



Role of Dr B R Ambedkar towards the Empowerment of Women in India

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Abstract : *Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb 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 came at the appropriate moment in British ruled India to assume the natural leadership of his kinsmen. He was participated in social movement and got involved in founding the constitutional edifice of the country. Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is both a highly important end in itself and necessary for the achievement of sustainable human development. 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. He builds up awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. He stated women of Indian society should be given equal opportunity and equal share with their male counterpart. During the time of Ambedkar that the status of women in India has started rising and he has started acquiring various rights not allowed to them prior. Previously women were treated as objects owned by men. It may undoubtedly be mentioned that B.R. Ambedkar was a path-maker of all the women irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender etc. He brought a new trend for uprising the women through his thoughts and beliefs. Not only women all the people of India should thankful to him because of his tremendous and everlasting steps of developmental works.*

Key words: *Women Empowerment, Welfare of Women, Child Marriages, Devadasi System.*

Introduction:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was among the most outstanding intellectuals of India in the 20th century in the world. He was 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. In present day context, Ambedkar and his thoughts on society based on equality are yet to be realized for reconstructing Indian society and making the life of women better.



His principle of life was to speak, work and fight for the just cause of oppressed, depressed, exploited, illiterates, ill fed and ill treated men and women irrespective of their caste or social status, place of birth affiliations and without caring for his personnel life discomforts. Till then woman was considered lowest of the low in the Indian society, so he fought a very difficult battle for their cause. On March 19 & 20, 1927 he addressed a huge meeting of depressed classes, including women, and gave strong call for liberation of women. He advised them to attend more to their development of mind and the spirit of self help, he said that education was as necessary for development of women as was for men. The four clauses of the Bill, which were adopted by the House on 25 September 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 Act 1956
4. The adoption & maintenance Act 1956

Objective of the Paper:

The objective of this paper is to state the role of women in society and role of Dr B R Ambedkar towards the Empowerment of Women in India.

Women Empowerment in India:

In ancient India, women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their position degenerated into merely objects of pleasure meant to serve certain

purpose. They lost their individual identity and even their basic human right. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society end nation, and to gain 'power'.

According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one, of power". But, from time immemorial, the women in this land of ours were treated as a sort of thing. Her placing in the society was not at par with other human beings. She has no rights. She cannot move nor does anything at her will.

"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior: has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"-

Mahatma Gandhi

Role of Women in Society:

Woman plays a critical role in the family which is the basic unit of society. Family is a strong force for social cohesion and integration and as such should be strengthened. The inadequate



support to women and insufficient protection to their respective families affect society as a whole and undermines efforts to achieve gender equality. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist and the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of family members must be respected.

The basic unit of society is a woman. As woman makes a family, family makes a home and homes make a society. So we should never think that a society would come into existence without the contribution of women. We all know that without education, no development is possible. Here we have forgotten that the very first and best school of a child is its mother's lap. A good healthy society doesn't automatically emerge on its own and stands firm but it needs to be emerged and for its emergence women play a pivotal role. From behavioural to health education women have their hands in. It's a woman who teaches how to behave, how to speak and how to deal with different classes of people. These all are the basic fundamentals of a good society and women are the main contributors in building up a strong society.

Dr B R Ambedkar towards the Empowerment of Indian Women:

The operations of caste both at the systematic level and at the functioning of patriarchy, the growing caste/class divide in feminist political discourse makes Ambedkar's view 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 socio-political scene unto his death, is thoughts never received adequate attention in the generality of Indian society just because he was born as an untouchable. 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.

Equality for women, like equality in general, is at its core a universal ideal. For a developing country like India which is home to 127.1 million working women, women's liberation is not an opulence but an urgent requisite for a life that is more than satisfying materially and spiritually. Women's status and acknowledgement of their contribution and also other related issues, have gained credence both in developing as well as developed countries, partly due to the observance of the International Decade of Women (1975-85) and partly because of the widely accepted reality that a society built on the gender inequality involves wastage of human resources which no country can afford.

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree which women have achieved". – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle, for eradication of caste systems and upliftment of the underprivileged sections. He realized that this could not be achieved without liberating the women themselves. He



motivated women and addressed them to participate in struggle against caste prejudices. During the Mahad Tank Struggle, women marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves. Impressed by the large gathering of women at women's conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1942, he told women to be progressive and abolish traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress.

Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream society. Education is the only mean by which societies grow out of oppression to democratic participation and involvement. It is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. Over the generations, marginalized sections and women in Indian society were denied the opportunity to education.

Role of International Agencies for Women Empowerment:

Promotion of equality between women is central to the work of United Nations. The UN actively promotes women's human rights and works to eradicate, discourage of violence against women, including in armed conflict and through trafficking. There are various UN agencies working for the empowerment of women like The Commission on the Status of women, The Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, The Division for the advancement of women, the United Nations Development Fund for women, and recently, the UN Women association is formed which co-ordinates the activities of all the former UN

agencies. These international agencies work to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society. So they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

Steps Undertaken in India for Women Empowerment:

The Constitution Frames were very much Conscious of the problem of women empowerment hence they ensured that the Principle of Gender Equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. The various articles mentioned in the earlier paragraph are meant for ensuring gender equality. Moreover the Constitution also empowers the states to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) was an important step taken by the Government of the time for accelerating the pace of women empowerment. The policy was aimed at ensuring women empowerment through positive economic and social policies for the full development of women. So that they could realize their full potential. The policy assumed equal access to women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economical life of the nation.

The National Policy also aims at Strengthening legal system for eliminating discrimination against women. It also visualizes strengthening partnership with Civil Society,



particularly Women's organizations. States have also taken various measures for empowerment of women.

Strategies for Economic Empowerment of Women:

These are as under:

- a. *Sound Macroeconomic Policies:* Gender inequalities are manifest as women and men have different access to resources, roles and responsibilities, both in the market and at the household. In the Indian context, fiscal policies are being increasingly examined through gender sensitive-budgeting exercise, although the focus still remains on expenditures in soft sectors, with several aspects like taxation, trade, capital flows etc. remaining largely an unstudied domain.
- b. *Improvement in Infrastructure:* Development of infrastructure was previously assumed to be gender neutral, with both sexes benefiting equally from well-designed projects. The new thinking asserts that gender – responsive infrastructure interventions can free up women's time, thereby increasing girls' enrolment in schools and facilitating women's participation in income-generation and decision-making activities.

There are women-specific transport needs like transportation of primary products; inter and intra-village roads/paths; non-motorised transport; dedicated bicycle lanes, pedestrian sidewalk use, passenger safety, and so on which

should be included in any transport policy or plan.

- c. *Gender-sensitive Agricultural Policies:* Rural women form the most important productive workforce in the Indian economy. Beyond the conventional market-oriented narrower definition of productive workers, almost all women in rural India can be considered as farmers in some sense, working as agricultural labourers, unpaid workers in the family farm enterprise, or combination of the two.

Women have traditionally been discriminated in their access to productive resources and have been denied ownership of land, cattle, trees, harvest and shelter. They have even been discriminated in access to credit and marketing facilities for their economic activities. It is, thus, essential to develop strategies and mechanism to improve women's access to agricultural support services.
- d. *Self-help Groups and Empowerment of Women:* The emergence and rapid multiplication of self-help groups (SHGs) based on micro credit is a phenomenon that is gaining increasing importance in the development scenario. SHGs are being viewed by governments and NGOs as a strategy for both women's empowerment as well as poverty reduction. A number of powerful players like MFIs, NGOs, corporations and donors – all of whom have a significant and growing interest in the SHG



phenomenon which centres on poor women – have entered the arena. Credit is a right that poor women must have access to.

- e. *Skill Development:* With the advent of globalisation and liberalization, new technologies and fast changing markets tend to make existing skills obsolete, requiring upgradation of existing skills and adoption of new skills and multi-skilling. Globalization often puts a premium on skills, requiring high levels of education, often puts a premium on skills, requiring high levels of education, often out of the reach of the unorganised sector workers. On the other hand, it opens up new markets which workers can reach by adopting existing or traditional skills. Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector.

Conclusion:

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. Are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality. Then only the Vedic verse would come true.

Dr B R Ambedkar 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, caste and class, Babasaheb had a particular humanitarianism view. He frequently raised his voice against all sorts of injustice towards women.

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