

Ambedkar's Stance on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Analysing His Views and Their Ongoing Relevance in Post-Modern India

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"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which the women have achieved."

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a visionary social reformer, a pioneer of social justice, a philosopher, freedom fighter and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, was a staunch advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of women. His efforts towards women's rights are often neglected, but he should be acknowledged as a key figure in the makers of modern India. His perspective on these issues was strongly connected to his overall criticism of the caste system and social hierarchies, which he believed upheld the oppression both of women and marginalized communities. He fought for women's equal participation in all aspects of life, played a crucial role in formulating laws to protect their rights. Ambedkar's advocacy for legal reforms, including his contributions to the drafting of the Indian Constitution and his support for the Hindu Code Bill, underscored his commitment to securing equal rights for women in marriage, property, education, and social participation.

This paper explores Ambedkar's views on gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on his beliefs in legal equality, education, and social justice for women. It also examines his critique of patriarchal religious practices and his support for Buddhism as an alternative that promoted gender equality. The paper highlights the ongoing relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in contemporary India, where, despite legal progress, gender inequality persists in various forms, such as educational disparities, violence on gender and economic exclusion. By assessing the current state of gender justice, the paper demonstrates how Ambedkar's vision continues to shape feminist movements, legal reforms and discussions on social justice. It argues for a renewed focus on his principles to address these challenges, with an emphasis on reforms in education, stronger women's rights laws, and the need to confront patriarchal norms. Additionally, the research underscores the particular struggles faced by women of lower section of the society and advocates for a holistic approach to

achieving gender equality and social transformation in India in 21st Century.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Women, Women's Rights, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, **Introduction**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was not only a torch bearer for the oppressed and marginalized sections of Indian society but also devoted his life to challenging the deeply ingrained orthodox Hindu social order that perpetuated gender inequality. Ambedkar excelled in multiple roles in his life and leader of various social movements. His broad knowledge in diverse fields enabled him to create a distinctive, independent ideology. He always had a vision on women empowerment through legal and social sources.

Ambedkar was a strong proponent of equality, opposing caste discrimination, inequality, and any form of societal superiority. Historical records show that, especially after the Vedic period, the status of women in India deteriorated over time, particularly leading up to independence. Women were denied fundamental rights, seen as inferior to men, and often treated as less than human. Dr. Ambedkar advocated for women's rights, economic independence, and social justice, emphasizing the need to protect their dignity. He thoroughly studied Hindu scriptures to uncover the root causes of the low status of women in India. His beliefs on gender equality and women empowerment remains the epicentre of Developed India and Strong Indian society.

Ambedkar's Stance on Gender Equality: -

Dr. Ambedkar's beliefs on women's rights was distinct from that of other social reformers of the British India era, who aimed to reform customs who unfavored the women in our society without challenging the hierarchical social structure. In contrast, Ambedkar developed his own vision for women's rights through gender equality, which was reflected in the Indian Constitution. His aim was to create a society founded on social justice, ensuring women had equal status with men through various provisions in the Constitution of India. Ambedkar always believed that sexual discrimination should be uprooted, and everyone should have equal opportunities in society. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees social, economic, and political justice to women, reflects his contribution. It emphasizes equality of status and opportunity, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship, and assures the dignity and unity of all citizens, regardless of caste, creed, or sex.

Ambedkar not only worked for the upliftment of untouchables but also for the advancement of women. He criticized traditional and conservative values, especially the degradation of women in Indian society. He strongly believed that women should enjoy equal status with men, with the right to education and property. In Mahad Satyagraha for temple entry in 1927 where he decided to burn the manumriti in which few laws against women and depressed section of the society. He also discussed problems and their solutions in Bombay Legislative Committee and as a Law minister after Independence in India.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that education was crucial for the empowerment of women. During his time, women, especially from lower castes, were denied access to education. His speeches reflect his deep concern for women's rights and empowerment. In one of his addresses at the Second All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference in Nagpur on July 20, 1942, where he emphasized the importance of women's progress as a measure of the community's overall development. He urged women to adopt clean habits, avoid vices, educate their children. He encouraged them to teach their children that they were destined for greatness and to help them overcome any feelings of inferiority.

