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## DR. AMBEDKAR AND WOMEN EMANCIPATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Throughout the ages women empowerment has been a contentious as well as contesting issue. Every period of social history witnessed the plight of women in the patriarchal society. Right from the very beginning of society, women were subjected to cruelty and ill-treatment. The origin of such a treatment to women can be traced back into the existing social structure of the various period of the entire social history. At the time social structure simply denoted, among other things, social hierarchy where in women were placed to an inferior position, or women were subordinated to men.*

*The first initiative to ameliorate the condition of women started in Europe when the women's liberation movement began to gain momentum. The first serious attempt toward women's empowerment was taken by the political philosopher John Stuart Mill who tirelessly fought for, among other things, voting rights for women.*

*In India, women's cause were taken up by social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, and so on, but not many people know that Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Fule tirelessly worked hard to uplift the situation of women in Indian society. Mahatma Fule along with his wife Savitri Phule, was a staunch advocate of anti-caste ideology and women's rights. The Phules' vision of social equality included fighting against the subjugation of women and according due rights to women. Whereas Mahatma Phule fought for women's empowerment as a social reformer, Dr. Ambedkar took up the same cause as an academician and an erudite constitutionalist. Ambedkar was always concerned about women empowerment. In a letter to his father's friend, young Ambedkar, during his studies at New York, said – "We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education..."*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dr. Ambedkar, Emancipation, rights, caste*

## DISCUSSION

Throughout the ages, women emancipation has been a contentious as well as contesting issue. Every period of social history witnesses the plight of women in the patriarchal society. Right from the very beginning of society, women were subjected to cruelty and ill-treatment. The origin of such a treatment to women can be traced back into the existing social structure of the various period of the entire social history.<sup>1</sup> At the time social structure simply denoted, among other things, social hierarchy where in women were placed to an inferior position, or women were subordinated to men.

Even the Greek society, which had become politically sound failed to give enough freedom to its women. The Greek political thinker Plato was of the view that women cannot be allowed to participate in the deliberative affairs of the state.<sup>2</sup> Even Aristotle was of the view women are not worthy of dealing with politics. In similar way many social thinkers did not allow women to step outside the four walls of house and participate in day-to-day affairs. Not only in Greece, were women in Indian sub-continent also disallowed to cross the threshold of the house they inhabited. These all sorts of restrictions against women were in conformity with the norms of society. These norms were in fact the social fact and violation of which attracted punishment or social disapproval.

The first initiative to ameliorate the condition of women started in Europe when the women's liberation movement began to gain momentum. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (1792), written by the 18th-century British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. In her celebrated work, Mary Wollstonecraft strongly support education for women as she contends that education given to women must be commensurate with their position in society, and she continues that education to women is essential because educated women can teach their children and become companion to their husbands rather than mere wives.<sup>3</sup>

However, it was John Stuart Mill who tirelessly fought for the women cause took the first serious attempt toward women's liberation. John Stuart Mill along with his lifelong companion Harriet Taylor wrote the Subjection of Women, the book that deals with problem faced by women at length. Mill demanded the suffrage right for women. And it was because of his effort, women were given right to vote in England.<sup>4</sup>

In France, it was Simone de Beauvoir, a lifelong companion of Jean Paul Sartre, who championed the cause of women. In her celebrated work the Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir argues that the term gender is a cultural construct, and the women are not born, rather

they are made. That is to say, women are women not because they are differently born, rather they are asked to behave differently. Right from her very childhood, women are socialized differently as compared to men. Girls, in a given family, are supposed to behave in a manner, which is considered suitable for women only, and the boys on the other hand are asked to behave in a masculine manner. Childhood play is also determined on the basis of physical strength required by certain play. Plays which require less effort and conforms to moral boundaries drawn for women, is usually assigned to girls whereas play which requires strength and assertion is assigned to boys. Not only play but the work also assigned to boys and girls are found to be of different nature and it is where the sexual division of labour takes place. Again the talent of women is subjected to prejudice and stereotyped thinking as women are suppose to be incapable of making decision of their own and therefore are not free to decide what they would study and which career they would pursue.<sup>5</sup>

