

INSPIRING WOMEN LUMINARIES IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY: AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

According to a United Nations Charter from 1997, development will be jeopardised if it is not supported. This point of view was also highlighted in the 2017-18 India Economic Survey's colour choices. The survey's pink colour symbolised the deep-rooted social ills that women face, and it urged the Indian community to think about gender inequity and empowering women through education and economic organisation, all of which were covered. The ideas, opinions, and policy directions of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are all excellent illustrations of how this school of thinking can be applied to a wide range of situations. As a social justice pioneer, Ambedkar had a vision of assisting others and worked to develop a culture of social justice for women and other marginalised groups. Finally, he wanted women to be the crusaders of the newly reformed society, which would be free and just. Ambedkar was a pioneer in the fight against practices that deprived women of their freedom and forced them to live dictatorships. He didn't leave any stone unturned in his quest to confront patriarchal foundations in order to establish equality for women, which was true to the spirit of empowerment. He was one of the first Indians to fight against evil and cruel traditions such as the devadasi system, child marriage, and prostitution. His values and beliefs, as well as his vision of gender equality and women's empowerment, were accepted into India's constitutional framework. The Hindu Code Bill, which he proposed in the legislature, was one of his most significant contributions to this cause. A number of laws supporting women have been passed over the years, including the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, and the Sati Prevention Act of 1987, the National Commission for Women Act of 1990, the Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005, as well as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006. The current paper, on the other hand, aims to 1) highlight Dr. Ambedkar's views on the social problems that women faced before and after Indian independence; 2) transformation in the status of women, highlighting the vision and achievements of women members of the constituent assembly and constitutional protections aimed at women's advancement; and 3) highlighting the need for social transformation in terms of Gender Equality in contemporary India.

Key Words: *Inequality, empowerment, social justice, constitutional framework.*

INTRODUCTION

In terms of national and international perspectives, women's empowerment is critical to achieving inclusive, egalitarian, and long-term development, and it is consistent with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 5. According to the 1975 "UN Declaration on the Decade of Women," women's full, effective, and non-disruptive participation in social, economic, political life is essential for civilization's welfare. According to the UN Women Annual Report 2018-19, despite the fact that the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment has progressed over time - through robust public debate, community mobilisation, and consciousness to shift social standards and support responsibility - inequality remains tense. As a result, women all over the world continue to fight for a decent living.

The news talks in the 2018-2019 Indian Economic Survey, such as the Son Meta-Preference, the event for annoying girls, and other related subjects, have a direct or indirect impact on the advancement of women in India. Some of the important conclusions of the survey geared at women's progress are as follows: Education, skills, and job opportunities for young people, particularly women, are critical to India's demography's benefits. Many departments in India have established 'Gender Budget Cells' to enhance and instrument gender budget procedures. In India, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) dropped by about one-third from 167 per lakh live births in 2011-13 to 130 in 2014-16. By 2030, it is expected that the number will be reduced to 70.

Despite legal protection, Indian women continue to face discrimination in their social environment. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2018, India was ranked 108th out of 149 countries, and has since slipped to 140th out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021. India has a long way to go in terms of gender parity and women's advancement, as evidenced by low female participation in Parliament and senior positions across the board, as well as widespread violence against women. In light of this, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas, vision, and unwavering commitment to women's empowerment must be studied.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a distinguished scholar, philosopher, visionary, emancipator, and ardent nationalist, is widely regarded as the primary architect of the Indian constitution. For the millions of Indian women who had been depressed, mistreated, and exploited by patriarchal culture, he was a glimmer of hope. Throughout his life as a social justice pioneer, he was dedicated to the emancipation of women. He was a reformer who played a key role in reducing the barriers that prevented Indian society in general, and women in particular, from realizing their full potential (Das, 2015). According to Dr. Ambedkar, empowerment is the process of improving an individual's or society's social, political, spiritual, or economic strength via education and training. Women's empowerment and self-sufficiency are essential goals in and of themselves, as well as a need for achieving sustainable societal growth, in terms of their economic, social, political, and health status. It's a multi-faceted, complicated, and multi-dimensional concept with various permutations. (Gunjal,2012).

