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11. Role of Dr. Ambedkar in Upliftment of Indian Women

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“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”

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

The need for women empowerment arose because of the gender discrimination and male domination in the Indian society since ancient time. Women are being suppressed by their family members and society for many reasons. They have been targeted for many types of violence and discriminatory practices by the male members of the family and society. Wrong and old practices in the society from ancient times have taken the form of well-developed customs and traditions. Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is both a highly important end in itself and necessary for the achievement of sustainable human development.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a saviour of the suppressed classes, a noted jurist, The chief architect of Indian constitution a profound scholar, a daring leader, overall a multifaceted personality an intellectual revolutionary, a ray of hope for the downtrodden and underprivileged section of Indian society.¹

But also he worked tirelessly throughout his life to challenge the legitimacy of orthodox Hindu social order that upheld iniquitous gender relations in an institutionalized manner.²

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has been one of the greatest social transformers of modern India, who struggled against caste, class, varna and gender discrimination to build egalitarian society based on equality, liberty and fraternity in every aspect of human life, that too between men and women. Dr. Ambedkar aimed at two fold social reforms; one, the reform of the Hindu family and the other, the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The problems of sati, widow remarriage,

child marriage, etc., related to the social reform of the Hindu family. The abolition of caste system, abolition of unsociability, changes in the laws of marriage, adoption, and succession relate to the social reform in the larger sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. Women were denied the right to education and the right to property, they were treated as objects to seduce men and they were said to be created to please man. Dr. Ambedkar criticized Manu for conferring inferior status upon woman. Woman has been meted out ill treatment in every walk of life. He is the real super human being who did not leave the worst structure of our Indian society, which was required to be restructured with the equalitarian and humanitarian principles. He advocated social and economic democracy and insisted that without them there would be no peace, happiness and prosperity in India. He was ardent supporter of the cherished value of liberty, equality and fraternity. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's contribution for the betterment of all in general and progress of women in particular is unique. He not only wanted to ensure social equality between man and man but also between man and woman.³

Dr. Ambedkar and Women Upliftment

Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle, for eradication of caste systems and upliftment of the underprivileged sections. He realized that this could not be achieved without liberating the women themselves. He motivated women and addressed them to participate in struggle against caste prejudices. During the Mahad Tank Struggle, women marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves.⁴

Dr Ambedkar believed in the strength of women and their role in the process of social reform. The historic "Mahad Satyagraha" witnessed participation of three hundred women along with their male counterparts. Addressing another meeting of about 3000 women, he said, "I measure the progress of community by the degree of progress which women had 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. I am sure if you follow this advice, you will bring honour and glory to yourselves."⁵

Dr. Ambedkar started his 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..."⁶

Dr. Ambedkar, expressed the view that women were denied the right to acquire education the right to realize their spiritual potentiality, this was a cruel deal for women. Manu imposed strict restrictions on women and openly advocated the policy of gender discrimination. Ambedkar thus concludes that it was in fact Manu