



B.R. AMBEDKAR PERCEPTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is popularly famous as the chief planner of the Indian constitution, and also as an icon for the Dalit rights movements in the country. But Ambedkar believed that women have a key role to play in the emancipation of oppressed communities, and this could be done by ensuring their own rights to property and education. Ambedkar was a great supporter of emancipation of women. He inspired them to attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self- help. According to him the progress of a community is measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved. He wanted to see them as their husbands' friend and equal but not their slave. He also believed that education is as important for women as for men. He was a feminist. He rendered great service to women while giving them rights in the political and social field and bringing changes in favour of women under the Hindu Marriage act.their is no doubt that the ill treatment, humiliations and cast based barriers which Ambedkar faced right from his school days to the end of his life, still exists in the society. He not only traced the roots and evils of Indian society in his lifetime, but also offered suggestions and remedies for eradicating them. In this paper Dr B R Amedkar perception on gender equality will be discussed.

KEY WORDS: Ambedkar, Gender, Equality

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is popularly famous as the chief planner of the Indian constitution, and also as an icon for the Dalit rights movements in the country. But Ambedkar believed that women have a key role to play in the emancipation of oppressed communities, and this could be done by ensuring their own rights to property and education. Ambedkar was a great supporter of emancipation of women. He inspired them to attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help. According to him the progress of a community is measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved. He wanted to see them as their husbands friend and equal but not their slave. He also believed that education is as important for women as for men. He was a feminist. He rendered great service to women while giving them rights in the political and social field and bringing changes in favour of women under the Hindu Marriage act.their is no doubt that the ill treatment, humiliations and cast based barriers which Ambedkar faced right from his school days to the end of his life, still exists in the society. He not only traced the roots and evils of Indian society in his lifetime, but also offered suggestions and remedies for eradicating them. In this paper Dr. B. R. Ambedkar perception on gender equality will be discussed.

AMBEDKAR AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

Dr. Ambedkar was aware of the miserable conditions of women. He believed that women are the worst sufferers of the oppressive, caste-based, and rigid hierarchical social system. His main effort was to liberate Indian women from various social and religious ties and provide access to necessities which they were deprived of i.e., Education and

Inheritance rights. He regarded education as the only tool for the emancipation of women. On 20 July 1942, while addressing the second All India Depressed classes' women's conference he said, "I shall tell you a few things which I think you should bear in mind. Learn to be clean; keep free from all vices. Give education to your children. Instil ambition in them. Inculcate in their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes."

Ambedkar's approach towards women was completely different from other social reformers i.e. Mahatma Gandhi, Jyotiba Phule, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who tried to reform without questioning the social hierarchical order.

In the early days of 1928, a women's conference was established in Bombay with Ramabai (Ambedkar's Wife) as its President. About 500 women participated in Kalram Temple's entry Satyagraha at Nasik in 1930. The number swelled up to 3000 women participating in the historic Mahad Satyagraha. He believed that family planning measures for women should be taken. In 1942, while serving as a labor minister of the executive council of governor-general he introduced a Maternity Benefit Bill. The bill aimed to provide maternity leave to women workers. In his journals i.e. Mooknayak and Bahiskrit Bharat, he made sure that the issues related to women get an equal place in it.¹

To achieve these goals, Ambedkar advocated for women's right to be educated along with men in the same schools and colleges, since it would ensure that both get the same quality of education. He believed that women's education could help them achieve two purposes: their own empowerment, and the empowerment of others through them. However, Ambedkar argued against professional or vocational education as per the British education system, since it aims at



creating a clerical nature of workers. His emphasis, instead, was on secular education for social emancipation and freedom so that depressed classes can enhance their social, economic and political status.ⁱⁱ

The inferior position as granted to women and the sub-human treatment given to them, can therefore, be explained according to Dr. Ambedkar in terms of the very nature of the social order which does not respect the value of equality among individuals and which does not recognize the worth of human dignity. As against the principals of equality and fraternity, the Hindu social order, in the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, is based upon three different principals- the principal of graded inequality, fixity or occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity and the principal of fixation of people within their respective classes. Among these, the first principal, that of graded inequality, Dr. Ambedkar finds as the most significant.ⁱⁱⁱ

