



B.R. Ambedkar's Contribution for Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

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Ambedkar was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution. It gives rights to all Indian without any discrimination. Our Constitution is Ambedkar's crusade for securing the rightful place for the discriminated, deprived and downtrodden sections of our society. In this paper an attempt is made to look at Ambedkar not as a dalit hero, but as a saviour of the Indian women. He made sincere efforts in understanding the reality about the status of women in India and made effort for women empowerment through education. He advocated a practical reformist measures for the upliftment of women. His reforms were for providing better opportunities to women so that they can occupy a position of equality and respect in the society. Due to Ambedkar's reforms, the women of India found a new identity. His words and deeds are inspiring thousands of women to fight against injustice and inequality. His effort was for awakening of women, which made them shed their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity and self- esteem. He believes that for social transformation we have to remove gender discrimination so he gives equal importance to women in the society.

Introduction

B.R Ambedkar was well known as a revolutionary thinker and philosopher. He was social activist and critic and strode like a colossus in the Indian sociopolitical scene unto his death. He worked not only for dalit but for women also. He gave new identity to Indian women. Singariya, M. R. (2014) wrote that, “Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system.” Ambedkar saw women as the victims of the oppressive, caste- based and rigid hierarchical social system. He provides source of inspiration for women's empowerment movement in India.

According to Velaskar, P. (2012), “Ambedkar’s social and educational thought remains surprisingly neglected in Indian educational discourse.” Not many people know that Ambedkar always worked hard to uplift the situation of women in Indian society.

According to Maurya, R.S.(1988), “Education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving self-esteem, self-confidence, necessary courage and their status within the family.”

Newspapers started by B. R. Ambedkar, Mooknayak and Bahiskrit Bharat predominantly used to cover issues related to women and their empowerment. Ambedkar was always concerned about women empowerment. In a letter to his father’s friend, young Ambedkar, during his studies at New York, said – We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education...”

The higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly the reason for women's dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. The lack of education is the main cause for women's exploitation, violence and negligence. Education can help women to understand the provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life (Singariya M. R. (2014)).

Women Empowerment

Empowerment means the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. (www.oxforddictionaries.com)

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society.

- Every minute, 2 girls and women are raped in South Africa.
- Every hour, 48 girls and women are raped as a weapon of war in Congo.
- Every day, 3 women are killed by their male partner in the United States.

In fact, more than 100 million girl babies have been killed, aborted, and neglected to die...simply because they were girls.(www.huffingtonpost.com)

According to the (www.selfgrowth.com), Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

Ambedkar's thoughts on women empowerment

On 18th July 1927, Ambedkar addressed a meeting of about three thousand women of Depressed classes, he said 'I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had achieved.'

- 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. – B. R. Ambedkar (While addressing women of Depressed classes on 18th July 1927)
- Ambedkar said to Women "Learn to be clean. Keep from vices. Give education to your children. Instill ambition into them. Inculcate in their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes."
- Ambedkar said to Women – The paternal duty lies in giving each child a better start than its parents had. Above all, let every girl who marries stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal, and refuse to his slave. I am sure if you follow this advice, you will bring honour and glory to yourselves.
- Ambedkar made provisions in articles 14-16 in the Indian Constitution, which provide equal status to Woman and also banned the of sale and purchase of woman prevailing Hindu India.
- Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system.

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India contains various provisions, which provide for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women.

The salient features are:-

- Article 14 guarantees that the State shall not deny equality before the law and equal protection of the laws;
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex;
- Article 15 (3) empowers the State to make positive discrimination in favour of women and children;

- Article 16 provides for Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment;

In pursuance of the above Constitutional provisions, various legislative enactments have been framed to protect, safeguard and promote the interests of women. Many of these legislative enactments have been in the sphere of labour laws to ameliorate the working conditions of women labour.

B.R. Ambedkar said that, "It is the education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom."

Education to women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position in the society. Education also brings about reduction in inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family. In order to encourage education of women at all levels and to dilute gender bias in the provision and acquaintance of education, schools, colleges and even universities were established exclusively for women in the country.

Conclusion

Society is in a continuous process of evolution. It will take several decades for these imbalances to be rectified. Education of both men and women will lead to change in attitudes and perceptions. It is not easy to eradicate deep-seated cultural value, or alter tradition that perpetuate discrimination. Women in the rural areas are wholly oblivious of their rights. It will require a much greater and concerted effort for the various measures to become a living reality for women in the rural areas. This can happen only through the collective effort of the State, NGOs, imparting of formal and informal education, through the media, etc. Enforcement of basic human rights of gender equality must take place, without undermining the institution and sanctity of marriage, and family. Working women continue to remain primarily responsible for taking care of home and child rearing, in addition to their careers. Increased stress has made them more prone to heart and other stress related diseases. Hence, it is necessary to improve the Support System for working women.

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