Ambedkar was a strong supporter of women's independence. He claims that the primary reasons for women's sadness in India can be traced back to so-called Hindu holy scriptures such as the Manusmriti, the Atharva Vedas, and a plethora of other texts in his thesis "The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women." Although Manusmriti is regarded as the most important of these religious scriptures, it divides people into social classes and advocates injustice between men and women (Narake et al., 2014). Women were the victims of a brutal caste-based and hierarchically constructed social order, according to Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar criticises Manu's portrayal of women in his articles "The Women and the Counter Revolution" and "The Riddle of Women." On the status of Indian women, he emphasises the importance of Manu's commandments in establishing Hindu attitudes and viewpoints toward women, which are sustained and kept Hindu personal norms based on Brahminic Shastras (Brahminic scriptures), caste, and endogamy (Mandal, 2011).

According to Ambedkar's other essay, "Castes in India: its mechanism, inception, and spread," published in 1997, women were mistreated by the imposition of widowhood, sati, and early marriages. (Kapoor et al., 1997). As a result of a range of harmful practises in civilization, including as the purdah system, the sati system, child marriages, female infanticide, and so on, women were deprived of their rudimentary important and human rights.

PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA AND QUESTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

To understand Ambedkar's impact on women's emancipation, we must peep into the history of women's rights from the Vedic era to the British Raj. During ancient times, it was thought that "Women's status began to deteriorate in the later Vedic era, when many traditional values were imposed on them, and women were denied privileges and expected to submit to their male superiors.

Dr. Ambedkar's first priority during his social drives in the 1920s was women's emancipation. He began a crusade in opposition to Hinduism in 1920, and in 1927, he published the fortnightly journals Mook Nayak and Bahiskrit Bharat, both of which were critical of Hinduism. In his fortnightly journals, Ambedkar advocated for gender equality and the importance of education, while also drawing attention to the difficulties faced by the women .Dr. Ambedkar believed that education was the most important factor in achieving women's self-respect and authorisation; as he put it, "We can forego the material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our rights and opportunities to the fullest extent possible, because education is the greatest material benefit" (Mandal: 2011).

Women took an active role in Ambedkar's activities, and they gained the confidence to speak out on a variety of topics in a variety of places. Females not only marched in the parade from the meeting site to the Chavdar Pond during the important Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, but they also "participated in the deliberations of the subject committee meetings in passing resolutions about the claim for equal human rights."

TOWARDS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

Dr. Ambedkar advocated for the rights and advantages of women during the various debates that took place within the Constituent Assembly after India gained independence in 1947. Equal rights and chances are provided to males and females in the political, economic, and social arenas as part of the final constitutional text. Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.

Ambedkar made a well-known and revolutionary contribution to the development of independent India, as well as to the equal treatment of women in Indian civilisation, with the Hindu Code Bill, a significant piece of legislation that granted Indian women a slew of privileges. According to Ambedkar, human rights and self-respect were more important to him than any religion customs or traditions (Bhushan: 2007).

According to Ambedkar, the project's purpose was to "codify and revise different areas of Hindu law," and it was a vital first step towards the formation of a Civil Code in order to achieve his vision of uniformity "in 2014; (Narake: 2014). Ambedkar gave a

speech at a conference organised by the Belgaum District Branch of the Scheduled Castes Federation on December 26, 1950, during which he also declared that, "The Bill's main goal was to eliminate a legal barrier to women's advancement in the workplace and society.

Most members of Congress, as well as caste Hindu leaders and intellectuals, were outspoken in their opposition to the legislation, which they saw as an attempt to undermine Hinduism's sacredness as a result of the move. Some Hindus viewed the Bill as an intrusion into the religious affairs of the Hindu community and outright rejected it (Keer, 1987)

After Ambedkar's death in 1956, other activists continued Ambedkar's campaign for women's emancipation, and it was through the speeches of Dalit and Bahujan women campaigners like Shantabai Dani, Babytai Kamble, and Urmila Pawar, among others, that Ambedkar's goals of a just and equal society were carried on and nourished. Shanta bai Dani considered inequality to be the most significant basis of shame.

