

**Dr. B R Ambedkar: Pioneer of Indian Women's Empowerment****Narendra Narsing Suryawanshi,**

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Email- [naren.588@rediffmail.com](mailto:naren.588@rediffmail.com)**Abstract**

*Dr Ambedkar, a staunch advocate of freedom, equality and fraternity, has made considerable contributions to the development of society. He was the first Indian to significantly reduce the obstacles to women empowerment in India. His life's mission was to codify the Civil Code of India, which challenged the ideological basis of caste hierarchies that denied women equality, liberty and human dignity in Hindu society. His seminal work, the Indian Constitution, serves as a living testament to the principle of equality by law in India. This paper seeks to draw attention to the views of Dr Ambedkar on the issues faced by women in pre-independent India and its relevance in the current situation. Dr Babasaheb sought to challenge the ideological basis of graded caste hierarchies that denied women equality, liberty and human dignity in Hindu society. However, his life documents serve as living documents, i.e., the Indian Constitution ensures equality through the rule of law. In this context, this paper provides a more in-depth analysis of Dr. Babasheb's ideas in order to demonstrate his ideological basis for the promotion of social, economic and political justice towards the empowerment of women in India. Dr. Babasheb was a symbol of hope for the millions of oppressed and exploited people in India.*

**Keywords:** - Women Empowerment, Hindu Code Bill, Gender Equality.

**I. Introduction**

**D**r. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a noted scholar, a teacher, a lawyer, a parliamentarian, an administrator, a journalist publicist, an agitator leader and devotee (Moon Vasant 1991). Babasaheb acquired a wide range of knowledge in all areas of human activity, which enabled him to form his own independent ideology as a social scientist. He believed that social development and social stability are dependent on equity. He believed that caste, inequality and superiority are not equal, and that is what he stood for (Sampath Kamar M., 2015). Literature survey shows that since ancient times, women in our country were not treated well, their social position was never equal with men, and they were not even given the basic rights. Women were treated like animals and were put to the lowest level of humanity (Mohammad S.Azaal- 2013). Babasaheb fought tirelessly for women's economic freedom and for securing women's social rights. He stressed the importance of

preserving the dignity and respect for the modesty of women folk.

He conducted extensive research on the Hindu Shastras and the Smritis in order to identify the reasons behind the degradation of women's status in India (Godbole-2015). He began his movement in 1920 by raising the voice against the social order and the social system of the Hindu society through the well-known journal 'Mook Nayak' in 1920 and 'Bahishkrit Bharat' in 1927. The main topics of his journal were gender equality, education for women and the problems of women and the depressed class. He strongly defended the rights of women in the matter of family planning in the Bombay Legislative Assembly (Satyajit Das-2015). He also supported equal opportunities and equal share for women with their male counterparts in the Indian society (Godbole-2015).

In addition to being the father of the Constitution of India, Dr. Ambedkar is also known as a freedom fighter, a political leader, a philosopher, a thinker, an economist, an editor, a social reformer, a revivalist of Buddhism, and the first Indian to break

down the barriers of women's advancement in India. Ambedkar secured the highest academic honours from some of the world's most prestigious universities. Ambedkar led the society on a path of liberty, equality and fraternal brotherhood. He laid the foundation for concrete and sincere efforts through the codification of the common civil code for Hindus and other segments of Indian society. Ambedkar believed that women should receive all round development more than social education, social well-being and social-cultural rights.

Ambedkar stressed that all sections of Indian women should receive their due share, and that it is essential to uphold and safeguard the dignity and modesty of these women (Bharati, T 1992). He was a strong advocate of movements led by women, and asserted that if women from all backgrounds are taken into consideration, they may be able to play a vital role in social reforms. He asserted that women have played a significant and active role in eliminating social injustices. He further asserted that married women must participate in their husband's activities as a friend, but must also have the courage to reject the life of slaves and uphold the principle of equal treatment. If all women adhere to this principle, they will gain the respect and autonomy of their own (Gunjal, 2012).

## II. Objectives and Research Methodology

This paper seeks to elucidate Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's perspective on the issues faced by women in India prior to and during independence, and to assess the relevance of his ideas in the current political and social context of India. The primary objective of this historical investigation is to assess the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in women's empowerment. The required secondary data of the study include information from the internet, government documents, newspapers, publications, books, speeches delivered in Parliament, conferences and meetings held in pre- and post-independence India.

## III. Discussion

Ambedkar's stance on the empowerment of women was distinct from that of other social reformers. Their aim was to reform Hindu society of archaic habits and practices without challenging the hierarchical social structure. He argued that society should be founded on rational considerations, rather

than the archaic tradition of caste system, in order to bring Hindu society into line with modern democratic values of freedom, equality and fraternity (Barnaval 2014). Ambedkar challenged the ideological foundations of the caste hierarchy, which denied women equality, liberty and human dignity in Hindu society (Godbole 2015). In his essay, "The Annihilation of the Caste System", Ambedkar proposed that the Hindu mind should be liberated from the thralldom of the Shastras.

