



Ambedkar On Caste And Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's perspectives on women's oppression, social democracy, caste, and Hindu social order and philosophy have greatly influenced modern Indian feminist thinking. According to Ambedkar caste systems play a significant role in both the systemic level and the functioning of patriarchy, and there is a growing gap between caste and class in feminist political discussions. In light of the current circumstances in society, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the extensive scope of his concerns, the profoundness of his perspective, the logic of his analysis, and the intrinsic humanistic quality of his prescriptions for practical actions. Dr. Ambedkar is a significant and influential figure in the Indian women's movement. His efforts have played a pivotal role in formulating a feminist political agenda that adeptly tackles the intricate matters of class, caste, and gender.

Keywords: women, empowerment, caste, religion, caste, gender, equality, education, rights.

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the most outstanding intellectuals of India in the twentieth century. In addition to being the political leader, liberation warrior, philosopher, thinker, writer, economist, editor, and jurist, Ambedkar was the architect of the Indian Constitution. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, said in the Lok Sabha that Dr. Ambedkar would be remembered mostly as “the symbol of revolt against all the oppressing features of the Hindu society.”¹ According to Ambedkar women should have substantial social and economic rights. He argued that women should have access to healthcare, social services, and cultural and educational opportunities so that they can reach their full potential. It is essential to preserve and safeguard women's dignity and modesty, he said, and every segment of Indian women must get their fair share.

The significance of Dr. Ambedkar's views on women's oppression, social democracy, caste, and Hindu social order and philosophy in modern Indian feminist thinking can be attributed to the operation of caste, both at the systemic level and within the functioning of patriarchy, as well as the increasing divide between caste and class in feminist political discourses. Given the prevailing circumstances in society, it is imperative to undertake a comprehensive examination of the wide-ranging nature of his concerns, the depth of his viewpoint, the rationality of his analysis, and the inherent humanistic nature of his suggestions for pragmatic measures. Dr. Ambedkar is a prominent figure who has greatly influenced the Indian women's movement. His contributions have been crucial in developing a feminist political agenda that effectively addresses the complex issues of class, caste, and gender.

The presence of caste, both in the system and within patriarchy, has led to an increasing division between caste and class in feminist political conversations. Consequently, the viewpoints of Dr. Ambedkar about the subjugation of women, the principles of social democracy, the caste system, the Hindu social hierarchy, and philosophical concepts bear significant significance within the realm of modern Indian feminist ideology. Despite the remarkable intellectual prowess and esteemed reputation of Dr. Ambedkar as a bright intellectual, philosopher, revolutionary, recognized lawyer, prolific writer, social activist, and critic, his ideas were not given sufficient recognition in Indian society due to his untouchable background. Nevertheless, the current societal circumstances necessitate a thorough scrutiny of the extensive array of subjects he addresses, the broad scope of his perspective, the profoundness of his analysis, and the logical nature of his viewpoint, as well as the fundamental humanity of his recommendations for practical implementation. Dr. Ambedkar is a highly

¹ Shahare, M. L., and Nalini Anil. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Struggles and Message. Samyak Prakashan, 2016. P. 603.

influential figure for the Indian women's movement, as he has played a crucial role in shaping a feminist political agenda that addresses the intricate challenges of class, caste, and gender within the existing socio-political structure. This framework, however, still retains conservative and reactionary values, particularly in relation to gender relations.

Within the context of the Women and Counter Revolution, and *The Riddle of Women*, in his work, Dr. Ambedkar examines the treatment of women by Manu. The individual highlighted the significance of Manu's regulations regarding the position of women in shaping the Hindu mindset and Indian perception of women. These laws are upheld and sustained through Hindu personal laws that are rooted in shastras, caste, and endogamy, hence serving as the foundation of Indian patriarchy. The individual criticised Manusmriti as a significant authority that justifies the deprivation of women's independence, self-respect, right to education, property, divorce, and other rights by ascribing a highly esteemed ideal to them. In Manu's law book, he notes that the act of killing a lady is comparable to consuming alcohol, which is considered a minor transgression. The act was associated with the act of killing Sudra. Manu strongly recommends that a man avoids solitude when in the company of his own sister, daughter, or even mother. Another set of laws imposed by Manu includes the requirement for males within their families to maintain the dependency of day and night women. Additionally, if women engage in sexual activities, they must be subject to control by their male counterparts. The woman is safeguarded by her father throughout her childhood, her husband during her youth, and her sons during her old age. It is not permissible for a girl, a young woman, or even an elderly lady to carry out any autonomous tasks, even inside the confines of her own home. When it came to matters of property, Manu treated a woman in the same manner as he would a slave. For the reason that he portrayed women as being as ambiguous as untruth, he prohibited women from studying the Vedas and from conducting Samskaras, which involved speaking the Vedic mantras. Manu gives the following advice to women: "Even if a husband is destitute, devoid of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or if he is devoid of any good qualities, a faithful wife must worship him as if he were a god." She needs to maintain a positive attitude at all times, be astute in the administration of her domestic affairs, be cautious when cleaning her utensils, and be conservative with her spending.

