CHAPTER V
A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF BASADEVSHWARA AND DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDIAN WOMEN

Women are given only a secondary role to play especially in the Indian society. Right from the birth discrimination between a boy and a girl is found in almost every household.

Emancipation of woman is another important dimension in the humanitarian aspects of Basaveshwara and Dr. B.R Ambedkar. Basaveshwara was probably the first after Buddha to recognize and realize the individuality and rights of women and he launched a social revolution for their emancipation. Dr. B. R Ambedkar in the 19th century along with Movement for the Rights of untouchables took up the task of male and female equality.

Their concern for the emancipation of women blossomed from their heart and soul. Here an account of the position and status of women before Basaveshwara and Dr. B. R Ambedkar and their fight for emancipation of women is discussed.

Basaveshwara and other sharanas of his time have made untiring efforts for building a society of equals, where both men and woman could participate in spiritual and religious spheres on equal footing.
Discrimination or exploitation of woman on the basis of sex is against the very principle of rationalism of Basaveshwara. The social and religious movement of Basaveshwara at Kalayan against the discrimination of caste, creed or sex attracted people across the country including women. According to Basaveshwara men and women differ only in physiological level but they are one and the same in metaphysical aspect. The sharanas of the 12th century understood and realized the position of women and provided an equal status and opportunity to them on par with men in spiritual matters. Their action towards the emancipation of women can be considered as the first such movement systematically launched in the country. The system of family preached by the Sharanas of is quite unique, for spirituality is the starting point for any transformation to take place. Therefore the Sharanas propounded the concept of equality between men and women first from the spiritual level.

Basaveshwara did not start his movement for emancipation of women in a vacuum. He was greatly influenced by the social, religious, economic and political conditions prevailing in his time that made him think in terms of equality, liberty and fraternity. It was a movement for human rights. It means a movement for self respect and dignity.
The caste system, institutionalized religion, social practices based on blind faith, superstitions and unhealthy traditions had been taking their own toll of human rights in the society. Social and economic inequalities and general ill treatment of women and other inhuman practice contributed to the deprivation of human rights. Basaveshwara was greatly influenced by such a social profile and it made him think in terms of an equitable society.

The Vachanas (sayings) of Basaveshwara speak about liberty, equality and fraternity. Hence, reference pertaining to the human rights can be found in the Vachanas of Basaveshwara. Teachings of Basaveshwara are in the form of Vachanas. In his teachings he emphasized the value of liberty, equality, dignity and respect which the human rights ensure and which ultimately contribute to the common good. Basaveshwara is regarded as a great champion of human rights. The aim of his movement was to restore the status of man in all his human dignity. He emphasized man’s basic rights as without them free development of man is not possible. He revolted against social tyranny and pleaded for the liberation of man. Basaveshwara asserted human rights and thereby lifted society to great heights from the morass into which it had earlier fallen. It was no mean revival, it was a veritable revolution as the new society he created began to throb with new values.
and new outlook. He initiated a bold and revolutionary social movement and has left us a great legacy of free thinking. He launched a movement with the loftiest ideals. His movement aimed at the abolition of all inequalities and removal of all obstacles and inhibitions and social disabilities inherent in the traditional social order. Basaveshwara upheld the dignity of individual and every individual however insignificant he may be regarded as an entity not to be overlooked. The significance of every individual personality was fully recognized.

Basaveshwara was essentially a humanist and fought for humanity. According to Basaveshwara, the spirit within the body knows neither the differences of male and female nor that of master and servant. This common humanity implies that all men have equal rights. Basaveshwara’s idea was that all human beings belong to one religion, that is, the religion of humanity, and any distinction between man and man is only man made. “In the Hellenistic period, the stoic philosophers formulated the doctrine of natural rights as something which belonged to all men at all times. The rights were not privileges of citizens of particular cities, but something to which every human being everywhere was entitled by virtue of being human and rational. They believed in the universal brotherhood of man and they related what they considered to be the “of man to cosmic order”. Basaveshwara also held the view that
man as a member of the human society has some rights. He resented the artificial barriers created by man, which prevented the progress of individuals. He advocated that men are equal as moral entities, as human beings. He held the view that all humanity is present in each man and justice constituted in the treatment of peoples as equals. He was a clear-cut rationalist who fearlessly attacked the ignorance and superstitions of society. With unity, equality and justice as his parameters based on his deep spiritual faith, he had subjected the religion of his time and its ancillary sub-systems to a thorough analysis. The religion, which created, propagated and promoted varna system came under his scathing attack. Institutionalized religion, its dogmatism, priest craft, superstitions and ritualize came under his most stringent criticism, nay condemnation. Basaveshwara saw that institutionalized religion had not only divided people but subjected many people to perennial social degradation. The denial of the bare minimum was justified in the name of religion. Basaveshwara condemned the promoters of institutionalized religion as vile and ridiculed their pure and pollution ideology. He made pertinent criticism of the traditional religious literature which promoted and approved hierarchy among people.

