

**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
IN THE ECONOMY OF KARNATAKA FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR**

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's progressive vision of women's empowerment is highly relevant. Ambedkar strongly opposed practices such as child marriage, commodification of women and forced labor. He stressed the importance of education, economic independence and active participation of women in all aspects of society. This research paper examines Dr. Ambedkar's contributions to improving the status of women, focusing on their self-reliance, economic participation and legal rights. The study highlights his belief in challenging patriarchal structures and uplifting the family economy to achieve gender equality. It underlines the significance of his ideas in addressing contemporary challenges of gender inequality and social justice.

KEYWORDS: *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Economic Progress, Women Empowerment.*

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Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar worked tirelessly to improve the condition of marginalized groups, including women. He believed that the progress of a nation depends on the active participation of women in social and economic life. Ambedkar was highly critical of patriarchal traditions, especially those rooted in ancient texts like Manusmriti. He blamed Manusmriti for the decline in the status of women in Karnataka society (Ambedkar and Moon, 2014). According to him, Manusmriti promoted a system that treated women as dependents, first on their fathers, then on their husbands, and then on their sons. This was evidence of their enslavement. He believed that women were not property that anyone could permanently control. He argued that this system deprived women of their rights and prevented them from contributing to the economic development of the nation. As a result, fifty percent of the country's power had to lead a life of misery instead of economic development. According to Ambedkar, social equality is essential for women to fully participate in the economy. He highlighted the important roles women play in raising children, managing families, and contributing to industries with their skills and creativity. He rejected the idea that women should be subordinate and instead supported their status as equals and partners in progress. His ideas were influenced by Buddhist principles, which supported equality for men and women in education, self-development, and religious life. He saw Buddhism as a model for an inclusive and progressive society. This essay examines Dr. Ambedkar's vision for women's empowerment. It focuses on his critique of patriarchal systems, his emphasis on equality, and the link between gender justice and economic growth.

Reviews of Literature

“An Analytical Study of Women Empowerment for Economic Progress in the Perspective of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.” Several studies covering various aspects have been conducted on the topic. A sincere attempt has been made in this study to update the literature related to the current research topic. A careful analysis of the relevant literature related to the current research topic. All such details have been collected from various sources. C. D. Naik (2025) had written and compiled in Social and Political Thought of Dr. B. R.

Ambedkar and discussed about an attempt is made to make aware of the contemporary situation vis-a-vis Ambedkar's solutions, which are still having bearing on current socioeconomic issues. Reddy, K. (2024) analyses the Ambedkar led Dalit movement with an anthropological perspective. He observes that mission of Ambedkar was aimed at bringing about radical transformation in the living conditions of millions of his community who had been condemned for many centuries to live degraded and dehumanized lives. Prasanna K. (2024) argues that the hypothetical base of social justice promises an individual to guard against any oppression discrimination and deprivation of social, economic and political liberty. Its social sphere argues for equality in terms of expression of ideas, belief, faith, and worship etc. It also facilitates the opportunity to promote the dignity of individual and respectful life. Social justice in terms of economic activities provide an equal opportunity for participation in economic activities to all without any discrimination and believe on the equal distribution of income and wealth, accessibility to basic necessities to all, provision of housing, health and sanitation facilities as well as other social safety nets. In its political perspective of all citizens in political affairs, no one should deny from participation in political activities on the basis of caste, clan, gender, race etc.

Significance of the Study

Ambedkar strongly opposed practices such as child marriage, commodification of women and forced labor. He stressed the importance of education, economic independence and active participation of women in all aspects of society. This research paper examines Dr. Ambedkar's contributions to improving the status of women, focusing on their self-reliance, economic participation and legal rights.

Statement of the Problem: "An Analytical Study of Women Empowerment for Economic Progress in the Perspective of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar".

Objectives of the Study

- A study of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's progressive vision of women's empowerment.
- A study of the work undertaken by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to improve the status of women.

Scope of the Study: Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's progressive vision of women's empowerment is extremely relevant in addressing the contemporary challenges of social and economic inequality in Karnataka.

Method and Materials

To examine historical documents, records and texts related to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, primary sources such as Dr. Ambedkar's works, speeches and legal reforms such as the Hindu Code Bill were analyzed to understand his ideas and advocacy. Archival documents including legislative documents and historical reports were also studied to provide context for his efforts. Secondary sources such as books, research articles and analyses of his work were used to gain additional perspectives and assess his impact on social and legal reforms. By integrating primary and secondary sources, this study provides a detailed understanding of Dr. Ambedkar's vision of the central role of women in shaping a more equal and prosperous society.