In the same way that Dr. Ambedkar did, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women from 2001 acknowledges that "the underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure and practices." As a consequence of this, women, particularly those who belong to disadvantaged sections such as Scheduled Castes/Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and Minorities, do not have proper access to a variety of resources, including education, health, and productive resources, amongst others. Consequently, they continue to be largely marginalised, impoverished, and socially excluded individuals. Furthermore, feminist scholars came to be aware of the significance of caste in the modern-day political system of India. In light of the discussion surrounding the Women's Reservation Bill, a significant number of feminist researchers have concluded that it is impossible to examine Indian society without taking into account caste. Although patriarchy is widespread in India, the degree to which it is practiced varies according to factors such as religion, area, caste, community, and social group. Endogamy is the means by which patriarchy is maintained and perpetuated. In the Indian context, feminists have a responsibility to work towards the liberation of women, taking into account the actual experiences of all marginalized and disadvantaged groups of women. This is due to the prevailing circumstances that necessitate their action. Dr. Ambedkar's personal experience as a victim of oppression and discrimination renders his perspectives on women's oppression and equal rights more valuable than theories derived solely from observation. These insights can assist the feminist movement in enhancing its approach to addressing systemic challenges and contradictions, thereby facilitating the mainstream inclusion of women. In order to comprehend the arguments that Dr. Ambedkar presented and the principles that he advocated for, it is essential to have an understanding of some of the painful and positive life events that he went through during his lifetime. He was born at the beginning of the sociopolitical awakening that began at that specific period.

He notes that the numerical sexual inequality in marriage can be understood as a result of the caste system, which eventually leads to the need to address the unequal distribution of marriageable individuals between genders. When a woman and a man became surplus women (widows) and surplus men (widowers) after their husband's death, there was a notion that their existence posed a threat. The mechanisms employed in the caste system encompass three detrimental customs that necessitate regulation. The following are the customs: (i) Sati, a cultural practice involving the cremation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband; (ii) enforced widowhood, which is the practice of preventing a widow from remarrying; and (iii) Girl marriage. His desires have always been taken into consideration, given that male has traditionally held a dominant position over women. In contrast, women have historically been a vulnerable target for a wide variety of inequitable injunctions, whether they be religious, social, or economic in nature, which are imposed by men. The awful traditions of the caste system should not be the foundation of society, as Dr. Ambedkar argues; rather, the community should be founded on reason. Therefore, in his book *"The Annihilation of Caste,"* he proposes: "Make every man and woman free from the thraldoms of the Shastras cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will interdine and intermarry." This is a manner by which the caste system that is maintained by the Shastras might be eradicated. He discovered that it is possible to

eradicate castes and patriarchy, which are maintained by endogamy, with the use of means such as education, intercaste marriage, and interdine.

Ambedkar initiated his social and political movements in 1920. *Mook Nayak*, a journal, was published in 1920, and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, a newspaper, was published in 1927, both with the intention of spreading his ferocious propaganda against the Hindu social order, its oppressive features towards women and depressed classes. Through its topics, he brought attention to the problems that women and people who are depressed face, as well as the importance of education and the necessity for gender equality. Because of his exposure to Western culture, he has developed a different perspective on feminist concerns. During a period marked by the conclusion of the initial wave of feminism, notable achievements such as the attainment of suffrage rights for women in Britain in 1918 and the United States in 1920 were observed. Dr. Ambedkar's viewpoint about the issue of women's rights, which underscored their entitlement to education, equitable treatment in comparison to men, entitlement to property, and participation in the political sphere, bore resemblance to the aspirations of the worldwide feminist movement. Dr. Ambedkar's ability to work for over eighteen hours a day without encountering tiredness or other obstacles is widely acknowledged.

The *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* was established in 1924 with the purpose of promoting the economic interests of depressed persons and working towards the socio-political equality of those who are sad. Women started creating women's groups to educate and create awareness at the same time they started participating in *satyagraha*'s. Even the Hindus from higher caste along with lower castes took part in the *Mahad Satyagraha*, which was held in 1927 to demand temple admission. A participant that fit this description was *Shandabai Shinde*. The decision to burn the *Manusmriti*, a text that degraded women and *shudras*, was made during the *Satyagraha*.

