

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PASTORAL COMMUNITIES: REVISITING AMBEDKAR THOUGHT

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19633456>

ABSTRACT

*Out here, where herds move with seasons, people live between memory and neglect. Though farming once leaned on their way of life, laws rarely see them clearly. For women in these shifting homes, hardship wears two faces. Caste marks one edge, tradition the other - shaping how far they can go, what work finds them, who speaks for their bodies, which benefits reach their hands. Into this quiet struggle steps an old but restless idea. The writings of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar stir again, pulled forward by questions few asked before. Thought meets ground when his vision is tested against lives lived on wheels and hooves. From Ambedkar's sharp take on caste flows a way to see how power stacks up against those already pushed aside. Pastoral women land at tangled crossings - birth rank, work type, money lack, womanhood - all tightening their limits. One idea pulls another along: when dignity is denied by law, it sticks around in daily life. Close reading of *Annihilation of Caste*, *States and Minorities*, and *The Buddha and His Dhamma* shows how old scripts still shape today's rules. Court rulings echo them too. So do state plans - even if quietly. A patchwork of texts reveals patterns nobody can afford to ignore. Real change? It skips quick fixes. Instead, roots must shift. Liberty means little without space for mobile lives. Equality falters where herding knowledge counts for nothing. Fraternity fails when purity myths linger. Building*

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anew begins not with aid but justice - with room made real through sight, sound, soil.

KEYWORDS: *Pastoral Communities, Ambedkar Thought, Women Empowerment, Constitutional Morality, Caste Discrimination, Social Democracy, Nomadic Tribes, Intersectionality, Gender Justice, Annihilation of Caste .*

1. Introduction

Out here, where grasslands meet distant hills, lives a patchwork of people known by many names - Nomadic Tribes, De-notified Tribes, sometimes Semi-Nomadic ones. Around ten crore strong, they move through deserts, mountains, forests, each group shaped by the land it crosses. Take Maharashtra's Dhangars, who follow flocks along ancient trails. Or picture Himachal's Gaddi shepherds climbing summer slopes with goats and stories alike. In Karnataka, Kuruba families tie life to sheep and monsoon rhythms. Rajasthan sees Rebaris guarding camels under open skies. For thousands of years, movement has been their work - herding animals, shifting with seasons, living between places. Yet even now, after decades of maps and censuses, few official records truly see them. Left out, overlooked, they exist on the edges of policy and public thought. In places where people barely get support, women carry heavier burdens. Not just tending animals but handling milk work, gathering feed, caring for children on the move - none of it counts in official economies or gets legal backing. Schools, clinics, IDs, land rights - these things slip beyond reach, blocked by old social ranks and rules about what women should do, shaped by local habits plus government silence. When gender meets caste, something sharp happens, a kind of pressure most feminist thought misses, even Dalit analysis alone does not fully name. What shows up isn't captured well when either lens works solo. Right where analysis falls short, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas start to matter again. More than just shaping a constitution, he examined deep social fractures, tracing how power locks people out through systems built into daily life. Because he grounded solutions in logic, fairness, and changes to institutions, his approach carried lasting weight. Even though his major works came decades ago, reflections on caste, faith,

governance, and womanhood still fit closely with what pastoral women face today. Instead of leaving those insights behind, drawing from them helps form a clearer way to see both struggle and strength among these women. By returning to his thinking, the piece builds a lens - focused but flexible - for making sense of their journey toward greater voice and choice.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the structural marginalization of women in pastoral communities: To examine how the intersection of caste, gender, and occupational stigma creates unique socio-economic barriers for women in nomadic and semi-nomadic herding groups.
- To analyse the relevance of Ambedkar's social critiques to pastoral realities: To critically revisit Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's writings on caste hierarchy, gender injustice, and constitutional morality, assessing how his frameworks apply to the lived experiences of pastoral women today.
- To evaluate gaps in existing legal and policy frameworks: To identify how current institutional systems-such as property ownership laws, identity documentation (e.g., Aadhaar, voter IDs), and educational access-fail to accommodate the mobile lifestyles of pastoral communities.
- To propose a policy framework based on "Ambedkarian Pastoral Feminism": To develop actionable, justice-driven policy recommendations that ensure visibility, economic empowerment, and democratic participation for pastoral women, rooted in the principles of social democracy.

