

## The Relevance of Education For Gender Equity -A Dream of Dr. Ambedkar



### Economics

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**Dr.H.R.Uma**

Professor of Economics, University of Mysore

**Pushpa Nanaiah K**

Project Fellow, DOS in Economics and Co-Operation, University of Mysore, MGM. Mysore.570006

### ABSTRACT

*In the popular mind, the major contribution of Ambedkar, hailed as the architect of the Indian Constitution. In this paper an attempt is made to look at Ambedkar not as a dalit hero alone, but as saviours of the Indian women in general and dalit women in particular. Ambedkar made sincere efforts in understanding the reality about the status of women in India and advocate a practical reformist measures especially comprehensive Hindu Code Bill for the Upliftment of women. Later on these measures form the basis of the legislation for providing better opportunities to women so that they can occupy a position of equality, respect and can realize their potentials for building an equitable and egalitarian society. One of the noteworthy results of his life-work has been the awakening of women, which made them shed their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity and self-esteem. The paper also point out that Ambedkar was very clear about the fact that there is a direct relationship between caste and gender and gender could not be seen in isolation from caste. He thus believes that any social transformation is incomplete till gender discrimination in that society comes to an end and that is possible only through proper education and gender sensitisation.*

"We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education..." are the words of Young Ambedkar, during his studies at New York which came out while writing a letter to his father's friend. It was identified as a key instrument of liberation from oppressive structures of Hindu caste-patriarchy as well as of reconstruction of a new social order. Women were integral to this visionary egalitarianism and were consciously mobilized as political actors in the dalit liberation movement led by Ambedkar in the early decades of the twentieth century. The arena of formal education was a significant focus of women's political involvement, and they played foundational roles as political educators and educational activists.

Interestingly Dr. Ambedkar's first academic paper "Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" also begins with his concern towards women, where he located the linkages between caste and gender by observing that "Superimposition of endogamy on exogamy means creation of caste" and concluded that there is no divine or natural cause of origin of caste but Brahmins of ancient India craftily designed it by enclosing their class through means of controlling and subjugating their woman.

Sati and Enforced Widowhood were not possible in the case of Surplus Man. Therefore, Surplus man was allowed to re-marry to recruit another bride, but here there is every possibility of increase in competition in consumption of woman in Caste, therefore as a corrective measure, man was allowed to recruit his wife from lower marriageable rank. This resulted in the beginning of Girl Marriage. In this way, the inhuman practices of i) Sati system ii) Enforced Widowhood and iii) Child marriage came into existence. Thus much before the Indian feminist school, Dr. Ambedkar pointed out the direct relationship between caste and gender and observed that gender could not be seen in isolation from caste.

Dr. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He started fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order and launched a journal **Mook Nayak** in 1920 and **Bahishkrit 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.

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. He declared "As you are, so shall be your children". While addressing largely attended Depressed Classes Women confer-

ence on 18-/9 July 1942, he said, "He measured the progress of a community by the degree of progress made by the women of that community. He advised, let every girl who marries, stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal partner and refuse to be his slave. He advocated avoiding early marriage and producing too many children. He advised the women folk to give proper education to their children, so that they live a dignified life". He strongly believed in the fact that if "a woman is educated a family is educated". He not only encouraged them to get educated themselves but also encouraged them to educate their children and keep them away from all kinds of vices.

He strongly opposed taking of intoxicants that was because he realized that most cases of domestic violence occurred under their influence. This view of Ambedkar is very relevant to contemporary India. As we are observing there is a high level of sexual abuse, atrocities against women within and outside the house. This is occurring when the man is intoxicated with alcohol and drugs.

Dr Ambedkar advocated for equal wages for equal work without discrimination on the basis of sex or caste, besides grant of paid maternity leave to expecting mothers. While strongly supporting proposed maternity benefits to women in Bombay Legislative Council in 1928 he said "---- it is in the interest of the Nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period and also subsequently". He strongly advocated family planning measures and said that besides many other problems giving birth to many children negatively affects a mother's health. In India, the insatiable desire to have son renders the life of women miserable, for she is pestered to produce more children till she gives birth to a son. Later in the year 1942, Dr. Ambedkar also introduced Maternity Benefit Bill during his tenure as Labour Minister in Governor General's Executive Council.