It was noticeable that more than five hundred women took part in the demonstration that took place following the bonfire of the *Manusmriti* and afterwards. Dr. Ambedkar addressed the gathering giving the following advice to the women: they should adjust the way they wore sarees; they should wear jewellery that were lightweight, and they should avoid eating the meat of dead animals. Women from higher castes, such as *Tipnis*, were the ones who informed them about the correct manner to wear sarees.

Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, was elected to the position of president of the women's association that was founded in Bombay in 1928. This event marked the beginning of the year 1928. Women conducted their own conference at the same time as the *Depressed Classes Conference*, which was held in Nagpur in 1930. Both conferences took place at the same time. During the *Kalram Temple Entry Satyagraha*, which took place in Nasik in 1930, there were five hundred women who participated in the protest. The majority of these women were held in prison alongside men, and while they were there, they were subjected to brutal punishment like other prisoners. Women likewise organised a *Samata Sainik Dal* in order to suffer the same kinds of tortures as their male counterparts. Women had the confidence to express their emotions with confidence as a result of Ambedkar's support. In the year 1931, *Radhabai Vadale* made a declaration during a news conference saying that, "We should get the right to enter the Hindu temples, to fill water at their water resources." We should get the respect of the Hindu community." Let us refer to these as social rights. In addition to this, we ought to be granted the political right to rule, sitting in close proximity to the Viceroy's throne. Regardless of whether or not we are given a heavy sentence, we do not care. It is our intention to fill every single jail in the nation. Why should we be afraid of being fired or subjected to a lathi charge? Does a warrior have concern for his own life when he is on the road? It would be better to die a hundred times over if you want to escape living a life that is plagued with humiliation throughout your entire existence. Our political rights are so important to us that we are willing to sacrifice our lives to protect them.

On July 20th, 1942, the *All India Dalit Mahila Conference* was organized. This event took place in India. As a result of the awakening and activity of women, Dr. Ambedkar experienced a great degree of happiness within himself. In regard to this problem, he wrote a letter to *Meshram*, who was one of his pals, on the thirteenth of August. The *All India Untouchable Women's Conference* was held on January 6th, 1945, in the city of Mumbai. The conference was held over the course of the year 1945. Regarding the movement, his strategy was akin to the Gandhian technique, despite the fact that he and Gandhi had various disagreements on a variety of problems. His tactic was comparable to the Gandhian method. Rather than concentrating on the social changes that were carried out by *Brahma Samaj* or *Arya Samaj*, he was of the opinion that the reconstruction of the Hindu society on the basis of equality should be given a higher priority. This was due to the fact that the activities of these organizations were limited to the highest levels of society. His views on Hindu philosophy and society were crystallized as a result of his in-depth study of *Smritis* and *Shashtras*, as well as his experience from the response of upper castes during his temple admission drive. His discoveries encompassed both secular and religious aspects of Hinduism. In order to obtain the personality development that is necessary to achieve effective administrative and leadership skills, women have participated in a range of activities. These activities include running newspapers, women's hostels, and boarding schools, as well as participating in *Satyagraha* to achieve their goals. A great number of women wrote about a variety of subjects, including planning, Buddhist philosophy, and other subjects, with Dr. Ambedkar serving as a source of inspiration and support. The

Satyagraha were participated in by women, and they also penned plays, diaries, and autobiographies. Tulsibai Bansode was the one who initiated the publication known as Chokhamela. This demonstrated how Ambedkar educated impoverished women who were unable to read or write and inspired them to fight against unfair societal norms such as child marriage and the devadasi system.

Dr. Ambedkar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, exerted a great deal of effort to ensure that women's rights were appropriately incorporated into India's written constitution and political language. When it came to the position of women, he was quite certain. Due to the fact that he considered women's equality in both a formal and practical sense, he devised specific regulations for them, while at the same time ensuring that all of the general regulations were applied to them in the same manner as they were to males. Because of this, there are Articles 15(3), 51(A), and others. It became known as the "New Charter of Human Rights" because of the important work he did to write the Indian Constitution. He thought that the law was the best way to make society work in a way that allowed each person to grow while also allowing society to grow. He wrote the Indian Constitution with the ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood in mind.