Gender injustice and violence are issues that cannot be considered in isolation in today's world, and the issue of caste discrimination and its impact on gender justice, or vice versa, is difficult to comprehend. Rege's (2013) work has played a critical role in this regard. According to Gupte (2013), "caste honour is predominantly oriented on the behaviour of women," and according to Welchman and Hossain (2005), "caste honour is vested in male (family and/or conjugal) authority over women, specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected, or potential" (p. 4).

The current discourse on public policy making in the areas of gender justice and the prevention of gendered violence is largely based on a top-down approach to problem solving. The Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), Amendments to the Indian Penal Code, 1862 (1986), Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), and Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) are some of the legal enactments made in the post-independence era. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) collected data in 2016 to determine the level of crime against women in the country. The most common type of crime against women was 'Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives' (29.2%), followed by 'Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty' (25.0%), 'Kidnapping & Abduction of Women' (22.2%), and 'Rape' (11.8%).

Gender imbalance in the provision of equitable admission and schooling to our girl children is a significant barrier to their attainment of a meaningful existence, and India still has a long way to go in addressing inequality, despite several high-profile initiatives launched by successive governments. According to World Bank estimates, less than two-thirds of females in low-income countries like India complete basic education, and only a quarter of male's complete basic education (World Bank 2018).

WOMEN VISIONARIES IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY: SOME REFLECTIONS

In 1925, Mahatma Gandhi said that "We will not be able to achieve anything as long as women do not enter public life and purify it... "The role women played in the independence fight should be written in gold letters," he said a few years ago.

Women MPs played a key role in guiding the Constituent Assembly, and as a result, they influenced the shape and future of the Indian Constitution significantly. This extends beyond the actual liberation movement. Despite the Mahatma's wish for them to be remembered in "golden letters," Indian antiquity has been unkind to women who have stood out for their rights. Most women who served in the Indian Constituent Assembly have been stonewashed from public consciousness, rather than being honoured in "golden letters."

It's vital to gain an insight into the vision and achievements of women members of the Constituent Assembly who contributed skilfully and significantly to the making of the Indian Constitution and Republic. The fifteen women members indeed visionaries in their own unique way were Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Durgabhai Deshmukh, Hansa Jivraj Mehta, Kamla Chaudhary, Leela Roy, Malati Chaudhary, Renuka Ray, Purnima Banerjee, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Anne Mascarene.

1. Ammu Swaminathan

In Anakara, Palghat district, Kerala, Ammu Swaminathan was born into so called upper caste Hindu family. Her name figures among the founders of the Women's India Association in Madras (1917) with Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Malathi Patwardhan, Mrs Dadabhoy, and Mrs Ambujammal. Further, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Constituency in 1946.

"People outside have been arguing that India did not grant equal rights to her women," an upbeat and confident Ammu said during the deliberation on Dr B R Ambedkar's motion to pass the draught Constitution on November 24, 1949. It can be said that when the Indian people drafted their Constitution, they gave women the same rights as the rest of the country's citizens."

Subsequently, she was elected to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in 1952 and in 1954 respectively. Ammu became the Vice President of the Federation of Film Societies in 1959, with Satyajit Ray as the President. She also served on the Bharat Scouts and Guides and the Censor Board from 1960 to 1965.

2. Dakshayani Velayudhan

Dakshayani Velayudhan was born on the island of Bolgatty near Cochin on July 4, 1912. She belonged to Pulaya community, which was severely discriminated against. She was among the first generation of Pulaya women to be educated. She was considered the representative of the Depressed Classes (as they were known at the time). Dakshayani was nominated to the *Cochin Legislative Council* by the State Government in 1945. In 1946, she became the first and only Dalit woman elected to the Constituent Assembly. During the Constituent Assembly debates, Dakshayani supported B R Ambedkar on a number of issues concerning the Scheduled Caste community. She was a member of the assembly and the transitional parliament from 1946 until 1952.

