



International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

Volume-I, Issue-I, February 2015, Page No. 191-195

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

Ambedkar and woman rights: An analysis

Satyajit Das

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Political Science, G.D.C., Dharmanagar, North Tripura

Abstract

Ambedkar is one of the greatest personalities of 20th century India. His life 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 the woman emancipation. 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 work for the upliftment of woman and their rights. In this context, the present paper intends and tries to narrate the rights and upliftment of woman in the view of Ambedkar. The endeavor was also given to highlight the relevance of Ambedkar at present day India.

Key Words: Ambedkar, woman rights, social justice, relevance, India.

Introduction: Dr. Ambedkar-the great fighter and a deep thinker has made significant efforts on the path of liberty. He was the first Indian reformer who roots out the barriers in the way of advancement of Indian society in general and of women in particular. Above all he was a pioneer of social justice. To secure all these goals he laid down the foundation of social justice by incorporating many factors or issues into Indian constitution through its various articles for the Hindus and other sections of the society; specially for backward communities and for under privileged classes.

He started his movement in 1920. He raised his voice against the Hindu social order and social system through his renowned journal *Mook Nayak* in 1920 and *Bahiskrit Bharat* in 1927. Almost through its all issues he spoke on the gender equality, women education and exposed the problems related to women and other depressed class. He was also a strong advocate of family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly.

Ambedkar was an example of inspiration of many classes of society. He spent his whole life for the betterment of Indian society as well as women and other under privileged sections. He was also involved to root out the evil practices like prostitutions. He worked for the welfare of the people for his whole life. He builds up awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. As a result of that finally he added and incorporated many rights of women in the constitution of India. It is to be noted here that Ambedkar was not only the father of Indian constitution, he was a freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, economist, editor, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and above all he was the pioneer of backward classes. He stated women of Indian society should be given equal opportunity and equal share with their male counterpart.

Objectives, Methods and Materials: The present paper is an endeavor to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women rights and problems in pre and post independent India and the relevancy of his ideas in present political and social scenario of India. Secondary data have been collected from internet, news papers, published papers and books.

Analysis and Discussion: It is to be noted here that if we look at what Ambedkar has done for the emancipation of women in Indian society, we have to highlight his pioneering work to improve the status of women by granting the fundamental rights to all the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race and sex. Infact during the introduction of Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament, he had been strongly

opposed by many MPs. Although later on, Ambedkar supported his views on the ground that woman's right to property was accepted by *Brihaspati Smriti* and divorce by *Parashara Smriti* (T.Bharati). To understand the contribution rendered by Ambedkar to liberate women from the cruel command of men, we have to trace out the status of women from the Vedic period to British raj.

In the initial stage of human history, the families were matriarchal. In those days of matriarchal families, it is a well known fact that women were physically stronger than men. During menstruation, pregnancy and child birth, she had to depend upon men for food and her protection which subsequently enslaved her and society took the form of 'Patriarchal'. In this way the matriarchal families have been changed to patriarchal families. Still women continued to enjoy authority and respect in the family. This was continued to Vedic period. **Status of women in Vedic period:** - In the Vedic period women enjoyed all the necessary rights which are common for a human being. The women had access to all branches of learning. In *Brahadaranika Upanishad* (III, 6-8) we are told that in the king Janaka's Court, the maiden scholar Gargi was examined in her knowledge by *Yaghavalkya* (Tikoo,P.N.). The women enjoyed equal position on par with men. Even in a religious ceremony, women played an important role. No religious ceremony by men was complete without participation of his wife. For instance, *Rama* had to get statue of *Sita* made to carry on with ceremonies for *Ashwamegh Yagna*. In that period, the girls were free to choose their husband in open '*Sayambars*'.

Status of women in later Vedic period: - The status of women in later Vedic period had been down grading and enslaving through sexual discrimination. The socio-economic status of the women was decreasing day by day. Many orthodox principles were imposed upon them and they had been deprived of basic human rights and opportunities. They were treated as slaves. They had no choices or freedom. They had been discriminated by men and orthodoxy structure of the society; even the minority suffered at the hands of majority. They were considered as one of the three 'W's-the wine, women and wealth (T.Bharathi). The women were expected to show their obedience to men. They had no property rights but they were treated as the property of men. Consequently the women in later Vedic period had thrown in complete darkness.

