



IMPROVING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA : CONTRIBUTION OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

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Abstract

The status of women depends on the contemporary social structure, varied cultural norms and value systems of the country which determines the role of women and their stature in the society. Any society is composed of traditions, values and ethics and the most significant of them are the system of decent family and religious traditions as they provide the beliefs and moral values of the men and women regarding their rights and duties. There was a time when the societies were matriarchal in nature which was headed by women. It was the time when women were considered superior to men. But this could not last long and the man's desire to impose authority over women dominated and gradually led to patriarchal family. Nevertheless during this period, women were never looked down upon and they still continued to occupy respectable position in the society. The article discusses about the status of the women through ages, articulate the advocacy of Dr. B R Ambedkar towards women and his contribution to the industrial women emphasizing that women should be treated equally with men in all the fields.

Key words: Industrial women, Dr. B R Ambedkar advocacy, patriarchal family

“Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruitless without educated women and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women”.

- B. R. Ambedkar.

Introduction:

The history of social change in India gives a clear account of the gradual decline of the state of women in the society. Nevertheless during this period, women were never looked down upon and they still continued to occupy respectable position in the society. **Swamy Vivekananda** one of Indian's most eminent scholars observed: “All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future”.

Yet another great son of India, **Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** said “in order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. Once she is on the move the household moves, the village moves, and through the women, their children

are brought into the picture and given the opportunity of a healthier life and better training”. Thus, through the children of today we build the India tomorrow. In behind this picture lies the real story of the Indian women (Hindu women) which is of gradual suppression.

Ambedkar was well versed with the dynamics of the Hindu Society and was well aware of the deplorable state of women in such society. His main motive behind accepting the role of drafting the Constitution was to achieve a respectable position for all the oppressed and depressed people in the Hindu Society. Hence, as the chairman of the Drafting Committee, he has done a pioneering work to elevate the status of women. He emphasized that women should be regarded equally with men in all the fields. He was against any discrimination of people belonging to the same society on gender inequality.

Dr.B.R. Ambedkar has tried to break down the barriers in the way of advancement of woman in India. He laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for the Hindus, irrespective of gender. This very idea of Dr. Ambedkar can be seen in the Constitution of this great country India. The women of the Indian society were deprived under the Hindu Law. Dr. Ambedkar tried to restore it to them as far as possible. He achieved this stupendous task by including it in the Constitution by way of rights. Based on this backdrop, an attempt is made on the state of women in India with the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar for women development.

Dr. Ambedkar’s first academic paper “Caste in India: Their mechanism, Genesis and development” begins with his concern towards women, where he identified the linkage between caste and gender. During his studies at New York, while writing a letter to his father’s friend, he mentioned, “we shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education.”

Status of women through Ages:

The Vedic Period marked a time in Indian history, which gave women in India, a position on par with men. Women were assigned a high place in the Society. They shared an equal standing with their men folk and enjoyed a kind of liberty that actually had societal sanctions. They enjoyed a status, which was full of authority and honour. They could inherit property and enjoy any other right without any sex discrimination. The girls were free to choose their own life partners by a system called Swayamvarm and they married after attaining puberty.

The customs and practices encoded in the law of those times encouraged mutual understanding and respect among all the members of the family irrespective of the gender. Some of these customs were. “A husband should serve his wife in five ways; by honouring her, by respecting her, by remaining faithful to her; by giving her charges of the home and by duly giving her adornments”.(Rajkumar Pruthi, Rameswari devi, et al) A wife should care for husband in five ways; “she should be efficient in her household tasks, she should manage her servants well, she should be

chaste, she should take care of the goods which he brings home and she should be skillful and untiring in all her duties".(Rajkumar Pruthi, et al)

