



Ambedkar and emancipation of women; A study with contexts

Renuka Chaudhary

Ph.D. Department of Political Science, Delhi University, Delhi, India

Abstract

Dr. B.R Ambedkar was the one among the most influential thinkers in India. He also play a important role towards empowering to women. His contribution through idea of women education, women freedom in society, critique of caste and *Manusmriti* , equal fundamental rights in constitution are remarkable in history. But a best study always incomplete without have a deep look in contexts. So here in this paper I try to find that what circumstances, situations, people, idea and stimulation had background role in his idea of women emancipation.

Keywords: women emancipation, caste, *Brahminvaad*, rights, women in buddism

Introduction

Dr. B.R Ambedkar regarded as one of the greatest intellectual and social reformer of modern India. He broke down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. 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. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar unravels the inequality and injustice inherent in Hindu social order that perpetuates inequality and subordination of women in a systemic manner. In his treatises, "The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women", "The Women and Counter Revolution", and "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", Dr. Ambedkar has analyzed the manner in which gender relations are artificially constructed under Hindu social order which not only moulds attitude of Hindus towards their women but also conditions women to confirm to a stereotype feminine behaviour. He raised his voice against the *brahminvaad*, hindu social order, *varna* system, caste system, and *Manusmriti* for the betterment of women. For this he spend his life to arrange rights, opportunity, education, equality, social justice through constitutional, institutional, social awareness and law settlements.

He rise his voice for women through his renowned journal *Mook Nayak* in 1920 and *Bahiskrit Bharat* in 1927. Almost through its all issues he spoke on the gender equality, women education and exposed the problems related to women and other depressed class. But as in the "History of Idea's" Quentin Skinner said every text and idea have their right meaning only in its/his particular political, religion, social, culture and economic context. Terence Ball in his "Interpretation concept" said that the interpretation must be include some aspect of criticism and analysis, which made text to "new". Hence in this paper I study his contribution in emancipation of women with his particular social, cultural, educational, political, economical contexts. So my central question of this paper is "how emancipation of women done by Ambedkar? How it was formed by his contexts? ". TO study this I divided my paper in three sub part. In first part I will

analyse the early and education life phases of Ambadkar and ideas formation regarding couese of women low status in Hindu Social order. In second part, his study on fall of women status and in third part there are a study of his contribution in women emancipation as providing strong empirical grounds for equality, freedom, education and opportunity.

The Roots and Education: Idea Formation Regarding Women Status

Dr. Ambedkar was born in a family of untouchable originally hailing from Konkan a part of the present state of Maharashtra in such caste of the *shudra* community called *Mahars*. His family experience, his experience in school, in travelling, in thrust of water shows him the cruelty of *brahminvaad*, hindu social order and untouchable practice. Bhim was deeply interested in learning Sanskrit. But he was not allowed to do as he was an untouchable. This harsh reality forced him to find the roots, Mechanism, Genesis and Development of caste system and he found it has a deep root in control of women sexuality as endogamy, freedom, opportunity and education too. Along with it Ambedkar family followed the preaching of Kabirs and Ramji used to practice the Ramayana, Mahabharata as well as Kabira songs. This is provide a intellectual ground to Ambedkar to study ancient hindu texts for finding the reality of discrimination in Hindu social order. It seems that this background greatly influenced the philosophy and deeds of Ambedkar of rationality. In Bhim family Out of 14 children only three of his brother and two sister survived. This personal experience of Bhim get effect on him and show the importance of family planning for women health, education, her self improvement and family itself. In his future public speeches he specially focused on the family planning when Bhim was about 10 year old his father decided to marry again. Bhim naturally did not like idea of his step mother. Another incident in his school time shape a idea regarding women equality in married life. In keeping with the custom of those days Bhim was compalled to marry soon after passing high school examination. He was only 16 year old and

Ramji was hardly nine. Bhim marriage at such an early age brought the harsh face of early marriage for woman in front of him. Where woman are in great loss of her educational, social, political, economical and self development. This life lesson had effect on his against child marriage thought.