3. Begum Aizaz Rasul

She was born into the Malerkotla royal family and married Nawab Aizaz Rasul, a young landowner.

Begum and her husband became members of the Muslim League and started electoral politics when the Government of India Act 1935 was passed. She was elected to the U.P. in the 1937 elections. Her statements indicated that she was not only informed about the law, but also about the constitutions of other countries. She was the only Muslim woman member of the Constituent Assembly. She proposed and advanced a number of changes on important issues, including the need for ministers to serve for a long time in order to do meaningful work. As a result, with a single non-transferable vote, she favoured the Swiss system. She supported India's Commonwealth admission, despite opposition from many Commonwealth countries.

The Muslim League in India was disbanded in 1950, and Begum Aizaz Rasul joined the Congress party. She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952. She was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly from 1969 to 1990. She served as Minister of Social Welfare and Minorities from 1969 until 1971. Her devotion to social work earned her the Padma Bhushan award in 2000.

4. Durgabai Deshmukh

Born on July 15, 1909, in Rajahmundry, Durgabai Deshmukh joined the Non-Cooperation Movement when she was twelve years old, and in May 1930, she joined the Salt Satyagraha movement in Madras with Andhra Kesari T. Prakasam. She founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha in 1936, which grew into a major educational and social welfare organisation in Madras within a decade. She was the Chairwoman of the Major Social Welfare Board, the National Council for Women's Education, and the National Committee for Girls' and Women's Education, among other central institutions. She served on the Planning Commission and as a member of Parliament. She was also a member of the New Delhi-based Andhra Educational Society. Durgabai received India's fourth Nehru Literary Award in 1971 for her remarkable contribution to literacy advancement. She received the Padma Vibhushan award in 1975.

As a student and practising lawyer at the time of the assembly debates, Durgabai's ideas reflected the need for judicial independence, the procedure of appointing the governor and judges in provincial high courts, and the construction of additional high courts in new states. She also recommended lowering the age for a seat in the Council of States from 35 to 30 years old, as well as ensuring that "Every judge shall be a citizen of the union of India."

5. Hansa Jivraj Mehta

Hansa Mehta was born on July 3, 1897, to the Dewan of Baroda Manubhai Nandshankar Mehta. She was a student of journalism and sociology in England. She was an educator, a writer as well as a reformer and social crusader. She had several books and translations to her credit, including *Gulliver's Travels*. In 1926, she was elected to the Bombay Schools Committee, and in 1945–46, she was chosen president of the All-India Women's Conference.

She proposed a Charter of Women's Rights in her Presidential Address at the All-India Women's Conference in Hyderabad. From 1945 to 1960, she held many positions in India, including Vice-Chancellor of SNT Women's University, member of the All India Secondary Board of Education, president of the Inter-University Board of India, and vice-chancellor of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

Her initiative to make the UCC a justiciable feature of the constitution was Mehta's most important contribution to the debates in the Constituent Assembly. Members of the fundamental rights sub-committee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Ambedkar, and Manoo Masani, saw the UCC as part of the state's responsibility in establishing a united Indian identity over different religious identities.

6. Kamla Chaudhary

Kamla Chaudhary was born into a rich Lucknow family, but she still had to struggle to pursue her studies. A nationalist, she became an active participant in Gandhi's 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement. She was Vice-President of the All-India Congress Committee in its fifty-fourth session and was elected to the Lok Sabha in the late 1970s. Chaudhary was also a well-known fiction writer, with most of her stories focusing on women's inner lives or India's modernization.

7. Leela Roy

Leela Roy was born in the Assam town of Goalpara in October of 1900. Her father, a deputy magistrate, was a supporter of the Nationalist Movement. She received her bachelor's degree from Bethune College in 1921 and went on to work as the assistant secretary of the All-Bengal Women's Suffrage Committee, wherein she organised meetings to demand women's rights. She started the Dipali Sangha with her friends in 1923, and developed schools that became centres of political discussion, with notable leaders participating. In 1926, the Chhatra Sangha, a women's student organisation in Dacca and Kolkata, was created. She was a driving force behind the formation of the Dacca Mahila Satyagraha Sangha, which was involved in the anti-salt tax struggle. She became the editor of the Jayashree periodical, which received Rabindranath Tagore's endorsement.