For Ambedkar the idea of social order is such where each individual is considered and respected as a human being and is not made to suffer only because accident of birth has relegated him to an inferior position; where each individual finds the ways and means of enhancing his own power and potentialities.^{iv}

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Dr. Ambedkar worked as a Chairman of the Drafting Committee and is regarded as the Father of the Indian Constitution. He has done a pioneering work to improve the status of women by granting the fundamental rights to all the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race and sex. In many of his speeches in the Constituent assembly, he debated for equal rights for women. His approach towards women's rights played a significant role in ensuring that Women's rights find a special place in the Indian Constitution. Some of the important constitutional provisions protecting women's rights are,

Article 14: This article ensures equality for all citizens irrespective of Gender, Caste, Creed, Religion, and race.

Article 15: This article prohibits discrimination on the grounds of Religion, Gender, Caste, Creed, and Race.

Article 16: This article says that there shall be an equality of opportunity in Public Employment.

Article 23: This article prohibits Human Trafficking and Bonded Labour.

These were some important provisions related to women. Apart from them, many other articles protect the rights of women i.e. Article 39(a) and (d), Article 42, Article 51A(e), Article 243D(3), Article 243T(3), and Article 243T(4).

Ambedkar as a minister in the Nehru's cabinet also introduced on 5th February 1951, the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament. The principal of monogamy and divorce introduced in the code where opposed energetically Dr. Ambedkar supported his views on the ground that a women's rights to property was accepted by Brihaspati Samiti and Divorce by Parashara samity.^v

Ambedkar not only ascertain constitutional guarantees to women but also introduced and got passed four acts which strengthened the position of women in the society. These were incorporated in the Hindu Code Bill. These are: i) The Hindu

Marriage Act, 1955, ii) The Hindu Succession Act 1956, iii) The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 iv) the Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. If we look at the provisions of those acts, we can easily make out that Ambedkar was a great thinker of women rights and emancipation.

Provisions that have been enshrined in the Acts are as follows: The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 was amended in 1976 made the following provisions for women:

1. The legitimization of illegitimate children (Sec.16)
2. Punishment –bigamy (Sec. 26)
3. Custody of children (Sec. 26)
4. Marriageable age of females raised to 18 years
5. Provision for alimony (Sec 25). The act abolishes the difference between a maiden and a widow.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956

This act contains the following provisions for women:

1. A widow has a right to adopt a son or a daughter which was not there in the Hindu Law.
2. It also provided an opportunity to be independent and dispose of her property by will as she wishes and desires (Sec 14)
3. A uniform scheme of succession to the property of a hindu female who dies, intestate after commencement of the act, was made in Section 15. Previously under the uncodified law the succession to stridhan varied according to the material status of a woman.

The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956:

Following provisions are come under the purview of this act:

1. The mother is empowered to change the guardian, appointed by the father and may appoint a new guardian by will.
2. The father's right to appoint a guardian for the minor by will during the life time of the minor's mother is prohibited under this Act.

The Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956:

This act has the following provisions:

1. This act accepts adoption of a male and a female child without any difference, whereas under the unmodified law a daughter could not be adopted.
2. This Acts permits a wife to adopt a child on her own right even during her own right during her husband's life time. She has no such right prior to this enactment.
3. In the unmodified law a spinster or a widow had no right to adopt whereas this Act grants them the right to adopt.
4. Under the old Hindu Law a wife need not be consulted while adopting a child or while giving a child for adoption, whereas this act made it essential to consult her in both the cases.
5. Section 11 lays down that, a father should adopt a daughter at least 21 years younger to him.^{vi}

It may be said that 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 remains. Now it is our prior duty to act according to Ambedkar's thoughts or for fulfilment of his dreams for a better life of a woman. Although Indian women achieves a lot in present but still in



Indian Society various social evils blocks the path of women equality. No nation can progress unless men and women are

treated as equals in the nation. Ambedkar's contribution in the empowerment of women will always be incomparable.

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^{vi} <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/1707-1424928442.pdf>