

Role of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar towards Women Empowerment in India: An Assessment

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Abstract – *In the Indian man-dominated society, women faced terrific problems since vedic period due to superstitions and misguided rituals. The women have been victimised through different ways, like-child marriage, sati pratha, parda pratha, restriction to widow remarriage, widow's exploitation, devadasi system etc. So, incidentally taking birth as woman had been treated as a curse for the woman. That system insipid the women and brought inferiority complex which proved a big hurdle in their social, economic and personal development. During British rule in India and after independence Dr. B.R. Ambedkar fought for the rights of women and made such provisions in constitution of India so that women must be treated equally in the society. The provision of equality to women made for all streams whether it is education, employment, social and economic rights. It is only due to Dr. Ambedkar that today women feel self-confident and self dependent. The implementation of many articles of constitution and laws brought self-confidence, individuality, self-respect and overall empowerment for women. The empowered women have proved themselves better than men in all fields be it education, entrepreneurship, medical, engineering and defence etc. The old ill trusted traditions disappeared to a large extent gradually from the society only due to the hard efforts put by Dr. Ambedkar. However, due to absence of strong judicial and administrative system and ignorance of laws women become victimized by various social evils such as child bearing, family care roles, deep rooted cultural norms etc. and become target of discrimination, exploitation and domestic violence. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. This present paper attempts to examine the status of women in India and their empowerment through Dr. Ambedkar in India. It tries to highlight the issues and challenges related to women in Indian society and eradication of such impediments through Ambedkarite approach. Through this paper it is tried to verify the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar approach for upliftment of economic, social and political status of women.*

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio - Economic Status, Crimes against women, Policy implications

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political

environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure.

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia.

With a decline in their status from the ancient to medieval times, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of the Opposition, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers and Governors. Women's rights are secured under the Constitution of India - mainly, equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination; further, India has various statutes governing the rights of women.

As of 2011, the President of India, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) were women. However, women in India continue to face numerous problems, including violent victimisation through rape, acid throwing, dowry killings, and the forced prostitution of young girls. In 2012, India was ranked by the Thomson Reuters Foundation as the worst G20 country in which to be a woman.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The contribution of Dr. Ambedkar and his blessings to India and all Indians, yet being real father modern India many national and international scholars have made incredible studies on Babasaheb preferably sector wise. **H. Subrahmanyam (2011)** compares women education in India at present and Past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empower means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them. **Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011)** Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship. **Duflo E. (2011)** Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and Under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the

relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka. India included tribal and rural subjects. **Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005)** focused on the effects of SHG on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

Dhanvijay (2012) studied the societal frame work meant to make women subordinate or subjugated need to be dismantled. Active participation of women from all the strata could make it possible. Many notable women activist are working on issues like environment, health, poverty etc. Those who indulge in social reforms were not supported, not even by women. Today women reservation bill is the hottest agenda of the discussion and fact is that a lay woman even doesn't know what it is. The more ridiculous male attitude is that girl's education meant only for her marriage. Today's women are trapped in the circle of insecurity, male domination, lack of awareness about her rights and no decision making powers. Much is talked about women empowerment today but it is more economic, political and health related. The issue of social empowerment of women need to be raised higher and given utmost importance then only it could complete phenomena.

Barnwal (2014) concluded that Dr B. R. Ambedkar can be regarded as one of the greatest intellectual and social reformer of modern India who struggled throughout his life for the liberation of Indian women (particularly from depressed classes) from the lifelong bondage and slavery under the weight of Hindu social institutions. By conceptualizing caste and gender inequality as inseparable constituents of Hindu social order, Dr B.R. Ambedkar laid the foundations for gradual transformation of Indian social consciousness and gender justice in India.

Singariya (2014) stated that 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 favours 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.

Ubale (2016) concluded that Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was a path-maker of all the women irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender and brought a new trend for uprising the women through his thoughts and beliefs. Along with women all the people of India should be proud for the tremendous and everlasting steps for the empowerment of women in Indian society carried by Dr. Ambedkar. He also talked about the Muslim women about wearing veil, their religious traditions and marriages and fought against all kinds of discrimination against women throughout his whole life. But still discrimination against women in Indian society is overlooked. So, it is a duty of every Indian to fulfil the dreams of Ambedkar for a better life world of women. It may also be mentioned here that the term, "Social Justice" will not be exercised properly if the people of India should not be able to change their attitudes specially towards women, SCs, STs and other weaker section of the society.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the status of women India during and after Vedic period.
- To recognize the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar for the upliftment and empowerment of Indian women during British rule.
- To recognize the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar for the upliftment and empowerment of Indian women after independence.
- To confirm the impact of Dr. Ambedkar's efforts for the empowerment of Indian women

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to recognise the contribution of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar towards women empowerment in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

