

**Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Contribution of Equality on Social Reforms -Women Empowerment**

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**Introduction**

In ancient India, women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their position degenerated into Merely objects of pleasure meant to serve certain purpose. They lost their individual identity and Even their basic human right. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources material, 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 end nation, and to gain 'power'. According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one; of power". But, from time immemorial, the women in this land of ours were treated as a sort cannot move nor do anything at her will. In HinduShastras, she has been branded just like animals or some Objects of enjoyment. From the verses of Ramayana as written by Tulsi Das, Dhol, ganwar, shudra, pashu, naari - Ye sab tadankeadhikari", In 'Manusmriti' the ancient Hindu Code-book.

The status granted to women is quite visible and she was put to the lowest rung of humanity as she was treated at par with the animals and slave by the proprietors of Hindu Dharma. Such was the placement earmarked to our mothers, sisters and even great grandmothers that humanity was ashamed of. That is why Dr. Ambedkar, the father and architect of Indian Constitution, was of the firm opinion that until and unless, we defy the Hindu Dharma-Shastras, nothing much can be changed. In the name of sanskaras, the Hindu women are tied to bondages of superstitions, which they carry till their death. They are also responsible for inculcating certain wrong notions learnt through baseless traditions and preaching of the Shastras, in the budding minds of their offspring.

**Dr. B.R Ambedkar towards the Empowerment of Indian Women**

The operations of caste both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste / class divide in feminist political discourse makes Ambedkar's view on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian feminist thinking. Although Ambedkar proved, himself to be a genius and was known as a great thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, jurist – par excellence, prolific writer, social activist and critic and strode like a colossus in the Indian sociopolitical scene unto his death, his thoughts never received adequate attention in the generality of Indian society just because he was born as an untouchable. However, the contemporary social realities warrant close examination of the wide

range of his topics, the width of his vision, the depth of his analysis, and the rationality of his outlook and there essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action. Hence, for Indian women's movement Ambedkar provides a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist political agenda which simultaneously addresses the issues of class, caste and gender in the Contemporary sociopolitical set up, which still keeps conservative and reactionary values in many Respects, particularly on gender relations. The writings and Speeches of Ambedkar show what Values India should develop and how they would modernize its social and political institutions.

Ambedkar saw women as the victims of the oppressive, caste- based and rigid hierarchical social system. It is true that great men do not demand rights they do their duties. But for Ambedkar, this is hardly true in respect of the general masses.

The rights of the upper castes are automatically protected, but not of the poor classes. The poor masses must have specific rights; otherwise they would be exploited and opposed by the clever and shrewd persons. The Hindu ideal of duties under the Varna-Vyavastha has developed only as a means of exploitation and oppression. It is a system which deadens, paralyses and crippled the people from which useful activity, and also prevents them formeretivity. Ambedkar made some memorable speeches in the Round Table conference. He placed the view point of the depressed classes and pleaded for Dominion Status. His speeches created a good impression upon the British public. He served on a number of important sub-committees and prepared scheme of political safeguards for the protections of depressed classes in the future constitution of a self governing India. Ambedkar also advocated the immediate introduction of adult franchise. Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India by the members of West Bengal Legislative Assembly though he was defeated in Bombay. He was elected on the on the Drafting Committee and later appointed its chairman. My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize, have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can loose our battle to me is a matter of joy. You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman. He also suggests strategies for emancipation from oppression. He found their emancipation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believes that Buddha treated women with respect and love and never tried to degrade them like Manu did. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Ambedkar cites women like Vishakha, Amrapali of Visali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, Queen of Prasenajjth who approached Buddha, as evidences of Budda's treatment of women as equals. (Paul, 1993 : 383-84) it was mainly the Hindu culture and social customs, which stood in the headway of women's empowerment.

Like Ambedkar, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, also admits, "The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure and practices, Consequently, the access of women, particularly those belonging to weaker section including Scheduled Caste / Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities . To education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded." Since Ambedkar himself was a victim of oppression and discrimination in all its severity, his views about women's oppression and equal rights are more useful than anybody else's theory based on mere observation for the feminist movement to strengthen its strategy for approaching the systemic challenges and contradictions in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream. He was the 14 child of RamjiSakpal and Bhimabai who belonged to Mahar and Murbadker untouchable communities respectively. The

Mahars formed the backbone of the Maratha army and also were important part or the Mumbai Army of the East India Company since they were the first to come into contact with the Europeans in India. From Satara government school Ambedkar completed primary education and entered high school

Here started the painful story of oppression and humiliation which compelled him later to act to blow up the oppressive social order. At the school he was insulted due to his inferior caste status as an untouchable. Ambedkar was pushed to a side of the classroom and was not allowed to mingle with other students. He was never given the opportunity to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities with fellow students. Even the teachers were reluctant to correct Ambedkar's and his brother notebook and avoided asking them questions because of the fear of being polluted. He was barred from studying certain subjects especially Sanskrit. Ambedkar was given Persian as second language when the Sanskrit teacher refused to teach him. In the midst of humanizations also, Ambedkar concentrated on his studies

due to the encouragement from his father. According to Ambedkar, the society must be based on reason, and not on atrocious traditions of caste system.

