



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's dynamic views on Women Rights

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Abstract: Dr. 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 socio- political set up, which still keeps conservative and reactionary values in many respects, particularly on gender relation from time immemorial, the women in this land of ours were treated as a sort of thing. Her placing in the society was not at par with other human being. She has no rights. She cannot move nor does anything at her will. Prior to these efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, the destiny of the Indian women depended upon the wrong notions and perceptions chalked out by the proprietors of orthodoxy. The operation of caste both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste/class divide in feminist political discourses makes Ambedkar's views on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian feminist thinking.

Key Words: Women rights, Human rights, Hindu code bill, Gender equality, Annihilation of Caste

Introduction

Ambedkar was not only the father of Indian Constitution; he was a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, writer, economist, editor, and a revivalist for Buddhism in India. The first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru said; "Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society". Dr. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women. He stated that women should be given all round development importantly social education, their wellbeing and socio-cultural right. He emphasized that each and every section of Indian women be given their due share and it is a must to maintain and protect dignity and modesty of women.

Analysis

Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that until or unless, by applying dynamite, the Hindu Dharma shastras are not blown up, nothing is going to happen. In the name sanskaras, the Hindu women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death. They are also responsible for inculcating these wrong notions learnt by them through baseless traditions and preaching of the Shastras in the budding minds of their off spring. In his Treatises, The Riddle of the Woman, The Woman And the Counter Revolution, The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women, Castes in India: Their Mechanism Genesis and Development and through the issues of his journals Mooknayak (1920) and Bahishkrit Bharat (1927), Ambedkar tries to show how the gender relations and differences



are constructed by Hindu Brahminical order, which conditions women to conform a stereo type feminine behaviour, requiring them to be passive and submissive, suited only to a life of domestic and family responsibilities.

In this direction, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has tried to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for the Hindus and the principle is capable of extension to other sections of the Indian society. Prior to these efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, the destiny of the Indian women depended upon the wrong notions and perceptions chalked out by the proprietors of orthodoxy. The operation of caste both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste/class divide in feminist political discourses makes Ambedkar's views on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian feminist thinking.

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 the essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action. 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. He believed that socio-cultural forces artificially construct gender relations, especially by Manusmriti and Hindu

religion. "Women are made, they are not born",

In the Women and Counter Revolution and The Riddle of Women Ambedkar portrays the way in which Manu treated women. He pointed out that the laws of Manu on the status of women are very important in moulding the Hindu attitude and perspective (Indian perspective) towards women, perpetuated and maintained through Hindu personal laws based on shastras, caste and endogamy, i.e. the base of Indian patriarchy. He attacked Manusmriti as a major source, which legitimizes the denial of freedom, self-respect, right to education, property, divorce etc., to women by attributing a very lofty ideal to them.

According to Ambedkar, the society must be based on reason, and not on atrocious traditions of caste system. Therefore, in "The Annihilation of Caste", he suggests as a means the annihilation of caste maintained through Shastras, "Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras and he or she will interline and intermarry". He found education, inter caste marriage and interline as methods, which may eliminate castes and patriarchy, maintained through endogamy. In Ambedkar's movement launched from 1920 onwards, women actively participated and acquired the confidence to voice their issues on various platforms. Venubai Bhatkar and Renubai Shambharakar are worth mentioning. In 1924, Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha was formed to work for the socio-political equality of depressed people and promoting their economic interests.



Women started participating in satyagrahas 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. In January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, as its president. Along with the Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur in 1930, women also had their separate conference. In the Kalram Temple Entry Satyagraha at Nasik in 1930 five hundred women participated and many of them were arrested along with men and ill-treated in jails. To face tortures along with their men, women also organized their Samata Sainik Dal. When Ambedkar returned to India after attending the round table conference in 1932, hundreds of women were present for the committee meetings. At various places depressed classes women's conferences were held and they began to present their demands assertively.

The encouragement of Ambedkar empowered women to speak out boldly their feelings. As Radhabai Vadale said in a press conference in 1931, "We should get the right to enter the Hindu temples, to fill water at their water resources. We call these social rights. We should also get the political right to rule, sitting near the seat of the Viceroy. We don't care even if we are given a severe sentence. We will fill all the jails in the

country. Why should we be scared of lathi-charge or firing? On the battlefield does a warrior care for his life? 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 credit for this self-respect and firm determination of women goes to Ambedkar. On 20th July 1942, The All India Dali Mahila conference was organized and 25,000 women attended.

