

Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Pioneer of Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

The Babasaheb is Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar.He is 'Baba', the father for all the suppressed and depressed people of India and 'Saheb',the master of knowledge.He has given a new path to the people of the world.This path leads towards equality,fraternity and brotherhood.He was keen on the development of women in India too. Women Empowerment can be taken as a tool for social, economic and political equality between men and women and developing capability of women by assigning rights that were not available earlier. Having the wider purpose of changing society for the betterment of the down-trodden society including women, Babasaheb found no other way except changing the very mechanism of the social order. He wanted to attack caste and thus bring about change not only for low caste people but also for women. The present paper discusses the valuable contribution of Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar for the empowerment of women in India.

Key words: Babasaheb,Ambedkar,Women, India,Empowerment, Education

The life of Babasaheb was a great saga of suffering, sacrifice and struggle. His birth as an untouchable gave him a bitter taste of caste tyranny, oppression and unbearable agony. He was a fighter for the dignity of man and deprived people. His life was a struggle of a champion of human rights. So obviously he was a great thinker of woman and their rights. Being a pioneer of social justice, he always worked for women empowerment. His principle aim was to build up a society based on social justice. To secure and fulfill his dreams he thought everybody should be equal irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion. For that reason he started to work for the upliftment of women and their rights.

His contribution was great in the field of women's empowerment who advocated for the liberation of women and gender equality in India. If there are any persons who worked for women's liberation in India, they are none other than Buddha, Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, Ramasamy Periyar and Jyotirao Phule. There are many leaders who fought for the women's rights in India. Most of

them failed in their action. But Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar was the only person who changed the picture via law. While drafting the constitution of India, Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar was the prime mover of the welfare of women. He has framed many laws for women.He has given equal status to women on par with men by providing many provisions in the Indian constitution. To him, sexual discrimination should be rooted out from the society and everybody should get equal opportunity in the society. The Preamble of Indian constitution guarantees social and economic justice to women and that is because of Babasaheb's contribution. In the preamble it is mentioned:

iii) Equality of status and opportunity and

iv) Fraternity assuring dignity of the individual and national unity to all the citizens of India without any discrimination of caste, creed or sex.

In Indian Constitution, there are few articles that help the women of Indian society to improve their

position and to compete with their male counterparts. For example

Article 14 - All are equal in the eyes of law and equally protected by the law. It means equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex.

Article 15(3) enables positive discrimination in favour of women.

Article 16 mentions there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office without any discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, creed and sex.

Article 39 and 39(d) state Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.

As per article 41 the state shall guarantee within its economic limits to all the citizens, the right to work, to education and public assistance in certain cases.

Article 42 the state makes provision for Human conditions of work and maternity relief.

Under article 44, the state provides a uniform Civil Code to all the citizens throughout the territory of India.

Article 46 - The state to promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

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

Article 51(A)(C) - Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women.

Women are the victim of evil caste system. They have been carrying caste from one generation to another generation. They are taught from a young age that they have to do this and that, are pressured, oppressed, suppressed, forced, whether it is mental torture or something else. In the name of the caste and the religion, women are tied up with the bondage of superstitious which they carry till their death. They are used just like a machine for procreation. Dr. Babasaheb insisted on the education of girls. He strongly believed that if a boy gets education, he is the only person to get educated in a family. Perhaps, if a girl child is educated in a family, the whole family is benefitted.

Women empowerment is a much discussed subject but sensitization about this issue is grossly neglected. While we must try to build alternative system of health care, we must also expose the responsibility of the system for neglecting the women. Women constitute about one half of the global population, but they are placed at various disadvantageous positions due to gender difference and bias. They have been the victims of violence and exploitation by the male dominated society all over the world. Our society is a tradition bound society, where women have been socially, economically, physically, psychologically and sexually exploited from times immemorial, sometimes in the name of religion, sometimes on the pretext of the writing in the scripture and sometimes by the social sanction.

Babasaheb started his social movement in 1920. 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 fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order and launched a journal Mook Nayak in 1920 and Bhishkrut Bharat in 1927 for this purpose. Through its issues he put due stress on the gender equality and need for education and exposed the problems of the

depressed as well as women. Babasaheb's perception of women question, emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists demand. As J.S. Mill expressed in the subjection of women, the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and one of the chief hindrance to human development; perfect equality, admitting no privilege or power on the one side, nor disability on the other, Babasaheb also holds the same views on work for women.

