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DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VISION TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved
– Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar—the determined fighter and a deep scholar has made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He was first Indian to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. . The encouragement of Dr. Ambedkar to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931. He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professions like prostitutions. Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system.

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 and nation, and to gain 'power'. According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one; of power". But, 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 beings. Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is both a highly important end in itself and necessary for the achievement of sustainable human development.

Dr. Ambedkar was well known about status of women, as the chairman of drafting committee, he tried to adequate inclusion of women's rights in the Indian constitution. Dr. Ambedkar believed in the strength of women's and their role in the process reform. The

historic Mahadsatyagrah witnessed participation of three hundred women's with their man counterparts addressing another meeting of about 300 women. He said that "The progress of a community is measured by degree of progress which women had achieved. He gave slogan. "The Educate, Unite and Fight." Let every girl who marries stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal, and refuse to be his slave. I am sure if you follow this advice you will bring honor and glory to your selves."

Dr. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He stated "We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education." Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professions like prostitutions. Dr. Ambedkar also raised the Women's issue as Member of Legislative Assembly on 10th Nov.1938; he strongly advocated family planning measures and said that besides many other problems giving Maternity Benefit Bill during his tenure as Labor Minister in Governor General's Executive council. He provided several provisions in the constitution for protecting the welfare and civil rights of women. Dr. Ambedkar also introduced the Hindu Code Bill in parliament which was opposed both inside as well outside the house and which was drop. Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet expressing his discontent over non acceptance of women's right by the parliament. Besides, he highlighted the issues of Muslim women. His secular perspective is known through his thoughts on 'purdha'(Veil) system, religious conversions and legal right for Muslim women. In short, along with the depressed class women, his thoughts for emancipation of all the women are expressed with same allegiance.

In his paper on "Casts in India: their mechanism, genesis and development", Dr. Ambedkar described how women were treated cruelly by the way of sati, enforced widowhood and girl marriages just to maintain strict endogamy in a caste. The social evils regarding women in Hindu religion as well as in Muslim society were highlighted by him. Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, networking, leaderships, financial freedom are the essential aspects of women empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar realized this at his time and included in the process of social reforms. Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle, for eradication of caste systems and upliftment of the underprivileged sections. He realized that this could not be achieved without liberating the women themselves. He motivated women and addressed them to participate in struggle against caste prejudices. During the Mahad Tank Struggle, women marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves. Impressed by the large gathering of women at women's conference held at Nagpur on 20th

July, 1942, he told women to be progressive and abolish traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress.

Dr. Ambedkar had great love for his fellow-creatures and an urge to serve and uplift them. Pursuing the path of "Bahujana Hitaya, Bahujana Sukhaya" (gain of the many, welfare of the many) he worked with full vigor and zeal for the emancipation of all. Though the untouchables received his special attention for obvious reasons, he was keen to ameliorate the condition of women who, also like the Shudras bore Manu's wrath. Dr. Ambedkar championed the cause of women as well as the miserable plight of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes throughout his life. He put forth a number of problems of Indian women and sought for their solutions in Bombay Legislative Council, in the Viceroy's Executive Council, as a Labour Member, in the Constituent Assembly as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and in the Parliament as the first Law Minister of Independent India. The decades after independence have seen tremendous and historical changes in the status and the position of women in Indian society. In fact, in no period of history such revolutionary changes took place, as taking place today. But the change from a position of utter

degradation of women in the nineteenth century to a position of equality in the middle of the twentieth century is not a simple case of progress of women in the modern era. In Indian Society, especially in Hindu Society, a female has a low social status, because she is treated as the “door of hell”, i.e., Nark ka dwar. It was 150 Dr. Ambedkar, who raised his voice against the deplorable conditions of womenfolk in Hindu Society. Looking into the social history and the rules of Shastras, he introduced the “Hindu Code Bill” in parliament to empower the womenfolk by giving them legitimate rights, relating to property, marriage, divorce, maintenance, etc. Although the Bill could not get due regard, yet most of the clauses were passed by the Parliament. This way Dr. Ambedkar fought for the equal rights to womenfolk in Hindu society. He respected women’s dignity without belittling their roles as mothers and wives. His ideas were remarkably similar to those voiced by the women’s liberation movement all over the world. He propagated equality in family and dignity of women’s personality in society. As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly, he advocated several measures to free women from age-old subordination and subservience imposed by the Hindu social laws authored by Manu. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm belief that unless the women themselves did not come forward to fight for the eradication of the social evils, their position in society would not improve, he was very much conscious of the fact that the religious scriptures, particularly the Manusmriti, contributed a great deal to the deplorable condition of women.

The inferior position as meted to women and the inhuman treatment given to them, therefore, explained by Dr. Ambedkar, in terms of the very nature of the social order does not respect the value of equality among individuals and which does not recognize the worth of human dignity. As against the principles of equality and fraternity, the Hindu social order in the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, is based upon three different principles: the principle of graded inequality, fixity of occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity and; the principle of fixation of people within their respective classes.

Much is talked about women empowerment today but it is more economic, political and health related. The issue of social empowerment of women needs to be raised higher and given utmost importance then only it could complete phenomena. Women empowerment has five components: women’s sense of self worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives; both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction and social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Dr. Ambedkar strongly believed that women empowerment can be achieved by welfare of women. The activities of empowering women worldwide should follow the vision of Dr. Ambedkar. Towards all the women, irrespective of their religion, cast and class, Babasaheb had a particular humanitarianism view. He frequently raised his voice against all supports of injustice towards women.

In the condolence message, on Ambedkar’s death in parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of 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 favors women empowerment.

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