He sent the Constitution with a warning because he thought that any plan for voting rights and districts that didn't include both representing people and their views wouldn't be enough to make a popular government. This is what he said in his speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949: "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at its base social democracy." It's a way of life that values freedom, equality, and brotherhood. This is what he means by "social democracy." He went on to say, "On January 26, 1950, we will start a life full of contradictions." There will be an imbalance in politics, but not in everyday life or the economy. We will follow the idea of "one man, one vote" and "one vote, one value" in politics. Because of how our society and economy are set up, we will continue to resist the idea that each person has their own worth. How long are we going to put up with this mess of a life? How long are we going to say that our social and economic lives can't be equal? We will only put our political system at risk if we keep denying it for a long time. We need to get rid of this contradiction right away, or else people who are angry about unfair treatment will destroy the democratic democracy that this Assembly has worked so hard to build." The new social movements formed, particularly among Dalits, women, and peasants, with the purpose of asserting democratic rights and urging for a new path of development. These movements validate the warning that the father of the Indian Constitution issued when he presented it to the nation.

Dr. Ambedkar advocated for the rights of women while serving as the Law Minister of the independent India. He was the one who presented the Hindu Code Bill to Parliament on April 11th, 1947. This bill was met with strong resistance from Hindu conservatives in India after it became independent. Women were given a lot of basic rights by the Bill.

It wanted to get rid of the different ways that Hindus get married and make monogamy the only formal system. Its goals were to give people the right to own land and adopt women. Legal separation and the restoration of marital rights were both made possible as a result of this. A united front was made to bring the Hindu code into conformity with contemporary and forward-thinking ideals.

When it was first introduced in parliament in 1948 and discussed on the floor of the house, the Hindu Code Bill was met with opposition from the general public. Dr. Ambedkar did everything in his power to defend the Bill by highlighting the issues that were plaguing Indian society and claiming that the ideas contained in the Bill originated from the Constitutional principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. He also said that the caste system and the way women are treated unfairly in Indian society meant that a legal framework was needed to make things better so that women had the same rights as men. He also said that the Bill's goal was "to codify the rules of Hindu law that are scattered in a huge number of decisions made by High Courts and the Privy Council, making it hard for the average person to understand." Most of Dr. Ambedkar's ideas were later put into action in four Bills on Hindu "marriage," "succession," "minority and guardianship," and "maintenance" in 1955–56. Changes were made to the Hindu legal system in the year 1976. However, despite the fact that the Indian Constitution has been in effect for fifty years, women still do not have their fundamental rights restored. The Constitution of India is founded on the principle that all Indian citizens should be able to enjoy freedom, equality, and justice. It became very evident, as a result of the argument that took place over the Hindu Code Bill, that the rights for women that are contained in the Book of the Indian Constitution are difficult to put into practice. A good answer to this question can be found in Dr. Ambedkar's study of the Hindu social order and its theory, which keeps women and oppressed classes in a state of slavery, poverty, ignorance, and helplessness, and these problems still exist today.

However, the Hindu Code Bill was a significant contributor to the revival of the feminist movement in India. As a result of Dr. Ambedkar's efforts to liberate women from oppression, the women who hold positions of power in Parliament are motivated to continue advocating for this cause until it is finally enacted. Women were given the push to acknowledge their status and to pursue the fight for rights as a result of the second-wave feminism movement, which began in the early 1960s. This was the beginning of the movement. Women continue to struggle against a variety of difficulties, including but not limited to rape, dowry-related deaths,

communalism, fundamentalism, sexual harassment, personal and social violence, poverty, and other similar issues.

Because of his profound problems with the principles that underpin Hinduism, Dr. Ambedkar ultimately decided to adopt Buddhism as his religion. According to the precepts of Hinduism, the only individuals who have benefited from the religion are those who belong to the so-called higher castes, he remarked in a speech that he delivered in Nagpur on October 15, 1956. He stated that this is the only group that has benefited from the religion. It is not likely to be beneficial to Sudras or untouchables in any significant way. "As soon as the wife of a Brahmin conceives, she thinks of the High Court whether any post of a Judge has fallen vacant but when our woman becomes pregnant, she cannot think of anything better than a sweeper's post under the Municipal Committee". Because of the pattern of making the rich richer and the poor poorer and denying them the right to work, this thesis is applicable to all economically impoverished sectors in contemporary India, regardless of caste. This is because of the trend of making the rich richer more than the poor. According to the trend of globalization, this thesis is applicable to all countries and regions that are economically disadvantaged. He came to the conclusion that Hinduism will ultimately put an end to India and the Hindu people. If Hinduism is allowed to play a role in politics, it will inevitably lead to a decline in social standing and, eventually, to dictatorship. Daniel O. Connell had warned India that "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 its liberty." He recalled that Daniel O. Connell had made this statement a warning to India.

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