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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

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Abstract:

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was a fighter for the dignity of women and depressed people and is known as champion of human rights. Being a pioneer of social justice, he always functioned for the empowerment of women. According to him, everybody should be treated equally irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion. That is why he started work for the liberation of woman and their rights. His aim was to make a society based on social justice. He realized the gender inequality among the Indian society and raised his voice to include them in the modern society. Dr. Ambedkar has given equal status to women as men by providing many provisions in the Indian constitution, for strengthening and solace the position of women.

This paper focuses on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's views and perceptions towards woman empowerment. The paper also analyzes the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a thinker and social reformer in the emancipation of social status of women in the society.

Index Terms - Rights, Awareness, Women education, Women empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

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. B.R Ambedkar

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.

The role played by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, as chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, has left imprint on the social tapestry of the country after independence, and shaped the socio-political fabric of the India today. It would have been a different India in a probability, a much more inequitable and unjust one without him. He

attempted to forge India's moral and social foundations a new and tried hard for a political order of the constitutional democracy that is sensitive to disadvantaged, inherited from the past or engendered by prevailing social relations. Dr. Ambedkar had the highest academic credential for an Indian of his time, and his erudition and scholarship have been widely acknowledged. It is known to all Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is the father of the Indian Constitution. But after reading some books on his works and his vision towards India, it will be clear that he has a versatile genius as he was also a serious scholar, good teacher, efficient lawyer, devoted leader, committed writer, distinguished educationist, social rebel, powerful debater. He was an authoritative constitutionalist, an able administrator, liberal emancipator, master statesman, daring liberator of the downtrodden masses and a fearless fighter for human rights.

Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar was born April 14, 1891 in Mhow, a city of military cantonment then Central Province India. His father, Ramji Satpal Maloji was a Subedar in the army and her mother Bhimabai Satpal was a housewife. Babasaheb belonged to the Mahar called lower caste who were treated as "untouchables". But his father was an army officer was able to arrange a good education for their children, despite several resistances of the society. Ambedkar was treated as "untouchable" in school with other children Dalits. They were not allowed to sit with other so-called upper-caste children, and were allowed to drink water from common water vessel. Ambedkar was very meritorious in studies and after completing his early education in Bombay moved to the United States for graduate studies and research; did his graduate and doctorate from Columbia University, New York. He also studied at the London School of Economics and completed master's and doctorate from there too.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The present paper is an effort to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's views and works for women empowerment in pre and post independent India and the relevancy of his ideas in present social scenario of India. Secondary data have been collected from internet, newspapers, published papers and books.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, networking, leaderships and financial freedom are the essential aspects of women empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar realized this at his time and included in the process of social reforms. The vision of Dr. Ambedkar about women is explicitly depicted in Indian Constitution. Equality of sexes is strongly backed by the constitution through articles 14 to 16. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. He laid down the foundation of social justice and there can be no social justice without gender equality. In his paper on "Castes 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. As a researcher, Dr. Ambedkar extensively studied the position of women in both the religion (and also in the other religions) and thrown light on denial of rights to her and ultimately the status of individual. He stated that the consequences of purdah system on Muslim women were that it deprives her of mental and moral nourishment. Dr. Ambedkar sought that Buddhism awards women, status equal to men and considered women capable of attaining spirituality. By adopting Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar expelled injustice for underprivileged segments including women and accepting the dignified equal status. Dr.

Ambedkar denied worshipping Hindu deities, ultimately freed women from inhumane customs, rituals and superstitions and made the way for her liberation.

3.1. The Education for Women: Ambedkar's Thoughts

"The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life." -Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the mainstream society. Education is the only mean by which societies grow out of oppression to democratic participation and involvement. It is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual.

Ambedkar identified two purposes of knowledge: first, to acquire it for betterment of others and secondly to use it for one's own betterment. Ambedkar has also argued against professional learning (The British Educational System) which aims at creating a clerical nature of workers. Ambedkar emphasized on secular education for social emancipation and freedom.

Education has the one and only one purpose to enlighten the depressed classes so as to enhance their cause of social, economic and political comfort. The social and ethical philosophy of Ambedkar aimed at making the depressed people aware to change their thoughts and old behaviour-patterns and to move forward in the direction of unity and freedom through education. The basic theme of his philosophy of education was to inculcate the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, justice and moral character among the boys and girls of all religion, region, class and caste.