The status of women during the Vedic Period has been further enhanced because of their education. They had access to all branches of learning and in the earlier Vedic and Upanishad period, girls were free to study Vedas and other subjects along with the boys. Atharva Veda went so far as to say that "a maiden was not entitled to marry until after she had completed her student life.(Atharva Veda) In Brahadaranika Upanishad, it is said that in the king Janaka's court the maiden scholar Gargi was examined in her knowledge by Yagnvalkyia".(Tikoo, 1985) Thus, Gargi joins in the discussion, and Maitreyi was conversant with Brahman and heard from her husband philosophical doctrines.(Rajkumar Pruthi & Rameswarari Devi, 2001) The wife should do agnihotra (yagna), sandhya (puja) and all other daily religious rituals. If her husband is not present, the woman alone has right to do yagna. (Rig – Veda Samhita, part – I, Sukta 79, Sloka 872)

Women and men are equal in the eyes of Dharma. It was made explicit in Rig – Veda. "O women! These mantras are given to you equally (as to men). May your thoughts, too, be harmonious. May your assemblies be open to all without discrimination? Your mind and consciousness should be harmonious. I (the Rishi) give you these mantras equally as to men and give you all and equal powers to absorb (the full powers) of these mantras." (Rig – Veda, 10-191-3).

Education being an important instrument in shaping the personality of an individual, the personality of women bloomed to the maximum during the early Vedic times. They rose to the highest pinnacle of learning and education. Some even exhibited their expertise in the fields of religion, philosophy and Meta physics. History goes on to record instances where women took up weapons to defend the country against the raids of the enemies. She was treated on par with man socially as well as economically. Thus, it can be said that women in India were held in high esteem and were always recipients of tender love and care in Vedic Period.

Status of women in later Vedic Period:

In the later Vedic period the condition of women started deteriorating through sex determination. The social status of women was under – viewed. Many restrictions were imposed on them and they were deprived of basic human rights. They were treated as bonded labourers and they were considered as one of the three "W"s, the Wife, Women and Wealth. The women were expected to show complete obedience to men. They were denied property rights and were treated as the property of men. Evils like early child marriages, polygamy, illiteracy, Sati etc., had thrown the women in complete darkness (Bharathi, T, 1992). Bheeshma and Yudhistira believed that the woman is the root cause of evils. Swami Sankaraacharya of Kerala proclaimed that a woman is a gate to hell and is poison in the disguise of nectar. Katha Upanishad strictly warns men not to follow women for their strictness about within the periphery of ignorance. Divorce and re-marriages were absolutely forbidden. The golden age of Guptas had been the Dark Age for women. They advocated early marriages and even the pre-puberty marriages. The Gupta kings strictly practiced the Brahmanical law

by upholding certain rules for women – like sati and celibacy of widows. Later in the medieval period Muslims invaded India and introduced the purda system (Bharathi, T, 1992).

Women and Manu Dharma Shastra:

Of all the above citations, the Manu Dharma Shastra had a far – reaching influence on the Hindu society. The emergence of Manu as the law maker of India made a major difference in the lives of Indian women. The status of women in the Indian society became worse. Discrimination and degradation of women reached its height. The laws of Manu gave women no better treatment than a Sudhra. Manu had a very low opinion of women, which he had incorporated in the Hindu law. In the Manu Smriti, Manu not only shows contempt for women but goes on to degrade them as slaves devoid of intellect, denies them the right to education and the right to property and forbids them from performing sacrifices. In fact all the rights enjoyed by women in the earlier days were out rightly denied to them under the Hindu Law framed by Manu.

Manu pictured women as individuals who were by nature morally unsound. He prescribed that women were not supposed to be free under any circumstances. To quote the words of Manu he said, “In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband when her lord is dead to her sons, a woman must never be independent”. He also said, “By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house”. His contention was that a woman is never fit for independence. Women were by no means given the liberty to free herself by way of divorce from the bond of marriage inspite of anything like even the immoral activities or unfaithfulness of her husband. But this same law excluded man from its purview. He was at liberty to give up his wife and moreover, he was given all rights even to sell her if he so desires. In other words, in no way did Manu desire to give woman her freedom.