K.A Keluskar an assistant teacher at the Wilson high school presented a copy of his own book entitled 'life of Gautam Buddha'. It would be accurate to say that this book had a great impact on the life and mind of Ambedkar. This was the seed of his interest towards Buddhism and comparison between women status in Buddhism and Hinduism as discussed by him in (Rise and Fall of Hindu women, 1951). After Schooling of Ambedkar his friend K. A Kelushkar having come to know of Bhim's difficulties personally approached then Maharaja of Baroda. Bhim granted a scholarship of rs 25 per month. HE passed his B.A examination in 1913. IN june 1913 the Maharaja of Baroda announced that he would send some deserving students to the U.S.A for higher education in Columbia university. As it is In Bombay, Ambedkar come in touch with another enlightened prince, the Maharaja of Kohapur, Shahu Maharaja who had been trying to break down the caste system barriers. Maharaja helped Ambedkar to start a fortnightly paper name *Mook Nayak*. BY july 1920 he had a loan of 5000 from his old friend Naval Bhathena. This enabled him to live London school of economics. In Ambedkar life these were helps give the major support to become as highly qualified Dr. Ambedkar. From this life experience Ambedkar knew that every deprived and marginalized person need a special opportunity help for their improvement or development. This would be only possible by reservation and special clause policy in constitution. Abroad Higher education opportunity was the turning point in Bhim life and opened wish of visit of opportunity and experience in country which upheld the basic principles of equal opportunity for everybody. The U.S.A emerged as truly liberal and democratic state out of turmoils the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity. This impact on his ideology regarding women too, example In this period Bhim wrote a letter to his relative and advocated the cause of women education. He emphasised that the education of young women was as important as that young men. If the goal of social progress to be achieved.

Manusmriti, Caste System, Buddhism and Fall-Rise Of Women

Ambedkar said in "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman, 1951" The women in Pre-Manu days enjoyed respectable status in the Hindu society. Women were free and enjoyed equal status along with men in matters of education, divorce, remarriage and economic independence. Woman's right to property was accepted by *Brihaspati Smriti* and divorce by *Parashara Smriti*. Vedic period women enjoyed all the necessary rights which are common for a human being. The women had access to all branches of learning. In *Brahadaranika Upanishad* we are told that in the king Janaka's Court, the maiden scholar Gargi was examined in her knowledge by *Yaghavalkya*. The women enjoyed equal position on par with men. Even in a religious ceremony, women played an important role. No religious ceremony by men was complete without participation of his wife. There can be no doubt that there has been an utter downfall in position of

women in India from what it once was. from the *Atharva Veda* where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her *Brahmacharya*. From the *Shrauta Sutras* it is clear that women could repeat the Mantras of the Vedas and the women were taught to read the Vedas. Panini's *Ashtadhyay* bears testimony to the fact that women attended *Gurukul* (College) and studied the various *Shakhas* (Sections) of the Veda and became expert in *Mimansa*. Patanjali's *Maha Bhashya* shows that women were teachers and taught Vedas to girl students. The stories of women entering into public discussions This is a very high position for women in any part of the World. Who was responsible for their fall? Ambedkar said It was Manu, the Law Giver of the Hindus. There can be no other answer. The deterioration in status of women in the society began with the imposition of severe restrictions on them under the influence of *Manusmriti*. Manu held a very low opinion about women. According to *Manusmriti*, women are not to be trusted for it is in their nature to seduce men. Men are forbidden to sit in a lonely place even with one's mother, sister or daughter. Women are not to be free under any circumstances, day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males of their families; her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is fit for independence. Though devoid of virtues, yet a husband must be worshipped as a god by a faithful wife. Manu did not give right to divorce to women under any circumstance while allowing man to give up his wife at the same time. Indeed man was allowed to abandon and even sell his wife. Even after repudiation by her husband, she was not released from her husband and could not become legitimate wife of another. A wife could be subjected to corporal punishment by her husband reducing her status to that of a slave. Like *Shudras*, a woman was forbidden by Manu to study Vedas. Offering sacrifices, the very soul of religion, was forbidden to be performed by women. In matters of property, a wife was reduced to the level of a slave as she was not allowed to have any dominion over property.⁸ Thus, under the influence of Dharamshastras (*Manusmriti*), women was held in bondage lifelong and were deprived of basic human rights like right to education, right to property and right to study religious scripture. Dr. Ambedkar points out that *Shastras*, Caste and Endogamy the three important pillars of patriarchy in Hindu society –were responsible for discriminatory practice against women and their degradation in social status.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar challenge the ideological foundations of graded system of caste hierarchy that denied equality, freedom and human dignity to women in Hindu society. He believed that society should be based on reason and not on atrocious tradition of caste system. He belief that "as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem." Whenever he looking custom which are highly remakble in low status are presents three singular uxorial customs, namely: (i) Sati or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. (ii) Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry. (iii) Girl marriage (Ambedkar, 1935, pp.13) ^[4]. For these conditions Ambedkar suggest some option for caste societies.

