

TOPIC: DR.AMBEDKAR AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

LANGAUAGE: ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION:

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in Mhow (presently in Madhya Pradesh). He was the fourteenth child of Ramji and Bhimabai Sakpal Ambavedkar. B.R. Ambedkar belonged to the "untouchable" Mahar Caste. His father and grandfather served in the British Army. In those days, the government ensured that all the army personnel and their children were educated and ran special schools for this purpose. This ensured good education for Bhimrao Ambedkar, which would have otherwise been denied to him by the virtue of his caste. Bhimrao Ambedkar experienced caste discrimination right from the childhood. After his retirement, Bhimrao's father settled in Satara Maharashtra. Bhimrao was enrolled in the local school. Here, he had to sit on the floor in one corner in the classroom and teachers would not touch his notebooks. In spite of these hardships, Bhimrao continued his studies and passed his Matriculation examination from Bombay University with flying colours in 1908.

Bhim Rao Ambedkar joined the Elphinstone College for further education. In 1912, he graduated in Political Science and Economics from Bombay University and got a job in Baroda. In 1913, Bhimrao Ambedkar lost his father. In the same year Maharaja of Baroda awarded scholarship to Bhim Rao Ambedkar and sent him to America for further studies. Bhimrao reached New York in July 1913. For the first time in his life, Bhim Rao was not demeaned for being a Mahar. He immersed himself in the studies and attained a degree in Master of Arts and a Doctorate in Philosophy from Columbia University in 1916 for his thesis "National Dividend for India: A Historical and Analytical Study." From America, Dr. Ambedkar proceeded to London to study economics and political science.

But the Baroda government terminated his scholarship and recalled him back. The Maharaja of Baroda appointed Dr. Ambedkar as his political secretary. But no one would take orders from him because he was a Mahar. Bhimrao Ambedkar returned to Bombay in November 1917. With the help of Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, a sympathizer of the cause for the upliftment of the depressed classes, he started a fortnightly newspaper, the "Mooknayak" (Dumb Hero) on January 31, 1920. The Maharaja also convened many meetings and conferences of the "untouchables" which Bhimrao addressed. In September 1920, after accumulating sufficient funds, Ambedkar went back to London to complete his studies. He became a barrister and got a Doctorate in science. After completing his studies in London, Ambedkar returned to India.

In July 1924, he founded the Bahishkrit Hitkaraini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association). The aim of the Sabha was to uplift the downtrodden socially and politically and bring them to the level of the others in the Indian society. In 1927, he led the Mahad March at the Chowdar Tank at Colaba, near Bombay, to give the untouchables the right to draw water from the public tank where he burnt copies of the 'Manusmriti' publicly.

In 1929, Ambedkar made the controversial decision to co-operate with the all-British Simon Commission which was to look into setting up a responsible Indian Government in India. The Congress decided to boycott the Commission and drafted its own version of a constitution for free India. The Congress version had no provisions for the depressed classes.

Ambedkar became more skeptical of the Congress's commitment to safeguard the rights of the depressed classes. When a separate electorate was announced for the depressed classes under Ramsay MacDonald 'Communal Award', Gandhiji went on a fast unto death against this decision. Leaders rushed to Dr. Ambedkar to drop his demand. On September 24, 1932, Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji reached an understanding, which became the famous Poona Pact. According to the pact the separate electorate demand was replaced with special concessions like reserved seats in the regional legislative assemblies and Central Council of States. Dr. Ambedkar attended all the three Round Table Conferences in London and forcefully argued for the welfare of the "untouchables". Meanwhile, British Government decided to hold provincial elections in 1937.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar set up the "Independent Labor Party" in August 1936 to contest the elections in the Bombay province. He and many candidates of his party were elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly. In 1937, Dr. Ambedkar introduced a Bill to abolish the "khoti" system of land tenure in the Konkan region, the serfdom of agricultural tenants and the Mahar "watan" system of working for the Government as slaves. A clause of an agrarian bill referred to the depressed classes as "Harijans," or people of God. Bhimrao was strongly opposed to this title for the untouchables. He argued that if the "untouchables" were people of God then all others would be people of monsters. He was against any such reference. But the Indian National Congress succeeded in introducing the term Harijan. Ambedkar felt bitter that they could not have any say in what they were called. In 1947, when India became independent, the first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, invited Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who had been elected as a Member of the Constituent Assembly from Bengal, to join his Cabinet as a Law Minister.

