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Dr. Ambedkar & Upliftment of Dalit Women

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[A great French writer remarked "…. If you want me to tell you what a nation is like or what a social organization is like, tell me the position of women in that nation…."[1] Thus social status and place of women thus indicate the country's character more than anything else. That applies equality to the other fields like educational, social, economic and religious status of the women. Here in this paper an attempt is made to highlight the upliftment of Dalit women as a part of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Movement. Paper examines the social aspects, religious matters and level of education of Dalit women in order to understand holistic approach of Babasaheb to eradicate the issues of Dalit women and empower them with the self-respect.]

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has been one of the greatest social transformers of modern India, who struggled against caste, class, varna and gender discrimination to build egalitarian society based on equality, liberty and fraternity in every aspect of human life, that too between men and women. He is the real super human being who did not leave the worst structure of our Indian society, which was required to be restructured with the equalitarian and humanitarian principles.

He advocated social and economic democracy and insisted that without them there would be no peace, happiness and prosperity in India. He was ardent supporter of the cherished value of liberty, equality and fraternity. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's contribution for the betterment of all in general and progress of Dalit women in particular is unique. He not only wanted to ensure social equality between man and man but also between man and woman.

Methodology

Objectives

i. To know the Socio-religious Movements of Dr. Ambedkar and emancipation of Dalit women.

ii. To explore the constructive solution for the issues of Dalit Women with the reference to the Socio-religious Movements of Dr. Ambedkar.

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Research Design

The study is based on secondary sources of existing literature Descriptive method was taken into consideration to examine issues of the Dalit women in-depth. Explorative design helps in finding solutions for the Dalit women to prevent and protect them for the future challenges.

Dalit Women

Being a Dalit is reason enough to be ready to face a life full of miseries, suffering, degradation and dehumanized way of life. Being woman means life-long exploitation in the name of sex, a weak variety of human subordinating to man, unwanted burden since birth and a domestic servant for life. Put the two together in one body and you have a creature that reflects the humanity at its worst, a Dalit. This is what it means to be Dalit woman. A Dalit woman suffers on two counts, first as a Dalit and second as woman. As Dalit she suffers at the hands of society of upper castes, as woman she suffers in society as well as at the hands of her own family members – males and females.

Religious Aspects of the Movement

The impassioned appeal to cast away evil practices and customs among certain sections of the depressed classes was made by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at a meeting held at Bombay in 1936, which was largely attended by men and women belonging to the Devadasi patraje, Bhute, Aradhi communities and held to accord support to mass conversion.

"Whether you change your religion along with us, or not it does not matter to me. But I insist that if you want to be with the rest of us you must give up your disgraceful life, you must marry and settle down normal domestic life as women of other classes, do not continue to live under conditions which inevitably drag you into prostitution."[2]

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar also critically analyzed that, "the Chaturvarna system of Hinduism made you the slave of the caste Hindus by imposing number of restrictions and it made you as an Untouchables. Though you people worship and pilgrimage to number of places like Savadatti, Pandarpur and Khandoba etc. but none of these Gods and Goddesses had solved problems like Poverty, Exploitations and Atrocities. In Hindu Dharmasastras, it is loudly mentioned that, God took ten incarnations to punish the evil and protect good. But the same God never looked at you to enslave and uplift you. These are false stories, by which Brahmanas have cheated the non-Brahmanas and have dominance in the name of God and religion. Thus, the root cause of Dalit was the blind practice of Chaturvarnya of Hinduism.

He further asked that "If Yallamma of Savadatti and other Gods and Goddesses will be pleased and satisfied and they bless you for having practicing the Devadasi system among Dalits. Then, why caste Hindus did not practice to get blessing from Gods and Goddesses? Thus, unless you gave up all these evil practices, there cannot be escape from slavery and exploitation."[3]

Social Aspects of the movement

The first Belgaum District Bahishkrit Social Conference was held on 23rd March 1929 at Belgaum under the Presidentship of Sri, Sitaram Namadev Shivatarakar, in which Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Dr. Solanki and others participated. Devaraya Ingale was Reception Committee President. It was presided over by Sitaram. Namadev Shivatarakar who told that, untouchables were not themselves having remained backward but it was environment, which never allowed them to advance. Though they are outside the Chaturvarnya system but all these four varnas kept them away.