First: burn her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband and get rid of her. This, however, is rather an impracticable way of solving the problem of sex disparity. In some cases it may work, in others it may not. Consequently every surplus woman cannot thus be disposed of, because it is an easy solution but a hard second remedy is to enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. So far as the objective results are concerned, burning is a better solution than enforcing widowhood. Burning the widow eliminates all the three evils that a surplus woman is fraught with. Being dead and gone she creates no problem of remarriage either inside or outside the Caste (Ambedkar, 1935, pp.11) ^[4].

In Ambedkar View Buddhism rise the status of women because Budha give right to women of *Bhikkunis*, Sacrifice even Budha separated *Bhikkus* and *Bhikkunis Sanghas*. Ambedkar said he did was to tell the *Bhikkhus* that whenever they met any women, do ye call up the mother-mind, the sister-mind, or the daughter mind as the case may be i.e. regard a woman as you would your own mother, sister or daughter. Rule of celibacy which was binding on both. The Buddha knew what a great force the sex instinct is with life of both man as well as woman. To use the Buddha's own words it is this instinct which drives a man in woman's bondage and a woman in man's bondage. So there are not any superior control over women of *sanghas* man.

"Whenever such a monarch appears there is the appearance of the seven treasures: the treasure of the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Jewel, the Woman, the House-father, and the treasure of the Heir Apparent." On another occasion the Buddha, In Ambedkar view the women in Budha eye is a treasure but for manu women is inferior as shudra. (The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman, 1951)

For a deep understanding of this different view toward women, Ambedkar take example of *Sannyas*, which is the ideal of the *Upanishadas* and the end of *Sannyasa* was to realize the *Upanishadic* doctrine that the Atman is Brahma. One of the conditions was that women (and *Shudras*) were not to be eligible for *Sannyas*. It is important to understand the reason why the Brahmins debarred woman from taking *Sannyas* because it helps to understand the attitude of the Brahmins towards woman which was in sharp contrast with that of the Buddha. The reason is stated by Manu Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their *Sanskars* (rites) are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras they are as untruth is. Although Manu was later than the Buddha, he has enunciated the old view propounded in the older *Dhanna* Sutras. This view of the women was both an insult and an injury to the women of India. It was an injury because without any justification she was denied the right to acquire knowledge which is the birthright of every human being. It was an insult because after denying her opportunity to acquire knowledge she was declared to be as unclean as untruth for want of knowledge and therefore not to be allowed to take *Sannyas* which was regarded as a path to reach Brahma. Not only was she denied the right to realize her spiritual potentiality she was declared to be barren of any spiritual potentiality by the Brahmins. Here Ambedkar said that

freedom which the Buddha gave to the women is a fact of far greater importance and out-weighs whatever stigma which is said to be involved in the subordination of the *Bhikkunis* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. So Allowing women to become *Bhikkunis* the Buddha not only opened for them the way to liberty, he also allowed them to acquire dignity, independent of sex. To her freedom she could, Buddha did not place any premium on virginity as such. He kept his way open to all classes of women-married, unmarried, widows and even to prostitutes. All could acquire merit, freedom, dignity, an equality along with man.

Empirical Ground of Women Emancipation

Ambedkar as constitution assembly member have a great role to determine the status of deprived class by effecting constitution, law, speeches, conferences and in act formation in through his life. In January 1928, a women's association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai, Ambedkar's wife as its president. On December 25, 1927 at a Conference of Depressed Classes held at Mahad, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made a bonfire of *Manusmriti* in presence of more than fifty women to protest against the discrimination of women and untouchables upheld by it. In his address at the Depressed Classes Women's Conference held at Nagpur on July 20, 1942 under the presidentship of Mrs Sulochanabai Dongre in which 25000 women attended, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, "I am a great believer in women's organizations. I know what they can do to improve the condition of society if they are convinced. In the eradication of social evils they have rendered great services". He also underlined that women should learn to be clean and keep themselves away from vices. They should educate their children and in still high ambition in them. Speaking on marriage and parental responsibilities, he advised women to get married only when they are financially able. They should stand by their husband as a friend and equal and refuse to be his slave. He reminded them that having too many children is a crime. The paternal duty lies in giving each child a better start than its parents had. He concluded his address, "I am sure if you follow this advice, you will bring honour and glory to yourselves". In The Preamble of Indian constitution guarantees social and economic justice to women and that is because of Ambedkar contribution. In the preamble it is mentioned: i) social, economic and political justice, ii) freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, iii) equality of status and opportunity and iv) fraternity assuring dignity of the individual and national unity to all the citizens of India without any discrimination of caste, creed or sex. In Indian Constitution 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.

