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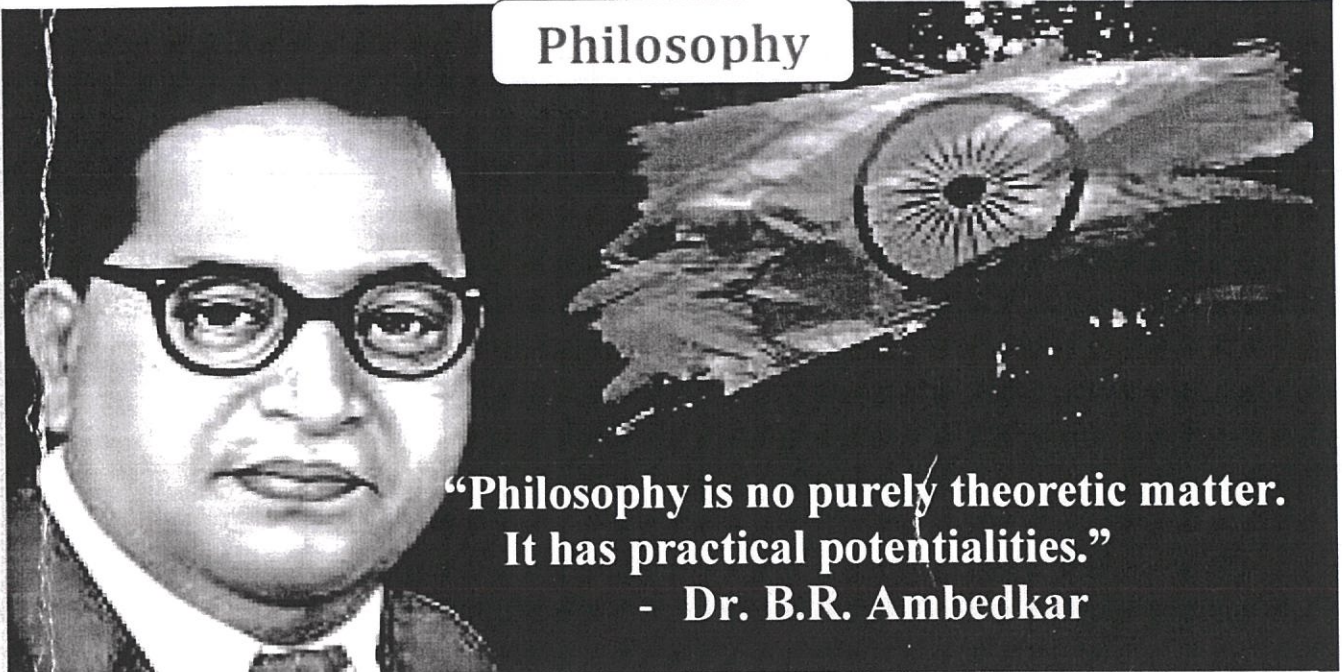
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**“Philosophy is no purely theoretic matter.
 It has practical potentialities.”
 - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

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Dr. Ambedkar's Perspective on Women Empowerment : A Retrospection

Dr. Rina Avinash Pitale-Puradkar.

Assistant professor,

Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College,

Ghatkopar, Mumbai- 400086

Email: rinaam23@gmail.com.

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Principal
Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College,
Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-400086.

Abstract:

In ancient India women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their positions were degenerated merely to objects. They lost their individual identity and even their basic human rights. In ManuSmruti the ancient Hindu code book, the status granted to women was lowest. She was treated at par with the animals and slaves. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that until and unless, we defy the Hindu Dharma shastras no change is possible because in the name of samskaras the Hindu women are tied to bondage of superstitions which they carry till their death. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India and the relevancy of his ideas in present political and social scenario of India.

Key Words: Women degradation, Women Rights, ManuSmriti, Mahad Satyagraha, Hindu Code Bill

Dr. Ambedkar's Perspective on Women Empowerment: A Retrospection

In ancient India women enjoyed a very high position but gradually their positions were degenerated merely to objects. They lost their individual identity and even their basic human rights. In ManuSmruti the ancient Hindu code book, the status granted to women was lowest. She was treated at par with the animals and slaves. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that until and unless, we defy the Hindu Dharma shastras no change is possible because in the name of samskaras the Hindu women are tied to bondage of superstitions which they carry till their death. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India and the relevancy of his ideas in present political and social scenario of India.