Methodology

Research Design: This study employs a qualitative, socio-legal, and theoretical research design. It uses an intersectional approach to bridge classical socio-political philosophy with contemporary developmental challenges faced by marginalized nomadic groups.

Data Collection: The research relies heavily on archival and desktop research, utilizing both primary and socio-legal secondary sources:

Primary Sources: A close textual analysis of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's foundational texts, including Annihilation of Caste, The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman, The Buddha and His Dhamma, and his speeches on Constitutional Morality in the Constituent Assembly.

Secondary Sources: A comprehensive review of academic literature, ethnographies on pastoral livelihoods, government policy documents, and reports (such as those from the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes) to establish the current socio-economic baseline of pastoral women.

Analytical Approach

The methodology utilizes a thematic and critical analysis. It maps Ambedkar's theoretical concepts (such as the unravelling of grammatical morality, the necessity of social democracy, and gender equity) directly onto the systemic exclusions observed in modern pastoral life. The analysis highlights the discrepancies between static state policies and the mobile realities of herding communities, ultimately synthesizing these findings into a newly proposed "Ambedkarian Pastoral Feminism" framework for future policy drafting.

2. Pastoral Communities and Women: A Structural Overview

Out here, how people live together among India's herding communities comes down to family ties, work-based rankings, and the need to keep moving. Clans form tight circles where marrying outside isn't common, and rules spell out who gets what, who leads ceremonies, and how lineage flows. A woman's daily reality fits inside both old local customs and wider religious or indigenous laws - rules that usually place men in charge of land, travel choices, and big household decisions. Most of her days out on the move belong to work that never stops. Running the family's mobile home falls to her, along with tending newborn animals and turning milk into butter or cheese. While walking long distances, she still finds time to sell small goods at village stalls. Ownership though? That part skips her entirely. Cattle titles go only to men in the family, by old custom. Even if everything runs because of her hands, the system sees her as extra, not essential. When seasons change, herding families often move, making it hard for kids to stay in school. Girls face bigger

setbacks because they're kept home doing chores or work, unlike their brothers who usually get sent back when things settle. Missing class adds up, especially if marriage happens young and there's no paper trail like a birth record or community proof. Without these, women from such backgrounds find themselves cut off - like being present but unseen by society, much as Ambedkar described lives stripped of basic standing.

3. Ambedkar's Critique of Caste and Its Implications for Pastoral Women

What set Ambedkar apart in shaping India's social ideas was how he dismantled the logic behind caste as the core framework of Hindu society. Not in *Annihilation of Caste*, written in 1936, did he see caste simply as ranking people - but as a layered form of domination rooted in birth, directing work, marriage, even who one could interact with, backed by religious rules and community pressure. Yet it was his insight into gender that cut deep - without tight control over women's bodies and who they bore children with; the entire boundary system of caste would unravel. His point stood clear: keep women confined, and the hierarchy stays intact. Looking at life through Ambedkar's eyes shows why some women face deep-rooted barriers, not just bad luck. Held back by design, not accident, many from herding families sit low in social rankings across villages. Outside the main framework most recognize, they exist on edges shaped by old divisions few question. Working with animals, moving seasonally - these roles paint them as less worthy in settled farming circles. Women bear double weight - one-part unequal treatment at home, another scorn tied to status out there. Seen as lesser because of birth and job alike, their struggles stretch beyond private spaces into public view. Wiping out rigid categories matters more than adjusting rules slightly, he argued again and again. Change that leaves power layers intact fixes nothing real for those already pushed aside. Tinkering around the edges won't touch roots where oppression grows thick and tangled. Real shift demands tearing up systems holding people down together - caste, sex, work - all bound tight.

