



THE INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR IN THE LIFE OF WOMEN : A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Dr. Ambedkar's view on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian Feminist thinking.

The purpose of this study is to review the role of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, in the life of women. 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 rights. Many social reformer had to fight for the rights of women, but they were able to provide them social status in some extent. It was Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, who fought for the upliftment of women, and made them aware about the importance of education and their fundamental rights. Because he knew that, education can play important role in the life of women. And until women get education, she will be unable to get proper place in society.

It was Manu, who propagated superstitions and wrong notions about women in his "Manusmriti". Dr. Ambedkar opposed this lower Hindu social system, and burnt "Manusmriti", in the presence of 3,000 women. As a chairman of drafting committee, Baba Saheb made lot of provisions for the rights of women, and introduced Hindu Code Bill, in the parliament, where long discussions were made over the women issues and Babasaheb had to face strong opposition of conservative upper caste people, Congress Party and Gandhiji. But he never bowed to them, and has been convincing them with his profound knowledge, and succeeded in his goal. Ambedkar paved the way for Indian Women to legally vote, divorce, and own property. He was indeed a feminist.

Key words: - *Manusmriti, upliftment, Hindu Code Bill.*

INTRODUCTION :

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved"

– Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar made this statement in a gathering of over 3,000 women in 1927. Naturally this comes to our mind that, why Baba Saheb quotes like this "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved", because he knew that, until women get proper place in our society, until she gets the right of education, until she gets the right of equality, until she gets the freedom of choice regarding her future husband or male companion, until she gets the right of remarriage after being widow, and she must have the right of marrying in a right age, not in a childhood, when she herself is child, and she must have the right of reproduction.

No one should compel her about reproduction, because she is also a human being, not a birth-giving machine. In our society we see that, from the early child hood she is married to an unknown person, who generally a full grown man and that man without considering the small age of that girl child, he claims on her body as a husband, and for sexual pleasure crushes her. And she is compelled to be pregnant again and again in her teen age just only for male child, where as her body is not ready or develop to have physical relation with man and give birth a child.

Today, we find the condition of women is all right, but few decades ago the position of women were not like that, lot of great personality of India, had to do hard work for reforming the condition of women, in which, we can take some name like:- Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar

Chandra Vidyasagar, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Sarojini Naidu and so on. But we forget to take the name of Bharat Ratna, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, we think that, he is only the father of Indian Constitution, he is only Law maker or first Law Minister of India and fought for only the rights of Dalits, we know only that things. We do not give him ample credit for his great work, which he did for the upliftment of Indian women.

But few decades ago, our society was not like that, the condition of women were very bad, because we lived in a male dominated conservative society, where women had to endure lot of things, on the name of sanskaras, tradition and on the name of family honour. She used to keep in Ghonghat and Pardha, whereas men had no restrictions. Women faced terrific problems since vedic period due to superstitions and misguided rituals. The women have been victimized through different ways, like child-marriage, Sati Pratha, Parda Pratha, restriction to widow remarriage, widow's exploitation, jogini and Devdasi system etc. where women were sexually exploited by the upper class people of society. So, incidentally taking birth as woman had been treated as a curse for the woman.

Whenever women tried to cross her limits, or raised her voice for her fundamental rights, she has been more brutally trampled under foot. So, for the upliftment of women, lot of great persons had to make constant effort for changing the women's condition, and they had been made target by upper class conservative people time to time. But even though, our great social reformer never bowed to them and keep going fighting with such types of negative people. And Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, was one of them, who observed and experienced very closely all cruelties with women from his early childhood, so when he grew young, he knew that, only education can be used as a weapon, for fighting against conservative society, where

lot of wrong things prevailed very deeply in our society. He knew the importance of education, so after learning all the niceties of law, he fought for the rights of women and made such provisions in constitution of India, so that, women must be treated equally in the society.

