

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: UNDERSTANDING AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS

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Abstract: *The major contribution of Ambedkar, hailed as the architect of the Indian Constitution, having been the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution, is his crusade for securing the rightful place for the discriminated deprived and downtrodden sections of our society. In this paper an attempt is made to look at Ambedkar not as a dalit hero alone, but as saviours of the Indian women. Ambedkar made sincere efforts in understanding the reality about the status of women in India and advocate a practical reformist measures especially comprehensive Hindu Code Bill for the Upliftment of women.*

Later on these measures form the basis of the legislation for providing better opportunities to women so that they can occupy a position of equality, respect and can realize their potentials for building an equitable and egalitarian society. In Ambedkar's philosophy, the women of India found a new identity. His words and deeds have inspired thousands of women, and will continue to do so, in their struggle against injustice and inequality. One of the noteworthy results of his life-work has been the awakening of women, which made them shed their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity and self-esteem. The paper also point out that Ambedkar was very clear -about the fact that is a direct relationship between caste and gender, and gender could not be seen in isolation from caste. He thus believes that any social transformation is incomplete till gender discrimination in any society comes to an end.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment refers to increasing, the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is both a highly important end in itself and necessary for the achievement of sustainable human development.

The role played by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, as chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, has left imprint on the social tapestry of the country after **independence**, and shaped the socio-political fabric of the India today. It would have been a different **India without him** and in a probability, a much more inequitable and unjust one. He attempted to forge India's moral and social foundations a new and strove for a political order of the constitutional democracy that is sensitive to disadvantaged, inherited from the past or engendered by prevailing social relations. Dr. Ambedkar had the highest academic credential for an Indian of his time, and his erudition and scholarship have been widely acknowledged.

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The vision of Dr. Ambedkar about women is explicitly depicted in Indian Constitution. Equality of sexes is strongly backed by the constitution through articles 14, 15 and 16. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. He laid down the foundation of social justice and there can be no social justice without gender equality. In his paper on "Caste in India: their mechanism, genesis and development", Dr. Ambedkar described how women were treated cruelly by the way of *Sati*, enforced widowhood and girl' marriages just to maintain strict endogamy in a caste.

The social evils regaling women in Hindu religion as well as in Muslim society were highlighted by him. As a researched Dr. Ambedkar extensively studied the position of women in both the religion (and also in the other religions) and thrown light on denial of rights to her and ultimately the status of individual. He stated that the consequences of purdah system on Muslim women were that it deprives her of mental and moral nourishment. Dr. Ambedkar sought that Buddhism awards women, status equal to men and considered women capable of attaining spirituality. By adopting Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar expelled in just for underprivileged segments including women and accepting the dignified equal status. Dr. Ambedkar denied worshipping Hindu deities, ultimately freed women from inhumane customs, rituals and superstitions and made the way for her liberation.

DR. AMBEDKAR AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Gender main streaming, gender equality networking, leaderships, financial freedom are the essential aspects of women empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar realized this at his time and included in the process of social reforms. Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle, for eradication of caste systems and upliftment of the underprivileged sections. He realized that this could not be achieved without liberating the women themselves. He motivated women and addressed them to participate in struggle against caste prejudices. During the Mahad Tank Struggle, women marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves. Impressed by the large gathering of women at women's conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1942, he told women to be progressive and abolish traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress.

Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream society. Education is the only mean by which societies grow out of oppression to democratic participation involvement. It is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. Over the generations, marginalized sections and women in Indian society were denied the opportunity to education. Dr. Ambedkar put all his efforts to guarantee the educational opportunities without any discrimination to all the citizens of India.

The British rule abolished detestable practices like sati but passed several laws to protect customs and traditions of Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar is an architect of Indian Constitution. He provided strong constitutional safeguards to women. The Special Marriage Act sets four

essential conditions for a valid marriage i.e., monogamy, sound mind, marriageable age and the parties should not be too closely related. There are some grounds available to the wife only, both in Hindu and the Civil marriages, provided to the women. Violent and forceful abortions and abortions without consent of women are crime under section 313.

The Hindu Succession Act gives male and female heirs almost equal rights to inheritance. Section 14 says that any property possessed by a female Hindu shall be held by her as full owner and not a limited owner. Dr. Ambedkar introduced Hindu Code Bill in 1948 which was revolutionary in confinement of proprietary rights to women but when not accepted by the parliament, he resigned from the ministerial post from the cabinet in 1951.

TODAY'S SCENARIO

Majority of the people are literate but not educated. Education by means of access to knowledge and learning played pivotal role the social reforms. Stagnation in process of social reforms and imposing so called divine status of ancient women on today's women there by influencing her development and upliftment. Shattered with, the reforms and liberation of women in the era of globalization and modernisation, the Indian mindset has not accepted the equality at par with men and hence forcing women to revert their development. Increasing incidences in women harassment in all way, violence, crime and humiliation insisted on her is only because of political apathy, which failed to kept social dogma. Education system, employment opportunities, tremendous population, inflation and non-availability of resources to strive are the barriers for development among people. Sheer influence of modern lifestyle and adopting technology doesn't mean improvement of individual and society. The societal frame work meant to make women subordinate or subjugated need to be dismantled. Active participation of women from all the strata could make it possible. Many notable women activist are working on issues like environment, health, poverty etc. Those who indulge in social reforms were not supported, not even by women. Today women reservation bill is the hottest agenda of the discussion and fact is that a lay woman even doesn't know what it is. The more ridiculous male attitude is that girl's education meant only for her marriage. Today's women are trapped in the circle of insecurity, male domination, lack of awareness about her rights and no decision making powers. Much is talked about women empowerment today but it is more economic, political and health related. The issue of social empowerment of women need to be raised higher and given utmost importance then only it could complete phenomena.

Women empowerment has five components: women's sense of self worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives; both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction and social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationality and internationally. Dr. Ambedkar strongly believed that women empowerment can be achieved by welfare of women. The activities of empowering women worldwide should follow the vision of Dr. Ambedkar.

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