She joined the Congress in 1937 and created the Bengal Provincial Congress Women's Organization the following year. She became a member of Subash Chandra Bose's women's subcommittee, and when Bose was imprisoned in 1940, she was appointed editor of the Forward Bloc Weekly. Before departing India, Netaji entrusted Leela Roy and her husband with entire control of the party's affairs. She formed the Jatiya Mahila Sanghati, a West Bengal-based women's organisation, in 1947. She became chairwoman of the new party formed by the merger of the Forward Bloc (Subhasist) and the Praja Socialist Party in 1960, although she was dissatisfied with its performance.

8. Malati Choudhury

Malati Choudhury was born in a prominent East Bengal family (now Bangladesh) in 1904. Malati Choudhury was sent to Santiniketan at the age of 16 in 1921, where she was admitted to Viswa-Bharati. She married Nabakrushna Choudhuri, who eventually became the Chief Minister of Odisha, and moved to Odisha in 1927. During the Salt Satyagraha, Malati Choudhury joined the Indian National Congress with her husband and took part in the struggle. To establish a favourable climate for Satyagraha, they educated and communicated with the people.

She and her husband founded Utkal Congress Samajvadi Karmi Sangh in 1933, which later became the Orissa Provincial Branch of the All-India Congress Socialist Party. In 1934, she travelled to Orissa with Gandhiji on his renowned "padayatra." She founded various organisations in Odisha, including the Bajiraut Chhatravas, to help vulnerable populations. She was imprisoned after protesting against Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency.

9. Purnima Banerjee

Purnima Banerjee, a Bengali, was the secretary of the Indian National Congress's Allahabad branch in Uttar Pradesh. She was detained for her role in the Satyagraha and Quit India Fight. She represented one of a radical network of women from Uttar Pradesh who stood at the vanguard of the liberation movement in the late 1930s and 1940s. Purnima Banerjee's staunch dedication to a socialist worldview was one of the most outstanding parts of her statements in the Constituent Assembly. She was in charge of engaging and organising labour unions, kisan gatherings, and efforts to increase rural engagement as the city committee's secretary.

10. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur

Amrit Kaur was born in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, on February 2, 1889. She was India's first Minister of Health, a position she held for ten years. She was educated at the Sherborne School for Girls in Dorset, England, as the daughter of Harnam Singh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Kapurthala, but gave it all up to become Mahatma Gandhi's secretary for 16 years. She founded the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and fought for its independence.

She was a strong supporter of women's education, sports involvement, and health care. She founded the Tuberculosis Association of India and the Central Leprosy and Research Institute, as well as served as Vice- Chairperson of the League of Red Cross Societies' Board of Governors and head of the St John's Ambulance Society's executive committee. The New York Times described her as "a princess in her nation's service" when she died in 1964.

11. Renuka Ray

Renuka Ray was the daughter of ICS officer Satish Chandra Mukherjee and social worker Charulata Mukherjee, a member of the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC). Renuka spent some time as a child in London, where she received her BA from the London School of Economics. She filed a document titled 'Legal Disabilities of Women in India; A Plea for a Commission of Enquiry' in 1934 as the AIWC's legal secretary. This expressed the AIWC's dissatisfaction with the Sharda Bill's treatment and their commitment to a legal review of women's legal status in India. Renuka argued for a uniform personal law code, claiming that Indian women's position was one of the world's most inequitable.

She served in the Central Legislative Assembly, the Constituent Assembly, and the Provisional Parliament from 1943 to 1946. Despite the fact that equality was already mentioned in fundamental rights, she agreed with another member that an express clause stating that social laws of marriage and inheritance should not be subject to any disabilities based on caste or sex should be included.