Basaveshwara also made his stand clear on many religious practices like vows, omen, observation of auspicious days, impurity of
women during menstrual days and child delivery times and such other practices which had become a heavy yoke on people. He though that these superstitious practices were only plunging people into perpetual ignorance. In one of his vachananas he says

“What sort of religion can it be without compassion?
Compassion needs must be towards all living things;
Compassion is the root of al religious faiths;
Lord Kudala a Sangama does not care for what is not like this.”

According to Sharanas the soul does not discriminate as regards gender or sex. Soul is basically the same; it is only the body, which appears as man and women. The Veerashaiva view of man and women can be best understood by the following vachana of Devara Dasimayya an elderly contemporary of Basaveshwara;

If breast and braid appear
They say it’s a woman
If beard and moustache appear
Thay say it’s a man
But the soul within
Is neither man nor woman, look Ramanatha

The Sharanas also pointed out that woman is not an illusion but a living being likes man in every walk of life. Considering women as an illusion represents the self-aggrandizement of the male, which is unfair.
Allamaprabhu the presiding deity of the Anubhava Mantapa, a seat of intellectual discourse about the socio-religious aspects of human life evolved by Basaveshwara exalts as under;

“They say that women is an allurement
No, one, she is not so
No no, it is not so,
The real allurement is the unstable
Appetite of mind
O Lord Guheshwara”

All Sharanas including Basaveshwara, unanimously shared the view. Women should not be considered as down fall of man. She is not a lamp lighting the path of hell. As stated in the above Vachanas, women, property and wealth are not temptations. The real cause of temptation is man’s uncontrolled and unchecked inner desire to possess them.

The Sharanas raised the question that when both men and women are made of the same metal why it that one can attain divinity and the other cannot, based on this argument the Veershaiva philosophy dismissed the belief that women as an obstacle in the path of spirituality. Siddharama notable Sharana of Basaveshwara’s time, upholding the nobility of woman hood proclaim;
“Woman is not just a female sex
Woman is not a demoness even
Woman is the very embodiment of Good Kapilasidha Mallikarjuna”\(^4\)

One of the prominent sharane of Basaveshwara period, Akka Mahadevi received highest praise from Basavanna, he described her as his mother and said;

“O lord look at the Personality
of my mother Mahadeviyakka”\(^5\)

Other Saharana’s join in the chorus of her praise, as she was considered as the main source of Bhakti, Mukti, Youkti;

“You are the power of My Bhakti
You are the power of My Shakti
You are the power of My Yukti”\(^6\)

All Sharanas involved in the movement accreting the principle of equality of soul, contributed to the women’s movement to outdo material demands and aim at spiritual attainments It was a movement against the exploitation of woman in the name of religion. Basaveshwara who spearheaded the movement determined to abolish all obstacles and social disabilities inherent in the traditional order. Basaveshwara questioned the sex of the soul. He attached importance to the principle of Kayaka, in which every man and woman are engaged and their active participation in spiritual discourses and deliberations at Anubhava
Mantapa. On this basis he undertook the mission of elevating the womanhood by the introduction of the ceremony of Linga Diksh thereby giving them equal opportunity in religious and spiritual activities along with men.

Basaveshwara in few of his vachanas refers to how woman is to be looked upon. In all these vahchanas the main point which he delivers to his followers is that to desire another man’s wife is a sin and to look upon a woman not otherwise as sister or mother is a deadlier. He never considered woman as the embodiment of evil and root of all sexual sin. According to him the impurity does not lie in sexuality itself but it lies in the desire one develops about other woman, this is stated by him in a vachana;

“If you express your sense
You will get into trouble.
All the five senses will come forward
To frustrate you
Did siriyala and conagule give up?
The pleasure of man and wife,
Did Sindhu Ballala give up His favorite enjoyment?
The pleasure of man and wife
I take this vow before you
If I were to desire another’s property or wife
Let me be dismissed from your feet
O lord Kudalsangamdeva”7
All sharanas and vachanakaras including Basaveshwara express the spiritual view that the male devotee regards himself as the wife of lord shiva, his relationship with the linga is a marriage in which he is the female having subordinate position. Basaveshwara himself in the following vachana expresses this view;

