

## **ROLE OF DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Dr. Ambedkar is considered as one of the greatest personalities of 20<sup>th</sup> century India. He has made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity. His principle aim was to build up a society based on social justice. He started his movement in 1920 in which he raised his voice against the Hindu social order and social system through his renowned journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahiskrit Bharat in 1927. Almost in his movement he spoke on the gender equality, women education and exposed the problems related to women and other depressed class. He made awareness among poor and illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust. He made adequate effort toward inclusion of women's right in political and constitution of India. He insisted on Hindu Code bill and suggesting the basic improvements and amendments in assembly. He also insisted and evoked the parliamentary members to help, to pass the bill in parliament. Eventually, he had resigned for the same reason. Thus his deep concern and feelings for all round development of women is expressed through his selfless work. So in the present study the researcher tries to bring out the role of Dr. Ambedkar in empowering women.

**Keywords:** Dr. Ambedkar, Women Empowerment, Equality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

*"I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved"*  
*Dr. Ambedkar*

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in 14<sup>th</sup> April 1891 from Madhya Pradesh, he hailed from the Hindu Mahar caste, which was considered as "untouchable" by the upper class. He was popularly known as Babasaheb. He was an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who inspired the Dalit Buddhist Movement and campaigned against social discrimination against Untouchables (Dalits). He became involved in campaigning and

negotiations for India's independence, publishing journals advocating political rights and social freedom for Dalits, and contributes significantly to the establishment of the state of India.

He was the first Indian reformer who roots out the barriers in the way of advancement of Indian society in general and of women in particular. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has given extraordinary contribution in making modern India. He strove for untouchables in India. The untouchable community which had been dominated for centuries had been dictated in Manusmriti which had brought the Dalits to the inferior position. The condition of Indian women on the other hand has been more miserable since they had been deprived of all the human rights. Dr. Ambedkar was not against Religions, but he was against unreligious acts in the name of religion, by the orthodox clergies and he always opposed the unreligious act of differentiating between humans (woman & Child included) on the basis of castes, sects, sex, color or place/ status at birth. Dr. Ambedkar also asserted that *“If God does not recognize man or woman by caste or place of birth, the man made Orthodox and superstitious religions cannot/ should not do so”*.

The thoughts and work concerning women's emancipation by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar have been of wider and pervasive vitality. To him women should not be shown pity, but they must be allowed their rights and empowerment. Besides, women must be restored to their ancient honour and respect. In order to get back their lost status in the society, Dr. Ambedkar demanded that the women should be accorded equal wages, marriages at a mature age, respect for female birth, women's education, women's liberation from fundamentalist's clutches, and character. He further asserted that the status of women in India can't be elevated until they are allowed Constitutional security. Dr. Ambedkar's heart can be read for women welfare from his following saying *“Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruitless without educated women, and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women”*.

## **OBJECTIVE, METHOD AND MATERIALS**

The present study tries to bring out the role of Dr. Ambedkar in empowering women. For this, only secondary data was used for the entire study. Secondary data was collected from internet, Government documents, newspapers, published papers, books and speeches delivered by Dr. Ambedkar in Parliament, various conferences and meetings in pre and post independent India.

### **Historical background of enslaving women**

In the initial stage of human history, the families were believed to be *“Matriarchal”* in nature. During menstruation, pregnancy and child birth, she had to depend upon men for food and her protection which subsequently enslaved her and society took the form of *“Patriarchal”*. Women continued to enjoy their authority and respect in the family till Vedic period which could be gauged from the verse *“Yater Nariasye Pujante, Ramte Tater Devita”* (God reside at places

where women are worshiped). It is also belief that to perform religious ceremonies by man was incomplete without the participation of women which can be seen from Rama life. Rama had to get the statue of Sita, made him to carry on with ceremonies for Ashawmegh Yagna.

The process of down grading & enslaving woman started in the later Vedic period, when Hindu law givers like Manu codified in his book Manusmriti as *"It is the very nature of woman to corrupt men Verse 2(213) ; Woman has no right to acquire property Verse 8 (416) ; Rules like serving husbands faithfully even, if he is devoid of any good qualities verse 154 (5); A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her own house. Verse 147 (5). A widow should be long suffering, until death, self-restrained, and chaste (Abstain re marrying) verse 158 (5)"* She should obey her husband while he is alive and not violate her vow to him when he is dead 151(5) Shankara charya of Kerela (9th Century AD) proclaimed *"A woman is a sure gate of hell and she is poison in the disguise of nectar"*.