She was the Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from 1952 to 1957. She served in the Lok Sabha as a member of the Malda constituency in 1957 and 1962. She also served on the Planning Commission and the governing body of Visva Bharati University at Shanti Niketan, and was President of the AIWC in 1952. She founded the Women's Coordinating Council and the All-Bengal Women's Union.

12. Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad, India, on February 13, 1879. She was the first Indian woman to serve as President of the Indian National Congress in pre- independence India and as a State Governor in post-independence India. She is referred to as "India's Nightingale." Sarojini Naidu was likewise a literary prodigy, having been elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1914.

She went to King's College in London and then to Girton College in Cambridge. She joined India's Congress movement and Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement after some experience in the suffragist fight in England. In 1924, she travelled to Africa on behalf of Indians there, and in 1928–29, she lectured on the Congress movement in North America. Back in India, she had to face imprisonment three times (1930, 1932, and 1942–43) owing to her nationalist and so-called anti-British activities. She proactively participated and subsequently led Dharsana Satyagraha. In 1931, she joined Gandhi to London for the Round Table Conference's second session which turned out unsatisfactory in terms of its outcome.

13. Sucheta Kripalani

Sucheta Kriplani was born in Ambala, Haryana, in the year 1908. Her contribution in the 1942 Quit India Movement is particularly well remembered. Kripalani also founded the Congress party's women's wing in 1940. After independence, Kripalani served as an MP in New Delhi and later as the state government of Uttar Pradesh's Minister of Labour, Community Development, and Industry. She succeeded Chandra Bhanu Gupta as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, a position she held until 1967. She was the country's first female Chief Minister.

14. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the sister of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and was born on August 18, 1900, in Allahabad. In 1932-1933, 1940, and 1942-1943, she was imprisoned by the British.

Pandit's long political career began when she was elected to the Allahabad Municipal Board. She was elected to the Assembly of the United Provinces in 1936 and appointed minister of local self-government and public health in 1937, making her the first Indian woman in pre independent India to hold a cabinet position.

She resigned in 1939, along with all other Congress party officeholders, in protest of the British government's declaration that India was a participant in World War II. She had the honour of moving the first resolution after the establishment of Provincial Autonomy in the United Provinces, calling for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly and the drafting of a constitution for an independent India. In September 1953, she was appointed as the first woman and the first Asian to be elected president of the *U.N. General Assembly*.

15. Annie Mascarene

Annie Mascarene was born in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, to a Latin Catholic family. She was one of the first women elected to the Travancore State Congress and served on the Travancore State Congress Working Committee for the first time. She was a key figure in the Travancore State's independence and merger with the Indian nation movements. She was imprisoned at several periods between 1939 and 1947 as a result of her political involvement. In the Indian general election of 1951, Mascarene was elected to the First Lok Sabha. She was Kerala's first female MP and one of just ten women elected to Parliament in those elections. She had briefly served as Minister in Charge of Health and Power prior to her election to Parliament in 1949-1950. She underlined the significance of centralization, but that it should be done later in the democratic process rather than at the start, when it can appear dictatorial.

Despite the great contributions of the women of the Constituent Assembly, we have struggled to realise and institutionalise women's positions in modern governance, despite their numerous achievements. Women's representation in the Lok Sabha has improved significantly from the first election, from 5% in the first election to a pitiful 14% presently. Since 1962, approximately half of India's 543 seats (48.4%) have failed to elect a single woman to the House of Commons, resulting in one of the country's most glaring gender prejudices.