In the financial matters Manu deliberately refused to give woman any share. He denied the right to property while degrading her to the level of a slave. Manu had also forbidden a woman from studying the Vedas and uttering the Veda mantras and from offering sacrifices like a sudhra was forbidden. In order to make his point of view acceptable he declared, “Sacrifices performed by women are inauspicious and not acceptable to God. They should therefore be avoided. On the whole, woman was prohibited to have any intellectual pursuits, to exercise freewill and to have freedom of thought”.

Only a few people dare to oppose such a system of society in which a woman was regarded no more than a slave or sometimes regarded as a mere commodity which can be dealt with in any way. Very few strived hard to bring about a change in the outlook or the attitude of the society. Most of these social reformers tried to uplift and restore the women’s glory through preaching, press and platform. Among them a few notable reformers are Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eshwara Chandra Vidya Sagar, Swami Dayanand, Vivekananda, Kandhukoori Veeresa Lingam, Durga Bhai Desh Mukh, Jyotibae Phulie and Periyar E. V. Rama Swamy (Bharathi, T, 1992). To

mention a few remarkable contributions made by these reformers to better the condition of woman in India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought for the abolition of the most gruesome practice of sati where a wife was burnt alive along with her dead husband. Jyotibhai Phulie and Eswar Chandra Vidya Sagar worked relentlessly to educate the girls. Periyar E. V. Rama Swamy fought to restore dignity and self – respect of women especially in marriage.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar – An Advocate of Women

Among such great social thinkers and reformers was included another important personality named Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Babasaheb had a high regard for women. He applied his philosophy of equality, liberty and justice impartially even to woman. He criticized the law framed by Manu and to demonstrate his hatred against it he even burned the Manu Shastra in public. He was the only person who could even dare to exhibit such courage. It could have been an act to express his frustration towards a system or law which failed to regard all individuals as equals.

Writing about the status and position of women as given by Manu, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar says, “Can anybody doubt that it was Manu who was responsible for the degradation of women in India? Most people are perhaps aware of this. But they do not seem to know the facts. The first thing they do not know: What is peculiar to Manu? There is nothing new or startling in the laws of Manu about women. They are the views of Brahmins ever since Brahmanism was born in India. Before Manu, they existed only as a matter of social theory. What Manu did was to convert what was a social theory into the law of the State. The second thing they do not know is the reason which led Manu to impose these disabilities upon women. Sudras and women were the two chief sections of the Aryan society which were flocking to join the religion of the Buddha and thereby undermining the foundations of Brahminic religion. Manu wanted to stem the tide of women flowing in the direction of Buddhism” (Hariprasanna, A, 1992)

Through this message, Dr. Ambedkar wanted to enlighten the people under the Hindu law that Manu Dharma Shastra gave women a low position not because of any religious truth but just with a selfish intention to preserve the supremacy of Brahmanism and to prevent the exodus of women from Hinduism to Buddhism. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar made a commendable contribution for the uplift and development of woman. He worked for the betterment and progress of women crushed under the Hindu law. He further added that he measured the progress of a community by the degree of progress, which women have achieved. He entrusted the women the responsibility of laying down a strong foundation in the minds of their children upon which they would later on build a better society and a better country at large.

Indian Constitution: Upholding Women’s Rights and Dignity:

Our Constitution has endeavored to introduce new dimensions in women status and roles. To be successful in this endeavour, the Constitution has guaranteed certain fundamental rights and freedoms such as freedom of speech, protection of life and personal liberty. The fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy provided in the Constitution are a living testimony revealing Dr. Ambedkar’s

commitment towards the welfare of women. Through these, Ambedkar tried to secure social and economic justice to women as he believed that economic, social and culture rights are indispensable for one's dignity and the free development of one's personality. This move was of special significance to women in India as they have endured severe oppression for ages and have been denied an identity and development of every kind.