Ambedkar was highly pleased with the awakening and activities of women. On 13th August, he wrote to one of his friends, Mesh ram about this. On 6th January 1945, the All India Untouchable Women's Conference was held in Mumbai. In the movement, his strategy was similar to Gandhian method though he had disagreements on many things with Gandhi. To him the emphasis was on reconstruction of the 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. His in depth study of Smritis and Shashtras and his experience from the response of upper castes during his temple entry movement crystallized his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society.

Since Ambedkar was well convinced about the status of women, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he tried an 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 while all other general provisions are applicable to them, as to men. Hence, there are Articles like 15(3), 51(A) (c), 16



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. He incorporated the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in the Indian Constitution.

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 democracy he means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as principles 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 in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle 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 principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. 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." The new social movements emerged especially from Dalits, women and peasants, to assert democratic rights and urged for a new path of development which legitimizes this warning of the Father of

the Indian Constitution, when he submitted it to the nation.

The preamble of the constitution of India proclaims to resolve of 'We, the people of India' to secure to its citizen justice, social, economic, and political as well as liberty and equality of status and opportunity. Article 14, 15, 15(3), 39, 42, 51A (e), 16 of the constitution give enough scope of the protection of women from any sort of discrimination. In the year 1976, article 39A was inserted to remind the state to ensure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and to provide for free legal aid. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India.

Article 14-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 favour of women.

Article 39-Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.

Article 42- Just and human conditions of work and maternity relief

Article 51(A) (c) Fundamental duties to renounce practises, derogatory to the dignity of women

Article 46-The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation



Article 47-The state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health and so on

Article 243D (3), 243T (3) and 243R (4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

There are number of protective laws in India to prevent exploitation of women. To quote few, Sati Prevention Act,1987,Dowry Prohibition Act,1961,the Family courts Act,1984, Protection of Human Right Act,1993,The Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Immoral traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, The Child Marriage Restraint Act,1929,The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique(Regulation and Prevention of Misuse)Act,1994, The legal Practitioners(women) Act,1923and so on.

Ambedkar's defence for women as the Law Minister of free India appeared in the form of the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament on 11th April 1947, the Bill could not withstand the opposition from the Hindu orthodoxy. Their major argument was that the Bill was an attempt at the "demolition of the entire structure and fabric of Hindu Society. The very foundations not only of one pillar but of all the pillars on which the Hindu society rests are shaken". In reality, the Bill was a threat to patriarchy on which traditional family structure, was bounded and that was the major reason behind the opposition. The Bill sought to abolish polygamy among the Hindus. It proposed the right to property and the right to divorce for women. The Bill tried to codify the Hindu Laws which were in a scattered form. He proposed to reform these laws on seven different matters, viz.

I) the right to property of a deceased Hindu dying intestate to both male and female,

II) The order of succession among different heirs to the property of a deceased dying in estate,

III) The law of maintenance,

IV) Marriage,

V) Divorce,

VI) Adoption, and

VII) Minority guardianship.

Despite the very moderate nature of Bill, Dr. Ambedkar could not get it passed due to is opposition by many conservative caste Hindus.

In protest against the failure of the Bill, Dr. Ambedkar resigned his seat in the cabinet. Although, his efforts did not, entirely, go waste. Later, the original Bill was split into four different Bills with slight changes. Those were passed as the Hindu Marriage Act,1955; The Hindu Succession Act,1956; the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act,1956; and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act1956.As Lord Casey said, Ambedkar stands as the "fountainhead of wisdom and knowledge" in modern India.

The equal remuneration Act, 1976 and National commission for women Act, 1990. 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 sections including Scheduled Castes/ Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities to education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded". The Policy includes creating



an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential, Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation, strengthening legal systems aimed at limitation of all forms of discrimination against women.

The newly enacted Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 provides effective relief to women facing violence, such as preventing dispossession from the shared household to them; this act does not make domestic violence a crime. It is only the violation of a court order in case of dispossessions that makes a person guilty of an offence. On the direction and guidance of the constitution of India various revolutionary laws giving equal status to women with men have been enacted in order to remove all disparities, dissimilarities against women.

We must concentrate on imparting social education before giving any concrete shape to their political empowerment to the women. Without academic and social education, the political empowerment of women in certain parts of the country had proved futile. In Panchayat Raj set up in U.P., Bihar and elsewhere in the country, the uneducated women are subjected to exploitation at the hands of government machinery. It will not be prudent on our part to restore the rights of the women belonging to the affluent section of the society only. Therefore, our efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving their due share. It is a must to maintain and protect chastity, dignity and modesty of women.

It is the need for share to each and every section of the Indian women for human rights.

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