“Listen to me dear fellows
I wear these men’s cloths
Only for your
Sometimes I am a man
Sometimes I am a woman
O Lord Kudala Sangamadeva”

By this vachana Basaveshwara gave a message that the outward physical condition has nothing to do with the inner soul. If one wears male dress it is only for the sake of others and not for the sake of himself and the God. Basaveshwara has repeatedly warned against the desire or the lust for other woman. This can be shunned by attaining the common hood by becoming the wife of God. He says that one should not have the desire to have another’s goods or property or wife. In a vachana he says as follows;

“How can I pretend to be Bhakta
Unless I break away from the
Company of wordings
How can I pretend to be? Maheshwara

Unless I break away from the

Spell of another’s wife or property”

The Veershaiva philosophy is based upon the principles of Shatsthala, where under the devotee experiences spiritual development in six phases, according to which, the devotee is to disassociate himself from egoism, passion, temptation and other worldly attractions. By this process alone he becomes the Master or Maheshwara. The desire for another’s wife leads to desire for property of one’s neighbour. Therefore, one has to give up such desire and try to become a devotee of Lord Shiva whereby he can develop his thinking in terms of welfare of all. This message Basavawanna preaches in the following vachana;

“O brothers, taking a bath in the river,

O master taking a bath in the river

Give up give up

Give up relations with others wives

Give up desire for another’s Property

If you go for a bath in the river

Without giving up these

It is like going for both in a river gone dry

O Lord Kudalasangamadeva”
All Sharanas, including Basaveshwara, accorded not only mother’s position to woman, but they also treated woman equal to Goddess Parvathi, a married woman has to be treated as if her womb is the womb of man’s birth. Woman should be treated as Goddess Gowri and if any one treats her as where arc thrown into the hell. They also have pointed out that hankering for another’s woman is like eating the flash of a dead dog.

Another important ideology Basaveshwara puts forward is that both husband and wife should be clean like the inner and outer side of a pot. Otherwise, their married life would be like a washing of the arrack pot only from outside. He has stated this in a vachana as under;

“Husband, a devotee of Shivalinga  
Wife, a devotee of Man, Masani  
Husband takes offerings Made to God  
Wife takes arrack and flesh  
The devotee of these whose containers  
And the foods are not clean  
It is like washing the arrack pot  
From the outside, Kudalsangamdeva”

Basaveshwara asserts that in marital relations the caste or the class should not become an obstacle. Both husband and wife should become the consorts of the linga, in that the Sharana is the wife and the linga is the husband. Basaveshwara is comparing the spiritual seeker to
the wife and the divine being to the husband. Further, there must be similar spiritual relationship between the husband and the wife.

A chaste woman remains ever beautiful to her husband and will not resort to any immoral life even if her husband turns out to be indifferent or shows no love for her. In the same way true devotee, cherishes firm faith only in one God, the supreme as a faithful wife has only one husband. This is how Basaveshwara spiritually rationalizes the wife hood in his following Vachana;

“Be hold a faithful wife has but one husband  
Behold a devotee, the true believer  
Has but one God  
Look, the fellowship of other Gods in base  
Look, to speak of other Gods in harlotry  
Should lord Kudalasangama see it?  
Look you he will off your nose”

The above Vachana makes it clear that belief in many Gods and husbands is nothing but a religious fidelity. Faith in only one God is the way for the attainment of spiritual progress in life. For this reason, Basaveshwara emphasizes the importance of monotheism.

He thought that practice was better than either pleasing or preaching. We get evidence of his broad view of woman in his treatment of his wives, Nilambika and Gangabmike, his sister Nagalambike and a good number of sharanes (woman saints) who participated in the
religious discussions at Anubhava Mantapa. Basavanna never laid down that a wife could be an obstacle to high spiritual attainments. His wives enjoyed a good deal of freedom and were his close and ardent followers.