Traditional India has seen a woman only as a member of the family or a group, as daughters, wives and mothers and not as an individual with an identity or rights of her own. The radicalism of the Constitution and its deliberate departure from the inherited social system lay in its implicit assumption that every adult woman, whatever her social position or accomplishment, will function as a citizen and as an individual partner in the task of nation building (Encyclopedia Of Women and Development, 1998). A major part of the credit of introducing such a revolutionary change of giving an Indian woman an identity in the society goes to the principal architect of the Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

In order to release women from their dependent and unequal status, the Constitution of India has guaranteed certain rights which would give women an opportunity to stand on an equal footing with men. Accordingly **Article 14** states "that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India".

Article 15 says

- (i) "The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only on religion, race, caste, sex and place of Birth or any of them".
- (ii) "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provisions for women and children".

Article 16 says

- (i) "That there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment to any office under the state".
- (ii) "No citizen shall on grounds only of religion, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or any of them, be ineligible for any office under the state".

The above Articles ensure equality in treatment in equal circumstances. The obligation not to discriminate in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state has thus at least normatively ensured a significant position or status to Indian women.

These rights are hence safeguards not only against communal discriminations or local discrimination but also against any discrimination against women. These above Articles serve as a shield to the women folk of India. They ensure equality of status of women and they are positively safeguarded against any ill treatment formerly carried out against them. Equality of opportunity has been granted to the women who earlier never dreamt of it when governed by the Manusmriti. They can no more be disqualified merely on the basis of sex. Thus, B. R. Ambedkar has been successful in laying down the foundation stone for the progress of a part of the oppressed section of the society, namely, women.

Certain other rights have also been conferred by the Constitution in order to promote the ideal of liberty which has been Dr. Ambedkar's passion. Article 19 forms the core of fundamental rights which provides six freedoms for all citizens including women.

Article 19 sought to redeem Indian women from their world of suppression prescribed by the tradition. It created opportunity for them to grow and develop themselves into individuals with an identity, status and dignity. They have been given freedom of self – expression and of entering any kind of profession/employment. Their freedom to form unions has even encouraged women to actively involve themselves in the activities of the trade unions in the industries.

Emphasizing the concept of liberty we have another article in our Constitution which lays down that “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedures established by law (Article 21(a)). In the result, a law coming under Article 21 must also satisfy the requirements of Article 19. In other words, a law made by the state which seeks to deprive a person of his personal liberty must prescribe a procedure for such deprivation which must not be arbitrary, unfair or unreasonable (Durga Das Basu, 1987).

Article 23 gives an individual “a right against exploitation and this is of special significance to women of our country who have been through exploitation for ages”. This article says

1. “Traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law”.
2. “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from imposing compulsory service for public purposes, and in imposing such service the State shall not make any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste or class or; any of them”.

The comprehensive expression “traffic in human beings” includes a prohibition not only of slavery but also of traffic in women for immoral or other purposes. This is intended to prevent the abuse of women in society. Thus, the various rights as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution is an attempt to remove social, political and legal disabilities and inequalities from which the Indian women had suffered through centuries.

In addition to fundamental rights the Directive Principles of State Policy also have some provisions in relation to women. The state is required to follow the directives to secure a social order for the promotion and welfare of women. The directive principles of state policy have provided the principles for the development of women promoting the welfare of the people socially, economically and politically. These are applicable to all women citizens equally with men as the Constitution prohibits gender discrimination.

Contrary to the traditional role of home – making a new world of opportunity has been laid before the women of India through these Directive Principles. These

have specially catered to the needs of a working woman. Every women has been endowed with a provision for free and compulsory education (article 21-A), while the spread of this literacy program has opened up more employment opportunities for women. In order to find an avenue for the practical application of the education gained, every women has been provided with a right to adequate means of livelihood (article 39) and right to work (article 41) .

Economically, a woman worker is protected against exploitation where she is given a right to a fair treatment on par with the male workers and to be paid equally with men for equal work. She is further ensured of a decent standard of living with her right to a living wage. In addition, she is eligible for the various social security and labour welfare measures available in the industries. Paying attention to the physical needs of a woman worker, the state is directed to provide for special treatment and benefits to them in the form of maternity relief. Through these constitutional provisions, the state is asked to see that the health and strength of the women workers also is not abused.

