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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: A Crusader of Women Empowerment

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Abstract: Indian Knowledge System holds valuable wisdom in fields like agriculture, healthcare, handicrafts, and sustainable living. Women have been key in preserving and passing on this knowledge. However, modernization and socio-economic changes have marginalized these systems, affecting women's traditional roles. This paper discusses how reviving IKS can empower women, tackle issues like economic inequality, cultural loss, and environmental challenges, and promote inclusive development and gender equality in India.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar considered education as an important tool for the emancipation of women. It is evident from his speeches that he had great concern for women empowerment. Addressing the women's conference held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, he said,

"I measure the progress of any community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. I shall tell you a few things which I think you should bear in mind. Learn to be clean; keep free from all vices. Give education to your children. Instill ambition in them. Inculcate on their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complexes".

Ambedkar observes, "Education is as necessary for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be mould their lives in virtuous way, for sons should be such as would make a mark in this world".

The above statements, made by Dr. Ambedkar, are enough to prove that he is an emancipator of women in its true sense.

Before Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the caste system, existing in India, considered women subordinate to men. The prevailing system denied liberty and rights to them. Being a born social reformer, the plight and oppression of women compelled Ambedkar to do something to free women from every bondage of life i.e. religious, social and economic. So far as the modern feminist movements are concerned, the job done by Ambedkar for the emancipation and upliftment of women is very significant. Dr. Ambedkar was a great thinker, philosopher, revolutionary, prolific writer, social activist and critic. He was exceptionally clever and spent his whole life fighting for the cause of marginalized people and women as well. There was discrimination on the basis of class, caste and gender. Thoughts and works of Ambedkar are powerful source of inspiration for the movements, fighting for the betterment and advancement of women.

Ambedkar realised that women were the victims of the oppressive caste-based and rigid hierarchical social system. He thought that the law of Manu was responsible for this wretched and pathetic condition of women. He attacked Manusmriti which denied women freedom, self-respect, education, property, divorce etc. They were treated as slaves. They were kept in dependence by the males. Ambedkar himself was the victim of oppression and discrimination. Therefore his views about women's oppression and equal rights are more useful to bring women to the mainstream of country. His first hand experiences of oppression and humiliation, during schooling, forced him later to destroy the brutal social order. Ambedkar started his movement in 1920. He started fighting against the Hindu social order. To raise his voice he launched journals like Mook Nayak and Bahiskrit Bharat. Through these journals he laid emphasis on the gender equality. He also urged the need for education and brought forth the problems of the depressed and as well as women.

After completing his higher education in London School of Economics and Political Science, where he came across the feminist movement, he returned to India devoted his life to work for the depressed classes including women. Ambedkar created awareness among poor, illiterate women and motivated them to fight against the unjust social practices. He was well acquainted with the status of women in Indian society. Being India's First Law Minister and Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. 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 tried sufficient inclusion of women's rights in the constitution of India. His support for women appeared in the form of Hindu Code Bill in parliament. But the orthodox people opposed to the bill. There was strong opposition both inside and outside the parliament. The bill provided many fundamental rights to women. In the Bill there was provision to abolish different marriage system and to establish monogamy as the only legal system. It gave the property right. It provided conjugal rights and judicial separation. When the Bill was introduced in parliament, the opposition was strong against the Bill. Ambedkar tried his level best to defend the Bill by pointing out the drawbacks of Indian society. He argued that the ideals in the Bill are based on constitutional principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The argument of the opposition was that the Bill will demolish the very structure and fabric of Hindu society. The very foundation, on which the Hindu society rests are shaken. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dropped the Bill by saying that there was too much opposition. Eventually Dr. Ambedkar resigned his post as the Law Minister of the country. Later many provisions proposed by Dr. Ambedkar were passed. Some changes were made in Hindu Law. But still some basic rights of women have yet to given to them. The Hindu Code Bill became the cause of resurgence the feminist movements in India.

The Maha Parinirvan of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar occurred on 6th December 1956. In the condolence message, in parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said; ' Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society'. His dream of society based on gender equality is not realised yet. Thus his thoughts and the work, done by him, are still important for the society and for the empowerment of women.

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