

DR. BHIM RAO AMBEDKAR'S ADVOCACY OF WOMEN RIGHTS

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Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar, who was a strong fighter and a wise scholar, has done a lot to move society toward Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood. He was the first Indian to break down barriers that kept women from getting ahead in India. By writing down the common Civil Code for Hindus and other parts of Indian society, he laid the groundwork for real and honest work. In this paper, we try to show what Dr. Ambedkar thought about women's problems in India before and after it became independent, as well as how they still matter today. Dr. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He made a lot of noise about how bad the Hindu social order was. In 1920, he started the journal Mook Nayak, and in 1927, he started Bahiskrit Bharat. Through its topics, he drew attention to the problems of women and the need for education, as well as the problems of the depressed. Radhabai Vadale's speech at a press conference in 1931 showed how Dr. Ambedkar tried to give women the confidence to speak up. In the Bombay Legislative Assembly, he pushed hard for measures to help women plan their families. Dr. Babasaheb worked his whole life to help women, even those who were involved in bad things like prostitution. Ambedkar made poor, illiterate women aware of their rights and gave them the motivation to fight against unfair social practises like child marriage and the devdasi system. Dr. Ambedkar tried to make sure that women's rights were a part of India's political language and constitution. He insisted that the Hindu Code bill include the most important changes and improvements. He also insisted and asked every member of parliament to help get the bill passed in parliament. In the end, he quit for the same reason. So, every sentence and word he says shows how much he cares about women and wants them to grow in every way.

Keywords : **Ambedkar, Equality, Rights, Upliftment, Women,**

1. INTRODUCTION

At a time when women's issues were seen as unimportant and unimportant, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's newspapers, Mooknayak and Bahiskrit Bharat, mostly talked about women's issues. Not many people know that Babasaheb was also determined to work for women's rights in addition to getting rid of caste.

Oppression doesn't work by itself, and feminism shouldn't either. So, Dalit feminism brings up how many Dalit women were treated unfairly because of their caste and because they were women. As the late Sharmila Rege, director of the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre at Pune University and a feminist sociologist, said at the 6th Ambedkar Memorial Lecture she gave at the Tata Institute of Social Science: (TISS),

“There is an urgency for feminist discourse to turn to Ambedkar. A category of women undifferentiated by caste does not exist for feminists to mobilise. Now the pressure is not to talk about gender in isolation, but to include class, caste and other factors. Therefore, there is a need to reclaim Dr. Ambedkar's writings as feminist classics.”

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar fought hard for women's economic freedom and for their social rights. He stressed the importance of protecting women's dignity and respecting their modesty. He read a lot of the Hindu Shastras and Smritis to figure out why women in India were treated so badly. He started his movements in 1920 and spoke out against the Hindu social order and social system through the well-known journals Mook Nayak and Bahishkrit Bharat in 1920 and 1927,

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respectively. All issues used to be about women's rights, women's education, and problems that women and other low-income people faced. In the Bombay Legislative Assembly, he fights hard for measures to help women plan their families. In Indian society, they have the same rights as men and the same chances.

2. DISCUSSION

Unlike other social reformers, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Rajaram Mohan Roy, Dr. Ambedkar took a very different approach to empowering women. Reformers in different schools of Hindu thought sought to modernise Hindu society by eliminating archaic practises and traditions while remaining loyal to the established social hierarchy. "It was Dr. Ambedkar's mission to reform Hindu society in accordance with modern democratic ideas of liberty, equal opportunity, and fraternity¹ and to challenge the ideological foundations of a graded system of caste hierarchy that denied women equal rights, freedom, and human dignity in Hindu Society. He believed that society should be based on reason and not the atrocious tradition that was the caste system." He favoured a society based on rationality rather than the caste system, which he viewed as an abomination. There is an argument to be made that the Hindu mind should be freed from the shastras, according to his article, "The Annihilation of Caste System."²

Ambedkar's quest for equality

In the 19th century, radical people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahadev Gobind Ranade, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and Mrityunjay Vidyalkar spoke out about the mistreatment of women from different social groups. Raja Ram Mohan Roy pushed for reformist laws to end Sati and give Hindu women equal inheritance rights. He also spoke out against child marriage and polygamy and fought for the right to education as a way to make people more civilised.³ But Roy's efforts to free people from caste were limited to Hindus, and the poor classes stayed at the bottom of the social ladder in a terrible, parasitic state. Untouchability was common, and women from the lower castes were treated badly on both the caste and class scales. So, reform groups like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and others didn't have the power to fix the problems in Indian society caused by the "Chaturvarna" system, which has been around for a long time. Jotiba Phule and his wife, Savitribai Phule, worked to get schools for untouchables and other girls, get rid of untouchability, and get rid of the caste system. Their work helped start the reform movement in Maharashtra. Dr. Ambedkar got involved in the fight for equal rights for men and women when he took a legal stand against a social order that taught women to be submissive and forced them to stay submissive to men and act in a typical female way. He thought there was a connection between caste and gender and said that getting rid of gender is a natural result of getting rid of caste.⁴ In the 20th century, there has been a growing awareness towards the necessity of empowering women in order to improve their socio-economic status.⁵

