

‘Dr. Ambedkar's Insights on Gender Issues: A Literary Exploration’

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Abstract :

Feminism in Indian English literature fights gender injustice, patriarchal traditions, and promotes women's rights. Since the Vedic era, superstitions and mistaken traditions have caused women in the male-dominated Indian culture to endure several challenges. A variety of practices have been used to victimize women. Feminism investigates topics such as identity, agency, and empowerment, emphasizing the nexus between gender and social concerns. Feminist authors employ a variety of literary forms, including poetry, fiction, and essays, to challenge stereotypes, advocate for greater autonomy, and discuss themes such as domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and education. Their goal is to encourage readers to question old narratives and imagine a more egalitarian future for women. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar worked for women's rights throughout British rule in India and after independence, including measures requiring equal treatment for women in society into the Indian Constitution. Women feel independent and self-assured now solely because to Dr. Ambedkar. The old, untrustworthy customs were progressively eradicated from society, largely because to Dr. Ambedkar's tireless efforts. This paper examines the status of women in India and their empowerment through Dr. Ambedkar's approach. It highlights the challenges faced by women in Indian society and the need for eradicating these impediments through the Ambedkarite approach. The paper aims to verify the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar's approach for the upliftment of women's economic, social, and political status, highlighting the need for a strong judicial and administrative system.

Key Words : Patriarchy, Feminist, Annihilation , Genesis etc.

Introduction :

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's contributions to English literature, particularly concerning gender issues, offer a critical perspective on the intersection of caste and patriarchy. His writings , such as *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development* (1916) and *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), are important works in English that show how caste structures intrinsically constrain women's rights and autonomy, highlighting the need for meaningful social transformation to address gender inequity. Ambedkar's critique of Hindu religious writings, particularly the *Manusmriti*, demonstrates his resistance to women's institutionalized servitude by criticizing religious conventions that limit their liberties. His work on the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s, a critical legislative initiative to guarantee women equal rights in marriage, inheritance, and property, demonstrates his dedication to gender equality. Though primarily concerned with legislative changes, these writings are studied in English literature due to their combination of philosophical analysis, social critique, and advocacy for women's rights. Ambedkar's works give a framework for comprehending the fundamental linkages between caste and patriarchy, employing precise and strong language to advocate for a society in which gender justice is inextricably linked to larger social justice. His contribution to English writing resides in how he articulates the necessity for liberation of both underprivileged castes and women, so developing debates about equality and social reform.

Contributions of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar to gender issues :

1. Annihilation of caste (1936) :

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar critiques the *Manusmriti*, an ancient Hindu text that he believes has been instrumental in shaping caste and gender oppression. He argues that the *Manusmriti* perpetuates patriarchal norms by prescribing rigid gender roles and denying women independence. Ambedkar highlights the role of caste in controlling women's sexuality and reproductive rights, which he sees as essential to maintaining caste purity. He describes practices such as child marriage, restrictions on widow remarriage, and strict norms around chastity as mechanisms to control women and ensure they do not marry outside their caste.

Ambedkar criticizes Hindu social reformers who focus on caste practices rather than addressing the fundamental injustices of both caste and gender oppression. He believes that meaningful social reform cannot ignore the plight of women, especially those from marginalized castes, who face dual discrimination. He asserts that the social reformers' failure to challenge the fundamental basis of caste also leaves unchallenged the structures that keep women subordinate.

Ambedkar provides a nuanced analysis of how caste and gender oppression intersect. He points out that women from lower castes suffer disproportionately due to both their caste identity and their gender within the hierarchical caste structure. He is particularly critical of how upper-caste norms often dictate the behavior and status of all women in Indian society, imposing restrictions that affect lower-caste women even more severely.

Ambedkar's intersectional analysis anticipates many aspects of contemporary feminist thought, emphasizing that a true movement for social justice must consider the compounded effects of multiple systems of oppression, including caste, class, and gender. His central thesis in *Annihilation of Caste* is a call for radical social change and its implications for women.

2. The Hindu Code Bill (1950s): Ambedkar's advocacy for legal reforms to provide women with equal rights in marriage and property.

The Hindu Code Bill, a significant legislative effort in the 1950s, was a progressive legislation aimed at reforming Hindu personal laws to ensure gender equality, particularly in matters related to marriage, inheritance, and property rights. B. R. Ambedkar, India's first Law Minister and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, believed that the bill was crucial for establishing a legal framework that recognized the equal rights of women and dismantled patriarchal norms embedded in traditional Hindu society. The bill proposed reforms such as granting women the right to divorce and maintenance, providing daughters with equal inheritance rights, and securing property rights for women, including the right to inherit property from their parents. It also proposed legalizing inter-caste marriages and simplifying adoption procedures, moving towards a more inclusive and egalitarian legal structure.

Despite Ambedkar's passionate advocacy, the bill faced significant resistance from conservative elements in the Indian Parliament and society, who viewed these reforms as a radical departure from traditional Hindu practices. Despite Ambedkar's passionate advocacy, the bill faced numerous delays and was eventually watered down. Frustrated with the lack of support and slow pace of social reform, Ambedkar resigned from his position as Law Minister in 1951.

3. *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development* (1916): Analysis of caste and its impact on women.

In his 1916 essay, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar analyzed the caste system in India, highlighting its detrimental effects on women. He argued that the caste system is closely intertwined with the regulation of marriage and sexual relationships, which severely restricts women's autonomy. Ambedkar identified the core mechanism of endogamy as the control of women, placing strict controls on their sexual behavior and marriage choices to maintain the "purity" of the caste.

To enforce endogamy, communities resorted to oppressive practices that regulated women's freedom, particularly in matters of marriage and sexuality. The control of women's reproductive capacity was crucial in maintaining caste boundaries. Practices like sati, widowhood, and child marriage emerged as methods to ensure the endogamous structure of the caste system. These practices prevented widows from accessing their reproductive potential and ensured that women were married at an early age before they could exercise any autonomy over their choice of partners.

Ambedkar also discussed the issue of "surplus women," referring to the gender imbalance caused by the constraints of endogamy, which often resulted in a larger number of unmarried women facing social ostracism and restrictions due to their status. The existence of "surplus men" further restricted women's freedoms, as men could take on multiple wives but women were not afforded similar rights to remarry.

The caste system systematically curtails women's autonomy by controlling their roles as wives and mothers, ensuring the continuation of caste purity. This system not only subjugates women but also assigns them the role of guardians of caste purity, making them bearers of caste honor.

Ambedkar critiqued the patriarchal nature of caste, stating that the very foundation of caste is based on the control and oppression of women. He argued that any attempt to dismantle the caste system must also address women's rights, as the two are inseparably linked.

Conclusion :

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a pivotal figure in Indian history, giving his life for the welfare of impoverished sectors of society. He drafted provisions and articles for the Indian constitution to assist ordinary citizens in fighting injustice. During the Vedic time, males frequently considered women as a source of fun and exploited them. Ambedkarite reforms and Ambedkarism resulted in women gaining independence, self-confidence, education, employment, and integration into the larger system.

Despite his efforts, women's ideals of gender equality have not come true, making his ideas critical for societal reconstruction. Dr. Ambedkar highlighted the need of equal treatment and status for women, and he pushed the Hindu Code bill, which he asked all legislative members to endorse. His humanitarianism toward women, regardless of caste, or class, is evident in his last speech in Indian Parliament. Babasaheb held a humanistic attitude toward all women, regardless of religion, caste, or status. He constantly spoke out against many forms of gender inequality. To make Babasaheb's goals a reality, the working women's support system must be improved.

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