According to *Manu*, in his book '*Manu Smriti*', it is the very nature of women to corrupt men verse 2(213); woman has no right to acquire property verse 8 (416); Rules like serving husbands faithfully even, if he is devoid of any good qualities verse 154 (5); a girl, a young woman or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her own house, verse 147 (5). A widow should be long suffering until death, self-restrained and chaste (Abstain re-marring) verse 158 (5). She should obey her husband while he is alive and not violate her vow to him when he is dead 151 (5). The *Artha Shastra* stated that the principle aim of woman is to get married and bear children. *Bhishma* and *Yudhistira* believed that the woman is the root cause of the evil. *Swamy Sankaracharya* (9th century A.D.) of Kerala proclaimed that a woman is a gate to hell and she is poison in the disguise of nectar. *Katha Upanishad* (2-5) strictly warns men not to follow women for "they strut about within the periphery of ignorance. They lead us as blind men lead the blind" (Tikoo, P.N.).

The so called golden Age of Guptas had been the Dark Age for women due to some evil practices performed by the women. They had been bound to perform those practices. They advocated early marriages-even the pre-puberty marriages. Some brahminical rules and dogmas were imposed upon women. The system started for keeping unmarried girls/women in temples '*Dev-Dassies*' for the service including sexual abuse by the priest in the name of God. Polygamy, child marriage, illiteracy for women and discrimination on sex, besides caste, creed became order of the day. This is not the end, in the medieval period, Muslims invaded India and introduced strict rules for women to remain in *Parda* (Veil). It cannot be completed without mentioning the view of *Tulsi Das* about women. In his '*Ramchariter Manas*' he said, 'Nobody can be as vile as a woman, who for a moment's enjoyment, does not understand the pains of hundreds of births" (Sloka-9). In Sloka 5 he furthered said, "A woman is impure from her birth". In *Balkanda* (Sloka-57-A) *Tulsi* wrote that a woman is silly and stupid by nature. In recent past a writer summed up the plight of women in his song '*Aurat Ne Janam Diya Mardon ko, Mardon Ne use Bazar Diya*'. (Woman gives birth to man, but man puts her in prostitution centre.).

Social Reformers: After the era of such suffering, oppression and the outlook of many thinker regarding women and their rights, it would be quite inspiring and interesting to mention women

position in the society in later periods. In the reign of British Raj in India, a new hope dawned in the mind of women for their emancipation. In most of the part, the western education system attracted and enlightened many Indians to work for the eradication of all evil practices that had been prevailed in Indian society. They started work to purify Hindu society from its old age tradition. In this context, we can make some illustrations such as according to Swami Vivekananda, “Women will work out their destinies much better than men can do for them”. Raja Rammohan Roy worked hard for the abolition of *sati system*. Jyotiba Phule sacrificed his life for the education of girls. There were many social workers who had sacrificed and laid down their lives for the rights of women.

Ambedkar and justice to women: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s approach to women’s right is exclusively different from other social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi who tried to reform the Hindu society of certain outdated customs and practices without questioning the hierarchical social order. But Ambedkar made his own view for the women rights and that has been reflected in Indian constitution. His goal was to make a society based on social justice. To secure this goal, Ambedkar has given equal status to women on par with men by providing many provisions in the Indian constitution. To him, sexual discrimination should be root 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 Ambedkar contribution. In the preamble it is mentioned: i) social, economic and political justice, ii) freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, 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.

Constitutional Rights and Women: In Indian Constitution, there are few articles exist 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 24 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines or in any other hazardous employment. 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. Article 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R (4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

The Hindu Code Bill: Ambedkar not only ascertain constitutional guarantees to women but also introduced and got passed four Acts which strengthened the position of women in the society. These were incorporated in the Hindu Code Bill. These are: i) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. ii) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956. iii) The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956. iv) The Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956.

If we look at the provisions of those Acts, we can easily make out that Ambedkar was a great thinker of women rights and emancipation. Provisions that have been enshrined in the Acts are as follows:

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 was amended in 1976 made the following provisions for women:

1. The legitimization of illegitimate children (Sec.16).
2. Punishment-bigamy (Sec.26).
3. Custody of children (Sec. 26).
4. Marriageable age of females raised to 18 years.

