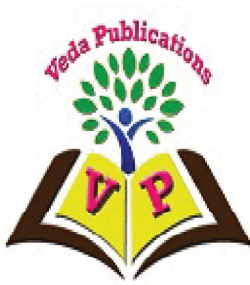




## LIBERATION OF WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA

Preeya Ratnalikar

( Guest Faculty, Govt Degree College, Khairtabad, Hyderabad, Telangana)



### ABSTRACT

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great advocate of the liberation of women in India. Dr. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He started fierce propaganda against the Hindu social order and launched a journal *Mook Nayak* in 1920 and *Bahiskrit Bharat* in 1927 for this purpose. Through its issues he put due stress on the gender equality and the need for education and exposed the problems of the depressed as well as women. Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. He insisted on Hindu Code bill suggesting the basic improvements and amendments in assembly. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar as the prime mover of the welfare of women.

**Keywords :** Women Empowerment, Hindu Code Bill, Perfect Equality, India.



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

While addressing a large meeting of women of the depressed classes at Mahad in 1927, he gave a clarion call for the liberation of women. He exhorted them to "attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help". He said: "Education is as necessary for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be." He advised women: "Do not be in a hurry to marry. Marriage is a liability. You should not impose it upon your children unless they are financially able to meet the liabilities arising from marriage. Those who will marry will have to keep in mind that to have too many children is a crime...Above all, let every girl who marries stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal, and refuse to be his slave."

While drafting the Constitution of India, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the prime mover of the welfare of women. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar resigned from the post of the first Law Minister of India when his noble 'Hindu Code Bill' a women's Rights for Indian Women dropped by then Prime Minister Nehru. For three years, he fought to get the Bill passed. It was the greatest ever social reform in India. It is nothing but declaration of women rights. It spoke of giving back dignity to Indian women and giving equal rights to men and women: Rights to property, Order of succession to property, marriage, divorce, guardianship.

Ambedkar's defense for women as the Law Minister of free India appeared in the form of the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament on 11th April 1947, the Bill could not withstand the opposition from the Hindu orthodoxy. Their major argument was that the Bill was an attempt at the "demolition of the entire structure and fabric of Hindu Society. In reality, the Bill was a threat to patriarchy on which traditional family structure, was bounded and that was the major reason behind the opposition. Ambedkar proposed to reform these laws on seven different matters, viz., i) the right to property of a deceased Hindu dying intestate to both male and female, ii) the order of succession among different heirs to the property of a deceased dying

intestate, iii) the law of maintenance, iv) marriage, v) divorce, vi) adoption, and vii) minority guardianship. Despite the very moderate nature of Bill, Dr. Ambedkar could not get it passed due to its opposition by many conservative caste. Later, the original Bill was split into four different Bills with slight changes. Those were passed as the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956; and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance .

#### **MATERNITY BENEFIT ACT**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar played a major role for the Maternity Benefits bill in the Bombay legislature in July, 1928. In fact it was the first Maternity Benefits Act passed in India in 1929 by the Bombay legislature. On this regard he said,

"I believe that it is in the interests of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period and also subsequently. I am prepared to admit this fact because the conservation of the people's welfare is primarily the concern of the Government. And in every country, therefore, where the maternity benefit has been introduced, you will find that the Government has been subjected to a certain amount of charge with regard to maternity benefit. I think, therefore, the benefits contemplated by this bill ought to be given by this Legislature to the poor women who toil in our factories in this Presidency."

As a Labour Minister in the Viceroy executive council between 1942 and 1946, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in bringing the Mines Maternity Benefit Bill for women in all over India. Under this act, a woman working in the mine is entitled to maternity benefit for a period of 8 weeks. This period of 8 weeks is divided into two parts of four weeks each, one part preceding delivery and another part succeeding delivery. Later all the acts of Maternity Benefit of various states were repealed and a common Maternity Benefit Act-1961 was adopted by the Central Government for all states in India.

### **EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK IRRESPECTIVE OF THE SEX**

Revolutionary Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the first person who brought "Equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex" in India in terms of Industrial workers as a Labour Minister in the Viceroy executive council. On this regard he said, "We have also taken care to see, and this is an important point, that women shall be paid the same wages as men." While drafting the Indian Constitution, Dr. Babasaheb played major contribution for embodied the Article 39(d) relates the state to strive for securing equal pay for equal work of both men and women in the Part IV of the directive principles of the State Policy.

### **RIGHT TO VOTE**

Every year, 25th January is observed as the National Voters Day in our Nation. It was Founding Father of Modern India, Revolutionary Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who voiced as the first person in India for the 'Universal Adult Franchise'. Today our constitution granted voting rights to all Indian women as a right because of him. But before Independent India, it is not easy task for everyone 'right to vote' even men also. Mostly the Right to vote was given only to those the rich, the landed and the tax payers.

### **FAMILY PLANNING**

Dr. Ambedkar was an ardent supporter of family planning. He emphasized the need of family planning way back in 1938. At that time nobody even dreamt of it. He even criticised his own parents in public speeches because he himself was the 14th child in the family. This showed his concern for the well being of the women.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dr. Ambedkar had also been encouraged women to organise themselves. He told the women to be progressive and told them to abolish traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress. Through the constitution of India, as the chairman of the constitution drafting committee, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in granting equal status to all the citizens irrespective of sex, religion etc. Thus the women,

contrary to their low status as per Hindu law books, were for the first time got equal status lawfully.

To resolve the issue of violence against women concerted efforts are required. Dr. Ambedkar tried to reconstruct Indian society on the egalitarian principles as markers of democratic civilisation. He tried to bring men-women equality through constitution and entitled women by 'Hindu Code Bill'. Indian women irrespective of caste class and religion should try to understand the teachings of Dr Ambedkar. Unless the women know their constitutional rights and duties, protection and safeguards they cannot be empowered.