In 1927, Dr Babasaheb, after being appointed as a member of the "Bombay Legislative Council", expressed his strong support for women's organizations and their efforts to improve the society, particularly in his *Satyagrahas* movement of 1920, when women actively participated and began to voice their concerns on various platforms regarding untouchability (More V. 2011). He also supported the establishment of women's associations to promote education and awareness, and argued that it was in the nation's interest for mothers to receive a certain amount of rest throughout the pre-natal and post-natal period, and that the bill was based on this principle (Kavita Kait 2013). 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. Ambedkar's word during his study at New York).

In order to promote a critique of the Hindu social order, Ambedkar began with the publication of a journal in 1920, "Mook Nayak", and a newspaper in 1927, "Bahiskrit Bharat". In these journals, he highlighted the importance of gender equality, the need for education, and the difficulties of both men and women with mental health issues. Ambedkar's perspective of women was one of inquiry, emphasizing their rights to education, equality with men, the right to property, and participation in the political process, in line with the demands of global feminists. According to J.S. Mill, the legal subjugation of one gender to the other is inherently wrong and constitutes a major obstacle to human progress; it should be replaced by a concept of perfect equality, which does not include any privilege or power on one side or disability on the other. Ambedkar also shares the same views on the work for women (More 2011).

Dr Ambedkar's wife Ramabai Ambedkar founded a women's association in Mumbai in January 1928, with him as its President. In 1930, she held a Kalram Temple Entry Satyagraha at Nasik, which saw five hundred women participate, despite the fact that many of them had been arrested alongside men and mistreated in prison. Her encouragement of women to speak up was reflected in her press conference speech in 1931, in which she stated that it was better to die than to live a life of humiliation. She further asserted that she would sacrifice her life, but that her determination and self-respect would ultimately lead to the attainment of her rights. Dr. Ambedkar is responsible for this self-respect and strong resolve of women. Dr. Ambedkar had faith in the power of women and their contribution to the process of social reforms. The historic 'Mahad satyagraha' saw the participation of 300 women along with their men. He said in another meeting of 3000 women, "I judge the progress of society by the progress of women. Let every woman who gets married stand by her husband and claim to be his friend and equal and refuse to become his slave. If you take this advice, I am sure you will bring honor and glory to yourself." He strongly supported family planning for women in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. He introduced the Maternity Benefit Bill in the Indian House of Assembly in 1942, when he was the Labour Minister of the Executive Council of the Governor General.

Dr. Ambedkar proposed several provisions in the Constitution to safeguard the social and individual rights of women. In Parliament, he proposed the Hindu Code Bill, which raised concerns about women's property rights. This bill was met with strong resistance from political leaders, leading to Dr Ambedkar's resignation from the cabinet due to his dissatisfaction with the Parliament's lack of acceptance of women's rights. Additionally, he raised issues related to the rights of Muslim women. While his secular outlook is evident in his opinions on the "Hijab" system, religious conversions, and the legal rights of Muslim women, his views on the emancipation of all women are equally passionate. Ambedkar's main focus was on rebuilding the Hindu society based on equality rather than social reforms initiated by Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj because their efforts were limited to the upper castes. His in-

depth analysis of Smritis and Shashtras as well as his experience of upper castes reaction during temple entry movement led him to his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society. Many women writers were inspired by Ambedkar and wrote about various topics. Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper called 'Chokhamela.' This demonstrates how Ambedkar raised awareness among poor illiterate women and motivated them to fight against unjust and social practices such as child marriage and Devdasis system. "I firmly believe in movements led by women," said Ambedkar. "If they are taken into confidence, they can change the current state of society which is extremely unhappy. Historically, women have played an important role in improving the situation of weaker sections and classes.

Babasaheb always gave credit to women for their hard work and difficulties. When addressing women in conferences, he was able to speak to them as a homemaker and as a conversationalist. He spoke to women as follows: "Do not wear clothes that will demean our character. Do not wear jewellery all over your body. Do not put a hole in your nose and wear a 'nath'." In these words, he denounced all the evil traditions, habits, and ways of living that make life difficult and complicated. To the surprise of women, even illiterate women, followed his advice with all their heart. Babasheb devoted his life to the cause of women, even those involved in bad practices and professionals such as prostitution. One of the most famous examples of this was at a brothel in Kamatipura, where a person named David was a mediator. He quit his job because he was inspired by the ideas and teachings of Ambedkar, so he asked all the prostitutes to quit their jobs and live a life of honor. Manu's Smriti was really harsh on women, saying that they should be treated like slaves and not have any intelligence. He also said that they shouldn't have education or property, and they shouldn't be allowed to make sacrifices. Dr Ambedkar, who was India's first Law Minister and chairman of the drafting committee, saw it as his responsibility to help women break away from the old ways of life by reforming Hindu social laws that Manu had created. So he took the initiative and introduced the Hindu code bill in the Assembly. Dr Ambedkar attempted to incorporate the rights of women into India's political

discourse and Constitution through the implementation of various constitutional provisions.

