

# DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a leading social reformer, played a transformative role in advocating for women's rights in India. His contributions went beyond legal frameworks, extending into social, economic, and educational reforms aimed at dismantling deeply entrenched patriarchal and caste-based inequalities. This paper critically examines Ambedkar's views on women's oppression, his critique of religious and social institutions, and his legislative efforts, particularly the Hindu Code Bill. It also evaluates the contemporary relevance of his ideas in addressing ongoing gender disparities. The study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on secondary sources, including Ambedkar's writings and scholarly analyses. The findings suggest that Ambedkar's vision of gender equality remains foundational to modern feminist discourse in India.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Social Justice, Hindu Code Bill, Feminism, Caste, Education, Constitution.*

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## Introduction

The status of women in India has historically been shaped by complex intersections of caste, class, and gender. In such a context, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar emerged as a pioneering voice advocating for women's emancipation. Unlike many reformers of his time, Ambedkar approached women's issues not in isolation but as part of a broader struggle against systemic inequality. Ambedkar's philosophy was rooted in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which he believed were essential for a just society. He argued that the oppression of women was intrinsically linked to the caste system and that any attempt to uplift women must simultaneously address caste-based discrimination. His critique of Hindu scriptures, particularly Manusmriti, highlighted how religious doctrines were used to legitimize women's subordination. Furthermore, Ambedkar emphasized that education, economic independence, and legal rights were crucial for women's empowerment. His efforts in framing the Constitution of India ensured that gender equality became a fundamental principle of the nation.

### Objectives of the Study:

- To analyse Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's perspective on women's rights and gender equality.
- To examine his critique of caste and religious structures affecting women.
- To study his contributions to legal and constitutional reforms for women.
- To explore his emphasis on education and economic independence for women.
- To evaluate the relevance of his ideas in contemporary feminist discourse.

**Methodology:** This study is based on a qualitative research methodology, employing a descriptive and analytical approach. The data is collected from:

**Primary sources:** Writings and speeches of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

**Secondary sources:** Books, journal articles, and research papers

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## Government documents and constitutional provisions

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The study uses interpretative analysis to examine Ambedkar's contributions and their impact on women's rights.

**Historical Context:** Status of Women in Pre-Independence India: Before independence, Indian women faced systemic discrimination. Practices such as child marriage, sati, purdah, and denial of education were widespread. Women were largely excluded from public life and had limited legal rights. The caste system further exacerbated gender inequality. Women from lower castes faced double oppression-both as women and as members of marginalized communities. Ambedkar recognized this intersectionality and argued that women's liberation could not be achieved without addressing caste oppression.

**Ambedkar's Feminist Philosophy:** Intersection of Caste and Gender: Ambedkar argued that caste is sustained through the control of women, particularly through restrictions on marriage and reproduction. He believed that endogamy (marriage within caste) was a key mechanism for maintaining caste hierarchy.

**Critique of Manusmriti:** Ambedkar strongly criticized Manusmriti, which prescribed subordinate roles for women. He publicly burned the text in 1927 as a symbolic rejection of its authority.

**Vision of Gender Equality:** Ambedkar envisioned a society where women had equal rights in all spheres-social, economic, and political. He believed that gender equality was essential for democracy.

**Contributions to Women's Rights:** Constitutional Provisions: As the chairman of the Drafting Committee, Ambedkar ensured the inclusion of:

- Article 14: Equality before law
- Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination
- Article 16: Equal opportunity.

These provisions laid the legal foundation for gender equality in India.

**Hindu Code Bill:** The Hindu Code Bill was a landmark reform that aimed to:

- Provide women with property rights
- Allow divorce
- Ensure equality in marriage

Although initially resisted, it paved the way for later reforms in Hindu personal laws.

### **Labor Rights for Women Ambedkar introduced policies supporting:**

**Maternity Benefits:** Maternity benefits refer to the legal rights and protections provided to women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar strongly supported such benefits as part of labour welfare, recognizing motherhood as a social responsibility that must be protected by the state. In India, these rights are primarily governed by the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, which provides paid maternity leave, medical bonuses, nursing breaks, and job security during and after pregnancy. The Act was further strengthened by the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, extending paid leave to 26 weeks and introducing provisions like crèche facilities. Ambedkar's early advocacy ensured that women workers were not forced to choose between employment and motherhood. These benefits are essential for protecting the health of both mother and child while promoting gender equality in workplaces. They also reduce discrimination and encourage greater participation of women in the workforce.

**Equal Wages:** Equal wages refer to the principle that men and women should receive equal pay for performing the same or similar work. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar strongly believed that economic equality is fundamental to social justice and emphasized fair wages for women workers. This principle is legally supported in India by the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, which mandates equal pay for equal work regardless of gender and prohibits discrimination in recruitment. Later, this principle was incorporated into the Code on Wages, 2019, which further strengthens wage equality and ensures uniform wage standards across sectors. Ambedkar's contributions to labour reforms laid the foundation for such legislation by addressing wage disparities and improving labour rights. Equal wages empower women by providing financial independence, dignity, and economic security. Despite these laws, gender pay gaps still persist, making

continued enforcement essential. Ensuring equal wages contributes not only to fairness but also to inclusive economic growth.