The Constituent Assembly entrusted the job of drafting the Constitution to a committee and Dr. Ambedkar was elected as Chairman of this Drafting Committee. In February 1948, Dr. Ambedkar presented the Draft Constitution before the people of India; it was adopted on November 26, 1949. In October 1948, Dr. Ambedkar submitted the Hindu Code Bill to the Constituent Assembly in an attempt to codify the Hindu law. The Bill caused great divisions even in the Congress party. Consideration for the bill was postponed to September 1951. When the Bill was taken up it was truncated. A dejected Ambedkar relinquished his position as Law Minister. On May 24, 1956, on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti, he declared in Bombay, that he would adopt Buddhism in October. On October 14, 1956 he embraced Buddhism along with many of his followers. On December 6, 1956, Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar died peacefully in his sleep.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

Considering sacrifices, sufferings & contribution of women for the welfare of the family, in the early times of human history, the families were Matriarchal (mother as head of the family). Although woman was not weaker than man, during menstruation, pregnancy & child birth she had to depend upon man., who subsequently enslaved her and society took the form of "Patriarchal" (Father as Ruler & Head of family). Still woman continued to enjoy authority & respect in the family. This continued in the Vedic Period, and women continued enjoying equal rights as men with liberty to choose their husbands in open "Sayambars" The respect enjoyed by woman of that time could be gauged from the verse "Yater Nariasye Pujante, Ramte Tater Devita (God reside at places where women are worshiped)" No religious ceremony by man was complete without participation of his wife and Rama had to get statue of Sita made to carry on with ceremonies for Ashawmegh Yagna. But process of down grading & enslaving woman had set in. *Rishi* (Hermit)Gotama's wife Ahalya's chastity was outraged by "Moon, Indra and August Rishi" by deceit. Gotama instead of getting punishing or at least protesting the action against wrong doers, he cursed his wife by get her converted to a stone for long time. This shows that even enlightened persons showed little concerns for the females.

Enslaving of women started in the later Vedic period, when Hindu Law Givers like Manu although, he too was born out of a mother (woman) , codified in his book **Manu Smiriti** as " It is the very nature of woman to corrupt men Verse 2(213) ; woman has no right to acquire property Verse 8 (416) ; Rules like serving husbands faithfully even, if he is devoid of any good qualities verse 154 (5); a girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her own house. Verse 147 (5). A widow should be long suffering, until death, self restrained, and chaste(Abstain re marring) verse 158 (5)" She should obey her husband while he is alive and not violate her vow to him when he is dead 151(5) **Shankara charya of Kerela** (9th Century AD) proclaimed "A woman is a sure gate of hell & she is poison in the disguise of nectar". In India so called Golden rule Of Gupta dynasty kings proved worst period for women, when Brahminical Rules & dogmas ,codified against women were got strictly enforced . The system started for keeping unmarried girls/ women in temples "Dev- Dassies" for the service including sexual abuse by the priest in the name of God . Polygamy, Child marriage, illiteracy for women and discrimination on Sex, besides caste creed became order of the day.

In **Ramchariter Manas** Goswami Tulsi Das Says in Arandkand salok 9 " No body can be as vile as a woman ,who for a moment's enjoyment, does not understand the pains of hundreds of births " In Saloka 5 he further says " A woman is impure from her birth". In Balkanda (sloka 57-A) Tulsi writes that a woman is silly and stupid by nature. Even Muslim religion advocates strict rules for women to remain in Parda (veil).