However, at the same time he has given considerable importance for the character of woman. In some of his vachanas Basaveshwara insisted that women should be faithful to their husband and disapproved of adultery. In one vachana he says;

“What a surprise
The ruin of yawl, you bitch
Making eyes at your lover
Whilst you have a husband
Who gives you food and clothes?
The Lord Kudalsangama,
Will chop off your pretty nose, So that your teeth stick out”

This kind of harsh verdict of Basaveshwara towards adulterous women is metaphorical. The unfaithful wife is an image of the devotee who is not faithful to Lord Shiva but worship other duties as well. In another vachana, the theme of unfaithful woman is worked out by Basaveshwara in a very beautiful manner;

“I went out for an adulterous play
But, all I got was counter felt
Behind a dilapidated wall I hid
But, there the scorpions stag me
The watchman heard my cries
And he tore off my saree
I went home in utter shame
And my husband slashed my back
So the Lord Kudalsangama took his fine”

Along with the liberation of woman from all kinds of exploitations, Basaveshwara had balanced his movement by insisting upon the good character of women. If character was so vehemently insisted upon by Basaveshwara, his attempts to uplift the low caste prostitutes by absorbing them in to the mainstream of life and describing them as “Punyastri” or meritorious women is noteworthy. A number of temple girls or the girls who are put as prostitutes in temple according to religious practices also followed the new devotional movement of Basavanna. An example of Sankavve and her vachana is significant in this context;

“I took a pledged; I shall not take another one
If I could do so they would strip me makes and kill mc
If I would deliberately associate myself with
One who breaks the vow?
They would chop off my hands
Ears and nose with a glowing knife,
I will certainly not do so knowingly
O lord of no shame”
The above vachana stands as good example of the prostitute’s spirituality. The theme of this poem is monotheism. Sankavva uses smiles from her professional background to explain the theme. In her ardent style, she not only stresses the loyalty to Shiva, she also reveals the morality of her professional life. In addition to the youth dedicated to this profession, there were also married women who prostituted, on usual practice among the lower castes.

The life stories of some of the *sharanes* give a good impression of the position of women in the movement. Discourses in the Anubhava Mantapa were held among men and women on an equal footing. Highly unconventional women saints like Akkamahadevi not only found prominent place in the movement but also its most accomplished female mystic and poet. Muktayakka was another profound philosopher who could develop her talents in the company of the devotees.

However, the female ascetics were not the most remarkable characters among the women of Basaweshwara fold, because their way of life was modeled on the classical pattern of world renunciation. A completely new phenomenon was the participation of married women in the movement. Among them Neelamma was the most brilliant and independent thinker. Mahadevijamma was also a very influential teacher and poet. Both had the advantage of a privileged position in the
community, but there were also women devotees of lower background. The working women in the community constituted a convincing proof the revolutionary ideas of the vachanakaras about the equality of men and woman which led to new opportunities for women, even from traditionally unlearned circles. Low caste women like spinners, rice producers and sweepers were allowed to participate in the discussions and share experiences in the spiritual path.

Ayadakki Marayya’s wife Lakkamma was one such example. She not only participated in the discourses at Anubhava mantapa, but also guided her husband when he neglected his duty. Her concern is that no one should neglect his duty. She tells him almost holding to get on to his work first or else it amounts to disservice to God. When her husband awakes to the vital importance of Kayaka and Dasoha and in the hurry collects double the usual quantity, she gets offended and says;

“This greed is good for kings
What has a Shiva devotee my lord?
To do with such”  

Another such example is that of Mahadeviyamma wife of Molige Marayya. It is not surprising that women sometimes were portrayed as no less than divine by the vachanakaras as below:

“The common that he created climbed on his head
The common that he created climbed on his a lap
The common that he created
Claimed on Brahmans tongue
The woman whom he created
Climbed again vishnus chest
Therefore a common is not just a female
A common is not a demon either
But a woman is really
The eminent lord of the jasmines”¹⁷

Writers may put a good number of reformers who worked for securing social, economic and political rights for women. But, none worked to secure equal rights in the field of religion. Basavanna is the only who declared that woman is entitled to religious initiation and salvation as men. The sociologists trace the history of the movement of women’s emancipation from Raja Ram Mohan Roy. There is no denying the fact that Roy’s contribution for the cause of women in the modern period is significant. But let us remember that women’s emancipation with Basavanna was not merely a matter for a social reform, it was like a rebellion.

**Anubava Mantapa and Promotion of Women’s Rights**

Anubava Mantapa played a significant role in the promotion and protection of human rights. It was Basaveshwara, who rose to the occasion to save humanity from the evils of society by establishing Anubava Mantapa. It is also described as a Democratic Forum.
There are differences of opinion regarding the existence of Anubava Mantapa in 12th century. But, a number of literary works give us a clear idea regarding the existence of an institution like the Anubava Mantapa century. Harihar’s Basavarajedevara Regale, written in 13th century speaks about the existence of Anubava Mantapa. The vachanas of Shivasharanas provide sufficient historical source to determine the authenticity of the institution known as Anubava Mantapa. The following vachana of Nilamma is significant, because it provides us perhaps the earliest contemporary evidence regarding the existence of the Anubava Mantapa.

