

Upliftment, Liberation and Empowerment: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Initiatives for Gender Equality

Dr. Durgesh Ravande
Department of English,
K.K.M.College, Manwath

“Birth is alike to all- but not their worth
Because of their diverse vocation.”--- Thirvalluvar (Tamil Poet)

Abstract:

The present research article highlights Dr. Ambedkar's whole-hearted concern for the problems of Indian women and practical initiatives undertaken for their liberation, upliftment and empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar's visionary work to eradicate gender discrimination from Indian society is also a matter of concern here. The researcher attempts an analytical method based on the factual data to ascertain Dr. Ambedkar's prudent deliberations to obtain social, gender justice.

Keywords: Emancipation, Discrimination, *Shastras*, Endogamy, Predicament.

Introduction:

The democratic Indians adore Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as an architect of the modern principles such as freedom, equality, and fraternity to whittle a new Indian society based on the mechanism of people-centric power structure. Dr. Ambedkar acquires an esteemed position for his fundamental initiatives to uplift millions of Indians who were forced to live in utmost deprivation and abomination based on caste-based inequality. His committed efforts to stimulate socio-political and economical reformation in the lives of under-privileged communities in terms of an emphasis on education, organization and struggle; formulates his leadership for a wider acceptance irrespective of any class, community and creed. He has a lion's share in spreading a ray of hope on one hand and changing the lives of these people on the other, with his constitutional programme undertaken in form of socio-intellectual as well as political movements. Being an emancipator, he provoked a life in the 'dead-like' lives of deprived, humiliated communities and prepared them on manifold levels to strife for their fundamental rights. Being a crusader of social justice, Dr. Ambedkar stands on the topmost

pedestal in his mission of the empowerment of weaker sections in Indian society including women irrespective of their social position.

The present research article highlights Dr. Ambedkar's whole-hearted concern for the problems of Indian women and practical initiatives undertaken for their liberation, upliftment and empowerment. The researcher attempts an analytical method relied upon the original texts to ascertain Dr. Ambedkar's prudent deliberations to formulate gender equality.

Dr. Ambedkar's Studious Arguments:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, recently been declared as the third most searched historical personality by Google, unravels the state of inequality and gender discrimination of Indian women for a long period of history, in a systematic, logical and rational way. More particularly through his thought-provoking intellectual writings such as "The Rise and Fall of Indian Women", "The Women and Counter Revolutions", "Riddles of Hindu Women", "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" and some other. Dr. Ambedkar challenged the deep-rooted and widely-accepted Hindu social order to reform this structure and reward the stature of dignity to Indian woman. He explored it at large that not particularly *dalit* woman but woman as a whole has been a victim of gender discrimination, based on patriarchal supremacy, ignited by the Hindu *Shastras* and *Smritis*. The substitution, subordination and discrimination of Indian woman caused Dr. Ambedkar to accentuate a logical analysis behind the predicament of Indian woman. As Simon de Beauvoir, the prominent French feminist scholar, systematized the subordination and exploitation of woman in her *magnum opus*, *The Second Sex* with anthropological, social, psychological and historical study of her presence in society to unearth patriarchal politics that enforced woman to accept gender subordination as a natural instinct. Similarly, Dr. Ambedkar argued Indian woman's discrimination in relation with *Shastras* and other Hindu scriptures to assure the state of Indian womanhood. 'Ambedkar reads Vedic text by arguing that however outwardly and fabulous their stories, they necessarily reflected and expressed worldly concerns as much as worldly power' (EPW, p.92). To state further, medieval patriarchal social structure restricted woman's freedom on various grounds leading ultimately to her overall subordination.

According to him, the Hindu laws, more particularly *Manusmriti* provides an ideological basis for gender discrimination in Indian society. Woman had been subordinated, ill-treated

and her social presence was constrained in terms of rights and also a trivial role in decision making inside and outside of the family. Manu says: ‘In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent’ (V: 148). Hence the independence of woman was scrapped to an extent that there left a little scope to breathe her choice. Some scholars argue the description of gender injustice in *Manusmriti* as a half-analysed and prejudiced interpretation and state further that it is just a trick to distract from the quaint-essential purpose behind *Manusmriti*. But Ambedkar’s studious endeavours to unearth the source of woman’s predicament prove their argument as biased. Dr. Ambedkar elaborates further in his valuable writings on women that the ancient Indian society did not restrict woman on the basis of gender. Rather she occupied ‘...a very high position in the intellectual and social life of the country’ (*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*: 122). To explain further, ‘Indian woman in pre-Manu’s time could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning of education.’ But in course of time, the social status of Indian woman witnessed a substantial downfall. She was prohibited to participate in any kind of social and intellectual activities. The medieval social ethics caused a great deal of subjugation of woman to limit her presence.