In India the so-called *"The Golden rule of Gupta dynasty"*, kings proved worst period for women, when Brahminical rules and dogma, codified against women and were got strictly enforced. The systems kept unmarried girls/ women in temples *"Dev-Dassies"* for the service. Sometimes those girls were sexually abused by the priest in the name of God. Not only that, the systems like Polygamy, Child marriage, illiteracy for women and discrimination on Sex, besides caste creed became the order of those days.

In Ramchariter Manas Goswami Tulsi Das Says in Arandkand salok 9 *"Nobody can be as vile as a woman ,who for a moment's enjoyment, does not understand the pains of hundreds of births"* In Saloka 5 he further says *"A woman is impure from her birth"*. In Balkanda (sloka 57A) Tulsi wrote that a *"woman is silly and stupid by nature"*. Even Muslim religion advocates strict rules for women to remain in Pardah (veil). In recent past a writer summed up the plight of women in his song *"Aurat Ne Janam Diya Mardon Ko, Mardon Ne usse Bazar Diya"* (Woman gives birth to man, but man puts her in Prostitution centre).

### **Rise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**

With the Coming of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891- 1956), women got their real emancipator. The Manusmriti was burnt in public by Dr. Ambedkar on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1927. Thus he blew bugle of fight against discrimination and exploitation on the basis of one's caste, creed, sex or place of birth. His aim and principle of life was to speak, work and fight for the just cause of oppressed, depressed, exploited, illiterates, ill fed & ill-treated men and women irrespective of their caste, social status, place of birth affiliations and without caring for his personnel life discomforts. On March 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 1927, he addressed a huge meeting of depressed classes, including women, and gave strong call for liberation of women. He advised them to development

their mind and the spirit of self-help; He said that education was necessary for development of both men and women. He declared “*As you are, so shall be your children*”. While addressing largely attended depressed classes women conference on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July 1942, he stated that, “*He measured the progress of a community by the degree of progress made by the women of that community*”. He advised, let every girl who marries, stand by her husband, claim to be her husband’s friend and equal and refuse to be his slave.

### **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s Perspective on Women’s Emancipation**

A distinct feature of Ambedkar’s theory of women’s emancipation is that there is a close association between women’s status and the philosophy of Brahminism. He contends that annihilation of the caste is the only way to establish a social order in which people can live together with equality.

### **Caste System**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar did a pains taking and profound contemplation of the caste system in India. He wrote “*Castes in India*” while he had been at Columbia University, America. The thesis contains his assessment of the reasons behind the sustenance of the caste system in India. Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the intra caste marital system was kept alive by virtue of different unfavorable customs and traditions. The intra caste and intra family marriages sustained the barriers between the castes.

### **The Religious Doctrines Source of Women’s Oppression**

In his article published in the daily Bahishkrut Bharat dated 12<sup>th</sup> August 1927, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar asserted that the Hindu religious practices like shaving the head of a widow, not allowing her to wear blouse, depriving her of jewellery, effacing the red spot from her forehead, use of white sari and making her survive on non-provocative and non-spicy food, making widow to look distorted and ugly, in order that no man would ever think of getting attracted towards them. These were the hideous ways of maintaining the so called loyalty towards the dead husband, all this were aimed at oppression. These practices were unscientific and inhuman. Thus, the degradation of women in the Indian society had been a result of the religious doctrines. It is the women who are made to suffer on account of the religious dogmas, mostly created as a part of the male chauvinism.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar frequently reiterated that it was religious fundamentalism which caused so much of exploitation and impoverishment of women in the Indian societies. This has been going on since time immemorial. Women have not been able to develop themselves due to the restrictions imposed on them through the religious agencies.

## **Manusmriti**

The Manusmriti is said to have been the biggest impediment in the way of women's development in India. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm belief that this Hindu religious book caused the worst possible conditions for the women. He stated that "*A women in the eyes of Manu was a thing of no value ..... All the responsibility for the decline and fall of women in India must be fastened upon Manu*". In his book "The Rise and fall of Hindu Women" (1988), he quoted verses of Manusmriti to explain the social understanding of the position of women such as women should be looked upon as objects for seducing men (11.213) because they were able to lead astray in this world not only a fool but even a learned man, and were capable of making man a slave of desire and anger (11.214). Thus it would be necessary for men to exert themselves to guard women (IX.16). He also pointed that Manusmriti painted a picture of women as creatures known for their disposition-love for ornaments, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct (IX.17), which the Lord of creature laid in them at the creation to be such (IX.16). Thus, Manusmriti pointed out that day and night they must be kept in dependence by the males of their family and if they attach themselves to sexual enjoyments they must be kept under ones control (IX.2). They needed to be controlled vigilantly by their guardians. Manusmriti did not offer the right to divorce to women (IX.45). A wife did not enjoy right over property, women were reduced to the level of a slave in the matter of property by Manu (IX.416). The husband had the right to beat his wife (VIII.299). She had no right in selecting a spouse of her own choice and she had to worship her husband faithfully (V.154). He prove his stance with evidence. During the Vedic Period the Hindu women had enjoyed several rights like the right to educate, learn different art forms and select their life partners. The marriages would take place at their mature age. However, the inauguration of the Manusmriti deprived the women of all the rights and burdened them with several restrictions and taboos. Some of the religious books too were aimed at separating the women from men. The Hindu fundamentalism had been the chief focus of attack by Dr. Ambedkar, since it had been a source of women's destitution and misery.