In his treatise, Ambedkar gives a long argument and a lot of facts to show how patriarchy works in a society that divides work based on caste, which increases inequality between different sub-groups. He started his movement when he published the journals *Mook Nayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat*. In these journals, he wrote about equality between men and women and the need for education to bring light into the lives of poor people, including women. He told them to report oppression and to learn, get angry, and get their fight together. The Hindu code bill was a set of laws that were meant to codify and fix Hindu personal law, get rid of the caste system, and give women a chance at life. But, because he was a Dalit, it was hard for him to get it done, and the parliament didn't pass his draught of the bill. As a result, he left Nehru's cabinet in 1951, and the bill was finally passed in 1955 and 1956, but in a shortened form and as four separate Acts that changed the rules for marriage, succession, adoption and maintenance, and minors and guardianship. This was during Nehru's second term as Prime Minister.⁶

Ambedkar and Feminism

Ambedkar was a scholar who thought that the intersection of gender and caste was necessary for the Brahmanical patriarchy to stay alive and grow. He says that the "infection of imitation" caused all of the non-Brahmin social groups to go their own ways and form different castes made up of people who were related to each other. Using French sociologist Gabriel Tarde as an example, he says that the castes closest to the Brahmins copied all three Sati customs, forced widowhood and girl marriage, and made sure that women didn't give in to the temptation to form relationships with people outside of their own castes. The ones who were closer kept the patriarchal system in place by making widowhood and girl marriage illegal. Those who were a little further away only had child marriage, and those who were the farthest away made sure that no one broke the law of the father. (Indian Castes) He is sad that caste privilege is a way for the powerful to use their power over the weak. In a theocratic society, the Brahmin caste, which means "servant of God," set the example for everyone else to follow. Non-caste groups like Mohammedans, Jews, Christians, and Parsis also became "castes" with respect to each other. So, if one caste wanted to be endogamous, another caste had to be, too, because that was just how things worked out. This was the main reason why low-caste people were treated badly. In his book *Waiting for a Visa*, Ambedkar talks about some times when he and other people were treated unfairly. He says again that people who are not allowed to touch are not allowed to touch in all religions. Even though they don't follow Hinduism, a Parsi or a Muslim thinks poorly of an untouchable. In the same way, women have been seen as "less than" in all religions, and each religion has its own way of showing sexism. Ambedkar, the reformer, can't be put in a box and called only a Dalit leader. He was a visionary who cared about everyone who was on the outside.⁷

Even though he put the fight for equality ahead of his own failing health, Ambedkar's ideas have not been fully understood by Indian feminists, and the mainstream women's movement has ignored his original ideas. Academics and feminists still don't care about his hard work to understand what's wrong with the system and don't give him credit for it. Sharmila Rege praises B.R. Ambedkar's feminist view on caste in her book, *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. She gives a theoretically advanced explanation of how Babasaheb thought about how the caste and gender questions fit together. She gives us a good reason to study how caste and gender interact and to look at Ambedkar's writings and speeches from a feminist perspective on Brahmanical patriarchy. He thought that the idea of endogamy was a political move to keep the balance, and that violence and injustices based on caste had nothing to do with it. Feminist writers of the 19th and 20th centuries wrote about the struggle between men and women.⁸

DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR THE CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Throughout his career, Dr. Ambedkar fought for the rights of women and for people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, whose lives were hopeless. He talked about different problems Indian women had and tried to find answers to them in the Bombay Legislative Council, the Viceroy's Assembly as the head of the Drafting Committee, and the Parliament as the country's first Law Minister. On February 18, 1927, the Bombay Legislative Council said that Dr. Ambedkar was a designated person. He tried to get Indians to join the war on the side of the British Government. His ideas about the Maternity Benefit Bill and Birth Critical helped people see the value of women. He was a strong supporter of the Maternity Bill. His argument was, "It is a legitimate concern for the country that the mother should get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period, and the Bill's standard is based entirely on that principle." "So, yes, Sir, I will agree that a lot of the weight of this should be carried by the government. I am willing to agree to this fact because the government's main concern is to protect the people who get help from the government. Also, you'll notice that the government has been accused of something different in each country when it comes to maternity benefits." Women started taking part in satyagrahs and