- Ways to Empower Women
- Changes in women's mobility and social interaction
- Changes in women's labour patterns
- Changes in women's access to and control over resources and
- Changes in women's control over Decision making providing education
- Self-employment and Self-help group

- Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing
- Other than this society should change the mentality towards the word women

Encouraging women to develop in their fields they are good at and make a career

V. DISCUSSION

A. Status of women India during and after Vedic period

Women of specific sections of society (namely Brahmanas and Kshtryiya) during the early Vedic period enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life, but such rights were not available to all sections of society due to superstitious and man-dominated scripture of Manu. The status of women was on declining trend. The reform movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to religious orders, by and large women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started around the sixth century. Few texts exist that specifically deal with the role of women an important exception is the Stri Dharma Paddhati of Tryambakayajvan, an official at Thanjavur c. 1730. The text compiles strictures on women's behaviour dating back to the Apastamba sutra (c. 4th century BCE). The opening verse goes: मुख्यो धर्मः स्मृतिषु विहितो भार्तृशुश्रूषणम् हि: Women are enjoined to be of service to their husbands.

The status represents the position of individual in the group. The word status denotes the position of an individual in a system with attendant rights and duties. It is the position which the individual occupies in the group by virtue of his or her sex, age, family, occupation, marriage and achievement. The status of women refers to her position in the network of social role structure, privileges, rights and duties. It refers to her rights and duties in family and social life. The status of a woman is generally measured in the comparative amount of prestige and respect accorded to her with that of man.

The status of Hindu women in India has been fluctuating. It has gone through several changes during various historical stages. Historically speaking, women in India have passed through two phases of their life – the period of subjugation and the period of liberation. At times she has been suppressed and oppressed and at times she is regarded as the deity of the home. From the Vedic age till today, her status and position has been changing with the passing of time. The Rig-Vedic society was a free society. The Aryans evidently preferred male child to female child. However, females were as free as their male counterparts. Education was equally open for boys and girls. Girls

studied the Veda and fine arts. Women never observed purdha in the Vedic period. They enjoyed freedom in selecting their mates. But divorce was not permissible to them. In the family, they enjoyed complete freedom and were treated as Ardhanginis.

In domestic life women were considered to be supreme and enjoyed freedom. Home was the place of production. Spinning and weaving of clothes was done at home. Women helped their husbands in agricultural pursuits also. Husband used to consult his wife on financial matters. Unmarried daughters had share in their fathers' property. Daughter had full legal rights in the property of her father in the absence of any son. Mother's property, after her death, was equally divided among sons and unmarried daughters. However, married women had no share in father's property. As a wife, a woman had no direct share in her husband's property. A widowed mother had some rights. The woman was regarded as having an equally important share in the social and religious life because a man without woman was considered as an inadequate person. She regularly participated in religious ceremonies with her husband. There were many scholars who composed hymns of Rig Veda. Lopamudra, Gargi and Maitreye were the pioneers among them. Lopamudra, the wife of Agasti rishi, composed two verses of Rig Veda.

Traditions such as Sati, Jauhar, and Devadasi among some communities have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some instances of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practiced by Indian women in some communities. Child marriage remains common in rural areas, although it is illegal under current Indian law.

- **Sati:** Sati is an old, almost completely defunct custom among some communities, in which the widow was immolated alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the act was supposed to be voluntary on the widow's part, its practice is forbidden by the Hindu scriptures in Kali yuga, the current age. After the foreign invasions of Indian subcontinent, this practice started to mark its presence, as women were often raped or kidnapped by the foreign forces. It was abolished by the British in 1829. There have been around forty reported cases of sati since independence.
- **Jauhar:** Jauhar refers to the practice of voluntary immolation by wives and daughters of defeated warriors, in order to avoid capture and consequent molestation by the enemy. The practice was followed by the wives of defeated Rajput rulers, who are known to place a high premium on honour. Evidently such practice took place during the Islamic invasions of India.
- **Purdah:** Purdah is the practice among some Hindu and Muslim communities requiring

women to cover themselves in front of males for the purpose of modesty.

- **Devadasis:** Devadasi is often misunderstood as religious practice. It was practised in southern India, in which women were "married" to a deity or temple. The people of the temple used to rape and physically and mentally harass the beautiful girls of lower caste in the name of God. The ritual was well-established by the 10th century A.D. By 1988, the practice was outlawed in the country.

B. Contribution of Dr. Ambedkar for the upliftment and empowerment of Indian women during British rule and after independence.

Dr. Ambedkar a 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 break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He stated that women should be given all round development more importantly social education, their wellbeing 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.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar always believed in movements led by women. 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. 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". He started a strong movement 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.

In January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, as its president. 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." Dr Ambedkar believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of social reform. 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.”