According to published data, women's emancipation numbers in India have steadily improved in recent years. The rate of maternal mortality has decreased significantly in the country's health sector. The number of pupils enrolling in school has increased in the education sector. Despite the fact that women in India continue to demonstrate their ability and contribute more financially to society, many do not find themselves in elected positions of responsibility. Change, on the other hand, is on the horizon. It is a heartening fact that a number of women were elected to the House of Commons, the current government has selected women to significant positions in important ministries. When given the chance, Indian women have shown that they are more than capable of taking on leadership roles. From Sushma Swaraj's deft handling of the external affairs ministry during her last term to Nirmala Sitharaman's remarkable resolve during her tenure as defence minister and now finance minister, Indian women have demonstrated that they are more than capable of taking on leadership roles when given the chance. In 2018, there were only three women in the Cabinet, down from a high of six in 2014 and a low of three in 2015. Women's presence at the highest levels of government is thus a cause of concern. According to the Economic Survey of 2017-18, female elected members made up 44.2 percent of the total number of elected representatives in panchayati raj institutions. At the state level, however, women's representation is virtually non-existent, particularly in the Hindi heartland.

GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution, as well as Article 15(3), which authorises creating provisions for women, contain constitutional provisions that empower Indian citizens in general and women in particular. Articles 39, 42, 51(a), and 47 of the Indian Constitution have universally and specifically emphasised the needs of women from a variety of perspectives, including equal living and pay, maternity relief, the promotion of special care for the weaker sections in the fields of education and economy, nutrition and standard of living, and other issues affecting women. The issue of representation in the Panchayati Raj system is addressed in Articles 243D (3), 243T (3), and 243R (3) of the Indian Constitution.

The Hindu Code Bills have provided a new viewpoint and insight by pushing for several women's rights that have previously been denied. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956, and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 were all approved by the Hindu Code Bills. Dr. Ambedkar's ideas and ideals are included into these four pieces of legislation. As a result, it is possible to argue that the Hindu Code Bill was responsible for these acts. Women now have full independence, as well as rights to adoption, succession, and property, which they previously did not have. In light of Ambedkar's significant contribution, Indian law is now able to maintain its progressive nature while keeping up with the rest of the world.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar endeavoured to remove the barriers that have hindered women's advancement in India. By establishing a single Civil Code for Hindus, he laid the framework for a succession of concrete and sincere efforts, and his viewpoint has the potential to be expanded to other segments of Indian society in the future. Women were victims of a repressive, caste-based, and hierarchically constructed social order, according to Ambedkar. Gender relations, he claims, are artificially produced by socio-cultural forces, including Manusmriti, among others. In his books *Females and Counter-Revolution* and *The Riddle of Women*, Ambedkar illustrates Manu's treatment of women, echoing Simone De Beauvoir's observation that "women are formed, not born." On the status of women, he emphasised that Hindu attitudes and perspectives (Indian perspectives) towards women are shaped by Hindu personal laws based on shastras, caste, and endogamy, which serve as the foundation of Indian patriarchy and are preserved.

ON ROAD TO GENDER EQUALITY: CONTEMPORARY INDIA

It is critical to deconstruct the existing social framework that was designed to keep women in their positions of subordination or submission. It may be possible thanks to the active participation of women from all walks of life. On topics such as the situation, health, and deficiency, among others, Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, and other well-known female activists are used. It was regrettable that those who fought for social change were frequently opposed by women themselves. Women are still trapped in a vicious circle of insecurity, male dominance, a lack of awareness of their own rights, and a lack of decision-making power to some extent today. The issue of women's social authorization must be addressed first and given the highest priority possible; only then will the phenomenon of women empowerment be realised. Engineering, medicine, advanced education, the Defence Academy, police management, politics, the Foreign Service, industry, and trade are just a few of the fields where women hold high-ranking positions of responsibility. Increased social workers, activists, and philosophers have contributed significantly to India's growth. As a result of a recent development and change to Article 243 (D) of the Indian Constitution, women would have more representation in Panchayati Raj. Women are entitled to 50 percent reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions under the requirements of this article. Apart from welfare measures pertaining to maternity leave, skill development, and nutritional schemes, the government has introduced provisions for a variety of types of training aimed at supporting self-employment and wage service among women in rural society, such as self-help groups.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The position assigned to women within a community can be used to determine the advancement of a civilization, and vice versa. One of the most effective techniques of appreciating a civilization's courage, as well as recognising its excellence and impact, is to do a historical study of women's position and status in that civilization. "The degree of independence granted to women in order to move about society and participate in its public life provides a good indication of the nature of its administration and allows us to determine how far it had realised the hard truth that women too have a giving to make in its growth and development," writes Altekhar.