The *Shastras*, Caste, and Endogamy these three factors were responsible to strengthen the patriarchal power structure and weakening woman’s social position in due course of history. Dr. Ambedkar found a logical reason in his “Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development” behind endogamy. He elaborates the process of caste domination within castes with a studious and rational consideration. To put his arguments in nutshell, the overall caste-centric approach was responsible for woman’s discrimination in the society. Therefore, irrespective of her caste, woman remained subordinate, secondary or substitute in our socio-political and socio-cultural structure.

The *Shastras* compelled women to experience a restricted rather negligible freedom. Her liberation was verged on the name of custom, culture and religion. The control of religious power still prevails over Indian woman as she could not defeat the system that slaves her. In this way, Dr. Ambedkar’s observations and his practical initiatives as the first Law Minister of India have a great deal of relevance and also a wider implication to relegate it with the presence in our society through the passage of history.

Dr. Ambedkar's Efforts for Woman's Empowerment:

As the central objective of the present article is to emphasize Ambedkar's actual initiatives to reform and reinforce the position of Indian woman i.e. her dignity and self respect. Hence the author finds it relevant to mention Dr. Ambedkar's actual efforts for woman's empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar spoke in Depressed Woman's Conference held at Nagpur on July 20, 1942: "I am a great believer in woman's organizations. I know what they can do to improve the condition of society if they are convinced in the eradication of social evils. They have rendered great services". Dr. Ambedkar's actual contribution for empowerment of Indian women is the act of bringing Hindu Code Bill in the parliament for discussion and consent. It was prepared to codify the Hindu laws which were responsible for dehumanizing woman in our society. The prominent inclusions in the bill were: 1) The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 2) Hindu Succession Act 1956 3) The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956 4) The Adaptation and Maintenance Act 1956. At the same time Dr. Ambedkar took deliberate enterprises to adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. i.e. Article 14 demands 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 connotes equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work. Article 42 states human conditions of work and maternity relief. Article 51 (A) (C) conveys fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 46 illustrates 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 elaborates 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 the allocation of seats in the Panchayat Raj System.

Challenging the Typecast:

Dr. Ambedkar encouraged an all-round empowerment of Indian woman. In his ideological and practical stances, woman's self-realization stood ahead of anything. That's why he emphasised a sense of self worth, freedom of choice, right to accept opportunities and giving an utmost importance to conceptualize themselves the way they live. The feminist scholars even admit a need to reinforce the voice of self, a need of restoration of identity to encounter the androcentric bondage and accentuate a woman's voice to explain the feminist stance

further. The forceful implication of *Sati* custom, childhood marriages, and widowhood were the most inhuman forms of woman's subjugation in post-*Manusmirti* society. Ambedkar strives in his writings to prove that woman's subordination is not natural but patriarchal because the state of Indian or particularly Hindu woman in ancient society was more liberal. She was freely allowed intellectual persuasions. Gargi Vachaknavi, ancient Indian philosopher, is the best example be cited in this regard. It was to maintain endogamy; there were a lot of restrictions kept over woman's social stature. She was burdened to accept the patriarchal injustice for her survival. Hence Dr. Ambedkar co-relates the predicament of Indian woman with the cruel, enforced caste-structure in India. More particularly it was the source of woman's exploitation. There was no upper-lower caste barrier as far exploitation of Indian woman is concerned. Dr. Ambedkar found it more inhuman or ruthless in case of upper caste women, particularly Brahmin women because gender discrimination was more rigid, conservative and it was believed as their faith. Dr. Ambedkar's rational analysis of relation between development of caste-centric society and gender inequality might have encouraged Indian feminist scholars to establish a strong relationship between gender inequality and caste system in the country, more particularly in the later decades of the twentieth century. Dr. Ambedkar was peculiar in raising the issues of Indian women. Their predicament and subjugation on the basis of gender more particularly in andocentric power structure had been scarcely anybody's concern. The upper caste people were pleased to relate and support the condition of women with their fate and the preaching of *Shastras*. They opined that it is as per the guiding principles in the *Shastras* of earlier traditions. The caste Hindus were pleased to follow the Brahmins as far as the treatment given to their women. Dr. Ambedkar wrote many editorials and articles for *Muknayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat* to highlight the predicament of women in our society. His genuine concerns in this regard aroused a gender consciousness in the minds of few Indians of those days.