Our Basava, having found Channabasava’s prasadi,
Started the Anubava Mantapa, and became Mysticism incarnate;
He attained realization, practiced the principles,
Made the seven hundred seventy Amaraganas
Embody the mystic experience... ¹⁸

In view of the strong evidence contained in the above Vachana, it would be wrong to deny the existence of Anubhava Mantap. Anubhava Mantapa was the manifestation of the sublime vision of Basavanna, a centre for propagation of ideas regarding the new society, religion and philosophy.”¹⁹ Hence, one can say that the Anubhava Mantapa was institution established by Basaveshwara to give a new life to society, because as we noted in earlier chapters, that society in his days had
degenerated deplorably. The formation of Anubhava Mantapa was an outstanding work of Basaveshwara. It was an assemblage of supermen of the time, common from the length and breadth of India, holding discussions and implementation for the welfare of humanity. It was also evident that men and women irrespective of caste, colour, creed, rank, position and occupation participated in the deliberations of the Anubhava Mantapa. All congregated for the socio-spiritual knowledge, sat side by side at a common table, discussed their individual experience, shared each other’s views, acknowledged their faults and being always ready to learn from others than to teach. It was after such deliberations that they used to reach conclusions. These conclusions were regarded as guiding principles for all the Sharanas who used to convey them to the society at large, to guide towards socio-spiritual pursuits. Nobody could envisage a more effective or a more democratic process of understand each other’s view, that by the creation or formation of Anubhava Mantapa. This shows that Anubhava Mantapa played an important role in bringing renaissance and humanism. It may be noted that the Anubhava Mantapa assured all among other things ‘dignity of individual’, and human rights are part and parcel of human dignity.

Anubhava Mantapa considered advancement of knowledge as a fundamental right of all persons. It was an august assembly in which
discussions were held relating to every aspect of life covering social, religious, spiritual, economic, philosophical, cultural and literary fields. The education that was imparted at the Anubhava Mantapa enabled the people to elevate and ennoble their lives. It made them develop a character of strength. No aspect of life eluded the attention of sharanas while discussing in the Anubhava Mantapa. All issues concerning both social and individual life, right from social reformation through the creation of equal opportunities upto self-realization were discussed.

As a result of the fruitful discussion in the Anubhava Mantapa martial relations were established between Haralayya, the cobbler and Madhuvayya, a Brahmin. It was a spiritual as well as a social academy presided over by Allam Prabhu. Basaveshwara used this Anubhava Mantapa to bring equality among the people in an effective manner. The principle of equality was a fundamental component to the Basaveshwara’s mechanism of promotion and protection of human rights.

Anubhava Mantapa was democratic in its outlook because it was mainly based on the democratic principles like liberty, equality and fraternity. It accepted the principle or fact that the individual is rational. Every person has the capacity to think over the general problems of the community, and is capable of taking decisions. In the Anubhava
Mantapa, every individual had equal status with others. It was based on the principles that no man or a class or a group should be strong enough to wrong others, and each man can judge for himself as to what is best for him.

“The fundamental principles accepted by Basaveshwara and other sharanas of the Anubhava Mantapa may be summarized as follows:22

1. All men are equal.
2. No man is high or low either by birth, sex or occupation.
3. There is no discrimination between man and man and between man and woman.
4. Woman has equal rights with man to follow the path for self-realization.
5. Each one should follow a profession of his own choice.
6. Women must also take up a Kayak.
7. All Kayskas are honorable professions, no Kayaka is either low or high.
8. Vamas (castes) and Asramas (Stages) are to be discarded.
9. Self development is to be achieved through Kayaka.
10. Renunciation and dwelling in the forest are ruled out as cowardly tendencies to escape from life.
11. Inter-caste marriages and free dining should be encouraged.
12. Untouchability has no place in society.
13. Every man is free to think on all spiritual and social subjects.
14. Reason and experience are the only guiding lights for free thinking and spiritual advancement.
15. The language of people should be the medium for imparting spiritual and secular education.

16. All men have equal rights to participate in spiritual discussions to acquire spiritual knowledge and to follow the same path of self-realization.”

