

Dr.B.R.AMBEDKAR Views on Dalith Women Empowerment

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Introduction:

In 'Manusmrati' the status granted to women is quite visible and she was put to the lowest rug of humanity as she was treated at par with the animals and slave by the proprietors of Hindu Dharma. Manusmriti as a major source, which legitimizes the denial of freedom, self respect, right to education, property, divorce etc., to women by attributing a very lofty ideal to them. In the name sanskaras, the Hindu women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death. They are also responsible for inculcating these wrong notions learnt by them through baseless traditions and preaching of the Shastras in the budding minds of their offspring. Socially discarded for a long period of time, they are compelled to live a vulnerable life, be it economic education health and all other areas that fall under basic needs. The word Dalit itself connotes the lowest strata of the society in all the aspects, a term which is condemnable itself. One has to go back to its history to understand the situation of the Dalits. Based on the Hindu caste system the total social system is divided into hierarchies since long; where people are divided into various castes and ethnic groups. The term Dalit stands for change and revolution... we feel that the voices and protests of Dalit women are almost invisible. In fact when we use phrases like, marginalization of women in the development process, or feminization of poverty or women's contribution in the unorganized sector we are referring to Dalit women without even being conscious about their specificity.

In this paper I wish to present the devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economical status of Dalit women in modern India. My aim is to highlight the harsh reality of the suppression, struggle and torture of Dalit women face every day in their miserable lives. The hardships of Dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economical status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper classes, which is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures. According to the Manusmriti, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth. It not only justifies the treatment of dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women

Ambedkar's Movement of Empowering Women:

Ambedkar's movement was launched from 1920 onwards, women actively participated and acquired the confidence to voice their issues on various platforms. Venubai Bhatkar and Renubai Shambharakar are worth mentioning. In 1924, Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha was formed to work for the socio-political equality of depressed people and promoting their economic interests. Women started participating in satyagrahas and also launched women's associations for untouchable women 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. Along with the Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur in 1930, women also had their separate conference. 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. To face tortures along with their men, women also organized their Samata Sainik Dal. When Ambedkar returned to India after attending the round table conference in 1932, hundreds of women were present for the committee meetings. At various places depressed classes women's conferences were held and they began to present their demands assertively. The encouragement of Ambedkar empowered women to speak out boldly their feelings. 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 a 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 for this self-respect and firm determination of women, goes to Ambedkar. 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.

Protective Measures for Women:

Ambedkar 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 special provisions for women while all other general provisions are applicable

to them, as to men. Hence, there are Articles like 15(3), 51(A)(c),16 and so on. He incorporated the values of liberty, equality and fraternity in the Indian Constitution.

The preamble of the constitution of India proclaims to resolve of 'We, the people of India' to secure to its citizen justice, social, economic, and political as well as liberty and equality of status and opportunity. Article 14,15,15(3),39, 42,51A(e) ,16 of the constitution give enough scope to the protection of women from any sort of discrimination in India. In the year 1976, article 39A was inserted to remind the state to ensure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and to provide for free legal aid. Dr.Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's rights in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. i.e.,

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- Just and 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 the weaker section of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Article 47-The state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health. and so on.

Article 243D(3),243T(3)and 243R(4)provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

There are number of protective laws in India to prevent exploitation on women. To quote few, Sati Prevention Act,1987,Dowry Prohibition Act,1961,the Family courts Act,1984, Protection of Human Right Act,1993,The Maternity Benefit Act1961,Immoral traffic(Prevention) Act1956,The Child Marriage Restraint Act,1929,The Pre- Natal Diagnostic Technique(Regulation and Prevention of Misuse)Act,1994, The legal Practitioners(women) Act,1923and so on.

The newly enacted Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act,2005 provides effective relief to women facing violence. On the direction and guidance of the constitution of India various revolutionary laws giving equal status to women with men have been enacted in

order to remove all disparities, dissimilarities against women. The equal remuneration Act, 1976 and National Commission for Women Act, 1990.

Status of Dalit Women in India:

According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 2000, approximately 75% of the Dalit girls drop out of primary school despite the strict laws of the Government of India, which hold reservations for Dalit children and despite showing keen academic aptitude, reasons for this early drop out from the education system is poverty or to escape humiliation, harassment and isolation by classmates, society, and even their teachers.

According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the majority of the educated people are of the upper caste, many of which may practice caste-based discrimination. Therefore, Dalit girls feel discouraged to enter education and we see the lowest literacy rate for Dalit girls compared to the total population of educated upper caste girls. The Annual Report of University Grant Commission for 1999-2000, shows that Dalits in general have very low participation rates in higher education.

The main reasons for the very low literacy rate among Dalit women could be some or all of the following:-

- ✓ The Lack of educational resources especially in rural areas.
- ✓ Privatization of schools and colleges.
- ✓ Extreme poverty, because of which they cannot afford the expensive fees for the private schools.
- ✓ The demand for an increase in the Dowry for educated girls.
- ✓ Humiliation and harassment by the high caste students and teachers.