Ambedkar listed these three components as objectives for policy makers:

1. Recasting the aims and purposes of education,
2. Education as an instrument of substantive equality,
3. Women's education (Velaskar, 2012).

Dr Ambedkar considered education as an important tool for the emancipation of women. They were not allowed to take education with lower castes. It is evident from his speeches that he had great concern for women empowerment. Addressing the Second All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, he said.

"I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. 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 on their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes."

In this way, Dr Ambedkar stressed on education for the progress of women and our country. With a deep faith in their emancipation, Ambedkar advised them: 'Give education to your children'. He stresses the need of the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help among men and women. He wants them to realize that they owe a great responsibility for educating their children in right way. But at the same time, he advised them: send your children to schools. To him, education is the most important factor for moulding the life of all men, women and children.

Ambedkar observes "Education is as necessary for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be mould their lives in virtuous way, for sons should be such as would make a mark in this world." He wanted to liberate women from their suffering and economic dependency. In order to give economic rights and freedom to women, Ambedkar demanded educational rights, equality and right to property for women. To educate women, he asked co-education for

women with men. Through education, he believed, that women would think independently which will lead to their intellectual and mental development.

3.2. Ambedkar and Women Rights and justice

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's approach to women's right is exclusively different from other social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi who tried to reform the Hindu society of certain outdated customs and practices without questioning the hierarchical social order. But Ambedkar made his own view for the women rights and that has been reflected in Indian constitution. His goal was to make a society based on social justice. To secure this goal, Ambedkar has given equal status to women on par with men by providing many provisions in the Indian constitution. To him, sexual discrimination should be root out from the society and everybody should get equal opportunity in the society. The Preamble of Indian constitution guarantees social and economic justice to women and that is because of Ambedkar contribution. In the preamble it is mentioned (i) social, economic and political justice, (ii) freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, (iii) equality of status and opportunity and (iv) fraternity assuring dignity of the individual and national unity to all the citizens of India without any discrimination of caste, creed or sex.

Not only had he worked hard for untouchables but also for the betterment and progress of women also. Dr. Ambedkar criticized the traditional and conservative values. He strongly criticized the degradation of women in Indian society. He believed that women should be entitled to equal status with men and they must have right to education. He lamented that the Hindu religion had deprived women of the right to property.

To ensure women's status Dr. Ambedkar had also introduced an emancipatory bill (the Hindu code Bill) in Parliament which proposed mainly, to abolish different marriage systems prevalent among Hindus and to establish monogamy as the only legal system, conferment of right to property and adoption on women, restitution of conjugal rights and judicial separation; attempts to unify the Hindu code in tune with progressive and modern thought. His concern was not limited to Hindu women only. He observed that even the Muslim women were also not getting their due which was provided to them under the Islamic Shariah as they were influenced by the Indian environment. He also criticized the denial of rights to Muslim women for divorce⁴¹ He lamented the sad plight of the Indian Muslim women and said:

"No Muslim girl has the courage to repudiate her marriage, although it may be open to her on the ground that she was a child and that it was brought about by persons other than her parents. No Muslim wife will think it proper to have a clause entered into her marriage contract reserving her right to divorce. In that even her fate is, once married always married" she cannot escape the marriage-tie however irksome it may be. While she cannot repudiate her marriage, the husband can always do it without having to show any cause."

Ambedkar even opposed the Indian Muslim purdah system which he believed was contrary to the real purdah system of Islam. He was of the opinion that as a consequence of the purdah system a kind of segregation is brought about in the Muslim women which has deteriorating effect upon the physical constitution of the Muslim women thereby depriving her of a healthy social life. The isolation of males and females is sure to produce bad effects on the morals of men. He believed that a system, if based on worth, cannot justify the permanent denial of education and religious right to women.