The provision of equality to women made for all streams whether it is education, employment, social and economic rights. It is only due to Dr. Ambedkar that today women feel self-confident and self-dependent. The implementation of many articles of constitution and laws brought self-confidence, individuality, self-respect and overall empowerment for women the empowered women have proved themselves better than men in all fields be it education, entrepreneurship, medical field, engineering field and defense etc. The old ill trusted traditions, which was prevailed deeply in our society, disappeared to a large extent gradually from the society only due to the hard efforts put by Dr. Ambedkar. However, due to absence of strong judicial and administrative system and ignorance of laws, women become victimized by various social evils such as child bearing in early age, family care roles, deep rooted cultural norms etc. and become target of discrimination, exploitation and domestic violence. Women empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices.

"I strongly believe in the movements run by women. If they are truly taken in to confidence, they may change the present picture of society which is very miserable. In past, they have played a significant role in improving the condition of weaker section and classes".

At a time when women's issues were considered unimportant and secondary, newspapers started by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Mooknayak and Bahishkrit Bharat predominately used to cover issues related to women. Not many are aware of Babasaheb's unequivocal determination to work

for women's empowerment apart from annihilating caste.

Apart from the numerous speeches which drive home his basic belief in the equality of women, Ambedkar's theorisation of the interlinked nature of caste and gender-based oppression in India was a pioneering feat. His now oft-quoted 1917 paper called Castes in India shows how in the Indian context, the specific ways in which women and their sexuality are controlled, all hinge on the maintenance of the caste system.



Ambedkar also believed that Women have the right over their own body. He argued for reproductive rights for women, recommended that birth control facilities be made available to them, and was a strong advocate of women's reproductive freedom.

“Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar believed that society should be based on reason and not on dreadful tradition of caste system. His aim was to challenge the sociopolitical foundations of hierarchal caste system that denied liberty, equality, and human poise to women in Hindu Society. He suggested in “The Annihilation of Caste System”, that Hindu mind should be expunged from thralldom of the shastras”.

Babasaheb as the chairman of Drafting Committee :

As the chairman of the drafting committee, he realizes the wretched condition of women, so on March 19 & 20, 1927 he addressed an enormous assembly of underprivileged classes, including women, and appealed for freedom and self-esteem of women with advise that education is essential for development of mind and the essence of self-help because he believed that a

“family is educated only when the men along with women in the family are educated’.

Dr. Ambedkar's treatise “Women and Counter Revolution” and “The Riddle of Women”, describes the way in which Manu treated women. He explicitly pointed out that the laws of Manu on the position of women are very vital in molding the Hindu outlook and perception towards women, propagated and upheld through Hindu Personal Laws based on caste, endogamy and shastras. He tried to demonstrate as to how the gender relationship and variances are fabricated by Hindu Brahmanical order, which conditions women to imitate a stereotype feminine behavior, wanting them to be submissive and docile, suitable only to a life of domestic and household accountabilities.

“Ambedkar details Manu's low opinion of women, specifically highlighting his commentary on the inherent seductions by women of men leading to deviance and disloyalty as necessitating control. To the frequent elucidation of Manu's injunction....Ambedkar posits the...picture of a misogynist, whose law of divorce neither curbed a man from giving up his wife nor pre-empted him from abandoning and or selling her...” (143).

Dr. Ambedkar condemned Manusmriti on the grounds that it legitimizes the renunciation of right to property and education, liberty and self-esteem to women by attaching a very condescending ideal to them. He also organized the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, which was for temple entry, more than 50 women were there and it was decided to burn the Manusmriti on 25th December, 1927, as a symbol of rejection of the religious basis of untouchability, which demeaned women and shudras. Delivering a sermon in a meeting of about three thousand women, Dr. Babasaheb said, “I measure the progress of Community by the degree of progress which women had achieved. 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 yourselves". Dr. Babasaheb wanted to bring equality in the Hindu society. He wanted to initiate the reforms for the lower sections of the society.