5. Provision for alimony (Sec. 25). The Act abolishes the difference between a maiden and a widow.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956

This Act contains the following provisions for women:

1. A widow has a right to adopt a son or a daughter which was not there in the Hindu Law.
2. It also provided an opportunity to be independent and dispose of her property by will as she wishes and desires (Sec. 14).
3. A uniform scheme of succession to the property of a Hindu female who dies, intestate after commencement of the Act, was made in Section 15. Previously under the uncodified law the succession to stridhan varied according to the marital status of a woman.

The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956:

Following provisions are come under the purview of this Act:

1. The mother is empowered to change the guardian, appointed by the father and may appoint a new guardian by will.
2. The father's right to appoint a guardian for the minor by will during the life time of the minor's mother is prohibited under this Act.

The Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956:

This Act has the following provisions:

1. This Act accepts adoption of a male and a female child without any difference, whereas under the uncodified law a daughter could not be adopted.
2. This Act permits a wife to adopt a child on her own right even during her husband's life time. She had no such right prior to this enactment.
3. In the uncodified law a spinster or a widow had no right to adopt whereas this Act grants them the right to adopt.
4. Under the old Hindu Law a wife need not be consulted while adopting a child or while giving a child for adoption, whereas this Act made it essential to consult her in both the cases.
5. Section 11 lays down that, a father should adopt a daughter atleast 21 years younger to him.

Conclusion: It may undoubtedly be mentioned here that B.R. Ambedkar was a path-maker of all the women irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender etc. He brought a new trend for uprising the women through his thoughts and beliefs. Not only women all the people of India should thankful to him because of his tremendous and everlasting steps of developmental works. He also talked about the Muslim women about wearing veil, their religious traditions and marriages. Keeping in mind the importance of Ambedkar's views towards Indian society, the then prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Neheru said, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of Hindu society". In present day context, Ambedkar and his thoughts on society based on equality are yet to be realized for reconstructing Indian society and making the life of women better.

B.R. Ambedkar was a fighter for women emancipation. He fought against all kinds of discrimination against women throughout his whole life. But still discrimination against women in Indian society is overlooked. So it is our duty to fulfill the dreams of Ambedkar for a better life world of women. It may also be mentioned here that the term 'Social Justice' will not be exercised properly if the people of India should not change their attitudes specially towards women, SCs, STs and other weaker section of the society. In the era of globalisation many MNCs are searching for merit for the smooth running of the functions of their companies. In that context, to prevail social justice in the society, the companies should work within the constitutional framework and the concerned state government or central government should make rules, regulation for the engagement and involvement of people from different categories so as to ensure social justice. So that society would be based on equality and equal opportunity. In this way the dreams of Ambedkar would be fulfilled.

It is also to be narrated here that, at present the Indian women have progressed a lot in various parts of their life although they are still suffering from various social evils like dowry, eve teasing, rape etc. It is a fact that in the glorious development of Indian society, the Indian women have march forward to the developmental process and somewhere treated equally with their male counterparts but it is yet to be realized by the people of India that women should have given the equal rights and

opportunity with men so as to establish a shining India where women can live freely and equally irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender etc.

I would like to conclude here by quoting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's slogan on Unity, Education and Agitation.

“Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruit-less without educated women, and Agitation is incomplete without the strength of women”.

Bibliography:

1. Singariya, Dr. M.R.; ‘Dr B R Ambedkar and Women Empowerment in India’, Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, Volume 2~ Issue 1, 2014
2. Barnwal, Bijay K., ‘Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Quest for Gender Equality It's Relevance in Contemporary Feminist Discourse’, Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, {Bi-Monthly}, Volume-IV, Issue-II, Mar-Apr 2014
3. More, Dr. Vijay G., ‘Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Contribution for Women's Rights’, Variorum, Multi- Disciplinary e-Research Journal Vol.-02, Issue-I, August 2011
4. Dhanvijay, Ms. Vaishali, ‘DR. Babasaheb Ambedkar's efforts for women empowerment and present status of women in society’, Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal (EIIRJ), { Bi-Monthly }, Volume-I, Issue II, April 2012
5. Shashi, S.S.,(edi), ‘Ambedkar and Social Justice-Volume II’, Director publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Patiala House, New Delhi, 1992
6. Bharati, T, ‘Ambedkar and Uplift of Women’, published in an edited book ‘Ambedkar and Social Justice-Volume II’ 1992, pp 264
7. Tikoo, P.N., ‘Indian Women: A Brief Socio-Cultural Survey’, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1985