On 20th July 1942, The All India Dalit Mahila conference was organized and 25,000 women attended. Ambedkar was highly pleased with the awakening and activities of women. On 6th January 1945, the All India Untouchable Women's Conference was held in Mumbai. (Limaye, 1999:57-61). In the movement, his strategy was similar to Gandhian method though he had disagreements on many things with Gandhi. To him the emphasis was on reconstruction of the Hindu society on the basis of equality rather than the social reforms.

Since Ambedkar was well convinced about the status of women, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he tried an adequate inclusion of women's rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. Therefore, by considering women's equality both in formal and substantial senses he included spe-

cial provisions for women while all other general provisions are applicable to them, as to men. Hence, there are Articles like 15(3), 51(A), and so on.

He said in his speech delivered in the Constituent Assembly on 25th November 1949, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy." By social democracy he means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as principles of life. He further said: "On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. He also threatens the country of a democratic peril if it continues to have this contradictions.

#### **Measures taken by Dr. Ambedkar to protect women from discrimination:**

**Constitutional Provisions:** - Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar worked with, dedication, zeal & conviction for the betterment of women on becoming Chairman of Constitution Drafting Committee & First Law Minister of Independent Indian. Discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex, creed, place of birth was codified as illegal acts under the Statute Book. The Indian Constitution provides for Equality before Law( Art.14 ), the State shall not discriminate any citizen on the grounds of, religion, caste, race, sex, place of birth or any of them ( Art 15 ), equal opportunities to all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment under the State ( Art16 ), equal pay to all for equal work for both men & women( Art.39d ) right to work, to education and public assistance in certain cases ( Art 41 ), Provision of just and human conditions of work and maternity relief (Art 42), Provision of uniform Civil Code to all the citizens throughout the Indian Territory (Art 44). Dr. Ambedkar by his scholarly arguments in framing/ debating Indian Constitution get put his seal of equality for women by getting them right of vote to equalize her position in running the State affairs.

**Hindu Code Bill:** To strike last nail in the coffin of discrimination against Indian women, Dr Ambedkar raised a new battle cry by finally submitting modified and revised Hindu Code bill to Constituent assembly in October 1948, which was under consideration since 1941 this gave a great shock to the reactionary opponents. But elite persons supported it as Justice Gajenderagadkar, an imminent Sanskrit Scholar, jurist & Judge of the Bombay High Court said, "If Dr Ambedkar gives us Hindu Code Bill, his achievement would go down in history as a very eloquent piece of poetic justice indeed". But Dr. Shayama Prashad Mookerjee said "The Hindu Code Bill would shatter the magnificent structure of Hindu culture---". The tactics of long speeches to delay the passage of the Bill was resorted to by the members opposed to the Bill. All objections raised against the Bill, during debates were replied ably by the Law Minister, but the Hindu Code Bill was never taken up. The Hindu Code Bill was let down in the tragic manner and in the words of Dr. Ambedkar "It was killed and buried, unwept and unsung after four clauses were passed". Even Nehru did not honor his word of full support for passage of the Bill. The four clauses of the Bill, which were adopted by the House on 25 Sept, 1951, strengthened the position of the women in the society. The four clauses passed were incorporated in the Hindu Code Bill, these were

- I) The Hindu marriage Act,1955
- II) The Hindu succession Act,1956
- III) The Hindu Minority and guardianship Act1956
- IV) The adoption & maintenance Act 1956

The First Union Law Minister was disappointed due to non passage of the Hindu Code Bill, as was conceived by him and promised support by Pt. Nehru. So Dr Ambedkar created history of sorts in sacrificing his Cabinet Law Ministry for the just cause of women by resigning on Sept., 27, 1951 as a matter of protest. An example of supreme sacrifice for women liberation was created in not only Indian but world history. In the history of India,

perhaps that was one sole instance when a man tendered resignation for the cause of women. (**Dr Ambedkar as the Champion of Women's Rights by Shura Darapuri**).The Hindu Code Bill of 1949, which was drafted by Ambedkar, was the first step towards women's empowerment, as it gave women the right to property. "Ambedkar had worked towards the breaking down of the barriers in the path of women's empowerment, but it is rarely acknowledged today,"( Prof. Hanumaiah).

Gender equality, gender main streaming, networking, leaderships, financial freedom are the essential aspects of women empowerment. Dr. Ambedkar realized this at his time and included in the process of social reforms. 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 prejudice. 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. Dr. Ambedkar put all his efforts to guarantee the educational opportunities without any discrimination to all the citizens of India.