The Vision of Ambedkar for Gender Equality

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed in the importance of women becoming self-reliant. He opposed practices like the buying and selling of women. He also criticized the idea that women should suffer under worthless husbands or fathers who keep torturing them. He believed that all relationships should be based on respect and dignity (Ambedkar, 2014, Vol. 17, 2). Ambedkar thought economic dependence was the main reason for women's exploitation and degradation. He wanted women to have the right to make their own decisions. He believed that society must end the patriarchal mindset that limited women's roles. The biggest challenge before women was to fight with the Brahmanical mentality, which did not allow women to work as equal citizens in a male-dominated society. Dr. Ambedkar has empowered women to build fulfilling and independent lives. For him, the progress of a society depended on the progress of its women. He considered women's status a key measure of national development. Dr. Ambedkar wrote an article titled 'The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman' in the Mahabodhi magazine, published in Calcutta, where he discussed the struggles of Dalit women. He worked to protect them from social discrimination and

exploitation (Ambedkar, 1955). While he condemned prostitution, he did not judge the women forced into it. Ambedkar was inspired by Lord Buddha, who had given women equal opportunities for spiritual and intellectual growth. He believed that women have always lived disciplined and committed lives as sisters, mothers, and wives. However, feudal attitudes and exploitative practices pushed them into inferior positions to control and oppress them. Hindu religion has been unjust to women by denying them education and knowledge, which is their basic right. This denial is cruel and unfair. Mahatma Buddha gave women equal opportunities to gain knowledge. Whether married, widowed, or unmarried, women were considered capable of holding responsibilities equal to men and were respected for their abilities. In ancient times, women chanted mantras, took vows of celibacy, and studied in Gurukuls. Patanjali, in his Mahabhashya, mentioned women as teachers and girls were taught the Vedas. Women were respected in society until the time of Shankaracharya (Ambedkar, 1955). The decline in the status of women began with Manu, whose teachings created Brahmanism. Brahmanism restricted the progress of women. Dr. Ambedkar strongly opposed the injustice faced by women. He worked to make women strong, empowered, and equal members of society. Ambedkar believed that the progress of a country depended on the respect and opportunities given to women. He saw mothers as key to shaping capable and intelligent citizens. He worked to restore pride, dignity, and respect for women in Karnataka society.

Policy Contributions by Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar advocated for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women in the Karnataka Constitution. He opposed discrimination based on employment or economic status and ensured that the right to equality was constitutionally guaranteed. Ambedkar strongly opposed the system of forced labor, which he identified as a significant cause of poverty among Dalits, women, and children. He described forced labor as not only a social evil but also an economic crime, where people were compelled to work under inhumane conditions for subsistence wages. He argued that the most harmful element in the concept of the so-called 'Hindu economy' is the forced labor system, which is against the national mentality. The practice of forced labor did not mean making slaves

work like slaves, but making them work at a subsistence level on a hereditary basis is also a part of forced labor. To address this, he ensured a constitutional ban on forced labor, aiming to eliminate its harmful effects on society and the economy. Ambedkar believed that property rights were essential for achieving true equality and liberty. Without these rights, other freedoms were incomplete. He worked to include provisions in the Constitution to ensure women's right to property, business, and trade. As part of this effort, he introduced the Hindu Code Bill, which proposed equal rights to family property to the daughters, wives, and mothers (Datta, 2019, pp. 26-27). It also gave women the right to adopt children and ensured financial protection for divorced or widowed women. Ambedkar emphasized that women needed these rights to achieve economic independence and self-reliance. However, the Hindu Code Bill faced opposition in Parliament, and its full implementation was delayed. Although parts of the bill were later passed as separate laws, Ambedkar resigned from his ministerial post in protest, as the bill was not adopted in its entirety. He believed the rejection of the bill reflected the feudal and patriarchal mindset of Karnataka society at that time (Sharma, 2019, p. 22). Ambedkar stressed the importance of equal wages for women and supported their right to divorce and maintenance. He believed that economic security was essential for women to lead independent and dignified lives. He highlighted how economic inequality and poverty pushed many women, especially those from downtrodden communities, into exploitation. He proposed that ensuring women's economic rights would address issues like divorce, adultery, and societal exploitation. Ambedkar also argued that women themselves must be aware of their rights and take an active role in fighting for them. He believed in a revolutionary approach, emphasizing education, family planning, and mental development as key tools for women's empowerment. The policies and ideas of Dr. Ambedkar on economic rights influenced constitutional provisions, laws, and social awareness. Though not all his recommendations were implemented as he envisioned, they laid the foundation for many progressive changes. His emphasis on equality, property rights, and economic independence for women continues to inspire gender and social reforms in India.

Women Empowerment and Economic Growth

Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the vital role women play in economic development and regarded their status as a key indicator of the progress of the society. He believed that a nation cannot develop if its women remain deprived of opportunities and resources. For Ambedkar, empowering women was not just a matter of justice but also a necessity for national economic growth. Ambedkar recognized the need to organize women to end the cycle of poverty and improve their economic participation. He argued that early marriages, excessive childbirth, and treating daughters as burdens contributed to poverty, especially among Dalit communities. He championed reforms such as banning child marriage, promoting family planning, and providing education to women to address these issues. Ambedkar also developed women's leadership in economic upliftment. He actively involved women like Shanti Bai Dadi, Geetabai Gaikwad, and Mrs. Manobala Shivraj in his movements, showcasing their potential as leaders and change-makers. He advocated for women's freedom from vices and compulsory education to enable their active participation in business and economic development. Ambedkar believed that the foundation of national economic growth lies in the family economy. He argued that women must be seen as equal partners in the financial decisions of the family. To increase the participation of women in the economic sector and bring equality in India, Ambedkar advised that child marriage should be banned and economic responsibility should be given to women. Ambedkar considered it responsible for the poor to have more children (Datta, 2019, p. 27). Regarding limiting the family size, his opinion was definite that he considered having more children a crime. Since women are the mirror of the progress of any society. That is why Karnataka society is troubled by poverty and forced labor. Its root cause is the neglect of women. Women have as much responsibility for economic development as men. But this is possible only when women get a place as an advisor before marriage and as a friend and co-manager of the husband after marriage. As long as women in Hindu families in India have the status of advisor, friend, manager and companion, the Karnataka rural economy has been happily self-reliant and exploitation-free. However, the feudal mentality has given priority to men. Brahminists pulled women