The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Hindu succession Act and The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 are the main influenced Act by Ambedkar contribution. The Hindu Marriage Act was amended in 1976 made the following provisions for women 1. The legitimization of illegitimate children (Sec.16). 2. Punishment-bigamy (Sec.26). 3. Custody of children (Sec. 26). 4. Marriageable age of females raised to 18 years, 5. Provision for alimony (Sec. 25). The Act abolishes the difference between a maiden and a widow. For the first time Hindu code bill amended by Ambedkar and gave a hindu woman the right to inherit property The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 This Act contains the following provisions for women: 1. A widow has a right to adopt a son or a daughter which was not there in the Hindu Law. 2. It also provided an opportunity to be independent and dispose of her property by will as she wishes and desires (Sec. 14). 3. A uniform scheme of succession to the property of a Hindu female who dies, intestate after commencement of the Act, was made in Section 15. Previously under the uncodified law the succession to stridhan varied according to the marital status of a woman. The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956: Following provisions are come under the purview of this Act: 1. The mother is empowered to change the gurdian, appointed by the father and may appoint a new gurdian by will. 2. The father's right to appoint a guardian for the minor by will during the life time of the minor's mother is prohibited under this Act. Thus through legal, constitutional, law and act Ambedkar were trying to established a democratic structure which is productive for all type of class including women.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is an important theoretical input in understanding the hurdles to empowerment of women. For Hindu minds who deny equal social status to women in matters of entitlement of rights, property, and inheritance. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar not only wrote extensively to counter the orthodox Hindu opinion against women but worked as an activist and social reformer at the grass roots level to organize and empower women of depressed classes. And This paper have tried to explain what he did for uprooted the women degraded status and how it is related to his concept of functioning of *Braminvaad*, *varna* system, caste structure, Hindu Social order based on caste hierarchy discrimination. Because he knows that these all are based on system of endogamy, purity of caste identity, inequality and all these centre is women sexuality – reproduction. Along with this, women have face more struggle, low status, low dignity and subordination in adjustments to security of women sexuality and reproductive purity for save hindu social order. Ambedkar said education, freedom, equality, opportunity and rationality, only ways through women get emancipate. These solutions are come from his theory of special treatment for deprived section, rationality, dignity, fraternity, equality which all have influenced by western idea of humanism and western realism. Here we can see that his perception, ambition, contribution, haters and ideas formed or developed by experience of childhood, study in London – Colombia and as a nationalist

participation in Indian politics. Women emancipation is also a branch of it. Along with it, Ambedkar compare to the between phase of rise and fall of women during pre *vedik* era, *manusimiriti*, and buddism have a look on how Ambedkar search about good in buddism and bad about in *manusmiriti*. His constitutional and law contributions are remarkable in women emancipation action mode. But there are some question – if Ambedkar had most of help from Hindu upper caste people then why he did not find a way to reform hindu caste structure itself? because he had been seen that there were some good mind set peoples in Hindu caste orthodoxal society. After this why he made his choice to change in buddism rather than correct the bad in Hindu social orders. This was not directly related to women emancipation but is a main question.

References

1. Ambedkar BR. Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development, in Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar: Speeches and Writings (1979), Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1916, 1.
2. Ambedkar BR. The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman: Who was Responsible for it?, originally published in the journal, The Mahabodhi(Calcutta), 1951,
3. Ambedkar BR. Women and Counter Revolution, "Riddles of Hindu Women in Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, 3.
4. Ambedkar BR. The Annihilation of Caste, text of the Presidential. Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1935.
5. Shahare ML. Dr. Bhimrao Amedkar; His life and work, N.C.R.T, New Delhi, 1987.
6. Singariya, Dr. MR. Dr B R Ambedkar and Women Empowerment in India". Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science. 2014; 2(1):59;137-51.