

The Contributions of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Women Empowerment in India Nagaraj Mallappa Kotagar

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ABSTRACT:

Dr. B.R Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar was one of the prime architects of Indian constitution. He worked all his life for the upliftment of the Dalits and bring social justice in the society. Even though he was criticized hard and was called a challenge to Hinduism, his work for eradication of social evils like caste system was remarkable. This paper throws light on his contribution towards women's emancipation, gender equality, electoral rights and compulsory education for all segments of the society, creating awareness about various unjust practices like child marriages and Devdasi system. It basically intends to discuss his contribution towards the upliftment and empowerment of downtrodden women in the Indian society.

KEYWORDS:

Women, Empowerment, Political, Hindu code bill, Education.

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Introduction:

Dr. B.R Ambedkar, was one of the most well-known social thinker or we can say a social scientist, an economist, a philosophical writer who had brilliant progressive ideas. He was the backbone of Indian constitution. He lived all his life working for the oppressed and the depressed classes of the society. He was the hero of the Dalits.

He was the first Indian reformer who pointed out the hindrances which came in the way of India's prosperity in general and women in particular. To accomplish those objectives he laid down the foundation of social justice by enumerating various issues in the constitution of India. His birth in an untouchable family gave him an acerbic taste of oppression and unbearable agony which helped him work especially for the backward communities, the under-privileged classes and women.

Ambedkar was not only the Father of Indian Constitution; he was a great political leader, philosopher, thinker, economist, editor, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and was first Indian to break down the

barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. He stated that women should be given all round development more importantly social education, their well being and socio-cultural rights. He emphasized that each and every section of Indian women be given their due share and it is a must to maintain and protect dignity and modesty of women (Shukla 2011). He stated “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 raised his voice against the Hindu social order and system through his very popular journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahiskrit Bharat in 1927. In all the issues he spoke on gender equality, women education and exposed the problems related to women and other depressed class. He was also a strong advocate of planning measures for women in the Bombay legislative Assembly. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar always believed in movements led by women. He also added that if the women from all walks of life are taken in to confidence, they may play a significant role in the social reforms. They have played very massive and active role to eradicate the social abuses. He insisted that every married woman must participate in her husband’s activities as a friend. But she must show the courage to deny the life of slaves. She should insist on the principle of equality. If all the women follow it, they will get the real respect and their own identity (Gunjal 2012).

During ancient India, women were considered to be of high stature. They were seen enjoying high and prestigious position in the society but gradually their positions in the society started degrading and were just seen as objects of pleasure meant to serve certain purpose. They even lost their basic human rights. Empowerment is a multi dimensional process. It is a process in which women has a greater share of control over resources, materials human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision making in the home, community, society and nation and to gain ‘power’. According to country report of the Government of India, “Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one; of power”. But her status was not at par with the males in the society. She was not given equal rights in the society. She was often branded as an object of enjoyment. Dr. B.R Ambedkar chose to rise

against all of these and worked hard to challenge the sinful gender relations under the Hindu social order so that Hindu society could be reconstructed along the modern democratic ideas of liberty , equality and fraternity.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India
2. To study the relevancy of his ideas in present political and social scenario of India.

Methodology:

The present study is a qualitative research and based on historical method as well as internet method. This research is based on a good deal secondary sources that are available. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's writings, such as 1.What Congress and Gandhi have done to untouchables (1945), 2. Federation versus Freedom (1939), 3.Annihilation of Caste (1936), 4. Castes in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development (1918), 5.Who were the Shudras (1946) 6.The Untouchables: Who were they and why they became Untouchables (1948) and diverse collection of secondary sources from internet, Government documents, newspapers, published papers, books and speeches delivered by Dr. Ambedkar in Parliament, various conferences and meetings in pre and post independent India were consulted for the study.

Analysis and Discussion:

Babasaheb Ambedkar embarked on his journey towards the upliftment of the women in the year 1920 with a fierce propaganda against Hindu social order by launching a journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahiskrit Bharat in 1927 for this purpose. Through it he expressed the need of gender equality and education of women for the societies' greater good. He also expressed various problems faced by the depressed class of the society. Ambedkar's perception of women question, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists demand. As J. S. Mill expressed in the Subjection of Women, the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and one of the chief hindrance to human development; and ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no privilege or power on the one

side, nor disability on the other, Ambedkar also holds the same views on work for women (More 2011).