Since only a small percentage of the total population of Dalit women are educated, the fate of the majority is very grim.

According to India's Ministry of Labour, 85% of the Dalit women have the most formidable occupations and work as agricultural labourers, scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work for minimal wages under the upper caste landlords, since it is proposed that by the National Commission for SC/ST that 85% of the Dalits are landless. When the Dalit women refuse to work for ridiculously low wages or fail to follow their harsh orders it results open violence, humiliation, beatings, rape, and even jail sentence. There are also a number of cases where the houses of Dalit women have been burnt down.

According to the Human Right Watch Report in 1992, an estimated 50,000 girls were sold every year to Hindu organizations that are involved in the Devdasi system. The 1992-93 Annual report from the Ministry of Welfare shows 1,236 reported cases of rape on Dalit women and the National Commission for SC/ST shows that approximately 10,000 cases of human right violations on Dalits are reported every month. But what is even more disturbing, is that only one out of ten of the cases are reported annually. Many Dalit women have formed NGO's through which they collectively fight against abuse from the upper classes. Such Dalit women abandon tears and embrace the shield of confidence in the hope of equality. The courage, struggle, and persistence of today's Dalit women against suppression, exploitation and torture has the power to ensure that the future generations will not have to face the bleak reality Dalits have faced for the past two thousand years. The caste system is truly a crippling disease to approximately 250 million Dalits in India today.

Dr. Ambedkar also raised the Women's issue as Member of Legislative Council during his debate in Bombay Legislative Assembly on 10th November 1938; he strongly advocated family planning measures and said that besides many other problems giving birth to many children negatively affects Mother's health. Later in the year 1942 Dr. Ambedkar also introduced Maternity Benefit Bill during his tenure as Labour Minister in Governor General's Executive Council.

Further to ensure women's status Dr. Ambedkar also introduced an emancipatory bill in Parliament which intended mainly

- to abolish different marriage systems prevalent among Hindus and to establish monogamy as the only legal system;
- Conferment of right to property and adoption on women;
- Restitution of conjugal rights and judicial separation; attempts to unify the Hindu Code in tune with progressive and modern thought.

Conclusion:

Ambedkar was not only the father of Indian Constitution; he was a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, writer, economist, editor, and a revivalist for Buddhism in India. The first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru said; “ Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society”. In his Treatises, *The Riddle of the Woman*, *The Woman And the Counter Revolution*, *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women*, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism Genesis and Development* and through the issues of his journals *Mooknayak* (1920) and *Bahishkrit Bharat* (1927), Ambedkar tries to show how the

gender relations and differences are constructed by Hindu Brahminical order, which conditions women to conform a stereotype feminine behavior, requiring them to be passive and submissive, suited only to a life of domestic and family responsibilities.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has tried to brake down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for the Hindus and the principle is capable of extension to other sections of the Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar provided 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 relation.

Women were the major force in all his struggles. Women's issue was also main plank in his fortnightly Mooknayak and Bahiskrit Bharat. In historic Mahad Satyagraha there were about 500 women took active part in this procession. On 18th July 1927, Dr. Ambedkar addressed a meeting of about three thousand women of Depressed classes, where he said that 'I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved' and said to the Women, "Never regard yourself as Untouchables, live a clean life. Dress yourselves as touchable ladies. Never mind, if your dress is full of patches, but see that it is clean. None can restrict your freedom in the choice of your garments. Attend more to the cultivation of the mind and spirit of self-Help." Then with a little fall in voice he said, "But do not feed in any case your spouse and sons if they are drunkards. Send your children to schools. Education is as necessary for Females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your Children will be." Dalit Women too responded very positively to Dr. Ambedkar's advice and to the surprise of all the women left early in the morning with wonderful change in the fashion of their Sarees as ordained by Babasaheb.

He also suggests strategies for emancipation from oppression. He found their emancipation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believes that Buddha treated women with respect and love, and never tried to degrade them like Manu did. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Ambedkar cites women like Vishakha, Amrapali of Visali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, queen of Prasenajith who approached Buddha, as evidences of Buddha's treatment of women as equals. It was mainly the Hindu culture and social customs, which stood in the headway of women's empowerment. He found education, inter caste marriage and inter dine as methods, which may eliminate castes and patriarchy, maintained through endogamy.

In recent past, a lot hue and cry is being made over 'Women's Reservation Bill' by the different sections of the Indian society, different political or apolitical organizations but nobody seems to be honest in its perspectives. The political empowerment is a must for the all round development of the women, but as in the case of dalit politicians and legislators, our efforts may prove futile. The Constitution Provisions and Acts are not sufficient to deal with the magnitude of violence in the society.

We must concentrate on imparting social education before giving any concrete shape to their political empowerment to the women. Without academic, social education and the political empowerment of women in certain parts of the country had proved futile.

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