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sending women's letters to faraway people to teach them about education and awareness. In 1927, even Hindus in power were interested in the Mahad Satyagraha for sanctuary. Shandabai Shinde was a member of this group. During the Satyagraha, it was decided that the Manusmriti would be eaten. This made women and shudras feel bad. After the big fire at the Manusmriti, more than fifty women went to see the show. Ambedkar then spoke to the crowd and told the women to change their style when it came to wearing saress, wear lighter accessories, and not eat meat from dead animals. Tipnis and other women of higher status showed them the right way to wear sarees.⁹ While fighting for the women rights in India Ambedkar was witness to the Women participation in the National uprisings e.g the Ghadar Movement.¹⁰

At the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference, which was held in Nagpur on July 20, 1940, Dr. Ambedkar said that women were the key to progress. He said, "I'm a big fan of the Ladies' Association." I know that how they might work depends on the state of the public and whether or not they can be convinced. They should teach their kids and teach them to have high goals. Ambedkar gave some very important speeches at the Round Table meeting. He gave the disenfranchised classes a voice and argued for Dominion Status. The British people liked what he said when he spoke. He was on a number of important subcommittees and made plans for political protections for the downtrodden classes after India became a self-governing country. Ambedkar also supported the quick release of movies for adults. When Ambedkar got back to India in 1932 from the round table meeting, there were a lot of women ready to talk at the panel meetings. Ambedkar was very concerned about the situation of women, so as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he tried to make sure that the political language and constitution of India gave women enough freedom. So, he made special arrangements for women based on their fairness in formal and important ways. Any other general arrangements are still important to women, but sacred arrangements are important to men. So, there are things like Articles 15(3), 51(A), etc. His most important job in getting the Indian Constitution ready was to get the word out that it would be a "New Charter of Human Rights." He thought that laws were a way to make a normal social order in which the progress of each person should go along with the progress of society.¹¹

THE HINDU CODE BILL, 1948

On August 1, 1946, this bill was brought up in parliament, but nothing happened with it. After India got its independence, law minister Dr. B. R. Ambedkar "brought it up again in the Constituent Assembly on April 11, 1947. The Hindu Code Bill shows how much Ambedkar cared about the status of women. He has even said that the work he does on the Hindu Code Bill will be just as important as the work he does on the Constitution."¹²

The bill itself represented a significant departure from Hinduism and the demeaning policies it upholds about women. Before that point, various passages from the Vedas, Smritis, and Puranas were read aloud and interpreted in a variety of ways. The lives of women were frequently left in the hands of male Hindu translators due to the absence of any genuine standards or uniformity in the culture. In Hinduism, certain topics such as inheritance, marriage, adoption, and so on were governed by two different sets of laws. Mitakshra and Dayabhaga were the names given to these legal codes. According to Mitakshra law, an individual's possessions do not solely belong to him. Instead, it is considered to be part of his coparcenaries, which refers to his male lineage and includes his father, son, grandson, and great-grandson. This ensures that they have full ownership of the property from the moment they are born onward. On the other hand, in Dayabhaga, each individual piece of property is owned by a different person. This implies that each individual who inherits property from their parents is granted complete power over the inherited property. Ambedkar included this final portion of the laws in the bill that would become known as the Hindu Code. By adapting it to the circumstances of the modern world, the intention was to transform it into common law.¹³

According on their marital status and the number of children they had, female heirs were subject to varied rules. This type of bias was also intended to be eliminated by the Hindu Code Bill. Dr. Ambedkar placed the widows of deceased children on equal footing with their children's mothers. The daughter was given an equal share of her father's and her husband's property in order to ensure that men and women were treated equally. With the exception of the son, she was regarded as a full heir, along with the son's widow, his widowed mother-in-law, and the son's widowed mother-in-law. That's not all: Ambedkar made it clear that "son will have a portion, even for Stridhana (described as money acquired by women as presents from relatives) too," he wrote in a letter.¹⁴

The bill aimed to give women complete authority over their assets. Only the "life estate" was available to women under Dayabhaga law; they could utilise it for as long as they lived but could not sell it. This property would pass to a member of her husband's family if she died before her husband. Ambedkar revolutionised the way things were done. A woman's partly estate should be turned into a complete estate so that she might do anything with it, and he insisted on that happening. Furthermore, an adopted kid would not be able to deprive his mother of her late husband's possessions prior to his adoption. This was another sacred pact. Adopted children and stepsons would be unable to strip their mother of all of her assets, and the rights of widows would be increased as a result of passage of the legislation. When her parents give her Stridhana (gifts from relatives) as a dowry when she marries, Ambedkar says her in-laws must recognise the dowry she got as her absolute property, according to Hindu law.