back and did not give protection to women in modern education. The British spread education for their own selfish interests, which led to a decline in the status of Dalits and women in the country. The concept of family economy can give a holistic form to every national economy. Therefore, the first responsibility is to uplift the family economy. Until the shadow of poverty is removed from the family economy, the idea of the national economy cannot develop, and for the development of the family economy, it is essential to increase the contribution of women in the economic sector. Ambedkar called for reforms to give women equal opportunities in economic sectors. He believed that economic self-reliance was the key to the empowerment of women. He emphasized instilling self-respect and courage in women so they could lead independent and advanced lives. He viewed women as sources of energy for their families and contributors to a broader economic vision. Dr. Ambedkar also recognized women's sacrifices in preserving traditional arts, skills, and handicrafts, which remain essential to livelihoods in Karnataka society. He argued that acknowledging and enhancing women's contributions to these sectors would strengthen the economy and reduce poverty. Ambedkar's approach combined economic reforms with social empowerment. He firmly believed that without granting women a social role, economic independence would remain unattainable. He advocated for self-improvement opportunities for women to enable their personal and professional growth. For Ambedkar, mutual respect and equality between men and women were prerequisites for a progressive society and economy. Through his vision and reforms, Ambedkar connected women empowerment with national progress. He championed their rights to education, economic participation, and leadership, making them indispensable contributors to economic growth and social transformation.

Result of the Study

Historical Context: The status of women in Karnataka society during the time of Dr. Ambedkar was shaped by centuries of social and cultural norms rooted in patriarchal traditions. Ancient texts like the Manusmriti reinforced these norms by establishing a rigid social order that subordinated women to men at every stage of life. Women were expected to depend on their fathers, husbands, and sons, effectively denying them autonomy and self-determination. This

system not only limited their social freedom but also excluded them from participating in economic activities beyond the household. By the 19th and early 20th centuries, women's roles remained confined to domestic responsibilities, with minimal access to education or employment. The economic contributions of women, such as managing households and engaging in traditional crafts, have been undervalued and overlooked in formal economic discussions.

Discussion of the Study

This lack of recognition for their labor further marginalizes them in economic decision-making and public life. This unequal status of women had a broader impact on the economic progress of the nation. Dr. Ambedkar observed that by suppressing the potential of half of the population, the country was depriving itself of valuable human resources. He argued that women's empowerment was essential not only for their own progress but also for the economic and social development of the entire nation. Against this backdrop, the advocacy for gender equality and economic participation of Ambedkar was revolutionary. He recognized the historical injustices faced by women and aimed to dismantle these systemic barriers. His approach emphasized education, legal rights, and equal opportunities as the foundation for enabling women to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society.

Conclusion of the Study

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed that the development of a country depends on the respectable life women receive. In ancient history, great personalities such as Shukracharya, Brihaspati, Chanakya, and Patanjali were created by pious and devoted mothers. Ambedkar emphasized that mothers play a vital role in shaping capable, intelligent, and skilled individuals in society. He argued that women are essential for the progress of any nation, and if they are not empowered with self-reliance and self-confidence, leaders like Shivaji and Rana Pratap cannot emerge. Ambedkar viewed women as the efficient creators of human capital. He believed that the power, wealth, and prosperity of a nation depend on production, trade, and industries, which are driven by intelligent, brave, and resourceful individuals. Women play a crucial role in shaping this workforce, providing the courage, cleverness, and readiness necessary for

economic development. Ambedkar advocated for the protection of women from exploitation, as their strength is vital for the creation of skilled and dynamic human capital. Without this, the economic progress of the country is unattainable, regardless of its material resources. Dr. Ambedkar was the first to address the inferior status of women, particularly within the Dalit community. He understood that the progress of society depends on empowering women, and he worked towards improving their social and economic condition. Ambedkar's recognition of women's contribution to agriculture, cottage industries, and other essential sectors shows his deep understanding of their role in the economy of India. The suppression of talent, especially from the lower castes, and the exploitation of women weakened India's economic foundations. The advancements in women's rights today, such as their contributions to science, technology, education, and various other fields, are the result of the vision of Ambedkar. Ambedkar not only connected women's empowerment to national development but also fought against the social and economic exploitation they faced for centuries. His vision laid the groundwork for the professional freedom women enjoy today. The victory of his struggle is evident in the progress made towards equality for women and the weaker sections of society.

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