Any assessment of women's standing in culture must begin with an examination of the social structure, social construction, cultural norms, and value systems that shape social expectations for men and women's performance, as well as the roles and positions of women in any given society. The civilised system, family and association, marriage, and religious conventions, among other things, make up a society. They give men and women with a moral and ideological framework that governs their rights and obligations, as well as their social standing and role.

Similarly, there is a contradicting message to be received in the case of women. On the one hand, they are elevated to a place of honour in the scriptures. The gods, according to an old Sanskrit proverb, can only be discovered in regions where women are worshipped out of respect for them. In Indian society, it is widely held that a society will flourish if women rise to the top of the social ladder, contribute to the progress of the spirit of development, and are recognised as domestic legislators and sources of social life. Even God is said to be half man, half woman in Indian mythology, and revered as "ardh-nareshwara."

Women are characterised as faithful and self-sacrificing in Indian literature, but they are also described as disobedient and dangerous. When it comes to presenting Indian women, historians took a consistent essentialist approach. Although it was usually because her deeds were significant by male values, the infrequent Indian record or historical storey singled out a particular lady for exceptional politeness. Topics that were intertwined with women's lives, such as housekeeping duties and farming knowledge; spiritual customs and opinions; fruitfulness and domestic size; furnishings, jewels, and wear; legacy; and marriage and divorce, according to Geraldine Forbes, went largely unnoticed. In view of history written from the perspective of women, Woolf's observations on the mocking paradox of a woman's life are particularly apt. "She is immensely valuable in terms of imagination, but she is absolutely insignificant in terms of practicality; she infuses all of poetry, from beginning to end, and she is nearly completely absent from historical records." Many examples of moral principles and devotion to the advancement of civilization may be found throughout history, yet women have been subjugated due to the male-controlled home structure and other historical and political factors.

Women have been oppressed throughout history, but some have proven to be capable of foreseeing their own fate and rising to positions of leadership and control. However, without performing a field study of the country's archives and historical documents, a correct assessment of women's place and status in Indian history is impossible. To obtain a feel of what was going on in the real world, history would be an excellent resource. It would be impossible to provide a global assessment of women's place in Indian society and culture in general, and in politics in particular, without a historical perspective. Indian women, on the other hand, have advanced with the times for ages, demonstrating to the world that the hand that can rock the cradle; being a support system can lead the globe. The most essential and spectacular endeavour the world has ever seen is making a victory out of adversity. Women's status and location in civilisation is a true barometer of a society's cultural, religious, social, and spiritual standing.

CONCLUSION

Ambedkar's perspective on female equality is critical to India's social and economic transformation. Women in India have made major contributions to the nation-building process. An examination of Indian Constituent Assembly debates sheds light on how women and women's issues have influenced and shaped the Indian Constitution. The women members of the Indian Constituent Assembly spoke out in support of minority rights, against reservation, and for an independent judiciary. The speeches of the women visionaries including those of Durgabai Deshmukh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Renuka Ray, and Purnima Banerji, as well as well-known figures like Sarojini Naidu and Vijayalakshmi Pandit can still be found in archives. An examination of India's attempts to empower women, based on concrete evidence, indicates that our progress is still restricted. Women, on the other hand, must speak up for themselves. Women's self-confidence, right to self-determination, access to opportunities and capital, ability to take control of their life both within and outside the house, and power to influence positive change in society are all factors that can contribute to women-centered change. When it comes to altering a patriarchal, endogamic, and hierarchical society, there is a lot of concern about gender equality and rights for the disadvantaged and marginalised. Effective women's engagement and collective consciousness are necessary to ensure gender fairness, as represented in the spirit of our Indian constitution. 'The fight is not for woman's status, but for human worth... for cosmic harmony, which never comes till woman comes,' as Justice Krishna Iyer (p.31) rightly put it.

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