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Championing Women's Empowerment: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Lasting Impact on India's Social Fabric

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Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is rightly called as the architect of our constitution. He has fought for social justice and for the upliftment of the underprivileged women in the society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has strived very hard to lead the society. As a policy maker he introduced the Hindu Code bill which revolutionized the Hindu domestic sphere and offered women the right to marry by their choice and across the various caste boundaries. This bill also gave women the right to inherit property. As an activist, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar set up many newspapers such as the Bahishkrit Bharat and the Moo Nayak which covered women-centric issues. The present paper aims to identify the role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in empowerment of women in India. The paper also tries to identify the condition of women in the present scenario.

Keywords: Constitution, women, empowerment, social justice, code bill

Introduction

Empowerment, a term denoting the extent of freedom and self-determination, enables individuals to articulate their interests responsibly. This transformative process fosters increased confidence and strength in asserting one's rights. Women's empowerment specifically revolves around enabling women to recognize their inherent value and exercise autonomy in decision-making. In the contemporary global context, the promotion of women's rights has gained paramount importance. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a staunch advocate for women's strength, dedicated significant efforts to uplift them. Emphasizing the need for women to advocate for their rights, Ambedkar played a pivotal role in reshaping society based on the principles of equality. This paper aims to delve into Bhimrao Ambedkar's role in women's empowerment, examining his contributions to reconstructing societal norms. Additionally, it seeks to draw a comparative analysis between the historical status of women and their present situation, shedding light on the evolution of their roles in society.

Status of Women in the Past

In the ancient epochs, women held a revered position in society, esteemed as embodiments of divinity, a sentiment reflected in the Vedic and Puranic scriptures. The profound belief encapsulated in the saying "Yatra Nariaystu Pujante, Ramante Tatra Devta" underscored the notion that the divine essence resides where women are venerated. Their active involvement in religious ceremonies was deemed

indispensable, emphasizing the integral role women played in the spiritual and societal fabric.

Despite the initially elevated status of women in ancient India, a gradual erosion of their standing occurred over time. The emergence of male dominance saw women relegated to subservient roles, exploited as mere tools for labor. This shift culminated in egregious practices such as child marriage and sati, deeply entrenched in societal norms, casting a shadow over women's dignity.

A stark contrast emerged as women, once enjoying liberties, found themselves constrained within the confines of patriarchal structures. Restrictive practices like the purdah system curtailed their participation in public life, confining them within domestic spheres. The pervasive influence of detrimental customs, including dowry, further diminished women's agency, perpetuating physical and mental vulnerabilities.

Enter Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a formidable social reformer whose tireless efforts sought to dismantle these oppressive traditions. His advocacy and reforms aimed at eradicating practices like child marriage and sati, granting women the agency to forge their identity in society. Ambedkar's visionary initiatives played a pivotal role in dismantling the shackles that bound women, ushering in an era where they could reclaim their freedom, basic rights, and a distinctive identity.

Contribution of B.R. Ambedkar in Women Empowerment

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, perceiving the adversity faced by women in ancient India, emerged as a formidable advocate for their rights. Recognizing education as the cornerstone of

empowerment, Ambedkar embarked on a journey to uplift women socially and economically. His commitment to safeguarding the dignity of women crystallized in his call for educational empowerment, asserting that gender equality was essential for societal advancement.

Commencing his efforts in 1920, Ambedkar emphasized the imperative of educating not only men but also women. In 1928, he played a pivotal role in establishing a women's association, with his wife Ramabai assuming the presidency. Delivering impactful speeches, Ambedkar underscored the need for gender equality, drawing inspiration from Buddhist principles that treated women with respect and equality.

Ambedkar's advocacy extended to legislative councils, where he vehemently opposed the exploitation of women. Encouraged by his leadership, women actively participated in the Satyagraha movement, championing their rights. As the chairman of the drafting committee, Ambedkar spearheaded the revolutionary Hindu Code bill, transforming the domestic landscape by granting women the right to choose their spouse and inherit property.

Enacted in 1955, the Hindu Marriage Act, along with subsequent legislations like the Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoption Act, marked significant milestones in affording independent status to women. By 1911, only 1.1% of women were literate, contrasting with 11.3% of men. However, Ambedkar's efforts led to a notable increase, with 42,97,785 women enrolled for education at the time of independence, fostering a demand for equality and fair treatment.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's unwavering efforts laid the groundwork for profound social reforms, paving the way for a more equitable and empowered society.

Role of the Government of India in Women empowerment

Based on the recommendation given by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the government of India made several new schemes and reforms were introduced.

- i). **Education:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly believed that education is the key to women empowerment. Based on his recommendations, the Government set up many educational institutions, colleges as well as universities providing exclusive education to women in India. Scholarship was also provided to women to motivate them to excel in their studies.
- ii). **Self Help Groups:** Self-help groups were initiated to ensure financial stability of women in India. It consists of 12-20 women who join together and form a group and mobilize savings. Self-help groups provide a platform for women to discuss their problems and to become more and more financially stable. They also find solutions to many of their problems to become more and more resilient.
- iii). **Capacity Building and Skill Enhancement:** The Government has taken steps to improve the entrepreneurial ability as well as skill of women; Several training programs have been organized by the Government of India to promote women and to enable them to become self-employed.
- iv). **Participation of Women:** Now women are given participation in various fields like theatre, education, health. Women have been given the right to vote as well as the right to take part in the parliament. Women started taking their role in various sectors of the economy through getting employment. There are various Acts for safeguarding the interest of women in the society such as

Dowry prohibition Act of 1961, Prohibition of child marriage Act 2006, The Commission of Sati Act 1987 etc.

Women Empowerment in Modern India

During the period of ancient India women were treated as goddess. They were treated as equal to men in the society. However, the status of women has gradually declined. Every day there are new cases regarding the exploitation of women in the society.

Although the government and the law has made serious amendments to protect women from various exploitations, the social evils still exists in the society. Starting from female infanticide, dowry deaths are also increasing at alarming rate. Gender discrimination is also increasing at different fields of work. Women are not given the opportunities that they actually deserve.

There is an urging need for the government to look into the matter and completely eliminate the exploitation of women in the society. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar has set the road map for the future of women in India. It is very essential to follow this roadmap to enable women to identify their social status and to uphold their dignity in the society.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar wanted women to enjoy equal status in the society. Ambedkar has always raised his voice against injustice practices in the society. Education is the key to empowerment of women in the society. More and more women both in the urban and the rural area should be given education to enable them to become self-reliant and self-employed.

It is the role of the government to take steps to brutally punish the people who commit inhumane practices against women in the society. Strict rules and regulations should be implemented to avoid crimes.

We all should strive hard to make the dreams of Baba Saheb Ambedkar to come true.

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