Dr. Ambedkar was the determined fighter and a deep scholar who had made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He was first Indian to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. The present paper is an attempt to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's view on women problems in pre and post independent India and its relevancy in present scenario. He started his movement in 1920. He started fierce propoganda 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. Dr. Babasaheb spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. He created awareness among poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight



against the unjust and social practices like child marriages and devdasi system. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar was among the most outstanding intellectuals of India in the 20th century in the word of Paul Baran, an eminent Marxist economist, had made a distinction in one of his essays between an "intellect worker" and an intellectual. The former, according to him, is one who uses his intellect for making a living whereas the latter is one who uses it for critical analysis and social transformation. Dr. Ambedkar fits in Baran's definition of an intellectual very well. Dr. Ambedkar is also an outstanding example of what Antonio Gramsci called an organic intellectual, that is, one who represents and articulates the interests of an entire social class. He secured highest academic honours from some of the most prestigious universities of the world. He made significant efforts to lead the society on the path of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Ambedkar's perception on women's question emphasizing their right to education, equal treatment with men, right to property and involvement in the political process resembled the global feminists demand. As J. S. Mill expressed in the Subjection of Women, the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and one of the chief hindrance to human development; and ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no privilege or power on the one side, nor disability on the other. Ambedkar holds same view for women. 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 equal to her husband's friend and equal to and refuse to his slaves. I am sure if you follow this advice, you bring honour and glory to yourselves."¹

In January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife, as its president. In the Kalram Temple Entry Satyagraha at Nasik in 1930, five hundred women participated and many of them were arrested along with men and ill treated in jails. The encouragement of Dr. Ambedkar to empower women to speak boldly was seen when Radhabai Vadale addressed a press conference in 1931. She said "It is better to die a hundred times than live a life full of humiliation. We will sacrifice our lives but we will win our rights."² The credit for this self - respect and firm determination of women goes to Ambedkar.

He strongly advocated for family planning measures for women in Bombay Legislative Assembly. In 1942, being a Labour Minister of Executive Council of Governor General, he introduced a Maternity Benefit Bill. He provided several provisions in the constitution for protecting the welfare and civil rights of women. He introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament and highlighted the issues about women's property right. The bill received strong opposition from many political leaders. In turn, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet expressed his dissatisfaction over non acceptance of women right by parliament.

Beside this he highlighted the issues of Muslim women. His secular perspective is known through his thoughts on 'Purdah' (Veil) system, religious conversions and legal rights for Muslim women. In short, along with the depressed class women, his thoughts for emancipation of all the women are expressed with same allegiance.³ Ambedkar's emphasis was on construction of the Hindu society on the basis of equality rather than the social reforms



initiated by Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj because their attempts were limited only to the upper strata of the society. His in depth study of Smritis and Shashtras and his experience from the response of upper castes during the temple entry movement crystallized his conclusions on Hindu philosophy and society. Gaining inspiration from Ambedkar, many women wrote on various topics. And Tulsiba Bansode and started a news paper 'Chokhamela'. This shows how Ambedkar created awareness poor, illiterate women and inspired them to fight against the unjust and social practices like child marriage and devdasi system.

While addressing in conferences to women he could easily communicate with them as a homely person and conversation. He evoked women in the following words. "Never wear such clothes which will degrade our personality and character. Avoid wearing the jewellery on your body everywhere. It is not fare to make hole on nose and wear nath or nose ring in this he condemned all the bad traditions, habits and ways of life which made life difficult and complex."⁴ And to the surprise, even the illiterate women followed his advice from the bottom of their heart. Dr. Ambedkar spent his life for the betterment of women even involved in bad practices and professionals like prostitutions. In Manu Smriti, Manu not only shows contempt for women but goes on to degrade them as slaves, devoid of intellect: denies them the right of education and the right to property and forbid them from performing sacrifices. Being India's first Law minister and Chairmen of Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar thought it appropriate, rather his duty, to free women from the age old thralldom by reforming the Hindu social laws created by Manu. He, therefore, took initiative to draft and introduce the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women's right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. i.e.

Article 14 - Equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex.

Article 15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

Article 39 - Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.

Article 42 - Human conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (A) (C) - Fundamental duties to renounce practices, derogatory to the dignity of women.

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 243D (3), 243T (3) & 243R (4) provides for allocation of seats in the Panchayati Raj System.

Dr. Ambedkar was not only the father of Indian Constitution; he was a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, thinker, economist, editor, social reformer, revivalist of Buddhism and was first Indian to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. He stated that women should be given all round development more importantly social education, their well being and socio-cultural rights. He emphasized that each and every section of Indian women be given their due share and it is a must to maintain and protect dignity and modesty of women.



Dr. Ambedkar always believed in movements led by women. He also added that if the women from all walks of life are taken in to confidence, they may play a significant role in the social reforms. They have played very massive and active role to eradicate the social abuses. He insisted that every married woman must participate in her husband's activities as a friend. But she must show the courage to deny the life of slaves. She should insist on the principle of equality. If all the women follow it, they will get the real respect and their own identity.

Dr. Ambedkar expressed his views on the state of life of all women. He stated that women must be treated equally and given equal prestige. He insisted on Hindu Code bill suggesting the basic improvements and amendments in assembly. He also insisted and evoked all the parliamentary members to help to pass the bill in parliament. Eventually, he resigned for the same. The teachings and thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar are useful not only for women but also to all the Indian even today. His deep concern and feelings for all round development of women is expressed from his each sentence and word. In his last speech in Indian Parliament we can know his feelings and respect showed towards women. He quoted the famous thoughts of an Irish Patriot Daniel O Connal as, "No man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity. And no nation can be grateful at the cost, of his liberty."⁵ Dr. Ambedkar says that 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. Thus to measure the development of any community it is necessary to see the development of women.

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Principal
Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College,
Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-400086.