



Research Paper

Dr B R Ambedkar and Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT: - Dr. Ambedkar – the determined fighter and a deep scholar has made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He was first Indian to brake down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India and its relevancy in present scenario.

Dr. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. 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. Through its issues he put due stress on the gender equality and the need for education and exposed the problems of the depressed as well as women. The encouragement of Dr. Ambedkar to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931. He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly.

Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. He insisted on Hindu Code bill suggesting the basic improvements and amendments in assembly. He also insisted and evoked all the parliamentary members to help to pass the bill in parliament. Eventually, he resigned for the same. Thus his deep concern and feelings for all round development of women is expressed from his each sentence and word.

Keywords: - women empowerment, Hindu code bill, perfect equality, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. B.R Ambedkar was among the most outstanding intellectuals of India in the 20th century in the word. Paul Baran, an eminent Marxist economist, had made a distinction in one of his essays between an "intellect worker" and an intellectual. The former, according to him, is one who uses his intellect for making a living whereas the latter is one who uses it for critical analysis and social transformation. Dr. Ambedkar fits Baran's definition of an intellectual very well. Dr. Ambedkar is also an outstanding example of what Antonio Gramsci called an organic intellectual, that is, one who represents and articulates the interests of an entire social class.

Dr. Ambedkar – the determined fighter and a deep scholar, secured the highest academic honors from some of the most prestigious universities of the world. He made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. It is proved by a recently conducted survey by 'History TV 18 and CNN IBN' in June 2012. 'Who is the greatest Indian after Mahatma Gandhi?' is the question asked from the people of India. The contestants include, First PM Jawahar Lal Nehru, Singer Lata Mangeshkar, Industrialist J.R.D.Tata, A.P.J.Abdul Kalam, Indira Gandhi and Vallbhbhai Patel etc. The final cumulative ranking was conducted following the three ways poll; ranking by jury (online and on ground), ranking by popular votes and ranking by market research. Finally, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar declared as winner. Historian Ramchandra Guha stated on the declaration of results "Dr. Ambedkar's legacy has been distorted to suit particular interests. He was a great scholar, institution builder and economic theorist"

Prof. A. K. Sen has also said, "Ambedkar is my Father in Economics. He is true celebrated champion of the underprivileged. He deserves more than what he has achieved today. However he was highly

controversial figure in his home country, though it was not the reality. His contribution in the field of economics is marvelous and will be remembered forever..!”

Ambedkar was not only the father of Indian Constitution; he was a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, economist, editor, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and was first Indian to brake down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. He stated that women should be given all round development more importantly social education, their well being and socio-cultural rights. He emphasized that each and every section of Indian women be given their due share and it is a must to maintain and protect dignity and modesty of women (Shukla 2011).

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar always believed in movements led by women. He also added that if the women from all walks of life are taken in to confidence, they may play a significant role in the social reforms. They have played very massive and active role to eradicate the social abuses. He insisted that every married woman must participate in her husband’s activities as a friend. But she must show the courage to deny the life of slaves. She should insist on the principle of equality. If all the women follow it, they will get the real respect and their own identity (Gunjal 2012).

II. OBJECTIVES, METHODS AND MATERIALS

The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India and the relevancy of his ideas in present political and social scenario of India.

Secondary data collected from internet, Government documents, newspapers, published papers, books and speeches delivered by Dr. Ambedkar in Parliament, various conferences and meetings in pre and post independent India.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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...”¹ 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. Through its issues he put due stress on the gender equality and the need for education and exposed the problems of the depressed as well as women.

Ambedkar’s perception of women question, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists demand. As J. S. Mill expressed in the Subjection of Women, the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and one of the chief hindrance to human development; and ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no privilege or power on the one side, nor disability on the other, Ambedkar also holds the same views on work for women (More 2011).

In January 1928, a women’s association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar’s wife, as its president. 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. The encouragement of Dr. Ambedkar to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931. She said “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.

Dr Ambedkar believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of social reform. The historic ‘Mahad Satyagraha’ witnessed participation of three hundred women along with their male counterparts. Addressing another meeting of about 3000 women, he 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 honour and glory to yourselves.”

He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. In 1942, being a Labour Minister of Executive Council of Governor General, he introduced a Maternity Benefit Bill. He provided several provisions in the constitution for protecting the welfare and civil rights of women. He introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament and highlighted the issues about women’s property right. The bill received strong opposition from many political leaders. In turn, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet expressing his discontent over non acceptance of woman’s right by the parliament. Besides, he highlighted the issues of Muslim women. His secular perspective is known through his thoughts on ‘Purdah’ (Veil) system, religious conversions and legal rights for Muslim women. In short, along with the depressed class women, his thoughts for emancipation of all the women are expressed with same allegiance².