In January 1923 a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramai, Babasaheb's wife as its president. In the Kalaram Temple entry satyagraha at Nashik many women participated and many of them were arrested along with men and ill-treated in jails. To face torture along with their men, women also organized their Samata sainik Dal. In the round table conference hundreds of women were present for the meeting. At various places depressed classes women's conferences were held and they began to present their demands assertively. The encouragement of Babasaheb empowered women to speak out boldly their feelings. He was well aware about status of women, as the chairperson of drafting committee, he adequately included women's rights in the Indian constitution. Dr. Ambedkar believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of reformation. The historic Mahad satyagraha witnessed participation of three hundred women with their male counterparts addressing another meeting of about 300 women. According to him, the progress of a community is measured by degree of progress which women have 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. This will bring honor and glory to our own selves

Babasaheb introduced the Hindu Code Bill in parliament which was opposed both inside as well outside the house and was dropped. He resigned from the cabinet expressing his discontent over non acceptance of women's right by the parliament. Besides, he highlighted the issues of

Muslim women. Babasaheb's emphasis was on reconstruction of the Hindu society on the basis of equality rather than the social reforms initiated by Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj because their attempts were limited only to the upper strata of the society. His in depth study of Smritis and Shastras and his experience from the response of upper castes during the temple entry movement constructed his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society. Gaining inspiration from Babasaheb, many women started writing on various topics and Tulsibai Bansode started a newspaper, 'Chokhamela'. This shows how Babasaheb created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and Devdasi system. He strongly believed in the movement run by women. According to him if women are truly taken into confidence, they may change the present miserable picture of the society. He always honored women for their work and hardship.

While addressing in conference to women he could easily communicate with them as a homely person. He told them to change their dressing style, to do away with unwanted ornaments, which they used to wear all the time and told them to send to their daughters to school, keep cleanliness etc. His speech was so effective that women dropped completely the unwanted ornaments in that meeting itself and next day the women could be seen with their style of dressing changed completely. Babasaheb brought about a revolutionary change in the attitude of women. That gave an extra boost to his movement. He was 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 social reconstruction that favors women empowerment. With the advent of information age, education has become an important tool for empowerment of women. Only when a woman is educated, she can understand the importance of social and political empowerment. Economic development of country like India depends upon women empowerment through

education. Unfortunately, at present still some percentage of Indian women are not exposed to education and thus necessary steps should be taken to ensure that education reaches to each and every woman of India.

The 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 laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. He started fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order through the issues of Mook Nayak and Bahiskrit Bharat he put due stress on gender equality and the need for education and exposed the problems of the depressed as well as women. The encouragement of Babasaheb to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931. He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. Babasaheb created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. Dr. Babasaheb tried an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. His deep concern and feelings for all round development of women is expressed from his each sentence and word.

Babasaheb was among the most outstanding intellectuals of India in the 20th century in the world. Paul Baran, an eminent Marxist economist, had made a distinction in one of his essays between an "intellect worker" and an intellectual. The former, according to him, is one who uses his intellect for making a living whereas the latter is one who uses it for critical analysis and social transformation. Babasaheb fits Baran's definition of an intellectual very well. Babasaheb is also an outstanding example of what Antonio Gramsci

called an organic intellectual, that is, one who represents and articulates the interests of an entire social class. 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 also added that if the women from all walks of life are taken in to confidence, they may play a significant role in the social reforms. He has played very massive and active role to eradicate the social abuses. His secular perspective is known through his thoughts on „Purdah“ (Veil) system, religious conversions and legal rights for Muslim women. This is a disservice not only to Ambedkar but to the fundamental precepts of the feminist movement, an important part of which is to acknowledge and celebrate contribution—intellectual and otherwise—of those who don't figure in the mainstream hero pantheon. And Ambedkar's contribution towards securing the position of disadvantaged sections is significant. This includes not just lower caste men and women, but also upper caste women. Apart from the numerous speeches which drive home his basic belief in the equality of women, Ambedkar's theorisation of the interlinked nature of caste and gender-based oppression in India was a pioneering feat. His now oft-quoted 1917 paper called Castes in India shows how in the Indian context, the specific ways in which women and their sexuality are controlled, all hinge on the maintenance of the caste system. He outlines this by showing how strict control of women through sati, child-marriage and restriction of widow remarriage were all devised to deal with the problem of 'surplus women'. To keep the caste group enclosed, marriage outside the community had to be restricted and to avoid men from marrying outside the community these novel strategies had to be devised. Women had to be controlled, not men. Babasaheb facilitated the legal recognition of women as equal citizens. He granted women the right to divorce, the right to inheritance and he provided for legal recognition of inter-caste marriages. That he recognised the equal status of

women and that he worked towards securing it legally at a time when barely anyone else was, is beyond question. But whether retrospectively labelling him as a feminist is necessary or sensible is a different question altogether. When we list our feminist icons here in India, we often overlook Babasaheb Ambedkar. Any mention of Dr Ambedkar and his work is often sought to be confined. He becomes a 'Dalit leader'. While his work in opposing and fighting the caste system is perhaps second to none, such a process of labelling refuses to recognize the other aspects of his work. Aspects of his work which have benefitted every Indian citizen.

The all round development of women was his top most agenda and he left no stone unturned in achieving this goal. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a social visionary aptly provided appropriate rights to women in the constitution through several articles and at a later stage, many more were included. The vision of Babasaheb is yet to become reality and unless minds are united it will be only a distant dream.

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