Although Dr Ambedkar could not succeed in getting passed the full Hindu Code Bill, he successfully put the ball rolling & laid the foundation of equality for the women of India in all spheres of life. Women can now have custody of child, no marriage before age of 18 years, Provision of alimony (maintenance allowance from husband on getting legally separation), Widow can now adopt a child, rights over parental property, a uniform scheme for succession to the property of a Hindu female who dies intestate (not having made a will), Mother can change guardian of minor by will, and many more rights due to the relentless efforts of Dr Ambedkar. Due to Dr. Ambedkar efforts the women are now holding high positions of authority in all fields including, Engineering, Medical, Education including Higher Education; Army, Air Force, Aviation, Navy, Police, Administration. Politics; Foreign Services, Industry & Trade.

India was proud to send in Space Indian Woman Kalpana Chawla. Installing Miss Mayawati a Dalit woman as Chief Minister besides other women CM's, Mrs Indra Gandhi as Prime Minister of India, Pratibha Singh Patil as President of Indian Union as per the equal rights granted by our Constitution. Ms.Sonia Gandhi is chairperson of one of the ruling National Parties, Ms J. Jayalalithaaa, Ms.Mamta Bhennerji are the proud Chief Ministers in India, where at one time woman was equated with the man's shoe. With the proposed amendment to Art.243-D of Indian Constitution, India shall have 50 percent share of women in Panchayati Raj with nearly ten lakhs and forty thousand women force. Already 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha have 59 Women members( 10.82%), which shall be raised three fold in the next Parliament with the passing of the proposed Women's Reservation Bill. However adequate representation to deprived castes women in Parliament and other elected bodies is a distant dream. Dalit women are suffering on two fronts of castes and sex.

Like 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 belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/ Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities ... to education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded". (Govt. Of India, 2001: 2). Ambedkar was a victim of oppression and discrimination in all its severity, his views about women's oppression and equal rights are more useful than anybody else's theory based on mere observation for the feminist movement to strengthen its strategy for approaching the systemic challenges and contradictions in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream.

But unfortunately, in the present times despite the various Constitutional safeguards and various laws claiming equality to all citizens, women are denied rights enjoyed by a citizen of this country. In fact she is denied even the basic right to live and the basic rights of women have yet to be restored to them even after sixty plus years of the working of the Indian Constitution based on the principle of liberty, equality and justice to all Indian citizens.

It is found that though advances are being made in the field of science and technology, worldwide literacy rates have risen yet old societal norms seem to govern the day. The cases of violence against women are on a rise. According to one of the Reports by World Bank says 70% of women are experiencing physical or sexual violence at some point in life. In India as on today every hour one woman is losing her life to the evil of dowry system.

Most people are literate but not educated. Education by means of access to knowledge and learning played pivotal role the social reforms. Stagnation in process of social reforms and imposing so called divine status of ancient women on today's women there by influencing her development and upliftment. Shattered with the reforms and liberation of women in the era of globalization and modernisation, the Indian mindset has not accepted the equality at par with men and hence forcing women to revert their development.

Increasing incidences in women harassment in all way, violence, crime and humiliation insisted on her is only because of political apathy, which failed to kept social dogma. Education system, employment opportunities, tremendous population, inflation and non-availability of resources to strive are the barriers for development among people. Sheer influence of modern lifestyle and adopting technology doesn't mean improvement of individual and society.

However, the contemporary social realities warrant close examination of the wide range of Ambedkar's topics, the width of

his vision, the depth of his analysis, and the rationality of his outlook and the essential humanity of his suggestions for practical action. 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. The Writings and Speeches of Ambedkar show what values India should develop and how they would modernize its social and political institutions.

In the condolence message, on Ambedkar's death in Parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said; "Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the 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's empowerment.

### Conclusion

People religiously take turn to take dips in the holy river at Kumbh, year after year people go for Haj, women remain more hungry for most days of the year, yet none ensures her a secure environment where she can breathe freely, move out of her house fearlessly. In such a situation when immorality seems to be the order of the day how is a woman expected to get herself educated and contribute to the progress of the country?

Dr Ambedkar greatly emphasised on a society based on moral values. Education is incomplete without instructions in moral values. According to Dr Ambedkar "Morality comes in only when individual comes in relation with other individual. It arises from the direct necessity from Man to Man. It does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that Man has to be moral but for the good of the society. Hope Ambedkar's dream of liberated India where there is equality, justice, peace and harmony exist will come true.

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