**Safe Working Conditions:** Safe working conditions refer to an environment where workers are protected from physical, mental, and occupational hazards. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played a key role in shaping labour policies that ensured workplace safety, especially for women in factories and mines. In India, workplace safety is governed by laws such as the Factories Act, 1948, which ensures proper sanitation, ventilation, working hours, and safety measures. Additionally, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 protects women from harassment and ensures a safe and dignified work environment. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 further consolidates and strengthens these protections. Ambedkar emphasized that unsafe workplaces exploit women and hinder their participation in the workforce. Providing safe working conditions ensures women's health, dignity, and productivity. These legal frameworks reflect his vision of a just society where equality is supported by safety and protection. He recognized the importance of economic independence for women's empowerment.

**Promotion of Education:** Ambedkar famously urged: "Educate, Agitate, Organize." He believed education was the most powerful tool for social change and encouraged women to pursue education.

**Political Participation:** Ambedkar supported women's suffrage and their participation in political processes, recognizing their role in nation-building. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar strongly believed that women's political participation was essential for achieving true democracy and social justice. He argued that without equal representation of women in political institutions, the interests and rights of half the population would remain neglected. Ambedkar supported universal adult franchise, ensuring that women, regardless of caste or class, had the right to vote and participate in governance. He viewed political empowerment as a tool for women to challenge social inequalities and assert their rights. Ambedkar also encouraged women to organize, educate themselves, and actively engage in political movements. He believed that laws and policies affecting

women should not be made without their representation. His efforts contributed to the inclusion of equal political rights in the Indian Constitution. Even today, his vision highlights the importance of increasing women's representation in legislatures and decision-making bodies for a more inclusive and equitable society.

**Ambedkar and Modern Feminism:** Ambedkar's ideas align closely with modern feminist theories, particularly intersectional feminism. He acknowledged that gender oppression is compounded by caste and class inequalities. His work has inspired Dalit feminism, which focuses on the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized communities.

**Relevance in Contemporary India:** Despite significant progress, gender inequality persists in India. Issues such as gender-based violence, wage gaps, and limited political representation continue to affect women. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas closely align with the principles of modern feminism, particularly intersectional feminism, which examines how gender oppression interacts with caste, class, and social inequalities. Ambedkar recognized that women's subordination in India could not be understood without addressing the caste system. He argued that Brahmanical patriarchy-controlled women's sexuality and mobility to maintain caste purity. This perspective resonates strongly with contemporary feminist theories that emphasize multiple forms of oppression. Ambedkar also advocated for women's education, economic independence, and legal rights-key pillars of modern feminist movements. His efforts to reform personal laws, ensure equal rights through the Constitution, and promote social justice laid the groundwork for feminist discourse in India. Dalit feminism, in particular, draws heavily from his ideas by highlighting the unique struggles of marginalized women. Thus, Ambedkar remains a foundational figure in shaping an inclusive and socially aware feminist framework.

**Ambedkar's ideas remain relevant in:**

**Legal Reforms:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas remain highly relevant in legal reforms, as his vision of equality and justice forms the backbone of Indian law. As the chief architect of the Constitution, he ensured provisions like equality before law, prohibition of discrimination, and protection of fundamental rights.

These principles continue to guide laws related to women's rights, labor protection, and social justice. Modern legal reforms addressing gender-based violence, workplace equality, and minority rights reflect his ideology. Ambedkar believed laws should transform society, and today's progressive legal frameworks continue to draw inspiration from his commitment to fairness, dignity, and equal justice.

**Educational Policies:** Ambedkar strongly believed that education is the key to empowerment and social transformation. His ideas remain relevant in shaping modern educational policies that focus on inclusivity and equal access. Government initiatives promoting education for women, marginalized communities, and economically weaker sections reflect his vision. Policies such as reservations, scholarships, and literacy programs aim to reduce social inequality. Ambedkar emphasized critical thinking and awareness, encouraging individuals to challenge injustice through knowledge. Today's focus on universal education and skill development aligns with his belief that education is essential for achieving equality, independence, and active participation in society.

**Social Justice Movements:** Ambedkar's ideas continue to inspire social justice movements across India. He advocated for the rights of marginalized communities, including women, Dalits, and labourers, emphasizing equality and human dignity. Modern movements addressing caste discrimination, gender inequality, and human rights draw heavily from his philosophy. His call to "educate, agitate, organize" remains a guiding principle for activists. Ambedkar's vision of an inclusive society encourages people to challenge injustice and demand equal rights. Contemporary campaigns for women's empowerment, social inclusion, and anti-discrimination policies reflect his enduring influence in shaping a more just and equitable society.

### **Suggestions:**

- Integrate Ambedkar's feminist ideas into educational curricula
- Promote awareness of gender equality
- Strengthen legal protections for women
- Encourage women's participation in leadership roles

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**Recommendations:**

- Implement gender-sensitive policies
- Address intersectional inequalities
- Support research on Ambedkar's contributions
- Enhance access to education and employment for women

**Conclusion:**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contributions to women's rights were revolutionary. His efforts in legal reform, education, and social activism significantly improved the status of women in India. His vision of equality and justice continues to guide contemporary movements for women's empowerment. Ambedkar's legacy remains a cornerstone of India's pursuit of social justice.

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