

Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Women Liberation and Empowerment

¹**Manish Tyagi*** Research Scholar, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, (M.P.), E-mail: tyagimanish181@gmail.com

²**Lal Kumar Singh**** Research Scholar, Department of Education, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, E-mail: lalsinghdbg@gmail.com

³**Dwimalu Basumatary***** Research Scholar, Department of Education, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, E-mail: dwima.basu92@gmail.com

Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar is a great contributor of Indian Society. He made his contribution to the society on the path of liberty, equality and fraternity. His efforts put to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. This paper highlights the views and contribution of Dr. Ambedkar in women empowerment and relevancy of his views in present scenario. He emphasized in his writings and lecture that everybody should be treated equally irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion. In the light of such view, he put due stress on the gender equity and exposed women's problems. He spent his whole life for the betterment of women and downtrodden of society. He spreads awareness among poor and illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust social practices like child marriage, *Devdasi* system of Indian society. He also worked for an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. To meet such needs, he insisted on Hindu code bill and suggested the amendments in assembly and also insisted and evoked all the parliamentary members to support the bill in parliament. It is the results of his contributions and vision that today women are experiencing liberty, equality and justice in the life. As a result, women are equally sharing the role of contributor of all-round development in modern India. His contributions give women's strength to fight against unlawful, unjust in the society and hope to have equality and dignified life in the society.

Key Words: Social justice, Women empowerment, Woman rights, Hindu code bill.

Introduction:

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 all kind of resources and materials like knowledge, information, ideas, financial resources, access of money and its use, decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and finally to gain power. In other words, women's empowerment is a holistic approach and it empowers them not only in socio-cultural sphere but also in economic and political sphere.

Dr. Ambedkar is not only the father of the Constitution of India, but also a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, economist, editor, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and was first Indian to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. Ambedkar think that women should be given all round development in general and more importantly social education. It led their well-being and socio-cultural rights in the society. Ambedkar has emphasized that women from all section must be given importance and due share. It is our responsibility to maintain their dignity and modesty (Shukla, 2011). He also believes in those movements which have been led by women leaders. According to him women from all section should be taken into confidence and believes that they could contribute significantly in the socio-cultural reforms. They have played very massive and active role to eradicate the social abuses (Danvijay, 2012). Hence the importance of women in social life could not be undermined. She shapes the present and future of family. He insisted about the role of women and highlighted that women should worked as co-worker with his husband. But she is not worked as a slave for him. She must carry her dignity and denied slavery. He also believes that if all the women accept this fact, then they certainly gain respect by all in the society and it helps to restore their own identity (Gunjal, 2012). According to him, women should be provided knowledge and awareness about socio-cultural right and education for their well-being and all-round development. Therefore, he stresses that each and every section of women should be aware about their importance and they must be taken care of their dignity.

Views Regarding Women from Past to Dr. Ambedkar:

In ancient times, the importance of women was established and recognized in many ways in *Dharma Shastras* and folklore. It is considered that in the past generally matriarchal form of society was existed (mother works as ruler and head of the family) and popularly it

was said and accepted that, “*Yatra Nariyastu Pujante, Ramante Tatra Devta*”, means God resides at places where women are worshiped. The religious ceremony by man is not complete without participation of his wife. At that time, women have equal rights as men and get respect in the family. Women also enjoy liberty to choose their husbands in open “Swayamvars”. In ancient India, the position of women was very high but gradually they lose their status and value. As a result, women had to consider as merely object of pleasure and lust. They lost their individual personality and fundamental human rights. The period in which Women status had gone down was the Later Vedic period. She was dominated and enslaved by man and the patriarchy came in vogue in society. *Manu Smriti* curtails the right of women, prevalence of ‘Devdassi’, Parda custom among women shows the low status of women in the society. Social morality sustained the society in the hours of crisis like barbarism, injustice, inhumanity, Polygamy, Child marriage, sati system, illiteracy among women and their discrimination on Sex, caste, creed was rampant. Muslim religion also promotes strict rules for women to remain in Parda (veil). For the performing *Sanskaras*, the Hindu women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they have followed till their death. It is conceived that a widow should not live luxurious life and she should live in a harsh condition, non-aggressive, and chaste (Abstain re-marring) until death. The Golden rule of Gupta Dynasty was the worst period for women where Brahmanical rules & dogmas were strictly enforced against the women. In this time, women have been used as a slave in the religious institution. Women especially unmarried girls had kept in temples as a “*Dev-Dassies*” for the service of God. But women have been exploited in various ways including sexual pleasure of the priest in the name of the service of God. Dr. Ambedkar experienced and looked into existing problems of women in the society. So, Ambedkar highlights that women’s status is as the victims of the tyrannical, caste-based and inflexible hierarchical social system and inhumane. Dr. Ambedkar started his movement against liberation of women in 1920. Ambedkar stated that upcoming days will be better and our progress will be high when we persuaded both male and female education altogether. Above statement reflects that women education was prime focus of Ambedkar.