At the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1940. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that there could not be any progress without women. He spoke "I am a great believer in women's organization, I know that, what they can do to improve the condition of the society, if they are convinced. They should educate their children and instill high ambition in them".

Ambedkar's memorable speech in the Round Table Conference :

Ambedkar made some memorable speeches in the Round Table Conference. He placed the view point of the depressed classes and pleaded for Dominion Status. His speeches created a good impression upon the British public. He served on a number of important sub-committees and prepared scheme of political safeguards for the protections of depressed classes in the future constitution of a self-governing India. Ambedkar also advocated the immediate introduction of adult franchise.

Dr. Babasaheb encouraged women and addressed them to participate in struggle against caste prejudices. "During the Chavdar Tale Satyagraha 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 July 20, 1942, he told women to be liberal and eradicate conventionalism, ritualism and accustomed habits, which were injurious to their development'.

Constitutional Provisions:- Ambedkar was a protagonist of the idea of social justice as an incontrovertible part of the constitutional

democratic framework in India. The Indian Constitution, in its expedition for a democratic and uniform social order bereft of a caste system, not only accomplishes to restructure the hitherto prevalent caste-ridden stratified social order but also the right to equality and self-esteem to the ill-fated sufferers of the caste system.

Ambedkar fought for the women's rights throughout his life. He not only provided them the equal rights but also introduced the four Acts, which strengthened the position of women in the society. These were amalgamated in the Hindu Code Bill 13.

The bill was divided into four independent Acts:

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:- made monogamy as universal, had raised the marriageable age for girls to 18 and boys to 21 years. It had also permitted divorce on certain specific grounds. Equal rights were provided to both men and women in respect to marriage and divorce and maintenance in some cases.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956:- Under this act previously, the widow doesn't have the right to adopt a son or a daughter but with this act she was given this right. She was also been given the opportunity to be independent and dispose her property by will as she desires (Section 14). Moreover a uniform scheme of succession to the property of a Hindu female, who dies, intestate after initiation of this Act as stated under Section 15. Which gave them the legal right to inherit family property.

The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 :- This Act permitted any female Hindu who is of sound mind and is neither a minor nor maimed or if maimed whose marriage has been dissolved or whose husband is dead or has absolutely abandoned the world or has ceased to be Hindu or has been declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be of unsound mind, to take a son or daughter in adoption. The consent of mother and father is essential for

giving the child in adoption unless otherwise. This Act allowed women to legally adopt a child.

The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 :- This act provides that the mother is authorized to change the guardian, appointed by the father and may appoint a new guardian by will. The father's right to employ a guardian for the minor by will during the life time of the minor's mother is prohibited under this Act. Which allowed a woman to be the natural guardian of her child.

"The Hindu Code was the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu society, untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attached to the Hindu Code. It is for its sake that I stayed on, notwithstanding my differences". (241)

But when discussion on the Bill was delayed repeatedly, and then finally the Bill was dropped because of lack of time for its discussion, Ambedkar handed in his resignation because he had "to be true to himself". In fact, in his resignation speech, Ambedkar says that while he was uncomfortable with the workings of the Cabinet and the government for some time, he never resigned earlier because he wanted the Hindu Code Bill to become law.

In this way, he recognized the equal status of women and that he worked towards securing it legally at a time when barely anyone else was beyond question. But whether retrospectively labeling him as a feminist is necessary or sensible is a different question altogether.

CONCLUSION :

Thus we can say that, 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 rights. They have lost all their rights, and brutally exploited and humiliated by upper caste male dominant conservative people. And for the upliftment of women, many great personalities of India had to do hard work for providing them basic human rights like :- Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule , Krantijyoti Savitiribai Phule, Perriyar and the Bharat Ratna, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, whose incredible contribution is generally forgot by we Indians, whereas Babasaheb was the person who strongly fought for the upliftment of women, by keeping all the provisions for safety and rights of women in the constitution.

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