

Women Empowerment in Dr B R Ambedkar's Insight

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Abstract

Indian women in ancient era enjoyed a very respectful position but gradually their position degenerated with certain selfish purposes of society. The women lost their identity and even basic human rights. Empowerment is a multi faceted, multi dimensional and multi layered concept. Dr Ambedkar considered the operation of caste, both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy as wrong practices. He studied and put up his views on the growing caste/class divide, domination on women, social democracy. All these issues took up by him which were become significant to modern Indian feminist thinking. The current social realities permit close examination of the wide range of his topics, the width of his vision, the depth of his analysis, and the consistency of his viewpoint and the essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action. For the Indian Women's Movement, Dr. Ambedkar provides a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist agenda which simultaneously addresses the issues based on class, caste and gender. Here in this paper, Dr Ambedkar's view related to women empowerment is discussed based on available literature.

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Dr Ambedkar proved to be a genius and was known as a great thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, jurist-par excellence, creative writer, social activist and reviewer in the Indian socio-political scene throughout his life. The Writings and Speeches of Ambedkar show what values India should develop and how they would modernize its social and political institutions. His work is enormous and exhaustive but here I try to attempt only a profile of his perception on women's status and their rights. Ambedkar saw women as the victims of the unfair, caste-based and rigid hierarchical social system. He believed that socio-cultural forces artificially construct gender relations, which conditions women to conform a stereotype feminine behaviour, requiring them to be passive and submissive, suited only to a life of domestic and family responsibilities.

Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of their families), and, if they attach themselves to sexual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. Nothing must be done independently by a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, even in her own house.

Ambedkar cites evidences of higher status of women in the pre-Manu days. She was free and equal partner of man and had the right to education, divorce, remarriage and economic freedom. The story of public disputation between Janaka and Sulabha, Yajnavalkya and Maitrei, Yajnavalkya and Gargi, and Sankaracharya and Vidyadhari show that Indian women in the pre-Manu period could rise to the highest height of learning and education. It is generally believed that Dr. Ambedkar had completed the books entitled *The Riddles of Hinduism*, *The Buddha and Karl Marx*, and *Revolution and Counter Revolution*. All carry chapters on women entitled *Elevation of Women and Degradation of Women* which expose how Chaturvarna prioritised “birth” instead of “worth,” degraded women and is unable to explain the status and position of women.

He also suggests strategies for liberation from oppression. Dr. Ambedkar found their liberation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believes that Buddha treated women with respect and love, and never tried to degrade them. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Ambedkar cites women like Vishakha, Amrapali of Visali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, queen of Prasenajith who approached Buddha, as evidences of Buddha’s treatment of women as equals.

Like Ambedkar, The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, also admits, “The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure... and practices. Consequently, the access of women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/ Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities ... to education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded”.

In Maharashtra the renowned social reformer Jyotirao Phule, the founder of Satya Shodhak Samaj, started a school for untouchables as early as 1848. He started a school for girls in Pune. Sayajirao Gaikwad, the ruler of Baroda, also worked towards the abolition of untouchability and started educational institutions for untouchables in the second half of the 19th century. Women’s education was given ample stress in these schools. The main inspiration to raise the women question in India during this period was from the ‘First wave feminism’, which was characterized by the demand that women should enjoy the same legal and political rights as men. Its expression can be traced in many feminist works. Dr

Ambedkar argued that since women also are rational beings, they should be educated equally; they should be enabled to live independently, if they wish, rather than being enforced

by economic necessity to become the property of man through marriage. Justification of the rights of Women claimed that women also are entitled to enjoy the same rights – right to education, employment, property and protection of civil law- as men do. She also presented the domestic sphere as a model of community and social order. Women empowerment movement waves reached India to form a new social awakening very late rather than foreign countries. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born at Mhow, in the erstwhile Central Province of British India on 14th April 1891. He said: “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved” .Women were put to the lowest rung of humanity as she was treated at par with the animals and slave. Such was the placement earmarked to our mothers, sisters and even great grandmothers that humanity was ashamed of. That is why Dr. Ambedkar, the father and architect of Indian constitution, was of the firm opinion that until and unless, we defy the Hindu dharma-Shastras, nothing much can be changed. In the name of sanskars, the Hindu women are tied to bondages of superstitions, which they carry till their death. They are also responsible for inculcating certain wrong notions learnt through baseless tradition, in the budding minds of their offspring.

Ambedkar made some memorable SPEECHES IN THE Round table conference. He placed the view of the depressed classes and pleaded for domination status. His speeches created a good impression upon the british public. He participated in a number of important sub- committees and prepared scheme of political safeguards for the protection of depressed classes in the future constitution of a self governing India. Ambedkar was elected to the constituent Assembly of India by the members of west Bengal Legislative Assembly though he was defeated in Bombay. He was elected on the Drafting committee and later appointed its chairman. He said, “My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize, have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle to me is a matter of joy. You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman.”

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