



Dalit Women in India and Ambedkar : The road to Gender Equality in 21st century

Dr Anu

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

Dr B. R. Ambedkar

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar not only championed the cause of social justice for the downtrodden and underprivileged sections of Indian society but also worked tirelessly throughout his life to challenge the legitimacy of orthodox Hindu social order that upheld iniquitous gender relations in an institutionalized manner. His mission in life was to recreate Hindu society along the modern democratic ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. The paper analyzes the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a thinker and social reformer in the emancipation of social status of women in the Hindu society. The paper also analyzes the relevance of his ideas in the contemporary feminist discourse on gender equality under Indian social conditions. His main argument is that gender relations are artificially constructed under Hindu social order which not only moulds attitude of Hindus towards their women but also conditions women to conform to a stereotype feminine behavior.

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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution may be regarded as one of greatest intellectual and social reformer of modern India for his pioneering contribution in reforming Hindu social order. He not only struggled throughout his life for the emancipation of social status of the underprivileged and women in the Indian society, he is one amongst the few Indian social and political thinkers, who has done original thinking on the Hindu social order and the status of women within the Hindu society. Exposed to the Western ideas of humanism and rational thinking, Dr. Ambedkar was appalled at the low status of women in the Hindu society. He not only worked hard at the grassroots level to raise awareness about the degraded status of women in India but also wrote extensively to counter the views on gender relations sanctioned by Shastras and upheld by tradition. Through his writings, 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”, “The Riddle of Women”, 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 conform to a stereotype feminine behavior. He worked hard to challenge the iniquitous gender relations under the Hindu social order so that Hindu society could be reconstructed along the modern democratic ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The paper also analyzes the relevance of his ideas in the contemporary feminist discourse on gender equality under Indian social conditions. Dr.B.R Ambedkar studied extensively the Hindu Shastras and Smritis to find out the root cause of degraded status of women in India. In his article, “The Rise and Fall of Hindu Woman”, he made a historical study of the women’s status in ancient India and the factors that led to a decline in their status in later years. He points out that during the pre-Manu days women occupied a very high position in the intellectual and social life of the country. That a woman was entitled to upanayan is clear from the Atharva Veda where a girl is spoken of as being eligible for marriage having finished her Brahmacharya. From the Shrauta Shrutras, it is clear that women could repeat the Mantras of the Vedas. Panini’s Ashtadhyayi bears testimony to the fact that women attended Gurukul (College) and studied the various Shakhas (sections) of the