

LITERATURE AND WORKS OF DR BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR IN EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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In Indian society, woman is always given a lower status. She is oppressed by the patriarchal order sanctioned by Hindu religion and laws of Manu. That's why she has become weak. In fact, she has been made weak. We are aware of their condition and helplessness. Woman is considered as the weaker section of Indian society. She has been denied of human rights. Systematic exploitation for centuries has transformed her into powerless living dead creature. Since Vedic period, she has been deprived of the right of freedom, gender equality, education and social status in the society. She has been socially, economically, physically, psychologically and sexually exploited since ancient time in the name of religion, tradition and taboos. The empowerment of women is a much discussed subject, but sensitization about this issue is grossly neglected at grass roots level.

The movement to empower her started firstly in Europe in 18th century and its effects have fallen all over the world. In Pre-Independent India, many social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, G.G. Agarkar, Maharshi Karve, Mahatma Fule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj have put their efforts to change women's conditions. But the pre and post independence socio-political movements did not pay proper attention towards her issues. The issue of her emancipation was not handled independently. Even the Indian feminist movements at their initial stage could not understand the problems of woman properly due to the influence of western feminism. The high class Indian feminist failed to address the issues relating to women.

The need was to go the root of this misery. But the attempts were peripheral. It was Dr Ambedkar who related the issue of exploitation of women with the 'genesis of caste system'. He related the issue of emancipation and empowerment of women with the 'annihilation of caste.' For that he wanted to build the new society and legal system on the foundation of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and the Rule of Law. He had perfect insight about problems of women and so was the solution. He studied how *Sati system* and *Girl child- Adult male marriage system* have evolved to retain caste system. He blames *Brahminical literature* for providing philosophical foundation under the cover of religion for systematic exploitation of women. He raised the question, "Why Manu degraded woman?" He quotes certain verses of Manu in *Manusmriti*, "Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of their families), and if they attach themselves to sexual enjoyment, they must be kept under one's control." In another verse Manu says, 'Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old

age; a woman is never fit for independence.” By quoting these satanic verses, Dr Ambedkar convinces how this philosophy deprived the women from basic right of Life and Liberty. According to him, Manu wanted to deprive woman of the freedom she had under the Buddhist regime. Manu thought that grant of liberty to woman would dismantle caste system. This denied her right to divorce and remarry. He also deprived women of property rights. He denies right of woman to study Vedas thus right of education. He allows the husband the right to beat his wife. *Ramayana of Tulsidas* also favoured and justified beating of wife. So, Dr Ambedkar was convinced that the annihilation of caste is the prerequisite for women empowerment. His undelivered speech published in the form of book ‘Annihilation of Caste’, is a guiding lamp in this direction. His attempt to burn the text of *Manusmriti*, role in the making of Indian Constitution, making of various laws, decision to embrace Buddhism explain what solutions he had with him for the empowerment of women. Dr Ambedkar believed in such democracy which has utmost respect for the notion of constitutionalism. He used the medium of Parliamentary mechanism to introduce the laws seeking women empowerment.

According to Dr Ambedkar, “It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self respect. Self respect is the most vital factor in life. Without it, man is a cipher. To live worthily with self respect, one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition.” Dr Ambedkar made certain attempts to ensure rights of woman. As a Labour Minister during British regime certain welfare laws in the interest of women labourer were introduced at his initiative. The right of just and humane condition at working place, regulation of working hours etc. could be mentioned here.

Dr Ambedkar was aware of the causes of the exploitation of women. So, his valiant effort, as the Law Minister of independent India, towards emancipation of women appeared in the form of *Hindu Code Bill*. The Bill provided for several basic rights to women which were denied by the caste ridden religion and *Manusmriti*. It was an effort to abolish different marriage systems prevalent under different schools of Hindu law. It also aimed to recognize the right to property and adoption of women. The salient features of the Bill in favour of women were as follows-

- A right to divorce
- A right to maintenance in case of divorce
- A right to challenge the re-marriage of her husband
- A right to adoption or to go in adoption
- A right to her own earnings
- Equal right to property of parents
- A right to be an heir
- A right to legalize inter-caste and ‘sagotra’ marriage
- A right to nominate an heir

At the time Dr Ambedkar was a Law Minister in the Cabinet led by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Before introducing the Bill in the Parliament Ambedkar had a discussion with Nehru who expressed his whole hearted support in favour of the Bill. But unfortunately, when it was introduced by Dr Ambedkar on 5 Feb. 1951, it was strongly opposed by the fundamentalist casteist forces inside as well as outside the Parliament. He resigned from the ministry on this issue. His explanation for resignation undoubtedly shows how the parliament of independent India deprived its women citizens of even basic rights. After his resignation, the Bill was passed in bits and pieces. The property rights section was immediately passed. This itself was a landmark in empowering women. The entire credit for this goes to Dr Ambedkar. The other sections of the Hindu Code Bill were passed in the form of following acts:

- Hindu Marriage Act 1955
- Hindu Succession Act 1956
- Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956
- Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956.

