

# DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S THOUGHTS AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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## Abstract

*The present paper is an attempt to highlight Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post-independent India and its impacts on future generations. It is the outcome of the extensive analysis of his work on women empowerment extracted from speeches delivered by him in parliament and proceedings of various conferences in pre and post-independent India. Dr. Ambedkar was among the pioneers Indians who broke down the barriers coming in the way of advancement of women in India. He launched journals Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahiskrit Bharat in 1927 and through these, he put due stress on the gender equality, dire need of educating women and exposed the social, traditional and cultural problems faced by the women in India. He strongly advocated for the measures of family planning for the betterment of state of women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. He created awareness among poor and illiterate women and inspired them to fight against oppression by higher castes and other unjust and social practices like devdasi system and child marriages. He framed many laws for Women in India viz, (i) Dearness Allowance, (ii) Employees' State Insurance, (iii) Provident fund Act (iv) Women Labour welfare fund, (v) Divorce Act, (vi) Right over parental Property, (vii) Women Labour Protection Act, (viii) Maternity benefit for women Labour bill, (ix) Leave Benefit to Piece Workers, (x) Revision of scale of pay for employees, (xi) Restoration of ban on women working underground in mines, (xii) No marriage before age of 18 years, (xiii) Maintenance allowance from husband on getting legal separation, (xiv) Widow can adopt a child, (xv) Equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex and (xvi) Mother can change guardian of minor by will. Dr. Babasaheb spent the whole of his life for improving the lifestyle of women belonging to every sphere of life, even for those who are involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitution.*

## 1. Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the first Indian reformer who rooted out the barriers in the way of advancement of women in the country. He was a great fighter and pioneer of social justice. To secure the social justice to women, he incorporated many issues in the Indian constitution through its various articles for the Hindus, especially for backward communities and under privileged classes. From ancient times, women in our country

were not treated properly and their positions in society were never been at par with men. They were not given even the basic rights and put to the lowest rug of humanity (Azaal, 2013). Among other causes, Dr. Ambedkar fought for securing woman's social rights throughout his life. He studied the Hindu Shastras and Smritis comprehensively to find out the root cause of degraded status of women in India (Godbole, 2015).

He raised his voice against the Hindu social order and social system through renowned journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahishkrit Bharat in 1927. Dr. Ambedkar raised many issues including gender equality, women education and exposed the social, traditional and cultural problems faced by the women and other depressed classes in India. He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly (Das, 2015) and he stressed on equal opportunity and equal share with their male counterpart in Indian Society.

## **2. Review's plan and procedure**

The present paper highlights all efforts made by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on gender relation and women problems in pre/post independent India. It also give insight into the relevancy of his democratic ideas in present social scenario of India. The data highlighted here is the outcome of the review of his published papers, books, proceedings of various conferences/meetings and speeches delivered by him in parliament, in pre and post independent India.

## **3. Discussion on Dr. Ambedkar's Contribution**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar emphasized on women's right to education, right to property, involvement in the political process, gender equality which resembled with the global feminist demand (Kumar, 2015). He strongly believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of Social reform and progress of the society which can be achieved only by accelerating male education along with female education. Through his owned journals like Mook Nayak and Bahishkrit Bharat, he tried to motivate women to participate in social movements against social evils and demanded their socio-economic rights. Dr. Ambedkar stressed upon gender relations that were artificially constructed under Hindu social order in pre and post independent India.

In 1928, a women's association was founded by him and Ramabai (his wife) in Bombay. The encouragement of Dr. Ambedkar to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931 and said "It is better to die a hundred times than live a life full of humiliation. We will sacrifice our lives but we will win our rights." The historic "Mahad Satyagraha" 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 the 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 refuses to be his slave. I am sure if you follow this advice, you will bring honor and glory to yourselves.”

As a Labour Minister of Executive Council of Governor General, he introduced a Maternity Benefit Bill in 1942 and 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. However, this bill was strongly opposed by many political leaders of the country at that time. In response to it, Dr. Ambedkar resigned on the spot from the cabinet expressing his sadness over nonacceptance of woman’s right by the parliament. Besides this, he also highlighted the issues of Muslim women. His secular perspective is known through his thoughts on “Purdah” (Veil) system, religious conversions and legal rights for Muslim women.

### **3.1 Status of women in pre and post-independent India**

Ambedkar’s advocated the reconstruction of Hindu society on the basis of equality rather than the social reforms initiated by Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj because their attempts were limited only to the upper strata of the society. To understand the contribution rendered by Ambedkar to liberate women from the cruel command of men, we have to check the status of women from the Vedic period to British Raj. In the initial stage of human history, the families were matriarchal. In those days, it is a known fact that women were physically stronger than men. During menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, she had to depend upon men for food and her protection which subsequently enslaved her and society took the form of “Patriarchal.” In this way, the matriarchal families have been changed to patriarchal families. Still, women continued to enjoy authority and respect in the family. This was continued to Vedic period.