3.3. Constitutional Rights and Women

In Indian Constitution, there are few articles exist that help the women of Indian society to improve their position and to compete with their male counterparts. For

example Article 14-All are equal in the eyes of law and equally protected by the law. It means equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex. Article 15(3) enables positive discrimination in favour of women. Article 16 mentions there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office without any discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, creed and sex. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines or in any other hazardous employment. Article 39 and 39(d) state Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work. As per article 41 the state shall guarantee within its economic limits to all the citizens, the right to work, to education and public assistance in certain cases. Article 42 the state makes provision for Human conditions of work and maternity relief. Under article 44, the state provides uniform Civil Code to all the citizens throughout the territory of India. Article 46- The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation 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 51 (A) (C)- Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women Article 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R(4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

Educational Rights given to Depressed Class and Women Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, tried an adequate inclusion of women's and depressed classes' rights in the constitution of India. He looked upon law as the instrument of creating a just social order. He incorporated the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in the Indian Constitution. To ensure equal rights of education to depressed class, special provisions are given which includes- Article 30(1) which gives the linguistic or religious minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Article 30(2) bars the state, while granting aid to educational institutions, from discriminating against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of linguistic or religious minority. Article 29 (2) of the Constitution of India defines the protection of interest of minorities and ensures that no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them. Article 46 directs the state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

3.4. Today's Present Context

Most people are literate but not educated. Education by means of access to knowledge and learning played pivotal role the social reforms. Stagnation in process of social reforms and imposing so called divine status of ancient women on today's women there by influencing her development and upliftment. Shattered with the reforms and liberation of women in the era of globalization and modernization, the Indian mindset has not accepted the equality at par with men and hence forcing women to revert their development.

Increasing incidences in women harassment in all way. violence, crime and humiliation insisted on her is only because of political apathy, which failed to kept social dogma. Education system, employment opportunities, tremendous population, inflation and non-availability of resources to strive are the barriers for development among people. Sheer influence of modern lifestyle and adopting technology doesn't mean improvement of individual and society.

The societal frame work meant to make women subordinate or subjugated need to be dismantled. Active participation of women from all the strata could make it possible. Many notable women activist are working on issues like environment, health, poverty etc.

Those who indulge in social reforms were not supported, not even by women. Today women reservation bill is the hottest agenda of the discussion and fact is that a lay woman even doesn't know what it is. The more ridiculous male attitude is that girl's education meant only for her marriage. Today's women are trapped in the circle of insecurity, male domination, lack of awareness about her rights and no decision making powers.

Much is talked about women empowerment today but it is more economic, political and health related. The issue of social empowerment of women need 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.

4. CONCLUSION

In a way, what appears from Ambedkar's own perception of the Indian social order, Hindu or Muslim was one of a system where women were denied in various ways, their dues in the society. He was frantically in search of a solution to their evil systems and sought to usher a society based on equality, justice and fraternity. Though the goal of women empowerment is yet to be achieved, Dr. Ambedkar's idea about the rights and development of women are still valid in the present scenario - not only in India, but in global context too.

Dr. Ambedkar's three word formula – 'educate, agitate and organize' is a powerful tool of social change even today. Ambedkar made the oppressed lot of the depressed classes conscious of their rights, which was denied to them for centuries. Educating the downtrodden people, he thought, was a sure way to instill in them a sense of consciousness, self-respect and dignity. He wanted the people to cultivate the values of freedom and equality among themselves; it was possible only through education. This turn would provide the necessary cultural basis for their progressive assimilation into the mainstream of an enlightened national life.

Dr. Ambedkar was a symbol of knowledge and character. He regarded education as a means to reach the doors of light and perception to remove the regions of darkness and ignorance. He used his philosophy of education to make aware of the condition of social degeneration in Hindu society among the lower strata of society and change the social order for the benefit of entire humanity. Through his educational institutes, he strives for educational development of all. He was an 'organic intellectual' in real sense. Dr. Ambedkar's contribution towards education and his independent thinking made him an independent intellectual of the world. He propounded his own philosophy of education and had largely influenced the outlook of downtrodden. In order to honour his brilliant academic career his statue is placed at the entrance London School of Economics and below that "Symbol of Knowledge" is written. It shows that how he was acclaimed as great student and educationist of far excellence. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on education and his educational philosophy are relevant even today in the 21st Century for the socio-economic and political development of our country.

"So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you." - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, India's first Law Minister.

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