When Dr Ambedkar was a member of Bombay Legislative Council, he supported vigorously Maternity Benefit Bill when it was introduced in the 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 parental period and also subsequently. Dr Ambedkar says, "To have too many children is a crime." He demanded to implement Family Planning Bill in 1938. But the leaders of that period opposed this. The leaders wanted to increase their religious population. This laid down India as a second largest population country in the world

Dr Ambedkar cautiously drafted the Constitution for independent India. He tried his level best to assure various human rights for the Indians irrespective of their caste, gender, race, language, culture, religion and place of birth. It thus guarantees the empowerment of women. Ambedkar has given equal status to women on par with men by providing many provisions in the Constitution. He said, "Unity is Meaningless without the accompaniment of women, and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women." *The Preamble* of the Constitution is considered as a key to open the minds of the framers of the Constitution. It explains the social contract made voluntarily by the Indians to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC. It vows securing Justice, Equality, Fraternity to all its citizens including women. The Constitution in its *Preamble* guarantees:

- Social, economic and political justice
- Freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship
- Equality of status and opportunity and
- Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and national unity to all the citizens of India without any discrimination of caste, creed or sex.
- *The Fundamental Rights* under the Constitution provide for provisions regarding empowerment of women. These rights assure the Rule of Law as below:
- Article 14- equality to all

- Article 15- guarantees the right of women against gender discrimination
- Article 15(3)- empowers the State to enact special laws for the benefit of women
- Article 16- prevents the State from making any discrimination in the matters of public employment on the ground of sex
- Article 21- guarantees the right of Life and Personal Liberty. Manusmriti denied this right to the women. But this article threw the Manusmriti into the dustbin. *Jati Panchayat* and *Khap Panchayat* have been declared as unconstitutional by the Judiciary with the help of this article. Now the court has made it mandatory for the State to protect inter-caste marriages. Sati system, Female foeticide, concept of *Moksha*, domestic violence etc have been now declared as unconstitutional.
- Directive Principles of State Policy- These are considered as a guiding lamp for the State in the governance. It casts moral obligation upon the Government to guarantee the rights like right to work, to education, living wages, uniform civil code etc which are meant for empowerment of women.
- Fundamental Duties under Part IV A- It casts duty upon the citizens to adopt the scientific temper and renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- Apart from these works for their emancipation, he delivered helpful guidance to them in his many speeches. Some of them can be mentioned as-
- In the speech delivered at the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held at Nagpur on the 20th July 1942, Dr Ambedkar said, "Do not be in a hurry to marry. Let each girl who marries stand up to her husband, claim to be his friend and equal and refuse to be his slave."
- In his advice to the prostitutes of Bombay on 16th June 1936, he said, "...either you remain where you are and continue to be despised and shunned or you give up your disgraceful profession and come with us."
- On 14th August 1931 before going to attend Round Table Conference the next day, he made a very stirring speech before the Depressed Class women. In it he says, "If you stand by your resolve to extirpate your slavery root and branch and undergo all trials and tribulations for it, the credit and success of my being able to discharge the onerous task will be yours."
- In reply to the addresses presented to Dr Ambedkar at Kolhapur on 25th December 1952, he said, "None of the prominent Indian women leaders were really interested in the social progress of women" and stated that the Hindu Code Bill was now just like milk spoiled by mixture with a bitter acid. He added that if they wanted to have the Hindu Code Bill passed, they should find two fat women to fast.

Conclusion:-

Dr Ambedkar fought bravely for the cause of emancipation of women. Instead of the peripheral efforts done by some reformers, he concentrated on the root of this issue. He has the proper understanding and knowledge of the women exploitation. So he related the issue of emancipation and empowerment of women with the annihilation of caste. For that he wanted to build the society on the foundation of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The role of Dr Ambedkar in women empowerment cited above is just an outline. But

truly, the whole Indian women community is highly indebted to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar for his unprecedented efforts for the empowerment of women. He infused a spark among the women to make progress in every field of life and imbibed in their creative minds the values of self-respect, dignity and liberty in the true sense of the word.

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