

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and His Idea on Gender Equality

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Abstract:

B.R. Ambedkar championed gender equality by advocating for women's education, economic independence, and political participation, believing these were essential for their dignity and liberation. He pushed for legal reforms, like the Hindu Code Bill, to grant women equal family and societal rights. Ambedkar also emphasized upholding women's modesty and dignity, criticizing religious and social systems that oppressed them, particularly within the Hindu community. He promoted a humanist perspective for all women, irrespective of religion or caste.

Introduction:

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved" -Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is popularly famous as the chief planner of the Indian constitution, and also as an icon for the Dalit rights movements in the country. But Ambedkar believed that women have a key role to play in the emancipation of oppressed communities, and this could be done by ensuring their own rights to property and education. Ambedkar was a great supporter of emancipation of women. He inspired them to attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of selfhelp. According to him the progress of a community is measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved. He wanted to see them as their husbands friend and equal but not their slave. He also believed that education is as important for women as for men. He was a feminist. He rendered great service to women while giving them rights in the political and social field and bringing changes in favour of women under the Hindu Marriage act.their is no doubt that the ill treatment, humiliations and cast based barriers which Ambedkar faced right from his school days to the end of his life, still exists in the society. He not only traced the roots and evils of Indian society in his lifetime, but also offered suggestions and remedies for eradicating them. In this paper Dr. B. R. Ambedkar perception on gender equality will be discussed.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Views on Women's Rights:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on women's rights were grounded in the principles of equality, justice, and empowerment. He believed in women's right to live free from violence, have adequate representation in public life, access justice, and participate in social reform. His ideas continue to inspire and guide efforts to promote women's rights and gender equality in India and beyond. In addition to the right to education Dr. B.R. Ambedkar also emphasized on Women's Right to Political Participation. Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to participate in political decisionmaking. He argued that women's exclusion from the political process was a major obstacle to their empowerment. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1937, he said, "Women should be allowed to vote, and there should be reservation for them in legislative bodies."

1. Women's Right to Property:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to own and inherit property. He argued that denying women access to property was a form of economic discrimination and contributed to their social and economic marginalization. In his book "The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution," he writes, "No society can progress if one-half of the population is denied the right to own property."

2. Women's Right to Choose Marriage:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to choose their own partners and decide whether or not to get married. He argued that forced marriages and child marriages were a violation of women's rights and called for legal reforms to protect women from such practices. In his book "Annihilation of Caste," he writes, "Child marriage is an evil practice. It should be banned. The marriage age of girls should be raised."

3. Women's Right to Work:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to work and earn a living. He argued that women's economic independence was essential for their empowerment and challenged the patriarchal norms that restricted women's access to the workforce. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1937, he said, "Women should have equal opportunities for employment, and their pay should be equal to that of men."

4. Women's Right to Divorce:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to seek divorce and end abusive or unhappy marriages. He argued that denying women the right to divorce was a form of oppression and called for legal reforms to make divorce easier for women. In his book "The Hindu Code Bill," he writes, "The Hindu woman has been completely subordinated to the will of her husband. She should be given the right to divorce her husband if he ill-treats her." Prior to the bill, divorce was a difficult and often impossible process for women, who had to prove specific grounds for divorce and seek permission from their husbands or the courts. The Hindu Code Bill, however, gave women the right to seek divorce on grounds such as cruelty, adultery, and desertion, without needing the consent of their husbands. This provision was a significant step towards gender equality, as it gave women greater agency and control over their lives and relationships.

5. Women's Right to Healthcare:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have access to healthcare services and medical facilities. He argued that women's health was essential for the health and wellbeing of families and communities and called for investments in healthcare infrastructure to improve women's access to care. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1942, he said, "Health is the key to progress and prosperity. Women's health is the foundation of the health of the family and the nation."

6. Women's Right to Freedom from Violence:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have the right to live free from violence and abuse. He argued that violence against women was a violation of their fundamental rights and called for legal and social measures to prevent and address violence against women. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1937, he said, "Violence against women is a curse. It must be condemned and punished by society."