He found education, intercaste marriage and interline as methods, which may eliminate caste and patriarchy, maintained through endogamy. In 1918, Ambedkar demanded separate electorate and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in proportion to their population. After fifty years of the working of the Indian Constitution, the Indian women's demand for political reservation and the lower status of other disadvantage sections proves that his theory is correct. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He started fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order and lunched a journal MookNayak in 1920 and

Bahishkrit Bharat in 1927 for this purpose. His exposure to the west has influenced his perception on feminist issues. it was a time when first wave feminism had been coming to an end with the achievement of franchise rights for women in Britain in 1918, and America in 1920 and Ambedkar's perception of the women question, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminist demands.

It is well known that Ambedkar has the habit to working for more than eighteen hours a day without any difficulty. His reading habit helped him to understand the feminist development in different cultures and countries around the world. After returning to India he devoted his life fully to work for the depressed classes including women. He was firmly committed to the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. In Ambedkar's movement lunched from 1920 onward, women actively participated and acquired the confidence to voice their issues on various platforms. VenbaiBhatkar and Renubai work for the socio-political equality of depressed people and promoting their economic interests.

### **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar The Champion Of Women's Rights**

Dr. Ambedkar championed the cause of women as well as the miserable plight of Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes throughout his career. He discussed a number of problems of Indian women and sought for their solutions in Bombay Legislative Council, in the Viceroy's Assembly as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and also in the Parliament as the first Law Minister of Independent India. Dr. Ambedkar was sworn in as a nominated members

of the Bombay Legislative Council on 18th Feb., 1927. He advised Indians to participate in the world war on behalf of the British Government. His arguments on the Maternity Benefit Bill and on Birth Critical were quite relevant to recognize the dignity of women. He vehemently supported the Maternity Bill. His argument was – “It is in the interest of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the prenatal period and also subsequently, and the principle of the Bill is based entirely on that principle”. That being so Sir, I am bound to admit that the burden of this ought to be largely borne by the Government, I am prepared to admit this fact because of the conservation of the people’s welfare is primary concern of the Government. And in every country, you will find that the Government has been subjected to a certain amount of charge with regard to maternity benefit.” Women started participating in satya grahs and also launched women’s associations for untouchable women for spreading education and awareness among them.

In the Mahad Satyagraha for temple entry in 1927, even caste Hindus participated. Shandabai Shinde was one such participant. In the Satyagraha it was decided to burn the Manusmriti, which humiliated women, and shudras. In the demonstration after the bonfire of the Manusmriti more than fifty Women participated. Ambedkar addressed the meeting thereafter and advised women to change their style of wearing saress, wear lightweight ornaments, not to eat meat of dead animals. It was upper caste women like Tipnis who taught them proper way of wearing sarees. At the All India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1940 Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that there could not be any progress without women. He spoke “I am a great believer in women’s organization I know that what they can do to improve the condition of the society if they are convinced. They should educate their children and instill high ambition in them. Ambedkar made some memorable speeches in the Round Table conference. He placed the view point of the depressed classes and pleaded for Dominion Status. His speeches created a good impression upon the British public. He served on a number of important sub-committees and prepared scheme of political safeguards for the protections of depressed classes in the future constitution of a self governing India. Ambedkar also advocated the immediate introduction of adult franchise. When Ambedkar returned to India after attending the round table conference in 1932, hundreds of women were present for the committee meetings. Since Ambedkar was well convinced about the status of women, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee he tried and adequate inclusion of women’s rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. Therefore, by considering women’s equality both in formal and substantial senses he included special provisions for women’s equality both in formal and sustainable senses he included special provisions for women while all other general provisions are applicable to them, as to men constitutional provisions. Hence, there are Articles like 15(3), 51(A), and so on. His key work in the preparation of Indian Constitution made it to be known as a New Charter of Human Rights. He looked upon law as the instrument of creating a sane social order in which the development of individual should be in harmony with the growth of society.