4. Constitutional Morality and the Rights of Pastoral Women

What stands out in Ambedkar's political thought is how

he saw the Constitution not just as rules, yet as a living guide for unity in a fractured land. On November 25, 1949, speaking before the assembly crafting India's founding law, he stressed a warning: respect for constitutional values wouldn't grow on its own here. Tradition had long fed people on rigid hierarchies, shaped by birth and old habits - what he called grammatical morality. For real change, constant work within democracy was needed; institutions could never afford to relax their watch. Right there near the start of India's rules you find promises like equal treatment under law, a ban on bias by gender or origin, fair access to jobs, survival with respect, and duties for government to aid disadvantaged groups - including those often overlooked. Though written into the foundation, such ideals rarely touch the lives of women who move with herds across regions. Often grouped as Other Backward Classes instead of Scheduled Tribes, they miss certain protections meant for nomadic people. Since moving around defines their existence, fixed residence requirements shut them out from benefits one might expect. Custom ways of using land, passed down through generations among herders, stay unacknowledged by official systems despite what fairness demands. When legal ideas ignore how people actually live, that gap feels less like oversight and more like broken promise. Ambedkar warned this would happen if laws turned blind to lived reality. Fixing these gaps matters under Ambedkar's idea of how constitutions should work - rights must hold weight, not goodwill. Education, earning a living, safety nets, fair inheritance - all flow from the structure he put in place. Looking again at his thinking shows one thing clearly: helping pastoral women isn't optional, it's built into the system.

5. Social Democracy and Pastoral Women's Agency

Life among people matters just as much as voting or laws, Ambedkar believed. Not far into his famous speech before the nation's founders, he described social democracy not as paperwork but as daily existence shaped by freedom, fairness, and belonging. One cannot thrive without the others, he insisted - tear one thread and the whole idea unravels. For women tending flocks and families in remote lands, those linked ideals shift how power settles - or refuses to settle - in their lives. Freedom, when Ambedkar talks about it, isn't just being left alone by laws - it's breaking free

from deep-rooted barriers holding people back from growing and acting on their potential. Take pastoral women: real liberty would mean escaping child marriage pushed onto them, gaining access to learning and land, moving without fear of harm, stepping into public life despite traditions trying to keep them out. Equal standing? That goes beyond equal words in a lawbook - it demands actual balance through fair shares of wealth, openings, and respect. To get there, efforts must meet the specific hardships these women face - think schools that move with herds, programs letting women own animals directly, help with local justice rooted in shared trust. Out here among herds and huts, sisterhood isn't woven into daily life. Though Ambedkar placed deep trust in fraternity, its threads rarely reach women who tend livestock under open skies. Instead of shared dignity, old slights linger - men setting limits at home, higher-caste neighbors withholding basic regard. He saw laws alone wouldn't mend broken bonds between people. A shift must take root in how folks see one another, not just in rulebooks. Real belonging demands habits of care growing where distrust once spread.

6. Ambedkar's Engagement with Gender and the Pastoral Question

Though often overlooked, Ambedkar tackled gender issues head on, especially in *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman* (1951), along with his role in the Hindu Code Bill discussions during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Behind much of the debate stood his firm push for legal change - laws that would give women fair shares in property, a way out of unwanted marriages, and an end to multiple spouses. Yet when lawmakers weakened the proposed reforms, he stepped down from government. That move, quiet but sharp, remains a rare moment where principle outweighed power in India's journey toward fairness under law. Still today, pastoral women carry the weight of unmet promises in personal law. Where property and marriage follow old customs, those ways seldom serve women well. Without legal paths to push back, they stay bound by rules Ambedkar likely saw as clashing with justice written into the Constitution. Reviving his vision on gender - reshaped for how pastoral groups live - must be part of real change for these women. Late in life, Ambedkar turned to Buddhism - not just faith, but rebellion against rigid caste lines and male rule baked into traditional

Hindu order. What he saw in the teachings of the Buddha was clarity: thinking with care, acting without rank, treating each person as real. His version of Dhamma wasn't ancient ritual - it moved like quiet protest, close to how some herding villages live even now, blending beliefs freely, ignoring priest-made borders. Faith, in this light, becomes ground where women might stand equal - drawing strength from old paths, yet stepping beyond them too.

