



## Gender and Democracy - Ambedkar's Perspective

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**Abstract :** *Democracy is as much about citizenship rights, participation and inclusion as it is about political parties, elections and checks and balances. The quality of democracy is determined not only by the form of institutions, but also by the extent that different social groups participate in these institutions. If women are excluded it is male democracy ""and it is incomplete and very biased form of democracy. There is a scope for expanding women's representation and for sustaining political focus on women's issues through democracy. The issues are heterogeneous and they are dependent on economic, historical and cultural factors as well as the effect of changing international norms. This paper throws a light on the plight of women and gives solutions prescribed by Dr. Ambedkar in the context of democracy. Further it makes an attempt to examine the women's rights incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Thus women's full participation in national and local politics, in the country, in academia and media is fundamental to democracy and essential to the achievement of sustainable development and peace in all contexts – during peace, through conflict and post conflict, and during political transitions.*

**Key words:** Democracy, political transitions, women

Democracy is as much about citizenship rights, participation and inclusion as it is about political parties, elections and checks and balances. The quality of democracy is determined not only by the form of institutions, but also by the extent that different social groups participate in these institutions. If women are excluded it is male democracy ""and it is incomplete and very biased form of democracy. There is a scope for expanding women's representation and for sustaining political focus on women's issues through democracy. The issues are heterogeneous and they are dependent on economic, historical and cultural factors as well as the effect of changing international norms. There has been little effort even today to systematically link women's participation. The very reason is different political systems are developing the institutions and the values

play a vital role in sustaining democracy. Women's visibility provided a useful but rarely acknowledged impetus to civilian rule by encouraging the hope that democratic governments would be popularly based and representative. At this juncture women's movements would help to raise expectations that democracy could pursue progressive but not radical agendas. Hence for Indian women's movement Ambedkar provides a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist political agenda. To be successful women need to be organized in ways that could put pressure on parties and the executive to pass laws and able to follow through to monitoring the effects of that legislature and ensure that the executive and the courts implemented the laws that were passed.

*"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress*



*which women achieved political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. Here social democracy implies liberty, equality and justice as principle of life' -*

He opined that women are at the lowest rung of humanity and was treated on par with the animals and slave by the proprietors of Hindu Dharma. Lot of restraints and constraints were imposed in the name of *sanskars* and tied to bondage of superstitions. The operations of caste both at the systematic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing class/caste divide in feminist; political discourse makes Ambedkar's views on elevating the status of women through social democracy is still relevant to the present scenario. He suggests strategies for emancipation of women from suppression. He found their emancipation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. If we examine the plight of women in the modern democracy we can evaluate his contribution towards the women development. The ground realities are :

- ❖ Globally 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime.
- ❖ Femicide claims far too many women's lives.
- ❖ Over 60 millions girls are child brides.
- ❖ Violence against women is one of the most widespread human right violations. Yet one of the least prosecuted crimes.

Women represent 3.5 billion citizens, still many countries women face a wide range of constraints for effective participation as candidates, votes and

elected officials. Women make up less than 10 percent of world leaders. Globally less than one in five members of parliament is a women. Women have found themselves consistently limited by traditions gender stereo types regarding women's ability to assume leadership positions. Hence these constraints must be removed.

Very long back Ambedkar identified that the root cause of all evils is gender inequalities. They are unfortunately linked up with social, economic structures and practices. Because of these inequalities women remained largely marginalized, Poor and socially excluded. So, equal rights should be given to women to strengthen democracy for approaching the systematic challenges and contradictions in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream.

Being India's first Law Minister and Chairman of Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly Dr. Ambedkar, he took initiative to draft and introduce Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly. For inclusive development he incorporated women's rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. They are

1. Article 14 – Equal rights and opportunities in political economic and social spheres.
2. Article 15 – Prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex.
3. Article 15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favour of women.
4. Article 42 – Human conditions of work and maternity relief.



5. Article 51 (A) (C) – Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women.
6. Art 46 – The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
7. Article 47 – 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 for allocation of seats in the Panchayat Raj system.
- 10) Widow can adopt a child
- 11) No marriage before age of 18 years
- 12) Maintenance allowance from husband on getting legally separated

The empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality are crucial to democracy. Democracy can be further strengthened through women's educational advantages; decades of exposure to gender – egalitarian ideologies, and their experience in work and politics, exposure to modern media will certainly remove highly gendered discriminatory practices.

Further, "grassroots organization depends on women, who are not always the leaders but also who are a source of volunteer work and commitment". Gender is increasingly being looked at as an important variable in global attitude surveys and opinion voting studies, because women votes often make a crucial difference. For example in Andhra Pradesh, Self Help Women Groups provided an important window on state / society relations proved how interest groups influence the state directly and indirectly.

If women's participation is increased in all spheres, issues like inequalities and redistribution will be banished from public debate and paves way to political and economic liberalization. This is a beginning to re-emerge and provides a platform for long-term prospects for peace.

Women's full participation in national and local politics, in the country, in academia and media is fundamental to democracy and essential to the achievement of sustainable development and peace in all contexts – during peace, through conflict and post conflict, and

He was the first person who brought "Equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex" in India in terms of Industrial workers and "Mines Maternity Benefit Bill" for women as a Labour Minister in the Viceroy Executive Council. He was the only person who changed the plight of women via law. Hence these rights are revolutionary and first step towards the recognition and empowerment of women in India. He framed many laws for women in India as follows.

- 1) Dearness Allowance
- 2) Women Labour Welfare Fund
- 3) ESI
- 4) Provident Fund Act
- 5) Women Labour Protection Act
- 6) Divorce Act
- 7) Right over Parental Property
- 8) Leave Benefit to Piece Workers
- 9) Mother can change guardian of minor by will



during political transitions. If a political system neglects women's participation, if it evades accountability for women's rights, it fails half of its citizens. Indeed, true democracy is based on the realization of human rights and gender equality. Weak democracy is a major barrier to the enjoyment of human rights. In the same way, it should be kept in mind; failure to respect human rights is an impediment to effective democracy.

- Women must be given an opportunity to seek redressal when their rights are violated.
- The judiciary, parliamentary oversight processes, and other institutions must act as guarantors of the rule of law and of women's enjoyment of their human rights.
- For realization of equality, their rights should be protected.
- Ensure the utilization of the potential and talents of women.
- Need more women leaders who can prevent the challenges like poverty, hunger, diseases, environmental degradation and violence.
- True change will come with inclusion of women in democratic process through their working collectively to achieve concrete progress.

Empowering women and girls are creating an environment that is conducive to make human rights relativity is a responsibility of the tallest order. It is now critical to ensure full participation of men and women and integration of women's rights in transitional structures and the reforms undertaken. This will only be possible with the solidarity of both women and men. This solidarity must be built

through the sharing everyday tasks and responsibilities within our homes, in our communities and in public life.

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