also for ensuring the education and aspirations of future generations. “We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education.” He strongly advocated for equal rights for women in all spheres, asserting that a nation’s progress depends on the empowerment of its women.

Ambedkar introduced several revolutionary ideas and policies for women's welfare. He supported paid maternity leave, casual leave for laborers and hardworking women, and equal pay for women working in hazardous sectors like coal mines. He also raised important issues like pensions after 20 years of service, compensation for workplace injuries, and ending polygamy. In fact, Babasaheb Ambedkar was among the first global leaders to introduce maternity leave for working women, setting a precedent that many countries adopted much later. As Law Minister in 1947, he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Lok Sabha, a landmark legislative effort that aimed to grant women the right to divorce, establish gender equality in marriage, ensure inheritance rights, and abolish untouchability. Although the bill faced strong opposition and was not passed during his tenure, it laid the foundation for future reforms.

Ambedkar's movement actively involved women. From the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, to the Women's Conference in Nagpur in 1942, and the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha in 1930, women stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Ambedkar in the fight for justice. He opposed forced marriages, believing that marriage should not obstruct a girl's growth or reduce her to someone else's possession. Instead, a woman should be treated as an equal partner in life, with full rights to express her thoughts and make independent choices. Babasaheb Ambedkar envisioned a society where every woman lives with dignity, equality, and freedom. Because the "Women are the real architects of society."

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