In the case of marriage, Ambedkar added two new clauses: restitution of conjugal rights and judicial separation. Prior to the bill, only sacramental marriages were permitted under Dayabhaga rule, and there was no room for atheists or anti-theists. In contrast, the Hindu Code Bill established two types of marriage: civil and non-civil, or sacramental. Because divorce was made easier, civil marriage provided the most personal freedom. For the first time, a woman's perspective on civil marriage divorce was presented. The progressive outlook of Ambedkar's philosophy was very much responsible for the beginning of civil marriage and its easier stamping out. Furthermore, in order to restore women's dignity as human beings in society, Ambedkar "prohibited polygamy while prescribing monogamy." Ambedkar went even further in this bill to abolish the caste system by "obliterating the caste precincts regarding marriage and adoption of a child."¹⁵

An illustration of Ambedkar's commitment to equality and justice is shown by the Hindu Code's essential tenets, to the right of the fundamental tenets. So, he thought that these social democratic ideas could be revived by making women's total ownership rights, caste-free marriage and adoption, and abolition of polygamy a seamless entanglement. Under the Hindu Code Bill, women were given the same legal rights as men. This undermined the intellectual foundations of the patriarchy. Therefore, the legislation was against the patriarchal framework that supports the subjection of women and so conflicts with the essential Hindu vision.¹⁶

Because of this significant break from orthodox Hindu doctrine, the Bill was not only rejected, but also withdrawn in the face of fierce opposition from Hindu Orthodoxy, particularly the Hindu Mahasabha and Bharatiya Jana Sangh, both of whom venerate Manu's legacy. "The Hindu Mahasabha opposed the Bill to prevent any legislative meddling in Hindu religious affairs, and it has been argued that it is against 'Indian culture' since it allows for divorce and monogamy, which may prohibit a man from having a son, which is sacred for salvation, and so on." The bill's provisions for "women's property rights, monogamy, and divorce" had been roundly denounced by religious, conservative, and patriarchal societal elements.

The president, Rajendra Prasad, who said that "the measure intervenes in Hindus' personal law and would satisfy just a few professed progressive people"; the deputy speaker, Ananthasayanam Aiyangar, who suggested that Ambedkar should not be allowed to continue. Ambedkar's status as a "non-congressman" had made manoeuvring more difficult for him. Ambedkar was such a strong supporter of the Hindu Code Bill that he would put the bill before of his health because he saw it as an opportunity to reform Hindu society. However, his status as an

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untouchable was a difficulty that slowed down his efforts to alter Hindu law. As seen by Jereshastri's statement, "Ganges water from a gutter cannot be deemed sacred," as he put it in derogatory terms. Some members publicly stated that they would not allow the Bill to pass as long as Dr. Ambedkar was the pilot. The fact that this bill was enacted smoothly in 1955–56, when Ambedkar was not in cabinet, shows that it was diluted and split into four separate acts: the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956.

Ambedkar's ideas influenced the enactment of many subsequent pro-women Acts viz. Sati Prevention Act, 1987, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Family Courts Act, 1984, Protection of Human Right Act, 1993, The Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, The National Commission for Women Act, 1990, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, to cite a few.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Babasaheb discussed the condition of all women's lives. He stated that women must have equal treatment and prestige. In the assembly, he persisted on the Hindu Code bill recommending fundamental revisions and amendments. He also pushed and urged all members of parliament to assist pass the bill in the chamber. Ultimately, he quit for the same reason. Dr. Ambedkar's lessons and ideas are useful not only for women but for all Indians even today. His interest for the holistic development of women is evident in every sentence and word he writes. In his final statement to the Indian Parliament, his thoughts and respect for women are shown. He cited the renowned words of Irish Patriot Daniel O'Connell: "No man can be grateful at the expense of his honour, and no lady at the expense of her virginity." And no nation can be thankful at the expense of his freedom." In his classic work, "Pakistan and the Partition of India," he discussed Muslim women and their religious traditions, including veiling and marriage. Various Islamic traditions stifled the rights of Muslim women. Regarding all women, regardless of religion, caste, or social status, Babasaheb held a specific humanist perspective. He frequently protested various forms of injustice against women.

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