## **Ambedkar Idea Of Equality**

He incorporated the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in the Indian Constitution. Based on the belief that any scheme of franchise and constituency that fails to bring about representation of opinions as well representation of persons falls short of creating a popular government, he submitted the Constitution with a warning. He said in his speech delivered in the Constituent Assembly on 25th November 1949, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy." By social he means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as principal of life. He further said: "On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principal of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principal of one man one value. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up." Ambedkar believed primarily in the efficacy of law and legislation, and he struggled to evolve a constitutional mechanism to fashion India of his dreams, where equality, liberty and fraternity would have an unhindered play. In Ambedkar's vision of India, all citizens would be equal before law; they have equal civic rights, equal access to all institutions, conveniences and amenities maintained by or for the public; they possess equal opportunities to settle or reside in any part of India to hold any public office, or exercise any trade or calling, here all key and basic industries would be owned by the state. He pleaded for special privileges and safeguards for the Dalits as scheduled Castes. In short, he demanded equality, which would not only lead, to the redressal of the part wrongs but also provide sufficient leverage, may be by way of compensation, as siabid to ensure their leveling up.

### **– B.R. Ambedkar, his life, work and relevance.**

#### **The Hindu Code Bill, 1948**

In 1948 when the Hindu Code Bill was introduced in parliament and debated on the floor of the house, the opposition was strong against the Bill. Ambedkar tried his level best to defend the Bill by pointing out the Constitutional Principles of equality, liberty and fraternity and that in the Indian society characterized by the caste system and the necessary for a social change in which women have equality in a legal frame system and the oppression of women since women are deprived of equality, a legal frame work is necessary for a social change in which women have equal right with men.

However, the Bill could not withstand the opposition from the Hindu orthodoxy. In reality, the Bill was a threat to patriarchy on which traditional family structure, was

bounded and that was the major reasons behind the opposition. Therefore, on the eve of the first elections in 1951 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dropped the Bill by saying that there was too much opposition. On this issue the then Law Minister Dr. Ambedkar resigned. His explanations for resignation show how the parliament of independent India deprived its women citizens of even basic rights. His resignation letter dated 27th September 1951.

Although most of the provisions proposed by Ambedkar were later passed during 1955-56 in four bills on Hindu 'marriage' succession, minority and guardianship and maintenances and later in 1976 some changes were made in Hindu law it still remains true that the basic rights of women have yet to be restored to them even after fifty years of the working of the Indian Constitution based on the principle of liberty, equality and justice to all Indian citizens. However, the Hindu code Bill helped the resurgence of feminist movement in India. This crusade of Ambedkar to emancipate women from injustice inspires the women leader in parliament to keep the issue alive until its enactment. This was the starting point for women to recognize their position and pursue rights movement by acquiring strength from second wave feminism started in the early 1960s. Women are still fighting issues such as rape, dowry death, communalism, fundamentalism, sexual harassment, and domestic violence and social, poverty and so on. The parinirvan of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who was recognized internationally as a crusader against caste system, a vigilant fighter for the human rights of all the oppressed and enslaved and the emancipator of humanity from social and economic injustice, occurred on 6th December 1956.

In the condolence message, on Ambedkar death in Parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said: "Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society." His dream of society based on gender equality is yet to be realized and therefore his thoughts are important for the social reconstruction that favors women's empowerment. The Nation honoured Baba Saheb Ambedkar by offering Bharat Ratna posthumously to him which was received by his widow Sativa Ambedkar in 1990. Dr. Ambedkar foundation was set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on 24th March 1992 for the purpose of promoting and propagating his ideology of social justice so as to reach the common masses. The foundation implemented Schemes such as Dr. Ambedkar National Memorial, Dr. Ambedkar National Public Library, Dr. Ambedkar Chairs in Universities / Institutions, Dr. Ambedkar Award for Social Understanding and upliftment of Weaker Sections and the Dr. Ambedkar International Award for Social Change. **Constitutional Provisions** The Constitution of India contains various provisions, which provide for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The salient features are:-

- Article 14 guarantees that the State shall not deny equality before the law and equal protection of the laws;
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex;
- Article 15 (3) empowers the State to make positive discrimination in favour of women and children;
- Article 16 provides for Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment;
- Article 23 prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour;
- Article 39 (a) and (d) enjoins the State to provide equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work;

- Article 42 enjoins upon the State to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work, and for maternity relief;
- Article 51A(e) imposes a Fundamental Duty on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- Article 243D (3) provides that not less than 1/3rd of the total number of seats to be filled by Direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women, and such seats to be allotted by Rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat;
- Article 243T(3) provides that not less than 1/3rd of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality;
- Article 243T(4) provides reservation of offices of Chairperson in Municipalities for SC, ST, Women in such manner as the legislature of a State, may by law provide; In pursuance of the above Constitutional provisions, various legislative enactments have been framed to protect, safeguard and promote the interests of women. Many of these legislative enactments have been in the sphere of labour laws to ameliorate the working conditions of women labour.

### **Steps Taken by the Government of India for Women's Empowerment**

It is the education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom .

– **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Education of Women:** Education to women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position in the society. Education also brings about reduction in inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family. In order to encourage education of women at all levels and to dilute gender bias in the provision and acquaintance of education, schools, colleges and even universities were established exclusively for women in the country. To bring more girl children, especially

from marginalised BPL families, into the mainstream of education, Government has been

providing a package of concessions in the form of free supply of books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for hostilities, mid-day meals, scholarships, free by-cycles and so on. Many universities such as Mother Teresa Women University have been established for the development of Women Studies and to encourage higher education among women and their social mobility. My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize, have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle to me is a matter of joy. You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman.

### **Self Help Groups:**

Self Help Groups are small homogenous groups consisting of 12-20 women from BPL families

voluntarily organised to promote savings. They are self-managed groups of poor women which

primarily came into existence to mobilise financial resources through their own savings and lend

the same amongst themselves to meet the credit needs of their members.

### **Capacity Building and Skill formation:**

In order to improve the entrepreneurial ability and skill of the women, Government has been

imparting various types of training designed to promote self and wage employment.

**Skill Up-gradation Training Programme:** Provision of skill training to women in SHG has been given recognition so as to enable them to start their own income-generating activities. The duration of the training and the cost depends on the nature of the trade selected by the members.

### **Women & Child Development**

Women's empowerment is an important agenda in the development efforts. There has been

significant shift in approach of the district administration towards the development of women,

especially the poor & the illiterate.

### **Working Women's Hostel:**

To provide secured accommodation to the working women, Working Women's Hostel has been

established at Angul & functioning since 1996. State Old Age Pension (SOAP) /

National Old Age

Pension (NOAP).

### **Employment And Work Participation Rate**

The work participation rate indicates to a great extent the economic empowerment of women in

the society. The status of women is intimately connected with their economic position, which in

turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. Education along with participation of women in workforce has been universally recognised as an important element in the adoption of small family norms, which is essential for family planning. There has been a considerable improvement in the entry of women in all sectors of employment in the country.

### **Women And Political Participation**

Political equality to all children regardless of birth, sex, colour, etc is one of the basic premises of

democracy. Political equality includes not only equal right to

franchise but also more importantly, the right to access to the institutionalized centres of power. Thus, political participation of women means not only using the right to

vote but also power sharing, co-decision making and co-policy making at all levels. The active participation of women in political sphere is integral to empowerment of

women and helps to build a gender-equal society as well as to speed up the process of national development.

### **National Commission For Women**

In January 1992, the National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament with

the specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation, to suggest

amendments wherever necessary, and safeguard the rights and entitlements of women.

The Commission extend financial support to NGOs and educational institutions to conduct legal awareness programme to enable women to become aware of their rights.

## **Conclusion**

Society is in a continuous process of evolution. It will take several decades for these imbalances to be rectified. Education of both men and women will lead to change in attitudes and perceptions. It is not easy to eradicate deep-seated cultural value, or alter tradition that perpetuate discrimination.

Law can only be an instrument of change that must be effectively used. The absence of effective law enforcement, results in low rates of conviction, which in turn emboldens the feeling that the accused can get away. It is necessary that deterrent punishments are provided in the statute, and are strictly enforced. A beginning has certainly been made in urban areas. Working women continue to remain primarily responsible for taking care of home and child rearing, in addition to their careers. Increased stress has made them more prone to heart and other stress related diseases.

Hence, it is necessary to improve the Support System for working women. The march towards elimination of gender bias has to go on, so as to make it meaningful for the vast majority of women in this country. There is a greater representation now in the legislature, executive and judiciary. India is one of the few countries in the world, which has had a woman Prime Minister. Various States have from time to time, had women Chief Ministers. A woman Judge in the Supreme Court, and in the High Courts, has today become the norm. Women have crossed many barriers, and head various departments in large multinationals today. A beginning has been made in the Army also, when women are being commissioned as SSC Officers. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution were brought about in 1993, which served as a break-through towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in the political power structure. The proposed Womens' Reservation Bill to provide 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislature is now under consideration. The empowerment of women in urban areas and the metropolises cannot be the indicator of growth in the country. In a country, where eighty percent of the population is in rural areas, until the lot of women in these areas is also not improved simultaneously, development will remain an illusion to them. The status of women cannot be raised without opening up opportunities of independent income and employment. In the rural areas, employment of women is concentrated mainly in labour-intensive, unskilled jobs where simple or traditional skills are required. There is lack of access to vocational institutions. Women in the rural areas are wholly oblivious of their rights. It will require a much greater and concerted effort for the various measures to become a living reality for women in the rural areas.

This can happen only through the collective effort of the State, NGOs, imparting of formal and informal education, through the media, etc. Empowerment of women so as to enable them to become equal partners with their male counterparts so that they have mutual respect for each other and share the responsibilities of the home and finances should be the ultimate goal that we must aspire to achieve. Enforcement of basic human rights of gender equality must take place, without undermining the institution and sanctity of marriage, and family.

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