

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Contribution to Women Education Dr. Kaneez Mehdi Zaidi

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Abstract

Education is the most powerful instrument of changing the position of women in society. It serves to reduce inequalities in society and thereby acts as a means to improve their status within the family as well as elevate their status in society. Women in India have always been a victim of the oppressive, caste-based, and rigid hierarchical social system. In the name of 'sanskaras', women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a great champion of the cause of women and devoted his entire life to the cause of social justice in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar discussed a number of problems of Indian women and sought their solutions in Bombay Legislative Council, in the Viceroy's Assembly as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and also in the Parliament as the first Law Minister of Independent India. Dr. Ambedkar's perception of women's issues, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property, and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists' demand. His views on women's oppression, social justice, and democracy hold great significance to modern Indian feminist thinking. Ambedkar's view provides a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist political agenda highlighting issues like gender disparity, social justice in the contemporary socio-political setup. In this context, this paper is an attempt to analyze the concept of gender equality in line with Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar's contribution to the field of women's education.

Keywords: Education, Women, democracy, Constitution, India

Introduction

Education is the most powerful instrument of empowering women. It serves to reduce inequalities in society and thereby acts as a means to improve women's status within the family as well as elevate their status in society.



Women in India have always been a victim of the oppressive, caste-based, and rigid hierarchical social system. In the name of customs and rituals, women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, one of the greatest intellectual and social reformers of modern India, widely known as a great champion of the cause of women devoted his entire life to the cause of social justice in India. He witnessed women's deplorable situation as the victims of the cruel, caste-based rigid hierarchical social system and stood up against it. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar not only worked at the grassroots level to promote the cause of women but also wrote extensively to unravel the inequality and injustice inherent in the Indian social order that perpetuates inequality and subordination of women in a systemic manner. As he makes it evident in his works “**The Riddle of Women**” “**The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women**”, and “**The Women and Counter-Revolution**”, gender relations and differences are artificially constructed in the social order which not only moulds the attitude of men towards their women but also conditions women to conform to a stereotype feminine behavior. Women act in subordination without questioning the social order. He pointed out how the prevalent social order expected them to be passive and submissive, suited only to a life of domestic and family responsibilities. He wanted women to abolish traditionalism, ritualism, and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress. Being dissatisfied with the deplorable state of women in India Dr. Ambedkar worked incessantly to challenge the unfair gender relations prevalent in society so that society could be reconstructed along with the modern democratic ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The paper is an attempt to analyze the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in raising awareness about gender inequality inherent in the social order as well as his attempt to eliminate it through education and other means.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar became sensitive towards the low status of women in Indian society at an early stage, while he was just studying. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's mission in life was to challenge the ideological foundations of caste hierarchy that denied equality, freedom, and human dignity to women in society. He believed that society should be based on reason and not on the atrocious tradition of the caste system. His emphasis was on the reconstruction of society on the basis of



social justice, and social equality. Thus his approach towards women's emancipation was also guided by such views and concepts. Through his writings in *MookNayak* and *BahishkritBharat*, he began to raise his voice for the liberation of women. He highlighted the issue of gender inequality prevalent in society and the need for women's education to raise their social status. Unlike the approach of other Indian social reformers who tried to reform the society of certain outdated customs and practices without questioning the hierarchical social order, Dr. Ambedkar challenged the prevalent social order and considered it solely responsible for the pathetic state of women in Indian society. Resembling the views of Ambedkar, The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, also admits, "*The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure... and practices. Consequently, the access of women, particularly those to education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded*".

Dr. Ambedkar's perception of women's issues, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property, and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists' demand. His views on women's oppression, social justice, and democracy hold great significance to modern Indian feminist thinking. His ideas provide a powerful source of inspiration to formulate a feminist political agenda highlighting issues like gender disparity, social justice in the contemporary socio-political setup. Dr. Ambedkar promoted equal access to participation and decision-making of women in the social, political, and economic life of the nation and strengthening of the legal systems aimed at the limitation of all forms of discrimination against women.