7. Women's Right to Representation:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have adequate representation in political and social institutions. He argued that women's voices and perspectives were essential for decisionmaking and social progress and called for measures to increase women's participation and representation. In his book "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables," he writes, "Women's representation in public life is a necessary condition for the emancipation of women."

8. Women's Right to Access Justice:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should have equal access to justice and legal remedies. He argued that gender-based discrimination in the justice system was a major obstacle to women's rights and called for legal reforms to ensure justice for women. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1942, he said, "Women must have equal access to the law and the courts, and their legal rights must be protected and enforced."

9. Women's Right to Participate in Social Reform:

Dr. Ambedkar believed that women should play an active role in social reform and the struggle for justice and equality. He argued that women's leadership and activism were essential for social change and called for the recognition and empowerment of women's movements. In his speech at the All India Women's Conference in 1937, he said, "Women must organize themselves into movements and fight for their rights and the rights of others."

Constitutional Provisions:

Dr. Ambedkar worked as a Chairman of the Drafting Committee and is regarded as the Father of the Indian Constitution. He has done a pioneering work to improve the status of women by granting the fundamental rights to all the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race and sex. In many of his speeches in the Constituent assembly, he debated for equal rights for women. His approach towards women's rights played a significant role in ensuring that Women's rights find a special place in the Indian Constitution. Some of the important constitutional provisions protecting women's rights are,

Article 14: This article ensures equality for all citizens irrespective of Gender, Caste, Creed, Religion, and race.

Article 15: This article prohibits discrimination on the grounds of Religion, Gender, Caste, Creed, and Race.

Article 16: This article says that there shall be an equality of opportunity in Public Employment.

Article 23: This article prohibits Human Trafficking and Bonded Labour. These were some important provisions related to women. Apart from them, many other articles protect the rights of women i.e.

Article 39(a) and (d), Article 42, Article 51A(e), Article 243D(3), Article 243T(3), and Article 243T(4).

Ambedkar as a minister in the Nehru's cabinet also introduced on 5th February 1951, the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament. The principal of monogamy and divorce introduced in the code where opposed energetically Dr. Ambedkar supported his views on the ground that a women's rights to property was accepted by Brihaspati Samiti and Divorce by Parashara samity.

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 material 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 unmodified 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 has no such right prior to this enactment.
3. In the unmodified 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 at least 21 years younger to him.

It may be said that B. R. Ambedkar was a fighter for women emancipation. He fought against all kinds of discrimination against women throughout his life. But still discrimination against women in Indian Society remains. Now it is our prior duty to act according to Ambedkar's thoughts or for fulfillment of his dreams for a better life of a woman. Although Indian women achieves a lot in present but still in Indian Society various social evils blocks the path of women equality. No nation can progress unless men and women are treated as equals in the nation. Ambedkar's contribution in the empowerment of women will always be incomparable.

Conclusion:

Dr. Ambedkar's ideas about gender equality were revolutionary for their time. He was among the first Indian leaders to recognize that gender discrimination was not just a problem for women but a social issue that affected the entire society. He believed that gender equality was essential for the creation of a just and prosperous society, and that it was the responsibility of the state to ensure that women had access to education, employment, and political representation. Throughout his career, Dr. Ambedkar fought against the caste system, which he saw as a major source of oppression for women and other marginalized groups. He argued that the caste system reinforced patriarchy and perpetuated genderbased discrimination, and that it needed to be dismantled if true gender equality was to be achieved. Today, Dr. Ambedkar's ideas about gender equality continue to inspire social activists and feminists in India and around the world. His vision of a society based on justice and equality remains as relevant today as it was during his lifetime. As we continue to work towards achieving gender equality, we can draw on Dr. Ambedkar's legacy to guide and inspire us. His life and work are a testament to the power of visionary leadership, social activism, and the struggle for human rights.

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