The above principles indicate that Anubhava Mantapa was established on the principles of liberty and equality, gave adequate opportunities to all and made everyone feel that existence was recognized and that full justice was being done to him. It also makes clear that promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedom was the major concern of Anubhava Mantapa.

One of the fundamental aims of the Anubhava Mantapa was to liberate religion from the fetters of ritualize and theoretical idealism. It made no distinction between or among men on the basis of caste, creed and sex. It preached that work allotted to any person and done in the spirit of dedication would lead to self-realization. Every member of that institution considered himself out of humility, as inferior to others. The brotherhood of man was the basis at the Anubhava Mantapa and all its members stood equal in the common fraternity. Birth, wealth, caste or creed did not determine the status of man. The Anubhava Mantapa emphasized the principle that a society ridden with social and economic inequalities hindered the development of individual’s personality and could not be called a democratic one. Social and economic inequalities
bring inequalities of treatment and rights. Societal oppression and systematic subjugation of untouchables and women have more dangerous implications for social change and development.

Anubhava Mantapa realised the above fact and it practiced brotherhood in every sphere of life. Each one addressed the other as brother, sister, as father or mother. Hence, Anubhava Mantapa was an institution of fraternity, of equals, a fair and open field for all. This kind of equality ensured social justice and it was the very life breath of the Anubhava Mantapa. The Anubhava Mantapa was unique in the sense that it enabled its members and others to learn and tackle the real problems of life. They could face any challenge that confronted them. Moreover, the Anubhava Mantapa gave its members and others supreme satisfaction and peace of mind.

During 12th century, the caste system was very rigid. Historically citing occupation Varna, mythology, conqueror/conquered, etc., whatever came handy was accepted to rationalize and justify the discrimination and exploitation system. Religious sanctions abetted and reinforced the perpetuation of this oppressive system. Society was thus, hierarchically stratified with proscriptive and prescriptive norms. Fenced in by endogamy these segments of society became watertight compartments and suited the hierarchical upper segments of society.
The study of Vedas was confined only to higher caste people, with time education became more and more narrow in content, the language of instruction being Sanskrit and hence it became the monopoly of Brahmins. They maintained that the sacred literature was the spoken word of God and others were completely debarred them. Hence, education became an exclusive privilege of the Brahmins not only in the vedic period, but also in the following centuries. Such a discrimination was a violation of human rights. It was the Anubhava Mantapa, which broke this monopoly of Sanskrit and made Kannada, the spoken language of the masses, the vehicle for the spread of its philosophy. Hence, the education that was imparted at the Anubhava Mantapa was a reaction against caste-based education, which had been the monopoly of few Brahmins. One can also say that the education and preaching received at the Anubhava Mantapa was very comprehensive. It enabled the development of an individual's body, mind and soul. It was Anubhava Mantapa, that provided equal opportunities to all for teaching and learning.

The Anubhava Mantapa believed in the principle of divinity of labour. Members of the Anubhava Mantapa practised their own professions, such as that of washerman, potter and the like. Machayya, Kakkayya, Channayya were engaged in their respective occupations
and yet became great persons. The Anubhava Mantapa did not attach importance to the caste or class in which a person was born. The following views of a scholar Uttangi Channappa, in the work under reference describes vividly the treatment given to the lowborn in the Anubhava Mantapa “occupational superiority or inferiority was not given any importance. Men of high status like royal dignitaries, scholars, merchants as well as men of low status like Channayya, the cobbler, Kakkayya, the tanner and others sought entrance into the Anubhava Mantapa.”

In the deliberations that took place in the Anubhava Mantapa the woodcutter, the washerman, the tailor, the shoemaker and the peasant sat side by side with the minister and the scholar. The members of Anubhava Mantapa had not only sympathy for the other and they tried to understand one another empathetically. Sympathy and understanding built the requisite level of tolerance among the members of the Anubhava Mantapa. The democratic principles of dissent and the freedom to differ manifested themselves in Anubhava Mantapa. The members of Anubhava Mantapa had differences of opinion no doubt on fundamental issues. But in spite of such differences of opinion, they had reached a reasonable level of understanding which was a solvent of variant conclusions. Thus, it is evident that the Anubhava Mantapa
upheld the dignity of individual personality. Every individual, however, insignificant he may be, was regarded as an entity not to be overlooked. The importance of every individual personality was fully recognized. So we meet with Madivala Machayya, a washerman, Ambigara Chowdayya, a ferryman, Hadpada Appanna, a barber, Dohara Kakkayya, a tanner, Madara Channayya, a cobbler and a large number of other common men and they had a voice in the Anubhava Mantapa.