RISE OF DR.AMBEDKAR:

With the rise of Polar Star from tatters in Marashtra , named Dr BR Ambedkar(1891-1956) women got their real emancipator .The Manusmriti was burnt in full public view by Dr Ambedkar on 25th December 1927, thus he blew bugle of fight against discrimination and exploitation on the basis of one's caste, creed , sex or place of birth. His principle of life was to speak, work & fight for the just cause of oppressed, depressed, exploited, illiterates, ill fed & ill treated men & women irrespective of their caste or social status, place of birth affiliations and without caring for his personnel life discomforts

The operation of caste both at the systemic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste/class divide in feminist political discourses makes Ambedkar's views on women's oppression, social democracy, caste and Hindu social order and philosophy, significant to modern Indian feminist thinking. Although Ambedkar proved, himself to be a genius and was known as a great thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, jurist-par excellence, prolific writer, social activist and critic and strode like a colossus in the Indian sociopolitical scene unto his death, his thoughts never received adequate attention in the generality of Indian society just because he was born as an untouchable. However, the contemporary social realities warrant close examination of the wide range of his topics, the width of his vision, the depth of his analysis, and the rationality of his outlook and the essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action.

Hence, for Indian women's movement Ambedkar provides a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist political agenda which simultaneously addresses the issues of class, caste and gender in the contemporary socio- political set up, which still keeps conservative and reactionary values in many respects, particularly on gender relations. The Writings and Speeches of Ambedkar show what values India should develop and how they would modernize its social and political institutions. Here I do not intend to provide a comprehensive review of all his works on various areas, because of the voluminous nature of his work; but try to attempt only a profile of his perception on women's status and their rights. The Government of Maharashtra and Government of India have brought volumes of his published and unpublished works during the occasion of Ambedkar centenary celebrations. His works have been published in various regional languages also.

Ambedkar saw women as the victims of the oppressive, caste-based and rigid hierarchical social system. He believed that socio-cultural forces artificially construct gender relations, especially by Manusmriti and Hindu religion. As Simone De Beauvoir observed, "Women are made, they are not born", Ambedkar also raised the question, "Why Manu degraded her (woman)?" In his *The Riddle of the Woman*, *The Woman And the Counter Revolution*, *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women*, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism Genesis and Development* and through the issues of his journals *Mooknayak* (1920) and *Bahishkrit Bharat* (1927),

Ambedkar tries to show how the gender relations and differences are constructed by Hindu Brahminical order, which conditions women to conform a stereotype feminine behavior, requiring them to be passive and submissive, suited only to a life of domestic and family responsibilities.

In 1924, Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha was formed to work for the socio-political equality of depressed people and promoting their economic interests. Women started participating in satyagrahas and also launched women's associations for untouchable women for spreading education and awareness among them. In the Mahad Satyagraha for temple entry in 1927, even caste Hindus participated. Shandabai Shinde was one such participant. In the Satyagraha it was decided to burn the Manusmriti, which humiliated women, and shudras. In the demonstration after the bonfire of the Manusmriti more than fifty women participated. Ambedkar addressed the meeting thereafter and advised women to change their style of wearing saree, wear lightweight ornaments, not to eat meat of dead animals. It was upper caste women like Tipnis who taught them proper way of wearing sarees.

In January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, as its president. Along with the Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur in 1930, women also had their separate conference. In the Kalram Temple Entry Satyagraha at Nasik in 1930 five hundred women participated and many of them were arrested along with men and ill treated in jails. To face tortures along with their men, women also organized their Samata Sainik Dal. When Ambedkar returned to India after attending the round table conference in 1932, hundreds of women were present for the committee meetings. At various places depressed classes women's conferences were held and they began to present their demands assertively. The encouragement of Ambedkar empowered women to speak out boldly their feelings. As Radhabai Vadale said in a press conference in 1931, "We should get the right to enter the Hindu temples, to fill water at their water resources. We call these social rights. We should also get the political right to rule, sitting near the seat of the Viceroy. We don't care even if we are given a severe sentence. We will fill all the jails in the country. Why should we be scared of lathi-charge or firing? On the battlefield does a warrior care for his life? It is better to die a hundred times than live a life full of humiliation. We will sacrifice our lives but we will win our rights." The credit for this self-respect and firm determination of women, goes to Ambedkar