In Indian subcontinent the condition of women began to deteriorate in the post-Vedic period, and following the Islamic invasion of the country it became worst.<sup>6</sup> Women were not as free as men were, and by the same token, women did not have enough rights as compared to their male counterparts. The caste hierarchy and patriarchy had gripped the social system to such an extent that the free flow of ideas and thought were not possible, let alone their dissemination and assertion. Because of caste hierarchy and patriarchal society, the voice and desire of women were never heard. Within the system of caste hierarchy, women belonging to *dalit* community are subjected to oppression at two levels. Firstly, being women, they are discriminated against and, secondly, being *dalit* or tribes they are subjected to ill-treatment. So the women in general and the *dalit* women in particular were never ever allowed to stand in society at par with men. While analysing the condition of the women in Indian society, it can safely be inferred that women, barring few exceptions, have never been active member of the society who could ever be relied upon or given opportunities to partake in the deliberative affairs of the society.

Dr. Ambedkar, having imbibed the Western Philosophy, attempted to inject western values within the Indian social milieu, and the same can be evidenced from the contents of constitution he gave to the people of India. While drafting constitution of India, Dr. Ambedkar amply gave attention to the cause of women, and therefore, he accordingly made provision in the constitution the directive principle of state policy under which welfare measures were left to states. States were given task of ensuring welfare of its people by promoting equality, justice and fraternity in

all walks of life. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women was included in DPSP, and it was left to states to create such an environment, which could conform to the principle of equal wages.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar vigorously advocated equal rights for women in the constituent assembly debate. He outlawed discrimination against women on the ground of, religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the above-mentioned grounds. Article 14 of the Indian constitution specifically enumerates the grounds of which discrimination shall be considered unconstitutional. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution does not only safeguard one from being subjected to social discrimination, it also provides protection in relation to employment and wage fixation. So long as employment is concerned, it protects the interest of a person seeking employment by guaranteeing him due protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The like manner one's due wages cannot be denied to him/her on the above-mentioned grounds.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar also supported the property rights of women, and in the constituent assembly debate, he brilliantly put up the cause of women in relation to property rights. Unfazed by the criticism he could attract by Brahmins for his unconditional support to women rights in relation to property, Dr. Ambedkar went ahead and supplied justification for so doing.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar, referring to Lord Buddha, said that "He never objected formal education to women and this is why He allowed entry of women into his monastery." Vishaka, Amrapali of Vaishali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, Queen of Prasenajit were among few prominent women received Buddha's teaching.<sup>10</sup>

Having been inspired by the contribution of Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule who made an invaluable contribution in the field of women education and they were the first to run school for women from every segment of society, Dr. Ambedkar wholeheartedly extended his support for women education.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar having been subjected to discrimination for his being belonging to *Dalit* community, decided to fight against caste hierarchy. He launched scathing attack prevalent caste system, which was not only inhuman but also offending in its very nature. Religious rights that were not available to non-Brahmin were not acceptable to Dr. Ambedkar. He considered religious rights as being fundamental to individual's need and the same needs to be protected. The Constitution of India in the like manner safeguards one's religious rights and considers it as one of fundamental rights.