Ambedkar's Stance on Women Empowerment: -

Dr. Ambedkar's commitment to women's rights went beyond his theoretical contributions; he also took practical steps to enact changes. He played a pivotal role in pushing for legal reforms, which aimed to give women empowerment. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Women Empowerment highlights Ambedkar's influential role in shaping India's social landscape, particularly through his advocacy for women's rights. Known for his work as a jurist, social reformer, and political thinker, Ambedkar was a strong proponent of equality and justice for marginalized communities, including women. He believed that women empowerment is a process which empowering the status of women in every aspects of life. His ideas on gender equality, which focus on education, economic independence, legal rights, and social reform, have cemented his position as a pioneering feminist figure. This article delves into the lasting impact of his contributions on women's empowerment and their relevance in contemporary India. He always in favour of all around development of half of the population of India, those who were waiting since centuries.

Dr. Ambedkar, stands as a transformative figure in India's history, credited with laying the foundation for modern legal and social systems. While his efforts to uplift the Dalits are well-documented, his advocacy for women's rights was equally ground breaking. Ambedkar acknowledged the entrenched patriarchal systems in Indian society and dedicated himself to challenging and dismantling them. His vision for women's empowerment was grounded in the belief that true equality could only be achieved through a combination of legal reforms, social changes, and the promotion of education.

Ambedkar's ideas on empowering women were radical for his time, and his approach went beyond mere legislative reforms. He believed that societal transformation was essential for women's true liberation. Ambedkar saw education as a vital tool for women's emancipation, believing it would help them break free from societal constraints. Education not only empowered women individually but also enabled them to positively influence their families and communities. Ambedkar emphasized the importance of women having financial autonomy, arguing that economic independence granted women dignity and control over

their lives. With financial freedom, women could make decisions that benefited both themselves and their families.

Advocacy and Social Movements: Dr. Ambedkar also recognized the power of collective action and supported the creation of women's associations and unions, which became platforms for women to voice their concerns and demand their rights. He used these gatherings to address issues like child marriage, family planning, and women's education, further emphasizing his belief in education and social reform as key tools for women's empowerment. Ambedkar was the path finder for the social movement like *Narmada Bachao* (1985) and Many more in 21st Century.

- ❖ **Challenging Traditional Practices:** Ambedkar's criticism of oppressive practices such as Sati and child marriage showcased his commitment to ending harmful customs. He condemned the practice of widows self-immolating on their husbands' pyres and spoke out against child marriages, which robbed young girls of their childhood and subjected them to the burdens of early motherhood.
- ❖ **Enduring Legacy and Contemporary Relevance:** Ambedkar's contributions to women's rights remain profoundly relevant today. His focus on education, economic independence, and legal rights for women laid the groundwork for modern feminist movements in India. Furthermore, his emphasis on the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender resonates with current feminist theories, particularly in the context of Dalit feminism.
- ❖ **Influence on Global Feminism:** – Ambedkar's approach to understanding the interconnectedness of caste, class, and gender aligns with contemporary intersectional feminist theories, offering a nuanced framework for addressing multiple forms of discrimination. He directly or may be indirectly influenced Like *Wangari Maathai* and *Greta Thunberg* (Both are World Famous Environmentalist and a leader of their moment)
- ❖ **Inspiration for Feminist Movements:** – Dr. Ambedkar's ideals continue to fuel feminist movements in India, Like *Chipko Movement* (March 1974) (Movement followed the Gandhian way of Satyagraha to protect the environment) and particularly focused on Dalit feminism, Like Ramabai Ambedkar. His emphasis on social justice, equality, and empowerment remains central to the fight for gender justice today.

Ambedkar's Views are still relevance in Post-Independence India most precisely in 21st Century: -

Dr. Ambedkar was a strong advocate for women's rights and worked tirelessly for

their empowerment. Through his writings such as **Mookanayak** and **Bahiskrit Bharat**, he raised awareness about the oppression of women in British Indian era. Ambedkar believed in involving women in all movements, such as the Mahad Satyagraha, where women led marches to assert the rights of untouchables to access public water resources. Ambedkar's vision for social reform included uplifting women through legal rights. His proposed Hindu Code Bill aimed to reform seven aspects of Hindu law: property rights for both men and women, inheritance laws, maintenance, marriage, divorce, adoption, and guardianship. Despite resistance from conservative factions, Ambedkar modified the Bill to gain acceptance. He also strongly advocated for women's political participation, including the right to vote too.