7. Policy Framework: Towards Ambedkarian Pastoral Feminism

Starting with how laws see them, putting Ambedkar's ideas into practice means seeing pastoral women clearly in policy. Not just visibility but real standing under the rules matters most here. Shaping livelihoods comes next - ways to earn that respect movement across seasons, not fight against it. Learning chances need rethinking too, since classrooms rarely follow herds through changing lands. Power shows up differently when decisions include those who move with their animals year after year. How systems respond depends on whether they notice rhythms of work tied to land and weather. Identity isn't picked once; it grows alongside flocks and family roles. Rules made far away often miss what happens where people live lightly on shifting ground. Being seen by law matters most. Without a steady home address, many herding women miss out on papers like Aadhaar, birth proof, caste records, or voting IDs since officials expect people to live in one place. Because Ambedkar believed being recognized before the law shapes belonging, governments must bring paperwork services directly into moving communities through teams that travel and local help desks. Paths long used by nomads - such as dhargar watas or pashtu trails - should hold legal weight too; treating them as rightful spaces guards against uprooting families, which hits women hardest when grasslands vanish. Women who work hard raising animals often own nothing despite their effort. Because they are left out when it comes to property, new rules need fixing. Instead of only men getting help, support like loans and aid for herding must go directly to women. When cattle or goats are put under a woman's name, laws should block anyone taking them without her say-so. Insurance plans and breeding projects run by officials can no longer ignore this gap. To make change real, programs such as the National Livestock Mission have to track results by gender where nomadic families live. Starting

far from home, some schools must grow where herders settle each season. Not just buildings matter but also accepting learning records no matter which border they cross. Money helps too when families lose work because daughters study rather than tend animals. One man's path shows what becomes possible - born into exclusion yet reaching top ranks through books and law. His name was Ambedkar, shaped by hardship, lifted by knowledge. When women move across regions, their right to take part in local meetings often gets left behind. Voting rules tied strictly to one location shut out those who travel seasonally. In villages where herders live, decision-making stays incomplete without voices of these mobile women. A path forward means updating how voter lists work - making them follow people instead of pinning them down. Such changes would honor what Ambedkar saw clearly: true democracy links voting rights with fair social standing. Without shifts in election laws, exclusion continues quietly. Belonging to a place should not vanish just because someone travels to sustain life. Reimagining access isn't new - it's long overdue.

8. Critical Assessment and Limitations

Though Ambedkar's ideas offer strong tools for empowering pastoral women, some key limits need attention. His main concern centered on Dalits inside the caste system; yet, herding groups sit in shifting social spaces that don't always match that structure. Not every such group connects with Dalit struggles or uses similar political terms. Using his thinking means adjusting it carefully to fit real conditions - never just copying it straight. Still, the value lies in how it can stretch when grounded in actual lives. Later on, Ambedkar did not focus much on nature or ecology. Pastoral life depends closely on particular natural settings - shared pastures, shifting water supplies, woodland zones - which face growing pressure from land grabs, protected area rules, and construction projects. To support pastoral women through an Ambedkar-inspired lens, one needs to add awareness of how survival, womanhood, and surroundings tie together. From such a view, separation rarely makes sense. Across India, differences in region, faith, and social standing among herding groups make one-size-fits-all policies ineffective. Instead of fixed answers, Ambedkar offers a guiding vision along with tools for thinking through problems. Turning those ideas into action depends

on long-term work alongside nomadic women, recognizing them as active creators of insight into their lives.

9. Conclusion

Women gaining power in herding communities sits at the heart of India's still-unfinished change. Tackling it means facing rigid class systems along with deep-seated bias against girls, shame tied to certain jobs, loss of land, and being shut out by officials - all happening at once. Looking again at Ambedkar's ideas here does not bring up old theory frozen in time instead his thinking breathes with urgent meaning today. What stands out in Ambedkar's thinking is how he saw caste not just as division but as layered injustice. Because of this view, constitutional morality wasn't mere procedure for him - it meant doing what is right when power is uneven. When liberty dances with equality while fraternity watches closely - that blend forms social democracy, at least in his mind. Women's struggles found strong support in his writings, especially around laws and daily life fairness. Put together, these ideas light up hidden corners where pastoral women face hardship. Though built during fights for Dalit freedom, one truth still cuts deep today - real change must reshape systems, not adjust symptoms. Dignity cannot grow unless society itself changes soil. Among those overlooked, India's pastoral women stand apart - not needing charity, but justice. What they seek aligns with what Ambedkar envisioned for the marginalised: rightful place, visibility, structures allowing growth on fair terms. Living fully, equally, without shame - that possibility must be built. Returning to his ideas here does more than remember a thinker; it affirms real lives shaped by struggle, resilience, quiet strength.

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