Drawing on the ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville, who recommended abolition of polygamy, Dr. Ambedkar contended that only the abolition of

polygamy could bring about complete emancipation of women.<sup>12</sup> Indian society which had been practicing polygamy for years, and because of which the condition of women had become worst, the hope for women emancipation seemed dim until the judicious intervention of Dr. Ambedkar into the matter. Dr. Ambedkar on the floor of the house proposed much controversial Hindu Code Bill (1948) what Dr. Ambedkar proposed under Hindu Code Bill was repugnant to the core tenets of Hindu traditions.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ambedkar had to face the ire of those who were placed at higher pedestal of Brahminical system. The status quoits were not in favour of giving any leeway to women. A wide range of protest was initiated against the proposed change within Hindu Code Bill. Dr. Rajendra Prasad also expressed his unwillingness over the proposed change by saying that it was too much.<sup>14</sup> The contentious issue in the Hindu Code Bill was the provision of divorce (that is dissolution of marriage). Nevertheless Dr. Ambedkar's resolve was too strong to be shaken by any caste forces. He tabled the bill and got it in enacted. However, he could not get Hindu Code Bill enacted during his lifetime. And hence accordingly Dr. Ambedkar prescribed for monogamy.

The issue of family planning was also contentious as it was coming in the way of religious tenets and age-old desire for son. But whatever may have been the reasons for longing for a son, these were the women who had to pay the price in terms of health. Consent of women was never considered desirable for conception: women were just means to an end. To perpetuate the lineage used to be the sole purpose of marriage.

Dr. Ambedkar was aware with the risk of not supporting family planning as it involved life of a woman and pressing social problems. According to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar overpopulation is linked with the problems of unemployment, poverty, social and economic backwardness, agriculture distress etc. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar focused that birth control through family planning is the only remedy to tackle the problem of overpopulation. He strongly opposed the Gandhiji's views related to spiritual measures of population control i.e. celibacy/continence (Brahmacharya) and self restraint. Population problem can be solved with the help of scientific instruments and scientific methods of abortion, operation, medical treatments etc. Family planning is boon to poor and women.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Before creating men and women, nature must not have thought of placing the women in social context where, unlike the natural world wherein the nature endowed both men and women with equal strength and wisdom to carry out their day-to-day activities, women will be put under complete subjection of men. The nature could not anticipate the

misfortune awaiting women. Had the nature been capable of knowing the plight of women beforehand, it would have endowed women with some specialties to fight Social oppression. But that is not the case.

The condition of women began to deteriorate ever since, among other things, sexual division of labour started. With the sexual division of labour, women were assigned those work which needed less physical strength and but more care and protection. These work included child rearing, cooking, and petty household works. Men on the other hand assigned themselves works, which needed muscular strength and wisdom. This division of labour led to development of a sense of superiority among male members of society, which in turn led to the development of dictatorial attitude of men towards women.

The sense of superiority and the dictatorial attitude inspire men to prevent women from competing with them. And this is why women in every age were prevented from engaging themselves in social affairs. For centuries, social affairs remained the masculine thing. Women were never recognized in the field of administration, science, literature, and arts. That is why women used to express their creativity under pseudonym.

Women in every age and society were subjected to violence; however, what differed was the form of violence. The meaning of the term violence should not be taken here literally; rather its wide connotation should be understood while using it in the context of violence against women. Women were never born free and she is everywhere in chains. Writing on the plight of women, John Stuart Mill observed that women were worst than the slaves. Slaves do have chances to win their freedom, but women are free when they are dead. Mill observed that such is the plight of women that even the worst man does have a wife!

Like Mill and other advocates of rights of women, Dr. Ambedkar also expressed his anguish over the condition of the women. He rejected the Varna System because he considered it as a sole reason behind segregating women from men and making them as category. He also accused Varna System for ill-treatment, violence, and discrimination against women. According to him, Varna System had degraded the life of women and had reified them. He exposed Varna System for being a regressive system, as it did not have welfare provision for deprived section of society. Women were also deprived section because they were not allowed to receive education, to engage in

economic activities, to demand property, to participate in rituals, and so on.

In Indian context, it was Dr. Ambedkar's effort, which brought about emancipation for women. What differentiates the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar from other champions of social reform towards women emancipation was Dr. Ambedkar's tireless effort that ultimately led to codification of women's right. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that women can never be liberated unless and until their existed mechanism to ensure their liberty in the event of their infringement.

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