While the Hindu Code Bill faced opposition, it eventually led to landmark changes in Indian law, including the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which granted women rights to inheritance, divorce, and equal property ownership. Ambedkar's efforts also led to several welfare programs for women, such as the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, Women Labour Welfare Fund, and Maternity Benefits for women workers, aiming to ensure women's safety, equality, and dignity. Apart from Hindu Code Bill Ambedkar established continue to underpin ongoing reforms aimed at protecting women's rights through legal way, such as *Hindu Marriage Act (1955)*, *Hindu Succession Act (1956)*, *Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956)*, and *the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956)*.

Although India has made significant progress since Independence, gender equality challenges remains exits. Issues like domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and unequal access to education continue to impact women's gender equality and women empowerment. However, Ambedkar's ideas provided us valuable framework for resolving these issues. Programs like *MNREGA*, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, *National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)* in UPA-1 and UPA-2 His emphasis on the importance of women's education is still relevant today but it is quite acceptable that India is in progressive mode on these sections. Initiatives such as ***Beti Bachao Beti Padhao***, in NDA-1 and NDA-2, which focus on improving female literacy and educational opportunities, are vital for empowering women both economically and socially, especially under Articles 21-A and 45 of the Indian Constitution.

Women's rights movements in India frequently draw on Ambedkar's legacy to address both caste and gender discrimination. His focus on intersectionality—recognizing how different forms of oppression overlap—remains central to feminist discourse in India today. The social reforms he championed also paved the way for other pro-women legislations, including the *Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)* and the *Equal Remuneration Act (1976)*.

The Constitution of India includes several provisions that ensure equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The key provisions are:

1. **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
2. **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
3. **Article 15(3):** Allows the State to make special provisions for women and children.
4. **Article 16:** Ensures equality of opportunity in public employment.
5. **Article 23:** Prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour.
6. **Article 39 (a) and (d):** Directs the State to ensure equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.
7. **Article 42:** Mandates the State to ensure humane working conditions and maternity relief.
8. **Article 51A (e):** Imposes a duty on citizens to renounce practices that demean women.
9. **Article 243D (3):** Reserves at least one-third of seats in Panchayats for women, with rotation in constituencies.
10. **Article 243T (3):** Reserves at least one-third of seats in Municipalities for women, with rotation in constituencies.
11. **Article 243T (4):** Provides for the reservation of Chairperson positions in Municipalities for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, as determined by State laws.

These provisions aim to promote gender equality and safeguard the rights of women in India. He always tried to protect the status of women and our constitution provides equal rights to every citizen of India which with the help of this especially women has concrete safeguards to half of the Indian Population. However, despite Ambedkar's significant contributions, gender equality in India remains a challenge. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India ranks 140th in terms of gender equality. We have to work on it. Nevertheless, Ambedkar's reforms and advocacy laid the foundation for ongoing efforts toward women's empowerment and equality in India. His legacy continues to inspire the fight for gender justice.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played a key role in shaping India's policies on gender equality, focusing on legal rights, social justice, and the empowerment of women. His initiatives, like the Hindu Code Bill, were instrumental in bringing about reforms in marriage, inheritance, and property rights, despite facing strong opposition. Ambedkar's work connected caste,

gender, and social justice, calling for the elimination of structural inequalities in gender equality efforts. His contributions, particularly for Dalit women, were most significant, but he also recognized the need for societal change along with the legal reforms. Ambedkar's vision continues to influence modern policies and movements advocating for gender equality in India. Ambedkar's legacy is vividly present in the struggles and achievements of marginal women today whether in seeking justice in cases of sexual violence, claiming their rightful share of land, or ascending to positions of power in village representative as sarpanch (Village head of Gram Panchayat), chief ministers (**Mayawati**, Former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh), or even the President (**Smt. Droupadi Murmu**, Current President of India). Ambedkar's vision aimed to ensure that women, particularly from marginalized communities, have control over material resources and access to education. To truly honour his contributions, we must recognize his feminist perspective, which continues to inspire and shape the fight for women's rights in India.

In conclusion, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on gender justice and women's empowerment remain highly relevant in post-independent India. His ideas on legal equality, access to education, and the economic empowerment of women by the Indian Constitution have laid a crucial foundation for advancing women's rights. Ambedkar's emphasis on prohibiting the caste-based and gendered oppression continues to inspire efforts to create a more just and inclusive society. While India has made progress in the 21st Century, his vision serves as a torch bearer that true gender equality requires not only legal reforms but also a profound change in societal attitudes and practices. Ambedkar's legacy is inevitable in the ongoing fight for women's empowerment in India still after passing 75 years of Independence.

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