

3

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision for Women in the Indian Constitution

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Abstract

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar dedicated his life to upholding the dignity of women and marginalized communities, earning recognition as a foremost advocate of human rights. As a visionary of social justice, he continually worked toward the empowerment and upliftment of women. Ambedkar believed firmly in equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of caste, religion, gender, or social background. Guided by this conviction, he initiated significant efforts to secure women's freedom and rights, striving to shape a society grounded in fairness and equality. Acknowledging the deep-rooted gender discrimination present in Indian society, he raised his voice to ensure women's inclusion in the modern socio-political framework. Through various constitutional provisions, he established equal status for women and strengthened their position in the country. This paper explores Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's views and ideals concerning women's empowerment. It further examines his role as a thinker and social reformer in enhancing the social standing and overall emancipation of women in society.

Keywords: Perseverance, Forthrightness, Admirable Integrity, Humiliation, Untouchables, Women's Upliftment, Leadership, Drafting Committee, Legal Talent, Discriminatory Conditions.

Introduction

A treasure trove of profound knowledge, intense perseverance, remarkable talent, admirable integrity, justice, and forthrightness, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar dedicated himself to the cause of the Dalits. Born into the Mahar caste, considered untouchable, he faced immense humiliation and severe torture at every step of his life. Enduring these humiliations and social suffering, he continued to move forward, determined to end the inhumane conditions of life for India's untouchables and bring them to the level of humanity. This great man's commitment and dedication to India's Dalits has earned him the sobriquet of "Lincoln and Martin Luther" and even earned him the title of "Bodhisattva."

Bhimrao was born on April 14, 1891, in the Mhow cantonment near Indore. His birth name was Bhim Sakpal. The Mahar caste, into which Dr. Ambedkar was born, was considered

untouchable in Maharashtra. Bhimrao's father, Ramji Sakpal, was a follower of Kabir, and therefore, casteism had no place in his mind.

In India, women of all castes have traditionally enjoyed a status similar to that of Dalits, and Ambedkar also made efforts for their upliftment. Ambedkar considered the view of Manusmriti, which states, "Fathers should protect women in childhood, husbands in youth, and sons in old age, and women should not be given independence." Ambedkar sharply criticized the Smritis and other scriptures on the grounds that they imposed restrictions on women's independent role in society.

Ambedkar was a strong opponent of the tendency in the Indian family system to consider women subordinate and dependent on men. Ambedkar believed that women should have equal opportunities with men in education and all other areas of social life. In Hindu society, women were denied the right to inherit property, the right to adopt if childless, and the right to remarry. Ambedkar considered it necessary to end these discriminatory conditions against women. To this end, he drafted the Hindu Code Bill and made serious efforts to have it passed by Parliament. Thus, he made commendable efforts towards women's upliftment.

Ambedkar was a mastermind of exceptional legal talent, and Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel, recognizing his talent, entrusted him with the position of chairman of the Drafting Committee, a crucial committee of the Constituent Assembly. Under his leadership, a constitution was developed for the country, capable of maintaining its unity in both peacetime and crisis.

The Education for Women: Ambedkar's view

B.R. Ambedkar viewed education as the most powerful tool for women's empowerment and liberation from social and economic oppression. He strongly advocated for universal, co-education for girls and boys, believing that the progress of a community is the best measured by the degree of progress women have achieved.

Core Views on Women's Education

Path to Empowerment: Ambedkar believed that education was essential for women to acquire knowledge, self-confidence, and the ability to make informed decisions about their lives, health, and finances.

Social Transformation: He saw education as a means to challenge and dismantle deeply ingrained patriarchal and caste-based norms and practices that subjugated women, such as child marriage, the Devadasi system, and enforced widowhood.

Intellectual and Mental Development: Ambedkar argued that education would enable women to think independently, leading to their overall mental and intellectual development.

Equality and Rights Awareness: He linked education directly to awareness of legal and constitutional rights. He believed that educated women would be better equipped to demand justice and equality in all spheres of life: social, economic, and political.

National Progress: Ambedkar famously stated, "We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education".

Implementation and Advocacy

- **Ambedkar translated his views into concrete action through**

Constitutional Provisions: As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, he ensured the inclusion of fundamental rights guaranteeing gender equality, such as Article 14 (equality before law), Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex), and Article 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment).

Legal Reforms: He advocated for comprehensive legal rights through the Hindu Code Bill, which aimed to grant women rights in inheritance, property ownership, marriage, and divorce. He resigned from his post as Law Minister when the bill faced significant opposition, highlighting his commitment to the cause.

Labour Laws: During his tenure as Labour Minister, he was instrumental in introducing pro-women legislation such as the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, ensuring maternity leave and improving working conditions for women.

Origin of the empowerment idea in India

The idea of empowerment in India has evolved over a long historical trajectory shaped by social reform movements, colonial encounters, constitutional developments, and post-independence policies. Although the term “empowerment” gained prominence in the late 20th century, its philosophical foundations can be traced to much earlier traditions in Indian society.