With the help of Directive principles, the rights of a woman to work, to adequate means of livelihood, to equal pay with men, to humane conditions of work have all become unquestionable. The employer is obligated to ensure all these privileges. A general tendency towards abolition of discrimination on the basis of sex was to be observed. Of course the Directive Principles are declared as non – justiciable, but “nevertheless serve as pointers to the fundamental vision of a socio – political order.” The state is directed to apply these principles while formulating laws. Accordingly various laws have been enacted for the benefit of industrial women labour.

The wages paid to women is determined not by economic criteria but as a result of the cultural attitudes and practices and power structure in a society. Women were seen entering labour market initially because of poverty. They were in fact forced to work. So women offered themselves for work at appealingly low wages and the employers were quick to exploit this situation. Wage discrimination was also due to the fact that there was a common accepted notion that men are more efficient than women and the income of a woman is only a supplementary earning while men were considered as principal earners. Such system of wage discrimination was considered by Dr. Ambedkar while drafting the Constitution for India. The Constitution of India enjoins upon the State to ensure that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was subsequently enacted based on this ideal enshrined in the Constitution.

Illiteracy, lack of skill, ignorance and cultural handicaps further supported wage discrimination. These handicaps disabled the women labour from earning wages on par with men. Even for this, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar provided a reasonable solution. In order to curtail such handicaps in the future, the Constitution has provided for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. This is applicable to all children irrespective of sex. The fulfillment of this particular Constitutional directive has been included as one of the components of the ‘Minimum

Needs Programme' and given over – riding priority (Encyclopedia Of Women and Development, 1998).

Education is the greatest known catalytic agent for social change and especially so to bring about a change in the status of women in India. Education of women, therefore, occupies top priority amongst various measures taken to improve the status of women in India. In recent years, the focus of planning has shifted from equipping women for their traditional roles of house wives and mothers to recognizing their worth as producers, making a major contribution to family and national income (Encyclopedia Of Women and Development, 1998). Such an important agent has been included in the Indian Constitution by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and has thus contributed to the progress of women in India.

The special attention, given to the needs and problems of women, enables them to enjoy and exercise their Constitutional equality of status, along with other specific provisions relating to the hitherto suppressed sections of our society have led many scholars to describe the Indian Constitution as a “social document” embodying the objectives of a social revolution (Encyclopedia Of Women and Development, 1998).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contribution to Industrial Women:

There is a plethora of laws for the protection of working women which regulate the hours of work and provide measures for safety and well – being of female labourers in the industries. Dr. Ambedkar, as the Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, as the Architect of the Constitution and as the first Law Minister of free India Contributed immensely to provide the women workers with these legal aides. Considering their social status and the conditions of the Hindu society, Dr. Ambedkar sought to bring the working women of India under the protection of law. Special laws have been enacted for the protection of women workers in factories, mines and plantations.

Factories Act, 1948, Mines Act, 1952 and Plantation Labour Act, 1951 prohibit the employment of women between 7 PM and 6 AM in factories, mines and plantations, regulate the working hours and contain provision for their safety and welfare. The Factories Act, 1948 has included certain special provisions relating to the employment of women in factories. This special attention has been accorded keeping in mind a woman's physical stature and her social responsibilities outside the work place especially towards her family. Section 19 provides that the occupier should provide separate latrines and urinals for female workers. Section 42 provides that the occupier should provide separate washing facility for the use of female workers. Section 48 and section 79 have included showing special concern towards nursing mothers and pregnant women respectively. The former section provides that in every organization where more than thirty women workers are ordinarily employed there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years of such women.