Dr. Ambedkar propagated the power of education as an integral dimension of his social awareness mission. He was persistent regarding women's education. A great deal of time and energy to make Indian women aware of the power of education and knowledge were devoted to explore the ways to formulate gender equality. In most of his meetings with women, Dr. Ambedkar emphasised the need of educating women to carve a brighter future of our nation. He knew it very well that until the responsibility of education is shouldered upon women; it is impossible to educate families and at large the nation. His emphasis upon the health of women is also an issue of importance. Without a good health of woman; healthy family is a

nightmare. Dr. Ambedkar had a thoughtful deliberation on various aspects of woman's empowerment. He was well aware of the possibilities that could lead in the direction of an overall empowerment of Indian woman. His strategic affirmation still maintains its importance as there is a continuous negligence towards the issue of woman's health in our country even today.

Conclusion:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar persisted an encompassing empowerment of woman i.e. social, educational, psychological and economical. He asserted that without woman's liberation and overall empowerment; formation of a modern Indian society with an ideal humanitarian value i.e. equality is next to impossible. The conservative society should realize the importance of woman's education in the social reformation of the nation. Dr. Ambedkar's luminous nationalism was based particularly on utmost importance given to the need of fundamental changes in our society so that post-independent Indian society can be constructed on the firm and solid basis of these universal values. On the other hand, he was keen regarding woman's role in the development of the nation. Women can play a vital role in the overall development of the nation as they are honest with their responsibilities. Women at large should be credited to strengthen family system in our country. Therefore, woman's family as well as social life should be governed by the constitution of the nation rather by the laws of religion. To a great extent, overall development of woman has been the most essential factor in his legal and logical arguments. His belief has already proved its essence in due course of history. The constitutional rights given to women could assure a liberated and developed life. Therefore his consideration 'I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved' has a thoughtful importance. Dr. Ambedkar also supported Indian women's direct involvement in politics and accentuated their leadership in all walks of life. No doubt, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar with his prudent programme for woman's empowerment and with his actual movement based work became a champion of women's issues in our society.

Findings:

The researcher states following foremost findings based upon the arguments in the paper:

1) Dr. Ambedkar explored the different aspects of woman's empowerment with his studious efforts.

2) He emphasised that there is no future of women's liberation movements without a wider acceptance of education.

3) Women belonging to different social classes should come together to uniform a movement to stimulate gender empowerment in various segments of the society.

4) The society should determine the position of woman not on the basis of *Shastras* and *Smiritis* but on the basis of equality.

5) Woman's overall empowerment is a solution to many evils in our society.

References:

Books:

Moon, Vasant.(2014). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches: Vol.1.*New
Delhi:Dr.Ambedkar Foundation.

Narke, Hari and et al.(2003). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches: Vol.17. (Part
2).*New Delhi:Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.

Journal:

Govind, Rahul.(2018). “ Ambedkar's Lessons, Ambedkar's Challenges: Hinduism, Hindutva and Indian Nation”. *Economic and Political Weekly*.83-(04).90-96.

Bio-note:

Dr. Durgesh Bhausaheb Ravande has been with the department of English, K.K.M.College, Manwath for last twelve years and so. He has been published in reputed journals such as *Triveni*, *The Literary Criterion*, *Littcrit*, *Langlit*, *Shodh Sampada*, *World Journal of Gender and Literature* and *Labyrinth*. He availed UGC's Teacher Fellowship to complete his doctoral research. His book on Indian Women's Theatre has been published by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi. The book has been referenced in the editorial note 'Commonwelath Literature 2016' (The Journal of Commonwelath Literature,Sage Publishing). His project work on Zhadipatti Theatre is on the verge of completion. Indian Theatre, Women's Theatre, Literary Theory, and Translation Studies have been the areas of his introspection and interpretation.