In ancient India, empowerment was embedded in concepts such as dharma, varna, ashrama, and local self-governance systems like village assemblies (sabhas and panchayats). While these structures were not egalitarian in today’s sense, they did create frameworks for collective decision-making and social responsibility. Religious and philosophical schools, particularly Buddhism and Bhakti traditions, challenged rigid hierarchies and emphasized equality, compassion, and moral agency, sowing early seeds of social empowerment.

The modern idea of empowerment began to take recognizable shape during the 19th-century socio-religious reform movements. Reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Swami Vivekananda, and others criticized caste oppression, gender inequality, and regressive customs. Their work promoted education, abolition of harmful practices, and uplift of marginalized groups—key elements of what we now understand as empowerment. Phule’s work with lower castes and women, and Savitribai’s pioneering role in female education, were especially influential in shaping a grassroots vision of empowerment.

The freedom movement further strengthened and expanded the idea. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized swaraj, not just as political independence but as self-rule of individuals and communities. His advocacy of gram swaraj, empowerment of women (whom he called “the embodiment of sacrifice and strength”), uplift of the “Depressed Classes,” and economic self-reliance gave empowerment a moral and socio-political dimension. Leaders like B.R. Ambedkar advanced a more radical vision, linking empowerment to justice, equality, and human rights. His struggle for caste abolition, access to education, and political representation for Dalits transformed empowerment into a constitutional and legal agenda.

With independence in 1947, empowerment became embedded in national policy through the Constitution. Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles provided a framework

for social, economic, and political empowerment, especially for historically marginalized groups. Reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and later Other Backward Classes institutionalized political and educational empowerment. Land reforms, community development programmes, and expansion of education sought to reduce inequalities.

From the 1970s onwards, empowerment became a central theme in developmental discourse, influenced by global debates on human development, gender equality, and participatory governance. The women's movement in India reframed empowerment as autonomy, decision-making ability, and control over resources. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992–93) marked a major turning point, introducing decentralization and reserving seats for women and marginalized groups in local governance. This democratized participation and created millions of empowered local representatives.

In recent decades, empowerment has broadened to include economic liberalization, digital inclusion, rights-based schemes (like the Right to Education and MGNREGA), and civil society activism. Today, empowerment in India represents a dynamic interplay of historical reformist traditions, constitutional guarantees, grassroots mobilization, and modern development paradigms.

Women and the Indian Constitution

The Indian Constitution is a progressive and transformative document that lays a strong foundation for gender equality and women's empowerment. Framed in the backdrop of social inequality and discrimination, the Constitution not only guarantees equal rights to women but also empowers the State to take affirmative actions to uplift them. Through its Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and specific constitutional provisions, it seeks to ensure dignity, equality, and justice for women in Indian society.

At the core of women's rights in the Constitution is the principle of equality. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws to all citizens, including women. This provision ensures that women are treated on par with men in the eyes of law. Article 15(1) explicitly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, caste, or place of birth. Importantly, Article 15(3) allows the State to make special provisions for women and children. This clause forms the constitutional basis for various women-centric welfare schemes, reservations, and protective laws. Constitution also emphasizes equal opportunity in public life. Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, enabling women to participate equally in government services and institutions. Further, Article 39(a) directs the State to secure an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women, while Article 39(d) mandates equal pay for equal work. These provisions highlight the commitment of the Constitution toward economic justice for women.

Women's dignity and personal liberty are protected under Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Judicial interpretations have expanded this right to include the right to live with dignity, right to privacy, and protection against sexual harassment and violence. Landmark judgments, such as those addressing workplace harassment, have strengthened constitutional safeguards for women.

Political empowerment of women is another significant constitutional objective. Articles 243D and 243T, introduced through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, provide for

the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. These provisions have played a crucial role in enhancing women's participation in grassroots governance, leadership, and decision-making processes. Millions of women across rural and urban India have benefited from this constitutional mandate.

The Directive Principles of State Policy, though non-justiciable, reinforce gender justice. Article 42 directs the State to make provisions for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief, acknowledging women's reproductive roles and workplace needs. Similarly, Article 51A(e), a Fundamental Duty, calls upon citizens to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women, emphasizing societal responsibility in achieving gender equality. Despite these strong constitutional provisions, challenges such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal access to education and employment persist. However, the Indian Constitution provides a robust framework to address these issues through laws, policies, and judicial activism.

Ambedkar and women Rights and Social Justice

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision for women's rights and social justice centered on achieving equality, education, and empowerment through legal and social reforms. He championed these causes by advocating for legislation like the Hindu Code Bill, which granted women rights to property, divorce, and guardianship. His work established women's rights as an integral part of achieving a just and equitable society.