Article 14 provides for equal rights and opportunities in politics, economics and social life. Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on sex. Article 15(3) allows for affirmative discrimination against women. Article 39 provides for equal means of living and equal pay for work. Article 42 provides for human conditions of work. Article 51(A) and (C) require fundamental obligations to renounce practices that are derogatory to women's dignity. Article 46 provides for the promotion with special care, education and economic interests of the weaker sections of society and to protect them against social injustice and exploitation. Article 47 provides for the state to improve the standard of living and public health of its people. Article 243D(3), 243T(3) and 243R(4) provide for the allocation of seats within the Panchayati Raj system.

In India, the Hindu Code Bill was one of the most significant legislative initiatives of modern times. It sought to eliminate a range of marriage systems and legalize monogamous marriages, as well as granting women the right to property and adoption, which had previously been denied to women. This legislation established equal rights for men and women. Dr Ambedkar stated that, "I would like to draw the attention of this House to an important fact. Burke, the great political philosopher, stated in his great book *Against the French Revolution* that those who are willing to conserve must also be willing to repair." This Bill asks that those who wish to preserve the Hindu system and Hindu culture, repair any areas that have become damaged.

He stated in his letter of resignation to the Prime Minister on 27 September 1951 that he had been considering resigning from his seat in the Cabinet for some time. The only obstacle to his decision was the belief that the Hindu Code Bill could be passed before the end of the current Parliament's term. He had even agreed to divide the bill into two parts, Marriage and Divorce, in the hope that at least some of his efforts would be successful. However, this part of the bill was eventually killed. He concluded that he saw no reason to continue in the Cabinet.

Following the Hindu Code Bill, it was later divided into four Bills, which were also included in

the Statue Book of India by Parliament. These are the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Succession Law 1956, the Hindu Minority And Guardianship Act 1956 and the Hindu Adoption And Maintenance Act 1956. These four enactments incorporate the concepts and principles of the Hindu Code Bill as formulated by Dr. Ambedkar. They grant women independent status and empower them to adopt, inherit and dispose of property, which Manu had totally rejected. So, it is true to say that a large portion of Hindu social law today is in line with the legal order prevailing in developed western countries. (Ahir, D.C. 1990)

In addition to establishing constitutional safeguards for women, Ambedkar introduced and passed four Acts that enhanced the status of women in society. These were integrated into 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. Dr. Ambedkar's contributions to the field of women's rights and emancipation are evident when examining the provisions of these Acts. The most prominent of these is the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which was revised in 1976 to include additional 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

#### IV. Conclusions

On the occasion of Ambedkar's death in Parliament, the Prime Minister of India expressed his condolences to the bereaved family. He noted that Ambedkar had been a symbol of resistance against the oppressive nature of Hindu society, and that his dream of a society based on equality between men and women had yet to be achieved. His ideas are of great importance for the purpose of social reconstruction that promotes the empowerment of women. Dr Ambedkar expressed his opinion on the current state of women's lives, asserting that they should be treated equitably and given equal status. He

was also instrumental in the passage of the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament, urging all parliamentary members to support the bill despite the fact that he had to resign. His teachings and ideas remain beneficial not only to women, but to all Indians today.

Babasaheb expressed his sentiments and respect for women in his final address in Indian Parliament. He quoted the renowned words of Daniel O Connal, an Irish Patriot, to the effect that "no man can be grateful for his honor, no woman for her chastity, and no nation for its freedom." In his renowned book, "Pakistan and the partition of India", he expressed his views on Muslim women, their religious practices, the wearing of veils, and their marriages. Muslim women were subject to various forms of oppression due to their religious practices. Babasaheb's humanitarianism extended to all women, regardless of their religion, caste, and class. He frequently spoke out against various forms of injustice against women.

Ambedkar was a pioneer in the field of women's empowerment, regardless of their religious, caste, creed or gender. His ideas and beliefs brought about a new trend for women's rebellion. All Indians should be proud of the immense and lasting strides Dr. Ambedkar has taken to empower women in India. He also discussed the issue of Muslim women wearing veils, their religious customs and marriages, and fought against all forms of discrimination against women. Despite this, discrimination against women in India is still overlooked (Arya, Sudha, 2000). Therefore, it is the responsibility of every Indian to live up to Ambedkar's dreams and strive for a better life for women. It is also important to note that the concept of 'social justice' will not be effective if people are not able to modify their attitudes towards women, the SCs, STs and other weaker section of the society.

In the present day, Indian women have made considerable progress in various aspects of their lives, yet they still suffer from a range of social ills, such as dowry, sexual harassment, and rape. It is undeniable that Indian women have made progress in the development of their society and are now treated equally to their male counterparts. However, the Indian people have yet to recognize that women should be given the same rights and opportunities as

men in order to create a vibrant society in which women can live without discrimination, regardless of their religious beliefs, caste, religion, creed, or gender.

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