One wonderful gift to women employees from the Indian labour laws has been the provision for maternity benefit. Apart from the various provisions for women in

the Factories Act, 1948 some special enactments have been made covering exclusively the maternity benefits for women. These Acts were enacted to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain periods before and after child birth and to provide for maternity benefit and certain other benefits. The main objective behind these Acts is to secure social justice to women and also to enable women workers not only to survive but also to overcome her physical pressure by safeguarding her competence as a worker besides taking care of her child and to sustain the level of her previous efficiency and productivity. The central Act namely, The Maternity Benefit Act, was passed in the year 1961 on the direction given by the Directive principles of state policy under Article 42 which speaks that the state has to secure just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief.

To sum up, we can say that protective legislation for women workers is based upon recognition of the fact that women must be protected because welfare of children and society depends upon them. Therefore, various Acts prohibit or regulate employment of women at night, limit their hours of work and amount of overtime and prohibit their employment on hazardous, arduous or unhealthy work such as carrying heavy loads and underground mining. In addition to this, many benefits and amenities like maternity benefit, crèches are also secured to the Indian women labour.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar apart from playing a pioneering role in framing and introducing these labour legislations to protect the rights of women workers and providing Constitutional guarantees to women, he was also seen taking up a Herculean task of replacing the Hindu law with a common code which he called the Hindu Code Bill.

Hindu Code Bill and Woman:

Being India first Law Minister and Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar thought it appropriate, rather his duty, to free woman from the age old thralldom by reforming the Hindu Social laws created by "Manu". He therefore took initiative to draft and introduced the Hindu code bill in the Constituent Assembly. The Hindu code bill, the most formidable legislative measure of modern India, sought among other reforms to put an end to a variety of marriage systems prevailing in India and legalize only monogamous marriages. The code also sought to confer on women the right of property and adoption which had been denied by Manu. It put men and woman on an equal level in all legal matters (Ahir, D, C, 1990). Various enactments which incorporated these ideas and principles of Hindu code bill formulated by Dr. Ambedkar are:

- 1. The Hindu marriage Act – 1955**
- 2. The Hindu succession Act – 1956**
- 3. The Adaptation and Maintenance Act, 1956.**
- 4. The Hindu minority and guardianship Act – 1966**

These laws gave the Indian women an identity and independent standing unlike the Manusmriti which destined woman to be more dependents of men and devoid of every kind of right. Dr. Ambedkar, by framing these laws has thus contributed significantly to the social progress of our nation. But surprisingly, the

Hindu Code Bill had to meet severe opposition in the constituent assembly. Among the many critics of the Hindu Code Bill were Dr. Shyam Prasad Mukherjee, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sardar Bhopendra Singh Mann etc. These people termed the code “A Conversion Law” adding that “the NEW MANU of Ambedkarian religion should not be imposed upon the people” (Hariprasanna, A, 1992). Dr. Ambedkar was heavily criticized for standing in favour of Women rights. He was dubbed a traitor to the country and an enemy of Hinduism, a great religion that kept two – thirds of its population in slavery. The Orthodox elements whipped up communal passion in the country by raising the cry of “Hinduism in Danger” in the hands of an “untouchable”.

Even amidst such great opposition on the members of the parliament, Dr. Ambedkar fought till the end without giving up. He tried to convince the critics with all his strength only to fail in his attempt. But his explanation given by him to defend the Bill, threw light on his ardent desire to uplift the status of women in India who have been placed at a disadvantage as compared with men.

Dr. Ambedkar further defended the necessity of the Bill to free women from perpetual slavery. He opined that the institution of marriage in our society dictated “Polygamy for the man and perpetual slavery for woman because under no circumstances can the woman get her liberty from her husband, however bad he may be, however undesirable he may be. I want to ask the house. Are we for slavery or are we for free labour? Free labour means the ability and the capacity to break the contract, whether the necessity for breaking the contract arises”.