Further, he started fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order and launched a journal “*Mook Nayak*” in 1920 and “*Bahiskrit Bharat*” in 1927 for this purpose. He also put due stress on the gender equality and the need for education and exposed the problems of the depressed as well as women through raising such issues. Women issues have been questioned by Ambedkar. His perception of women issues were emphasizing their right to education,

equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process. These issues and concerns were resembled the global feminists demand of the period of Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar and Women Empowerment:

Dr. Ambedkar realized that gender equality, gender main streaming, networking, leaderships, financial freedom are the essential aspects of women empowerment and included in the process of social reforms. Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle. These struggles were 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 the struggle against caste prejudices, caste discrimination and finally against overall caste system. Therefore, During the *Mahad Tank Struggle*, women not only participated but also marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves. He was impressed by the large gathering of women at women's conference held at Nagpur on 20th July 1942; where addressing in conference, he stated that women to be progressive and women should be focused on abolition of traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress. He also enforced to the importance of education and its role in empowerment in general and women in particular. Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream 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 and society. From the past, Indian society has denied educational opportunities to all section of society. Therefore, lack of education led to various problems in marginalized section including women. Dr. Ambedkar put all his efforts to guarantee the educational opportunities without any kind of discrimination to all the citizens of India.

Dr. Ambedkar has also drawn our attention on various social problems and social rituals and dogmas. The British rule abolished detestable practices like sati. It provides a ground to fight against such social evil deeds in the society which not only undermined individual desired and dignity but also social desired and humanity in the society. In this direction, Dr. Ambedkar provided strong *constitutional safeguards to women*. The Special Marriage Act sets four essential conditions for a valid marriage i.e., monogamy, sound mind, marriageable age and the parties should not be too closely related. There are some grounds available to the wife only, both in Hindu and the Civil marriages provided to the women; for

example, violent and forceful abortions and abortions without consent of women are crime under section 313. Various acts such as Hindu succession act and others state that female members will enjoy equal inheritance rights in heirs and property. Above mentioned steps have been taken under the guidance of Ambedkar, it shows that he was very enthusiastic to uplift and empower the women in the society. Despite of these efforts, he faced numerous obstacles in this procession; for example, when Dr. Ambedkar introduced Hindu Code Bill in 1948 which was revolutionary in confinement of proprietary rights to women, but it was not accepted by the parliament. In the response, he resigned from the ministerial post from the cabinet in 1951. It can be said that women got their real emancipator in 20th century. Dr. Ambedkar's heart read for women welfare, he said that "Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women". According to Dr. Ambedkar, the society must be based on objective, and not on vicious traditions of caste system. He found education, inter-caste marriage as methods, which may abolish caste and patriarchy system, maintained through endogamy from the ancient time. His western education and deep understanding of the philosophies helped him to evolve as a visionary; which was developed with clear ideas for the liberation of the depressed people and women in India. He also transforms many of his ideas and dreams into specific policies and institutions during his time as the designer of Indian constitution and as the law minister of India. His acquaintance to the west has influenced his view on feminist issues. It was a time when feminism had been coming to an end with the attainment of franchise rights for women in Britain in 1918, and America in 1920. Ambedkar's opinion for the women and gender question were related about emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and contribution in the political process resembled with the universal feminist demands at that time. It is very well-known fact that Ambedkar used to work for more than 18 hours a day without any trouble. His reading practice helped him to know the progress in feminism in different cultures and countries around the world. Dr. Ambedkar provides an influential source of motivation to formulate a feminist political discourse which instantaneously reports the issues of class, caste and gender in the modern socio-political set up, which still keeps traditional and liberal principles in many respects, mainly on gender relation. He also suggests policies for liberation from exploitation and harassment. He found liberation values in Buddhism, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Dr. Ambedkar believes that Gautam Buddha treated women with great respect and love and never tried to vitiate

them like Manu did. Therefore, he found their liberation through Buddhist values and in Buddhism.

He taught them Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Dr. Ambedkar considers women like *Vishakha*, *Amrapali of Vishali*, *Gautami*, *Rani Mallika*, *Queen of Prasenajith* who approached Buddha for being treated equal like men. It was chiefly the Hindu culture and social customs, which played hurdles in the path of women's empowerment at that time. He was advocated family planning, Maternity Benefit Bill, Hindu Code bill and so on, to raise women issues, women welfare, and women property rights etc. There were instances which have faced strong opposition in parliament by other members but he still remains firm on his vision and issues. He has not limited his thinking on limited arena but he also thought about problems of Muslim women like Parda (Veil) system, religious and legal problems. In short, it can be said that his thoughts were useful for emancipation of all the women of the country and the world. Gaining inspiration from Ambedkar, many women wrote on various topics related to women problems and Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper "Chokhamela". This shows that how Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and successfully inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and *Devdasi* system. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar exclaimed about women led movements in the country and the world. His various statements are reflected Ambedkar's belief and hope on women and their role to make positive changes in the society with their active participation to improve social situation.