The constitution has laid down as a fundamental right the equality of sexes. But the change from a position of utter degradation and subjugation of women in the nineteenth century to a position of equality in the middle of the twentieth century is not a simple case of progress of women in modern era. Revolutionary changes have taken place in the position of women in India after independence. The Constitution of India provided for special steps to be taken by the government to improve the condition of women by separate institutions.

A quick and effective change in the status of women was contemplated through social legislations. The Constitution of India guarantees certain fundamental rights and freedom such as protection of life and personal liberty. Indian women are the beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as the Indian men. Article 14 ensures equality before law and Article 15 prohibits any discrimination. Article 16(a) forbids discrimination in any respect of employment of office under the state on the grounds only of religion caste, sex, descent, and place of birth, residence or any of them.

In the post-independent India we had series of laws passed for the upliftment of women. These legislations have been brought in order to give equal rights and privileges with men, to eliminate discriminations against women, remove inequality between sexes, and remove external barriers coming in the way of their self-realisation and development. The important Acts passed for the upliftment of women are:

- **The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955:** This Act provided equal rights to women to obtain divorce and also maintenance in certain cases.
- **The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956:** By virtue of this Act a woman can adopt a boy or a girl as her son or daughter.
- **The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956:** This Act provides that a woman is entitled to act as the natural guardian of her minor children.
- **The Hindu Succession Act of 1956:** As a result of this Act, woman has got equal rights in the inheritance of family property. This Act is a landmark in the history of Hindu law.
- **The Hindu Women Right to Property Act of 1937:** This Act has given more facilities to women. According to this Act, the daughter, the widow, and the mother can inherit property of the deceased simultaneously. Now women will hold her property absolutely with full right to sell, mortgage, and dispose of as she

desires. But according to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, woman has only to enjoy her husband's share in coparcenaries property for her life time without any right to alienate property.

- **The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961:** According to this Act, taking or demanding dowry is an offence punishable by imprisonment and or fines.
- **The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976:** This Act does not permit wage discrimination between male and female workers.

C. Impact of Dr. Ambedkar's Efforts for the Empowerment of Indian women:

Considering the guidelines, recommendations, suggestions and statutes given by Dr. Ambedkar, the Government of India and other State Governments have implemented large number of schemes for the empowerment of women in India. On Dr. Ambedkar's death, in the condolence message in parliament, then Prime Minister Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru said "Babasaheb Dr. 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 favours women empowerment.

a. Laws for Women Empowerment in India

Here is the list of some specific laws which were enacted by the Parliament in order to fulfil Constitutional obligation of women empowerment:

- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- The Medical termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- The Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994.

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.

b. Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Considering various article in the constitution, many schemes for the empowerment have been launched by the part and current government. Like-Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, One Stop Centre Scheme, Women Helpline Scheme, UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Reuse, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Working Women Hostel, Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers, Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects, SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances), Revision under IGMSY in Accordance with National Food Security Act, 2013 in XIIth Plan, Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR, Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar, Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman, Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) - A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme, Mahila police Volunteers etc.

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

c. Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India contains various provisions, which provide for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The salient features are:-

1. Article 14 guarantees that the State shall not deny equality before the law and equal protection of the laws;
2. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex;
3. Article 15 (3) empowers the State to make positive discrimination in favour of women and children;
4. Article 16 provides for Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment;

5. Article 23 prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour;
6. Article 39 (a) and (d) enjoins the State to provide equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work;
7. Article 42 enjoins upon the State to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work, and for maternity relief;
8. Article 51A (e) imposes a Fundamental Duty on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
9. Article 243D (3) provides that not less than 1/3rd of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women, and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat;
10. Article 243T(3) provides that not less than 1/3rd of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality;
11. Article 243T (4) provides reservation of offices of Chairperson in Municipalities for Sc, ST, Women in such manner as the legislature of a State, may by law provide;

In pursuance of the above Constitutional provisions, various legislative enactments have been framed to protect, safeguard and promote the interests of women. Many of these legislative enactments have been in the sphere of labour laws to ameliorate the working conditions of women labour.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is not easy to eradicate deep-seated cultural value, or alter tradition that perpetuates discrimination. Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar sacrificed his whole life for the betterment, rights and justice to underprivileged sections of society. He made such provisions and included such articles in the constitution of India which helped a common man to fight against injustice. Woman is treated as source of enjoyment and exploited by man in Hindu culture prevalence during and after vedic period because the society move according to *manusmriti* at that time. Due to Ambedkarite reforms and Ambedkarism, women got independence and learnt to live with honour and pride. With self confidence, women started getting education, employment and become a part of whole system like man. It is only due to the efforts and contribution of Babasaheb that women are self-dependent today and government has initiated many schemes and implemented many laws for the empowerment of

women in Indian society. In the condolence message (on Dr. Ambedkar's death) in parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said "Babasaheb Dr. 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 in maximum of his speeches. 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'Connell 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." 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. In order to convert the dreams of Babasaheb into reality it is necessary to improve the Support System for working women.

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