



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Role in Women Empowerment

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Abstract: In ancient India, women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their position degenerated into merely objects of pleasure meant to serve certain purpose. They lost their individual identity and even their basic human right. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money - and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society end nation, and to gain 'power'.

Key words: to gain 'power' Women's empowerment, Ambedkar

Introduction

Dr. B.R Ambedkar towards the Empowerment of Indian Women

The operations of caste both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste / class divide in feminist political discourse makes Ambedkar's view on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian feminist thinking. Although Ambedkar proved, himself to be a genius and was known as a great thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, jurist – par excellence, prolific writer, social activist and critic and strode like a colossus in the Indian sociopolitical scene unto his death, his thoughts never received adequate attention in the generality of Indian society just because he was born as an untouchable. 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 there essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action. Hence, for Indian women's movement 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 sociopolitical set up, which still keeps conservative and reactionary values in many respects, particularly on gender relations. 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.

Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India by the members of West Bengal Legislative Assembly though he was defeated in Bombay. He was elected on the on the Drafting Committee and later appointed its chairman.

My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize, have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can loose our battle to me is a matter of joy. You must abolish



your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman.

He also suggests strategies for emancipation from oppression. He found their emancipation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believes that Buddha treated women with respect and love and never tried to degrade them like Manu did. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Ambedkar cites women like Vishakha, Amrapali of Visali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, Queen of Prasenajjth who approached Buddha, as evidences of Buddha's treatment of women as equals. (Paul, 1993 : 383-84) it was mainly the Hindu culture and social customs, which stood in the headway of women's empowerment.

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 section including Scheduled Caste / Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities To education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded." Since Ambedkar himself was a victim of oppression and discrimination in all its severity, his views about women's oppression and equal rights are more useful than anybody else's theory based on mere observation for the feminist movement to strengthen its strategy for approaching the systemic challenges and contradictions in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream.

According to Ambedkar, the society must be based on reason, and not on atrocious traditions of caste system. He found education, intercaste marriage and interdine as methods, which may eliminate caste and patriarchy, maintained through endogamy.

In 1918, Ambedkar demanded separate electorate and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in proportion to their population. After fifty years of the working of the Indian Constitution, the Indian women's demand for political reservation and the lower status of other disadvantage sections proves that his theory is correct. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He started fierce propoganda against the Hindu social order and lunched a journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bahishkrit Bharat in 1927 for this purpose.

His exposure to the west has influenced his perception on feminist issues. it was a time when first wave feminism had been coming to an end with the achievement of franchise rights for women in Britain in 1918, and America in 1920 and Ambedkar's perception of the women question, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminist demands. It is well known that Ambedkar has the habit to working for more then eighteen hours a day without any difficulty. His reading habit helped him to understand the feminist development in different cultures and countries around the world.

After returning to India he devoted his life fully to work for the depressed classes including women. He was firmly committed to the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. In



Ambedkar's movement lunched from 1920 onward, women actively participated and acquired the confidence to voice their issues on various platforms. Venbai Bhatkar and Renubai work for the socio- political equality of depressed people and promoting their economic interests.

Ambedkar Idea of Equality:

He incorporated the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in the Indian Constitution. Based on the belief that any scheme of franchise and constituency that fails to bring about representation of opinions as well representation of persons falls short of creating a popular government, he submitted the Constitution with a warning. 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 he means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as principal 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 social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principal 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 principal of one man one value. 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 parinirvan of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who was recognized internationally as a crusader against

caste system, a vigilant fighter for the human rights of all the oppressed and enslaved and the emancipator of humanity from social and economic injustice, occurred on 6th December 1956. In the condolence message, on Ambedkar death in Parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said: "Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society." His dream of society based on gender equality is yet to be realized and therefore his thoughts are important for the social reconstruction that favours women's empowerment. The Nation honoured Baba Saheb Ambedkar by offering Bharat Ratna posthumously to him which was received by his widow Savita Ambedkar in 1990. Dr. Ambedkar foundation was set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on 24th March 1992 for the purpose of promoting and propagating his ideology of social justice so as to reach the common masses. The foundation implemented Schemes such as Dr. Ambedkar National Memorial, Dr. Ambedkar National Public Library, Dr. Ambedkar Chairs in Universities / Institutions, Dr. Ambedkar Award for Social Understanding and upliftment of Weaker Sections and the Dr. Ambedkar International Award for Social Change.

Conclusion:

Society is in a continuous process of evolution. It will take several decades for these imbalances to be rectified. Education of both men and women will lead to change in attitudes and perceptions. It is not easy to eradicate deep-seated cultural value, or alter tradition that perpetuate discrimination. Law can only be an instrument of change, that must be effectively used. The absence of effective law enforcement,



results in low rates of conviction, which in turn emboldens the feeling that the accused can get away. It is necessary that deterrent punishments are provided in the statute, and are strictly enforced. A beginning has certainly been made in urban areas. Working women continue to remain primarily responsible for taking care of home and child rearing, in addition to their careers. Increased stress has made them more prone to heart and other stress related diseases. Hence, it is necessary to improve the Support System for working women.

The march towards elimination of gender bias has to go on, so as to make it meaningful for the vast majority of women in this country. There is a greater representation now in the legislature, executive and judiciary. India is one of the few countries in the world, which has had a woman Prime Minister. Various States have from time to time, had women Chief Ministers. A woman Judge in the Supreme Court, and in the High Courts, has today become the norm. Women have crossed many barriers, and head various departments in large multinationals today. A beginning has been made in the Army also, when women are being commissioned as SSC Officers. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution were brought about in 1993, which served as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in the political power structure. The proposed Womens' Reservation Bill to provide 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislature is now under consideration. The empowerment of women in urban areas and the metropolises cannot be the indicator of growth in the country. In a country, where eighty percent of the population is

in rural areas, until the lot of women in these areas is also not improved simultaneously, development will remain an illusion to them. The status of women cannot be raised without opening up opportunities of independent income and employment. In the rural areas, employment of women is concentrated mainly in labour-intensive, unskilled jobs where simple or traditional skills are required. There is lack of access to vocational institutions.

Women in the rural areas are wholly oblivious of their rights. It will require a much greater and concerted effort for the various measures to become a living reality for women in the rural areas. This can happen only through the collective effort of the State, NGOs, imparting of formal and informal education, through the media, etc.

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