Ambedkar’s 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 the temple entry movement crystallized his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society.

Gaining inspiration from Ambedkar, many women wrote on various topics. And Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper 'Chokhamela'. This shows how Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar exclaimed, "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." He always honored women for their work and hardships.

While addressing in conferences to women he could easily communicate with them as a homely person and conversation. He evoked women in the following words. "Never wear such clothes which will degrade our personality and character. Avoid wearing the jewellery on your body everywhere. It is not fare to make hole on nose and wear 'nath'." In this he condemned all the bad traditions, habits and ways of life which made life difficult and complex. And to the surprise, even the illiterate women followed his advice from the bottom of their heart.

Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. The greatest example of it was seen in Kamathipura. There was a person named David who was the mediator working in brothel. He left his profession persuaded by the thoughts and teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He evoked the entire prostitute to give up their profession and lead the life of honour.

In the Manu Smriti, Manu not only shows contempt for women but goes on to degrade them as slaves, devoid of intellect; denies them the right of education and the right to property; and forbids them from performing sacrifices. Being India's first Law minister and chairman of drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar thought it appropriate, rather his duty, to free women from the age old thralldom by reforming the Hindu social laws created by Manu. He, therefore, took initiative to draft and introduce the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly.

Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. i.e. ,

Article 14 - Equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex.

Article 15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

Article 39 - Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.

Article 42 - Human conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (A) (C) - Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 46 - The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Article 47 - The state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health and so on.

Article 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R (4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

The Hindu Code Bill, the most formidable legislative measure of modern India, sought among other reforms, to put an end to a variety of marriage systems prevailing in India and legalise only monogamous marriages. The Code also sought to confer on women the right of property and adoption which had been denied by Manu. It put men and women on an equal level in all legal matters. Dr. Ambedkar said, "I should like draw attention of the house to one important fact. The great political philosopher Burke who wrote his great book against the French Revolution said that those who want to conserve must be ready to repair. And all I am asking this House is: If you want to maintain the Hindu system, Hindu culture and Hindu society, do not hesitate to repair where repair is necessary. This Bill asks for nothing more than to repair those parts of the Hindu system which have become dilapidated".

In his letter of resignation dated the 27 September, 1951 to the Prime Minister, he wrote¹ "For a long time I have been thinking of resigning my seat from the Cabinet. The only thing that had held me back from giving effect to my intention was the hope that it would be possible to give effect to the Hindu Code Bill before the life of present Parliament came to an end. I even agreed to break up the bill and restricted it to Marriage and Divorce in the fond hope that atleast this much of our labour may bear fruit. But even that part of Bill had been killed. I see no purpose in my continuing to be a Member of your Cabinet".

The Hindu Code Bill was later split in to four Bills, and the same were put on the Statue Book by Parliament. 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 are the four enactments which incorporate the ideas and principles of Hindu Code Bill formulated by Dr Ambedkar. They give independent

status to women and endow them with the right of adoption, succession and property, so completely denied by Manu. Therefore, it is truism to say that it is due to Dr. Ambedkar that a large part of the Hindu social law is now on par with the legal system prevailing in advanced western countries (Ahir D.C. 1990).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the condolence message, on Ambedkar's death in parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of Hindu society". His dream of society, based on gender equality is yet to be realized and therefore his thoughts are important for the social reconstruction that favors women empowerment.

Dr. Babasaheb expressed his views on the state of life of all women. He stated that women must be treated equally and given equal prestige. He insisted on Hindu Code bill suggesting the basic improvements and amendments in assembly. He also insisted and evoked all the parliamentary members to help to pass the bill in parliament. Eventually, he resigned for the same. The teachings and thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar are useful not only women but also all the Indian even today. His deep concern and feelings for all round development of women is expressed from his each sentence and word. In his last speech in Indian Parliament we can know his feelings and respect showed towards women. He quoted the famous thoughts of an Irish Patriot Daniel O Connal as, "No man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity. And no nation can be grateful at the cost of his liberty."

In his famous book 'Pakistan and partition of India' he expressed his views about Muslim women and their religious traditions, about wearing veil, their marriages and so on. Muslim women were suppressed under various religious traditions. Towards all the women, irrespective of their religion, casts and class, Babasaheb had a particular humanitarianism view. He frequently raised his voice against all sorts of injustice towards women.

Footnotes

1. Dr. Ambedkar's word during his study at New York.
2. The 6th Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Lecture (AML) is on "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Thoughts on Women's Emancipation" and the lecture will be delivered by renowned sociologist, Dr. Sharmila Rege.

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