Constitutional Provisions and Women Empowerment:

Constitution of India incorporates constitutional provisions to empower citizens of India in general and women in particular like; Article-14, Article-15, Article-15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favor of women. Various articles of the constitution such as 39, 42, 51(a), 47 have commonly and specifically emphasized the need of the women in different perspective like equal means of livelihood and pay, maternity relief, promotion of special care of weaker section in the field of education and economy, nutrition, standard of living and other issues related with women. The representation in Panchayati Raj system has been addressed by Article Article-243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R (4). In this direction, Hindu Code Bill has provided new vision and insight to end various marriage system which were prevailing in India from the past. And it advocates the various rights of women which have been denied earlier.

The Hindu Code Bill incorporates four bills including The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 and The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. These four enactments are incorporated the ideas and principles formulated by Dr Ambedkar. Hence it can be said that these acts were by product of Hindu Code Bill. They give independent status to women and endow them with the right of adoption, succession and property, which has been earlier completely denied by Manu in ancient text. Therefore, it is safe to say that due to the contribution of Ambedkar, a large part of the Hindu social law is now on par with the legal system prevailing in advanced western countries (Ahir, 1990). It could not be denied that only due to Ambedkar's large contribution, Indian law is now able to maintain progressive nature along with the global world.

Application of Ambedkar's Views and its Effect:

Dr. Ambedkar was the First Union Law Minister of India and the Champion of women's Right. There are number of protective laws in India passed by the parliament in the direction and guidance of the constitution of India to prevent women from the exploitation. In order to remove all disparities, dissimilarities and inequalities against women like, The Equal Remuneration act, 1976; The National Commission For Women Act, 1990; The Sati Prevention Act 1987; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; The Family Courts Act, 1984; The Protection Of Human Right Act, 1993; The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956; The Pre- Natal Diagnostic Technique(Regulation And Prevention Of Misuse)Act1994; The Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923etcetera were passed. The newly enacted the Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 provides operational relief to women fronting with domestic violence, abuse and misbehave and prevent them from all kind of dispossession from their share in household. It also restores the physical, social, mental health and dignity of women in the house and family. This is the outcome of the Ambedkar's effort in the context of women situation and miseries. In 1918, Dr. Ambedkar wishes separate electorate and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in proportion to their population; so that, they could adequately represent and raised their interests in political sphere. After long years of the working of the Indian Constitution, the demand of the women of India for political reservation and the lower status of other depressed sections shows that his vision and theory need to be addressed. Recent steps have been taken in this direction like 33 percent reservation has been allotted to women in various

offices. Above mentioned examples not only show the victory of his efforts but also relevancy of his thinking and vision in the upliftment of women.

Women in Present Scenario:

The existed societal frame work was 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 activists are working on issues like environment, health, poverty like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar etc. Sometimes, those who indulge in social reforms were not supported even by women themselves. Today's women are trapped in the circle of insecurity, male domination, lack of awareness about her rights and lack of decision-making powers.

Much is talked about women empowerment today, but it is more related with economic, political and health issues. The issue of social empowerment of women needs to be addressed at first and given utmost importance; then only, it could achieve women empowerment phenomena. Women are at present holding high positions of authority in all fields including, Engineering, Medical, Higher Education, Defense Academy, Police Administration, Politics, Foreign Services, Industry & Trade. There are many more social workers, activists and thinkers, who gave their contribution in the prosperity of India. Recent development and amendment in Article 243 (D) of Indian Constitution will provide women representation in Panchayati Raj. Fifty percent reservation has been reserved to women in Panchayati Raj institution under this article. For improving the tactical ability and skill among women, Government has been launching and working on various types of training designed to sponsor self and wage employment among women in rural society; for example, self-help group, maternity leave, skill development and nutritional schemes etc.

Conclusion:

It may indisputably be mentioned here that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was paved the path of social justice for all the women irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender etc. He brought a movement for the upliftment of women through his thoughts and rational ideas. Not only women, everybody should be grateful to him because of his incredible and endless steps of developmental works.

He also talked about irrespective of caste, religion and race focusing on humanity and rationality. In the present-day context, Ambedkar and his beliefs on society based on quality are yet to be recognized for reforming the Indian society and empowering the life of women.

Through-out his whole life, he fought against all kinds of discrimination against women. But women problem is still overlooked in the Indian society. So, it is our responsibility and duty to maintain the pace of revolution which was started by the Dr. Ambedkar for the betterment of the women. Social justice will not be executed properly if the people will not change their attitudes towards women. Hence, the women and society work hand in hand to have equality in the society. It restores the dignity of women and preserves the historical heritage. The Government of India further must be promoted women strength, contribution and sacrifice for the society and worked for the empowerment of women in the society; so that people would realize the woman's right, importance in real sense. It would be true realization of Ambedkar's views on women empowerment.

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