In the Vedic period, women enjoyed all the necessary rights which are common for a human being with access to all branches of learning. In *Brahadaranika Upanishad* (III, 6-8), it is written that in the king Janaka’s Court, the maiden scholar Gargi was examined in her knowledge by *Yaghavalkya* (Tikoo, 1985). Women played the important role in all types of religious ceremonies with a stipulation that no religious ceremony by men was complete without the participation of his wife. For instance, Lord Rama put a statue of his wife (Sita) to initiate ceremony for Ashawmegh Yagya. In that period, the girls were free to choose their husband in open Sayambars.

The so-called golden Age of Guptas was the Dark Age for women due to some evil practices imposed on women. They had been bound to perform these practices. They advocated early marriages, even the pre-puberty marriages. Some brahminical rules and dogmas were imposed upon women. A system started for keeping unmarried women in temples for the service including sexual abuse by the priests in the name of God. These women were named as Dev-Dasies. Polygamy, child marriage, illiteracy for women and discrimination on sex, caste, creed became the order of the day. Even in the view of Tulsi Das about women, in his “*RamchariterManas*” he said, “Nobody can be as vile as a woman, who for a moment’s enjoyment does not understand the pains of hundreds of births” (Sloka-9). In Sloka 5, he furthered said, “A woman is impure from her birth”. In *Balkanda* (Sloka-57-A), Tulsi wrote that a woman is silly and stupid by nature. This is not the end, in the medieval period, Muslims invaded India and imposed stricter rules on women, robbed them of their freedom and put them under a Parda (Veil).

After the era of such suffering, oppression and the outlook of many thinkers regarding women and their rights, it would be quite inspiring and interesting to mention the position of women in the society in later periods. In the regime of British Raj in India, a new hope dawned in the women community. In most of the part of the country, the western education system attracted and enlightened many Indians to work for the eradication of all evil practices that had been prevailed in Indian society. The British started work to purify Hindu society from its old age tradition. In this context, we can emphasize some illustrations such as according to Swami Vivekananda, “Women will work out their destinies much better than men can do for them”. Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitri Bai Phule dedicated their whole lives to the education of girls. Raja Rammohan Roy worked hard for the abolition of Sati system and fought against dominant castes for the betterment of lives of thousands of women. There were many social workers who had sacrificed and laid down their lives for the rights of women.

### **3.2 Dr. Ambedkar’s approach towards women status**

Inspired from Dr. Ambedkar, many women came in front to encourage other women and wrote on various topics, e.g., Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper “Chokhamela” to publish many articles the struggle of women in the society. This shows how Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. If Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts to encourage women are truly taken in to practice, the present picture of the society can change drastically, and women can claim equal rights in society as well. He

always honored women for their work and hardships. While addressing a women conferences, he could easily communicate with them as a homely person. He evoked women with the following words. “Never wear such clothes which will degrade our personality and character. Avoid wearing the jewelry on your body everywhere. It is not fare to make a hole in the nose and wear nath.” In this, he condemned all the bad traditions, habits and ways of life which made life difficult and complex. And to the surprise, even the illiterate women followed his advice from the bottom of their heart.

In his letter of resignation dated Sept. 27, 1951 to the Prime Minister, he wrote “For a long time, I have been thinking of resigning my seat from the cabinet. The only thing that had held me back from giving effect to my intention was the hope that it would be possible to give effect to the Hindu Code Bill before the life of present Parliament came to an end. I even agreed to break up the bill and restricted it to marriage and divorce in the fond hope that at least this much of our labor may bear fruit. But even that part of Bill had been killed. I see no purpose in continuing to be a member of your cabinet”.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s approach to women’s right is exclusively different from other social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi. All others tried to reform the Hindu society of certain outdated customs and practices without questioning the hierarchical social order. However, Ambedkar made his own view of the women rights and that has been reflected in Indian constitution later. To secure the goal of social justice to Women, Ambedkar has given equal status to women at par with men by providing many provisions in the Indian constitution. The Preamble of Indian constitution guarantees social and economic justice to women and that is because of Ambedkar contribution. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women’s right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India like Article 14 provides 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 favor of women, article 39 provide equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work, article 42 gives human conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 51 (A) (C) deals with fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 46 allows the state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 47 empowers the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health and so on. Article 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R

(4) provides the provision for allocation of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj System. If we look at the provisions of constitution deeply, we can easily make out that Ambedkar was a great thinker of women rights and freedom.

#### 4. Conclusion

Dr. Ambedkar brought a new trend for uprising women through his thoughts and beliefs and he was a path-maker of all the women irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender. Along with women, all the people of India should be proud for his tremendous contributions and everlasting steps for the empowerment of women in Indian society. He opposed the wearing of the veil by Muslim women, their religious traditions, and marriages and fought against all kinds of discrimination against women throughout his whole life. But still, discrimination against women in Indian society can't be overlooked. So, it is a duty of every Indian to fulfill the dreams of Dr. Ambedkar for a better world for women. In the era of globalization, many Multi-National Companies (MNC) are searching for the smooth running of the functions of their companies. In that context, to prevail social justice in the society, the companies should work within the constitutional framework and the concerned state government or central government should make rules, regulation for the engagement and involvement of people from different categories so as to ensure social justice. However, in the present scenario, the Indian women have progressed a lot in various parts of their life although they are still suffering from various social evils like dowry, eve teasing, rape etc. Dr. Ambedkar's slogan on unity, education, and agitation must be remembered always. "Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women, education is fruitless without educated women, and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women".

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