On 20th July 1942, The All India Dalit Mahila conference was organized and 25,000 women attended. Ambedkar was highly pleased with the awakening and activities of women. On 13th August, he wrote to one of his friends, Meshram about this. On 6th January 1945, the All India Untouchable Women's Conference was held in Mumbai. (Limaye, 1999:57-61). In the movement, his strategy was similar to Gandhian method though he had disagreements on many things with Gandhi. To him the emphasis was on reconstruction of the Hindu society on the basis of equality rather than the social reforms initiated by Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj because their attempts were limited only to the upper strata of the society. His in depth

study of Smritis and Shashtras and his experience from the response of upper castes during his temple entry movement crystallized his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society.

Running newspapers, women's hostels, boarding schools participating in Sathyagrahas were some of the activities of woman for acquiring the personality development to secure efficient administrative and leadership capacity as men have. Gaining inspiration and encouragement from Ambedkar, many women wrote on topics like Planning, Buddhist philosophy and such other topics. Women also wrote plays, autobiographies, and participated in Satyagrahas. Tulsabai Bansode started a newspaper Chokhamela. This showed how Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust social practices like child marriages and devdasi system.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION FOR WOMENS:

Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar worked with, dedication, zeal & conviction for the betterment of women on becoming Chairman Of Constitution Drafting Committee & First Law Minister of Independent Indian. He gave India a living& organic Constitution, enshrining in it all those conditions which are necessary to promote fraternity among all citizens of free India, including women.. Discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex, creed, place of birth was codified as illegal acts under the Statute Book. The Indian Constitution provides :

1. For Equality before Law(Art.14) ,
2. The State shall not discriminate any citizen on the grounds of , religion, caste, race, sex , place of birth or any of them (Art 15),
3. Equal opportunities to all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment under the State (Art16),
4. Equal pay to all for equal work for both men & women(Art.39d)
5. Right to work , to education and public assistance in certain cases (Art 41),
6. Provision of just and human conditions of work and maternity relief (Art 42) ,
7. Provision of uniform Civil Code to all the citizens throughout the Indian Territory (Art 44).

Dr. Ambedkar by his scholarly arguments in framing/ debating Indian Constitution get put his seal of equality for women by getting them right of vote to equalize her position in running the State affairs.

HINDU CODE BILL:

Dr Ambedkar raised a new battle cry by finally submitting modified and revised Hindu Code bill to Constituent assembly in October 1948, which was under consideration since 1941 this gave a great shock to the reactionary opponents. But elite persons supported it as Justice Gajenderagadkar, an imminent Sanskrit Scholar, jurist & Judge of the Bombay High Court said, "If Dr Ambedkar gives us Hindu Code Bill, his achievement would go down in history as a very eloquent piece of poetic justice indeed". The discussion on this historic Bill by the Modern Manu began on Feb.5, 1951 in the Parliament and continued for three days, when its consideration was postponed to next session in Sept. , 1951. Pt Nehru promised for the passage of the Bill and said that, if, the Hindu Code bill was not passed he along with his Cabinet of Ministers shall resign. But it is reported that even Dr Rajindra Prasad (Then President of India), a devote Brahmin, said, that, if, the Bill was passed he shall resign. Patel was not in favour of even its consideration, not to speak of passing of the Hindu Code Bill. It was decided by the Congress Party to take it up on Sept., 17, 1951, but only the first part of the Bill "Marriage & Divorce" and other clauses to be taken later. Elaborate security arrangements were made in & around Parliament, as opponents of the Bill, were gearing up for trouble. During discussion Dr. Shayama Prasad Mookerjee said "The Hindu Code Bill would shatter the magnificent structure of Hindu culture---." The tactics of long speeches to delay the passage of the Bill was resorted to by the members opposed to the Bill. All objections raised against the Bill, during debates were replied ably by the Law Minister, but even the "Marriage & Divorce" Bill could not be completed, and the rest of the Hindu Code Bill was never taken up. The Hindu Code Bill was let down in the tragic manner and in the words of Dr. Ambedkar "It was killed and buried, unwept and unsung after four clauses were passed". Even Nehru did not honor his word of full support for passage of the Bill. The four clauses of the Bill, which were adopted by the House on 25 Sept, 1951, strengthened the position of the women in the society