## **Child Marriages**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was totally against the practice of child marriage. He stated that child marriages were neither in the interest of men nor women, since they were unscientific. He asserted "*if the next generation are to be healthier, then the marriages in tender ages must be precluded*". The children of the couples married at a tender age, to Dr. Ambedkar, would be very susceptible making the society moribund. One of the important resolutions sanctioned at the Satyagraha of Mahad, organized under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> March 1927, was the demand for the marriage of a male at the age of 20 and that of a female at 16. The same resolution was sanctioned at the Belgaon District Bahishkrut Social

Council held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1929. Dr. Ambedkar appealed to the people gathered on this occasion that they need not spend unnecessary money in their daughters' marriages; but to keep some money for satisfying their domestic needs.

### **Inter-caste Marriages**

Dr. Ambedkar asserted that the measures like collective meals are not sufficient to exterminate the evils of casteism. The only alternative, according to Dr. Ambedkar is to encourage intercaste marriages. In the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1928 issue of Bahishkrut Bharat he writes that "*The mass meals of healthy persons won't cause leprosy, and in the same way the inter-caste marriages will give rise to healthy generations*".

### **Family Planning**

Dr. Ambedkar gives very much importance to family planning. He asserted that the growing population is the biggest problems in making the standards of life, as it rise the poverty, unemployment and rise in price. The women who deliver more babies suffer from different ailments. They are bound to the task of rearing children and grow untimely old. In his speech delivered to the Dalit students on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1938, he asserted that family planning was a vital aspect of women's life and health. In the capacity of member of the Provincial Council, he proposed a nongovernment resolution in the interest of family planning through a member of his party namely P. C. Roham on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938, which consist propagation of awareness among people of means of family planning through the government's intervention. However, the resolution was defeated on the floors of the Council by 52 to 1 vote. Dr. Ambedkar advised to the gathering of students of a college in Bombay that the responsibility of family planning must be borne by both husband and wife. He set his family's example by saying that they were fourteen siblings in their family, which made their life miserable. So he asserted that the energies of a woman could be utilized for so many constructive deeds instead of wasting them on bearing and rearing a huge numbers of children.

### **Women's Education**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar give a lot of importance to women's education, as he was a loyal adherent of Mahatma Phule's philosophy. It was Mahatma Phule who pioneered the cause of women's education in Maharashtra by setting up the first school for girls. According to Dr. Ambedkar "*Educated men mean a lot of difference to his family, but an educated woman would see the progress of two families at a time*". During the 1927 Satyagraha of Mahad, Dr. Ambedkar appealed to the assembled women that they must realize the significance of education and educate their daughters. He proclaimed that knowledge and edification 'are not' the private property of men only. He allocated special space for women's education in the "*Bahujan*

*Hitakarani*” founded in the year 1924 and in the manifesto of the Independent Labour Party set up in 1936.

### **Women in the Movement**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar motivated the participation of women in all the agitations he undertook in his lifetime. He started with the movement for the water of Chavadaar Lake in Mahad. It was followed by the agitations launched for temple entry of the backward communities. The struggles in social participation were also shared by the women under the guidance of Dr. Ambedkar. This is quite sufficient to declare Dr. Ambedkar to be a social revolutionary. The suffocated breath of the Dalit women was given relief by his efforts. Women began to attend the public meetings. They started to express themselves by adopting different means and forms of writings. In the Bombay and Vidarbha regions, there came into existence a class of women activists as a result of the work done by Dr. Ambedkar. Ramabai Kamble, the women’s leader who organized the mill workers, Jaibai Chowdhary, the founder of the girls’ school, Virendrabai Teerthkar, the lady who undertook the task of disseminating education among the deprived and underprivileged people are some of the examples of women who had been essentially inspired by Dr. Ambedkar’s creed, words and deeds.