After the speech of the Shivatarakar, resolutions were passed by the Parishad, which reflects their concern to the cause of Dalit women and the children. They wanted the Untouchability to be made as an offence by law. No one is superior or inferior by birth and not to accept the sanctity of Dharma Shastras, which uphold the high and low on births. The Parishad also severely condemned Chaturvarnya system, which

discriminates between men and women. They urged that the government should interfere into the religious affairs, to redress the insults of the Bahujans.

It was decided to fix the marriage age 20 years for men and 16 years for women, inter-caste marriage was to be allowed between men and women of different castes and to avoid unnecessary expenditure in marriages so that the money thus saved could be utilized for educating both males and females and their children.[4]

These were some of the important resolutions of this Parishad. Then after this, with the permission of the president, Dr. Ambedkar delivered the speech and suggested the twin means for enslavement of Dalits are-one is to get right through waging struggle and another is to get political power.[5] Thus he concluded the speech with message "You must abolish your slavery by yourselves, do not depend upon God or a superman. Your salvation lies in political and not in pilgrimages and observance of fasts."[6]

While addressing Devadasi women at Athani in Belgaum district, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that, "unless our womenfolk give up this evil practice of Devadasi system, there is no emancipation to our Community" Then, one Devadasi woman stood and replied that, "scarcity of love, affection and wealth forced us to practice these kinds of social ills. We are seeking for status and dignified life which is declined by the wealth-centric people."

Dr. Ambedkar replied her in a pragmatic way declaring that "you are my mother from this day", listening these holy words, women from the crowd got inspired with the affectionate approach of Dr. Ambedkar and she donated all her earnings to him for the socio-religious movement. This is one incident of peculiar kind, which shows that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was genuine emancipator of women. So, women were greatly influenced by his work and actions. Thus, they were ready to make any kind of sacrifice. some of these women went to jail also along with their kith and kin and pets.[7]

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had a vision for the future. He always thought far ahead of his contemporaries. He rightly emphasized on the progress of women. He said so in his address in the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held at Nagpur on July 20,1942. He asserted that marriage is a liability and said, "let each girl who marries stand up to her husband and claim to be her husband's friend and equal and refuse to be his slave".[8]

Even after the centenary celebrations of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar are over, it is painful to see that a majority of the women have faith in rites and rituals of Hindu religion, irrespective of the fact, whether they are educated or not. They worship traditional gods and goddesses. They are completely in the dark. Even most educated Dalit women are not aware of Ambedkar's teachings, not having studied his writings. They do not know what Hindu religion had done to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes nor do they understand the riddles of Hinduism.[9]

They are completely confused. But for all these, actually the Dalit women are not to be blamed. Their men are responsible for their backwardness and ignorance. But influenced by Dr. Ambedkar's Movement, the enlightened women from Maharashtra are playing an important role in the society. They have started their own organizations. But outside Maharashtra, especially in the Hindi speaking states, women have not been able to unite for their cause; though a few women have come forward to fight against injustice and atrocities.[10]

Dalit Women and Education

Once Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar asked his followers in a seminar 'If you want to educate your children, first educate women. 'It is the duty of true Ambedkarite that they must educate and provide all facilities to the Dalit women, if they are honestly anxious to fulfil the desires of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had studied the problems of Dalits very seriously. He had seen the horrible condition of women, which was no different from the Shudras and the

Untouchables. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar took risk of challenging the established traditions of Hindu society because he had firm conviction that no society could change positively unless it was challenged. Thus instead of justifying and glorifying it, he felt that the better way to serve Hinduism was through its open criticism. Further, he suggests every Dalit member of the country must educate and develop the critical thinking ability. Education is the ultimate solutions for the majority issues of Dalit community, he said.

Conclusion and Discussion

It is established fact that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was not only the emancipator of Dalit women but entire womenfolk in India. The gist of his advocacy of the cause of women and his exhortation to the Hindus to change the society to suit the needs of the modern times can best be described in his own words: "Those who want to conserve must be ready to repair and all I want is that, if you want to maintain the Hindu system, the Hindu culture, the Hindu society, do not hesitate to repair where it is necessary. The Hindu Code Bill asks for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu society, which has almost become dilapidated."[11]

It is important to note that under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Dalit women took active part in Dalit Movement on several occasions. Until and unless there is an improvement in the status of Dalit women and their equal participation in the society, all talk of nation's progress and development is meaningless. This study encourages the future researchers for descriptive and analytic studies in this area in future.

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