The four clauses passed were incorporated in the Hindu Code Bill, these were

1. The Hindu marriage Act,1955
2. The Hindu succession Act,1956
3. The Hindu Minority and guardianship Act1956
4. The adoption & maintenance Act 1956

The First Union Law Minister was disappointed due to non passage of the Hindu Code Bill, as was conceived by him and promised support by Pt. Nehru. So Dr Ambedkar created history of sorts in sacrificing his Cabinet Law Ministry for the just cause of women by

resigning on Sept., 27, 1951 as a matter of protest. An example of supreme sacrifice for women liberation was created in not only Indian but world history. Although Dr Ambedkar could not succeed in getting passed the full Hindu Code Bill, he successfully put the ball rolling & laid the foundation of equality for the women of India in all spheres of life. Women can now have custody of child, no marriage before age of 18 years, Provision of alimony (maintenance allowance from husband on getting legally separation)), Widow can now adopt a child, rights over parental property , a uniform scheme for succession to the property of a Hindu female who dies intestate (not having made a will), Mother can change guardian of minor by will, and many more rights due to the relentless efforts of Dr Ambedkar.

EFFECT OF HINDU CODE BILL IN MODERN INDIA:

Due to Dr. Ambedkar efforts the women are now holding high positions of authority in all fields including, Engineering, Medical, Education including Higher Education; Army, Air Force, Aviation, Navy. Police, Administration. Politics; Foreign Services, Industry & Trade. India was proud to send in Space Indian Woman Kalpana Chawla. Installing Miss Mayawati a Dalit woman as Chief Minister besides other women CM's, Mrs Indra Gandhi as Prime Minister of India & now Her Excellency Madam Pratibha Singh Patil is President of Indian Union as per the equal rights granted by our Constitution. Madam Sonia Gandhi is chairperson of one of the ruling National Parties, Madam J. Jayalalithaaa, madam Mamta Bhennerji are the proud Chief Ministers in India, where at one time woman was equated with the man's shoe. With the proposed amendment to Art.243-D of Indian Constitution, India shall have 50 percent share of women in Panchayati Raj with nearly ten lacs and forty thousands women force. Already 15th Lok Sabha have 59 Women members(10.82%), which shall be raised three fold in the next Parliament with the passing of the proposed Women's Reservation Bill, for which ruling party is committed .

However adequate representation to deprived castes women in Parliament and other elected bodies is a distant dream. Dalit women are suffering on two fronts of castes and sex. Still religiously dominated India did not permit Mrs. Indra Gandhi, the only child of Pt Nehru, to lit pyre of her father, as such acts are solely reserved for men only.

Madam Savitribai Phuley(1830-1897) dared to lit the Pyre of her husband against all opposition from religious orthodox ,as their heir son, being an adopted one was also not religiously qualified to do . It a matter of concern that a handful orthodox , are still glorifying the illegal act like Sati , favoring child marriage, Parading naked, Dalit women in full public view for minor crimes , advocating opening of Girl- Dance Bars .Still curse of killing of girl child in the mother's womb is continuing unabated despite strict rules against

this inhuman act. This has reduced the population of the girls in India greatly and it needs to be curbed with strong hand.

TODAY'S SCENARIO:

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 modernisation, 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.

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