Members of Anubhava Mantapa were allowed to express themselves freely and act freely, without fear or favour. They could speak for and against any issue and could suggest alternative ways. Hence, any individual member was free to think, speak, fit .The individual could not be coerced into doing anything against his will. The Anubhava Mantapa was based on the fact, that truth comes only out of a clash of opinion and every member had bringing it forward. Liberty, which Anubhava Mantapa granted or conferred on the members made them think and decide issue or resolve problems as rational men and rationality was one of the fundamental tenets of the Anubhava Mantapa. A corollary to this was that no one had a monopoly of reason and truth. No one was the repository of all wisdom. This was the essence of the spirit of the Anubhava Mantapa. Therefore, the members of Anubhava Mantapa not only thought for themselves but they also thought for the
fraternity to which they belonged. Hence, free thinking was the right of every person in the Anubhava Mantapa.

The vachanas of the various members of the Anubhava Mantapa are the outcome of that freethinking and it may be inferred that they used to raise questions or reply in the form of vachanas. A noted scholar speculates as to the mode of discourse and complete liberty enjoyed by the formulation of conclusions in the Anubhava Mantapa as follows: “Socio-religious ideas were discussed with an open mind in the Anubhava Mantapa. Right from the ideas relating to the metaphysical problems like god, world, the ways of religious practices and social problems like caste, etc. were being discussed by members of Anubhava Mantapa. Probably these discussions inspired the sharanas to compose vachanas. There is also a possibility that the vachanas were composed prior to the deliberations in the Anubhava Mantapa. Sunya Sarnpadane hints at these possibilities. The Anubahava Mantapa provided an ideal forum for not only varied ideas but for the composition of vachanas too. Vachana Bhandari Shantarasa collected these vachanas and stored them for future use. The sharans intended to awaken the people through their vachanas and indeed, today, they are the monuments of independent thinking and liberal exchange of
This account clearly indicates the significance attached to the liberty of individuals.

The sharanas of the Anubhava Mantapa underlined the fact that man feels a tendency to go even beyond the social mechanism and realize his own spiritual being and personality, and the greater the approximation to his inner self-realization the freer he becomes, because freedom is the essence of growth. It enables the flowering of the individual’s potentiality and capacity whereby he realizes the parameters of his spiritual nature. This spiritual realization is not confined to the limits set by society. Hence, one can say that liberty is in essence the spontaneous power of initiative for self-realization and fulfillment. The sharanas of Anubhava Mantapa stressed such a principle. The liberty underlined by the sharanas of the Anubhav Mantapa refers to self conscious and spontaneous capacity to will and act for the common good and for one’s highest good. Liberty is very precious to man. A teachers like the Budha, Socrates and others occasionally taught the significance and supremacy of the individual human being but no social movement for individual liberty had ever been started. It is also believed that the quest and demand for individual liberty is a modern phenomenon. But, one can say that it was at the Anubhava Mantapa long back in 12th century, under the leadership of
Lord Basaveshwara, that a movement for individual liberty was started. The Anubahava Mantapas innate love of equality, unflinching support for individual freedom and its consistent plea for bringing about barriers of sex, religion, language, culture etc., testify to its faith in democratic principles.

In the Anubhava Mantapa sharnas discussed their experiences without any distinction of sex or social standing. Shivasharanas believed that all men are equal since the all pervading soul resides in them. This earth is real. It is not an illusion. The attainment of moksha (liberation) is possible only here on earth with the cooperation of the body. They proclaimed that the world is “the will also be accepted in heaven. Thus, the shivasharanism instead of running away from life, lived a life of responsibility and thus the shivasharanas, instead of running away from life, lived a life of responsibility and thus sanctified it. Their aim was to realize the Kingdom of God on earth. They were pioneers among the Indian religious teachers in proving that liberation is possible here and now in a single life span. Thus, they proposed a simple means. They preached that, “This life becomes the last one, if we act as we speak.” This harmony between word and deed was considered the highest attainment of a sharana. They call it “the concord of action and knowledge but believed, that harmony between speech and action alone
was the highest attainment. We may recognize here the great efforts of sharanas in interweaving moral principles, religion and social life. Thus, the shivasharanas brought the material and the spiritual religion is not, and should not be a possession of the spiritual worlds together. The divine message of the sharanas is that religion is not, and should not be a possession of the privileged few. They held that all our activities should be guided by the knowledge and truth. Life should become divine. They struggled hard to establish a religion that is universal in its appeal and casteless in structure. By pointing out that God is in woman too, they brought full freedom to women in a society which held that no woman is entitled to freedom. Basaveshwara held that society should not suffer because of religion. He, therefore, recognized the dignity of labour and declared that ‘work is worship.’ Sharanas went still further and said that one should forget even the Guru, Linga, Jangama when they are engaged in work. Thus, they gave a proper place to the greater values of human life. Every act became meaningful. This world became real and significant. There appeared unity in diversity, individuality harmonized with universality. One account of this new spiritual drive, the Shivanubhava Mantapa became a welfare centre.”