Key contributions

Legislative reforms:

- Ambedkar was instrumental in drafting the Hindu Code Bill, which included acts that granted women greater rights.
- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955: Gave women the right to divorce and maintenance.
- Hindu Succession Act, 1956: Provided women with the legal right to inherit property.
- Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956: Allowed women to legally adopt a child.
- Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956: Allowed women to be the natural guardian of their children.
- Advocacy for education: He strongly believed that education was essential for women's empowerment, enabling them to be aware of their legal rights and to participate actively in society.
- Challenging social injustices: Ambedkar fought against social practices like child marriage, the Devdasi system, and other forms of exploitation that degraded women.
- Constitutional guarantees: As a framer of the Indian Constitution, he ensured the inclusion of provisions that uphold gender justice and social equality, notes ResearchGate.
- Article 14: Ensured equality before the law for all citizens.
- Article 15: Prohibited discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Article 42: Mandated provisions for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

- Article 44: Advocated for a uniform civil code for all citizens, which would ensure equal rights regardless of gender.
- Economic and political empowerment: He viewed women's economic and political participation as crucial for their empowerment and advocated for their inclusion in the democratic process.
- Resignation for the cause: Ambedkar resigned from his position in the cabinet in protest when the Hindu Code Bill was not passed in parliament, highlighting his deep commitment to the cause, says Informatics Journals.

Ambedkar and Women's Education

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's commitment to women's education was firmly grounded in the principle of "sudhaarana" (improvement), which he believed was essential for cultivating women's intellect, self-awareness, and overall self-development through education. Ambedkar viewed education not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge but as a powerful tool for social transformation and generational progress. In his newspaper *Bahishkrut Bharat* dated February 3, 1928, he clearly articulated this belief by asserting that knowledge and learning are not the exclusive domain of men but are equally vital for women. He emphasized that if society truly desired improvement for future generations, the education of girls must be given the highest priority. Ambedkar strongly urged people not only to remember his words but also to actively implement them in practice. According to Ambedkar, the subordinate status of women in Indian society was not inherent but historically constructed. He argued that women had once enjoyed a respectable and dignified position prior to the codification of patriarchal norms in texts such as the *Manusmriti*. Ambedkar highlighted that during the Vedic period, women had access to education and intellectual pursuits, as evidenced by references in ancient texts like the *Atharvaveda* and the *Shrauta-sutras*. These sources indicate that women actively participated in scholarly debates and spiritual discourses. To reinforce his argument, Ambedkar acknowledged eminent female intellectuals of ancient India such as Rishi Gargi, Vidhyadhari, Sulabha, and Maitreyi. These women were celebrated for their philosophical insights and scholarly contributions, demonstrating that women's intellectual capabilities were widely recognized in earlier periods. By invoking these figures, Ambedkar not only paid homage to India's rich intellectual heritage but also strongly endorsed the cause of women's education. His vision underscored that educating women was fundamental to social reform, equality, and the overall progress of society.

Ambedkar's Role in Empowering Women and the Right to Divorce

Dr. Ambedkar envisioned enhancing the capabilities of women through freedom of choice, which led to their capacity building. The Hindu Code Bill brought up and included those women who earlier had not been allowed to sell property in their lives, and after their death property would go to their in-laws family.

Having been restructuring property rights for women, Dr. Ambedkar introduced two ground-breaking clauses, more the compensation of matrimonial rights and judicial separation. These clauses permit women to have personal choice and liberty to lodge a file for legal divorce or separation.

The bill has four different acts:

- The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) for giving women the right to divorce
- The Hindu Succession Act (1956) for giving women legal rights to succeed to family property
- The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956) for allowing women to legally adopt a child
- The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956) allows women to become the natural guardians of their children

Today's Present Context

Even in the 21st Century, the issue of gender inequality still finds its deep roots in Indian society. The condition was more critical in the pre-independence era and the early parts of post-independence. It was Ambedkar and some other handful of social reformers who came forward to lessen the plight of age-old sufferers i.e., Women. Interestingly, when the Hindu Code Bill was to be introduced by Ambedkar, numerous women opposed the Bill. In this way, after going through the improvement made by Ambedkar, we can safely and rightly aver the fact that Ambedkar was an internationally as a crusader against caste system and emancipator of humanity from social and economic injustice. His vision of society based on gender inequality is yet to be realized and, without any shadow of doubts, his thoughts are significant for the social reconstruction that favours women's empowerment.

Conclusion

Mostly the women can be signified as the mother and can play different vital role in daily life. They can be recognized as the head of the family. Dr. Ambedkar wanted that women should be treated equally and given equal prestige. His thoughts and philosophy are helpful to us even today. He always raised his voice against any kind of injustice happening around him and this is what every person should inculcate in him or her. India is a country where women once were given the status of deity. But now her position has gradually decreased. It can be signified to be reflected as the social movement according to the injustice behaviour to be served in case of women and they were forced to face child marriage. But in the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, he stated that the women can be idealized as the victims to be stated for the caste-based relativity, inflexible criteria can be seen within the hierarchical assumption to be conducted under the inhumanity and social biasness. Almost every day we come across some or the other incident of dowry death, domestic violence, rape cases, harassment etc. These incidents reflect the problem still faced by women in India.

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