### **Women’s Economic Betterment**

Dr. Ambedkar undertook relentless efforts in favour of women. In the year 1944 he formulated an amendment in the interest of women containing the following highlights:

1. Both the men and women working in the factories must be paid equal wages.
2. The women workers must be given diurnal working hours, they should not be made to work at night.
3. The women workers must be given time for rest and recreation.
4. They must be allowed four weeks of maternity leave before and after the delivery.
5. The facility of children’s pens must be provided at the work places.

The afore-stated provisions were totally in the interest of gaining rights for the women by Dr Ambedkar. He utilized his offices for the improvement of the conditions of women, whether it was his membership of Bombay Provincial Council or as a member of the Central Ministry. The most important step Dr. Ambedkar took towards women’s emancipation was through the formation of the Constitution of India. Dr. Ambedkar has been the first ever social reformer to have spoken passionately in favour of women by demanding for women equal wages, maternity leave and children’s pens at workplaces. The travesty is that some of these demands are yet to be fulfilled by the existing democratic system.

### **Constitutional Provisions**

Dr. Ambedkar worked with dedication, zeal and conviction for the betterment of women on becoming chairman of constitution drafting committee and first law minister of independent Indian. He gave India a living and organic constitution, enshrining in it all those conditions which are necessary to promote fraternity among all citizens of free India, including women. Discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex, creed, place of birth was codified as illegal acts under the Statute Book. The Indian Constitution provides for equality before law-

- (Art. 14), the State shall not discriminate any citizen on the grounds of , religion, caste, race, sex place of birth or any of them.
- (Art. 15), equal opportunities to all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment under the State.
- (Art 16), equal pay to all for equal work for both men & women.
- (Art. 39d), right to work, to education and public assistance in certain cases.
- (Art 41), Provision of just and human conditions of work and maternity relief.
- (Art 42), Provision of uniform Civil Code to all the citizens throughout the Indian Territory.

### **Hindu Code Bill**

To strike last nail in the coffin of discrimination against Indian women, Dr. Ambedkar raised a new battle cry by finally submitting modified and revised Hindu Code Bill to constituent assembly in October 1948, which was under consideration since 1941. The discussion on this historic Bill by the Modern Manu began on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1951 in the Parliament and continued for three days, when its consideration was postponed to next session in September 1951. Pt. Nehru promised for the passage of the Bill and said that, if, the Hindu Code bill was not passed he along with his Cabinet of Ministers shall resign. It was decided by the Congress Party to take it up on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1951, but only the first part of the Bill "*Marriage & Divorce*" and other clauses to be taken later. The tactics of long speeches to delay the passage of the Bill was resorted to by the members opposed to the Bill. All objections raised against the Bill, during debates were replied ably by the Law Minister, but even the "*Marriage & Divorce*" Bill could not be completed, and the rest of the Hindu Code Bill was never taken up. The Hindu Code Bill was let down in the tragic manner and in the words of Dr. Ambedkar "*It was killed and buried, unwept and unsung after four clauses were passed*". Even Nehru did not honor his word of full support for passage of the Bill. The four clauses of the Bill, which were adopted by the House on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1951, strengthened the position of the women in the society. The four clauses passed were incorporated in the Hindu Code Bill, these were

1. The Hindu marriage Act, 1955
2. The Hindu succession Act, 1956
3. The Hindu Minority and guardianship Act 1956
4. The adoption & maintenance Act 1956

The First Union Law Minister was disappointed due to non-passage of the Hindu Code Bill, as was conceived by him and promised support by Pt. Nehru. So Dr. Ambedkar created history of sorts in sacrificing his Cabinet Law Ministry for the cause of women by resigning on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1951 as a matter of protest. An example of supreme sacrifice for women liberation was created in not only Indian but world history. Although Dr. Ambedkar could not succeed in getting passed the full Hindu Code Bill, he successfully put the ball rolling and laid the foundation of equality for the women of India in all spheres of life.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is undoubtedly we understand that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a path-maker of all the women irrespective of religion, race, caste, creed, place of birth etc. He brought a new trend for uprising the women through his thoughts and beliefs. His deep concern and feelings for all round development of women was expressed through his selfless work. Keeping in mind the importance of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar views towards Indian society, the former prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of Hindu society*". In the present day context, Ambedkar and his thoughts on society based on equality are yet to be realized for reconstructing Indian society and making the life of women better. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a fighter for women emancipation. He fought against all kinds of discrimination against women throughout his life. But still discrimination against women in Indian society is overlooked. So it is our duty to fulfill the dreams of Dr. Ambedkar for a better world of women. It may also be mentioned here that the term "*Social Justice*" will not be exercised properly if the people of India did not change their attitudes towards women.

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