Apart from the aspect of marriage, the Hindu Code Bill dealt with the restitution of conjugal rights and the grounds of judicial separation. With regard to adoption it made it clear that an adoption which is void shall neither create any rights in the adoptive family in favour of any person, nor destroy his rights in the family of his birth, which is salutary. This puts an end to the anomaly from which the adopted son suffered under the earlier law. The new law also insists upon the consent of the wife to the adoption of a son by the husband. A daughter is also permitted to be adopted. The provision dealing with the joint family property includes the abolition of the rule of pious obligation and the liability to pay primary debts which are incurred by the family (Hariprasanna, A, 1992).

With the recognition of the Woman’s right over property, she is now regarded as a competent and intelligent human being, able to sell and dispose of her property. The daughter is also given an equal share in the property as the son or the widow. Thus, the Hindu code had superseded the customs recognized by nearly 137 Smritis including that of Manu and Yagnavalkya and also the precedents of the Privy Council which recognized that the custom would override the law (Hariprasanna, A, 1992). Dr. Ambedkar through the Hindu Code Bill brought women a status equal to men in the society.

This shows that the degree of sincerity and commitment in Dr. Ambedkar in regard to the cause of women. Though disappointed with the working of the cabinet, he chose to hold on to it just to better the condition of women in the Indian society.

He sought to bring about a complete and permanent healing to the condition of the Indian women as far as possible. That is why he sought the refuge of law. Time and again while speaking on behalf of the Hindu Code Bill he emphasized the role of law in moving the society towards progress. Dr. Ambedkar regarded law as an important instrument to work for the emancipation of woman kind in a concrete way. He was very modern yet conservative in this approach.

CONCLUSION:

Tradition had bound the Women of Indian society from times immemorial. They were the victims of traditional and cultural taboos. Since the time of Manu, women's role had been considered as secondary in comparison to men. The old traditional image of women was that of mere helper to their men folk. They were expected to be only wives, mothers and home-makers. They have not been treated as men's partners and co-workers in different walks of life or as additional bread-winners.

This is the picture of the status of woman in the past. Though the picture has not changed completely, today we see a substantial change for the better. On the broad spectrum of women's employment at one end, women are working as casual labourer in most sweated industries in unskilled and low paid jobs and at the other end there are high status professional women workers. The concept of equality has helped women to a great extent. They have entered into all professions including the police departments and airlines. We have an entire CRPF battalion 88 – comprising women. Recently the Chief of the Army announced that women will be recruited in Army. We have universities entirely for women where professional and job – oriented courses are given importance. Banks provide loans to women to achieve self – employment (Bharathi. T, 1992).

Today, we witnessed a tremendous amount of positive change in the lives of Indian Women. We see women coming out of their cocoons of home activities into the big world outside, In order to pursue their careers in almost every field. The changed socio – economic conditions, particularly after independence, have widened opportunities for women's education and employment and have provided them with new avenues to express and assert their equality. This along with the newly granted politico – legal privileges is liable to affect their feelings, thoughts and ways of looking at life.

Time has witnessed the various stages of great transformational process that has taken place in the life of an Indian Woman. She has been transformed from a mere slave dependent on men for everything, to an independent working woman occupying the highest positions in the world. Such a fantastic difference in the lives of Indian women called for relentless and sometimes sacrificial efforts of some great reformers, and Dr. Ambedkar made a major contribution in this direction.

One of the most fundamental and far-reaching socio-politico-economic changes brought about since independence has been the emancipation of women from their tradition bound ethos, by way of their being given various politico-legal and socio-economic rights and privileges by their education women of the middle and upper classes are entering into remunerative vocations that were largely preserves of

men. With this very important socio –economic change, the urban educated women in Indian have achieved a new status and a new role.

With these factors as the measuring rod, we see that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stands out as one who had taken a major initiative in leading women towards this progress. The above mentioned factors such as education, Politico- legal and socio economic rights and privileges have been secured by Dr. Ambedkar to women either through legislation as labour Member and Law Minister or through the Indian Constitution. Thus, it would be justified to call Dr. Ambedkar as the savior and a great emancipator of Indian woman kind. He indeed worked relentlessly to give Indian woman a new status and a new life altogether.

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