Ambedkar was well convinced about the status of women in India and made all possible efforts to liberate her from the shackles of oppression. Dr. Ambedkar discussed a number of problems of Indian women and sought their solutions in Bombay Legislative Council, in the Viceroy's Assembly as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and also in the Parliament as the first Law Minister of Independent India. As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he tried an adequate inclusion of women's rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. His sincere



efforts in this direction can be noticed by considering women's equality in both informal and substantial senses. He included special provisions for women while all other general provisions are applicable to them, as to men. Here Articles like 15(3), 51(A)(c), 16, and so on are worth mentioning, 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 a 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 the allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System. By incorporating the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity in the Indian Constitution he wanted to make the constitution an instrument of creating a rational and justified social order in which the development of individuals should be in harmony with the growth of society.

He stood up for the extensive economic, political, and social rights of women in society. He emphasized that each and every section of Indian women be given their due share and it is a must to maintain and protect the dignity and modesty of women. To accomplish it practically he encouraged women participants in all the socio-political movements which he launched against social evils. He had full faith in women's power of organization as is reflected in his words "*I am a great believer in women'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*" He always honored women for their work and hardships.

Women like Venubai Bhatkar and Renubai Shambharakar and others actively participated in Ambedkar's movement launched in 1920. In 1924, Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha was formed to work for the socio-political equality of depressed people and promote their economic interests. He also launched a women's association for spreading education and awareness among them. In



January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, as its president.

Women were also encouraged to participate in 'satyagrahs'. 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 Ambedkar empowered women to express their feelings without any fear. He instilled in them a feeling of self-respect and self-determination. Depressed classes women's conferences were held at various places and they began to present their demands assertively. 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 the 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 of generating this self-respect and firm determination in women goes to Ambedkar. It was owing to his encouragement that "The All India Dalit Mahila conference" organized on 20th July 1942 was attended by 25,000 women and the All India Untouchable Women's Conference was held on 6th January 1945 in Mumbai.

In order to reconstruct Indian society, he wanted to make every man and woman free from the thrall of the age-old social order and for which he found education, inter-caste marriage, and inter-dinning as methods by which caste and patriarchy can be eliminated. He recognized that lack of education was the main cause for the backwardness of women. Education for him was an instrument of change, it alone would enlighten women and encourage them to stand against ill-treatment, oppression, and subjugation in society. He allocated education a revolutionary role so as to accelerate social progress and to establish a just and equal society. Education was identified as a key instrument of liberation from oppressive structures of caste-patriarchy as well as of reconstruction of a new social order. Education could encourage the oppressed ones to fight and remove injustice and exploitation and pave ways for free thinking. He established a 'Depressed Classes Educational Society' to organize the school education of his community. Thus he



perceived education as a catalyst for accelerated change and promoted the creation of an environment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential. According to Babasaheb *“It is the education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom”*

Babasaheb Ambedkar lists two purposes of education: first, to acquire it for the betterment of others and secondly to use it for one's own betterment implying that education has a dual purpose to serve i.e. as a means of social change and as a medium for individual development. The latter according to him is pursued by a larger circle of people than the former. The realization of existence is not the only valid standpoint, but the realization of struggled existence of the 'others' is also important. Thus on one hand education should work towards the objectives of self-actualization and on the other towards creating a just society. Education according to him is not only a source for social mobility of the oppressed class but it also opens the doors for their modernization.

Dr. Ambedkar believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of social reform. Addressing a meeting of women, he said, *“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women had achieved”* He can be regarded as one of the greatest intellectual and social reformers of modern India who struggled throughout his life for the liberation of Indian women from the lifelong oppression and in this direction made innumerable efforts to elevate her to a respected and justified position. Thus he laid the foundations for the gradual transformation of Indian social consciousness and gender justice in India.

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