Through his literary work, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar untangles the inequality and injustice that was present in the Hindu social order. In his work, "The Rise and Fall Of Hindu Women", he made historical study of the women's status in ancient India and the factors that led to a decline in their status in later years. He concluded in his study that during the Pre-Manu period that is the Aryan era, Women enjoyed a very active position in the sphere of intellectual and social life in the country. It was also found that women were execute Upanayan which could be deducted from Atharva veda where a girl on finishing her Brahmacharya was entitled to speak of her own marriage. Panini's Ashtadhyayi revealed that women attended Gurukuls and studies various shakhas of Vedas. Similarly, Patanjali's Maha Bhyasya made it evident that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. Women was given a similar position to that of men and was free to express her thoughts on various issues pertaining to religion, philosophy and other important areas. Many stories like that of Janak and Sulabha, Yajnavalkya and Gargi etc proved that women during those days were more dignified and respectful.

He also presented a paper on 'Caste in India' where he spoke or rather proclaimed that caste system in India was one of the biggest hurdle and that will result in also gender equity in Hindu society. His other articles, 'The women and counter revolution' and 'the riddle of women' also stated that women were at par with men during the pre Manu days. Kautilya even viewed that women could claim for divorce on the ground of mutual enmity. He said that it was during the Manu day that women's status was harmed and downtrodden because of the immense restrictions imposed on them.

In his paper on 'Castes in India: their genesis, mechanism and development' he described how women were treated brutally by way of sati, enforced widowhood and child marriages just to maintain strict endogamy in a caste. The social evils regarding women in Hindu as well as Muslim society were highlighted by him. He also expressed that the purdah system on Muslim women deprived her of mental and moral nourishment.

He felt that Education is the only powerful tool which could

withhold all women from shackles and bondages of the Indian society. It could be only through education that a women catered a great deal of confidence and gave them the strength to fight and oppose all the humiliations which they had undergone. Ambedkar had inspired many women to write on various topics and that's how Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper 'Chokhamela'. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar exclaimed, "I strongly believe in the movements run by women. If they are truly taken in to confidence, they may change the present picture of society which is very miserable. In past, they have played a significant role in improving the condition of weaker section and classes." He always honored and appreciated women for their work and hardships. He evoked the woman race by the following words, "Never wear such clothes which will degrade our personality and character. Avoid wearing the jewellery on your body everywhere. It is not fare to make hole on nose and wear "nath"." In this he condemned all the bad traditions, habits and ways of life which made life difficult and complex. And surprisingly, even the illiterate women followed his advice from the bottom of their heart. Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. One of the greatest example was in Kamathipura. A person named David, a mediator working in brothel, left his profession as he was persuaded by the thoughts and teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He even evoked the prostitutes to give up their profession and lead a life of honor.

He also put forward that in Buddhism women is treated at par with men. He himself adopted Buddhism and went against worshipping of Hindu Gods and Goddesses to freed the women from the inhuman customs and traditions. He encouraged the women to attain spiritual domain through Buddhism and maintain their dignity and social status. Dr Ambedkar believed that every woman was very strong and she had an important role in the process of social reform . The "Mahad Satyagraha" was a historic moment when it witnessed participation of three hundred women along with their male counterparts. Addressing another meeting of about 3000 women, he said, "I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved. Let every girl who marries stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal, and refuse to be his slave. I am sure if you follow this advice, you will bring honour and glory to yourselves."

He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. In 1942, being a Labour Minister of Executive Council of Governor General, he introduced a Maternity Benefit Bill. He provided several provisions in the constitution for protecting the welfare and civil rights of women. He introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament and highlighted the issues about women's property right. The bill received strong opposition from many political leaders. Prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru dropped the bill as it could not sustain the opposition. In turn, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet expressing his discontent over deprivation of woman's right by the parliament. However, The Hindu Code Bill was later split in to four Bills, and the same were put on the Statute Book by Parliament. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 and The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 are the four enactments which give independent Status to women and endow them with the right of adoption, succession and property. Thus we can say that it is just because of Ambedkar that today our legislative system is at par with the western countries. Being a member of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution, he made various provisions for the upliftment of the women of the country. Some of them were, Article 14 – Equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, Article 15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favour of women, Article 39 – Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work, Article 42 – Human conditions of work and maternity relief, Article 51 (A) (C) – Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women, Article 46 – The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation, Article 47 – The state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health and so on and Article 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R (4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

Conclusion:

Babasaheb Ambedkar had always revolt against the oppressive features of the Indian society especially Hindu society and strongly expressed his views on the state of life of women. His visions regarding

the equality of Men and women are yet to be realized. So even today his work, his thoughts are of utmost relevance. His teachings and thoughts are not only important only for women but also the whole of India. He had always dreamt of a modern and technologically advanced India.

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