The Anubhava Mantapa did not make a distinction between young and old, men and women with regard to knowledge. For example,
Channabasavanna who was a young boy of 12 years initiated Siddarama into Virashaivism. Another noted instance is of Akka Mahadevi. Though she was 16 years old only, she answered all the questions put by Allam Prabhu. Basaveshwara said that she had the ability to be the spiritual mentor of all. In reply to that Akkamahadevi says, “You must not say so, I am the child of the compassion of all of you. I am the youngest of you all.” This indicates that personal liberty and human dignity were the most cherished values and they were the necessary epitomes which helped in the development of an individual’s personality and in the realization of human rights.

As noted earlier, Brahminical traditions in Karnataka had excluded women from the basic religious ritual order. It was the Anubhava Mantapa that challenged this by restoring to women a position and role of equality with men. The Anubhava Mantapa was able to produce a large number of women writers who role vachanas. A noted scholar has given a description regarding the treatment given to women during the Brahminical period and the effective role played by the Anubhava Mantapa in providing equal opportunities to both men and women for the fullest development of their personality in these words, “Confusing rules were provided by Smritis regarding women and their role putting them into a narrow frame. She was a Sudra who had no liberty to read
the vedas, to chant the mantras and to perform religious rites. She was forced to live in the four walls of the house attending to every whim and fancy of the elders. She was considered a weaker sex she had little opportunity to develop her personality. She had to be under the care of one or another. The sharanas endeavoured to break this traditional image of the woman and helped create a healthy social atmosphere. This indeed is memorable in the context of 12th century Indian history.”

Thus, the Anubhava Mantapa gave women an independent outlook. It was the Anubhava Mantapa which broke a tradition which had bound the life of women. The Anubhava Mantapa had a good number of women as its members and they were regarded in no way as inferior to men in spiritual matters. When Akka Mahadevi came to Kalyana before being admitted into the Anubhava Mantapa she had to face a barrage of severe questions from Allam Prabhu. The discussion that took place between Akka Mahadevi and Allam Prabhu is one of the most notable instances of the lofty level at which these parleys took place. Hence, a scholar has rightly pointed out “Akka Mahadevi is a rare example of a young women of sixteen years who participated in the religious discourses. Basaveshwara who pleaded for the equality of women, revered Akka Mahadevi, whose rational and courageous outlook has endeared her to the womenfolk of the present day, is a sublime example
of character and devotion, every one bowed before her in reverence of her spiritual attainments. Her vachanas are beautiful poetry.”

Sattyakka, Muktayakka, Akkanagamma, Neelambike, Gangambike, Moolegamahadevi, were women of sterling character and a remarkable spiritual status. Sometimes they surpassed men in keenness of perception and soundness of argument.

This clearly reveals the independence the women enjoyed and the equal a role and position they had with men in the Anubhava Mantapa. The Anubhava Mantapa established by the sharanas, under the leadership of Basavanna, performed the task of organizing social behaviour into stable patterns and it provided a basis for the integration of society. The Anubhava Mantapa owed its effective functioning to the keen involvement and participation of all the sharanas. It cultivated community spirit. The spontaneous participation by individual members in its activities fostered a sense of social solidarity. Unfettered autonomy is essential for man the autonomous human being unconstrainedly harnessing his efforts for the perfect flowering of his personality and the fulfillments of his destiny is the theoretical presupposition of democracy.

The monarchial system prevalent during the 12th century was against the humanism preached by Basavaeshwara. The Anubhava Mantapa considered man’s personality sacred and hence sought to
preserve his personality from disruption and dehumanization. Humanism
pleads for saving humankind from the worship of primitive fetishes and
supernaturalism. It enshrines man in place of the theological deities and
metaphysical concepts. Humanistic democracy is an attempt to wants to
find a scheme of values to fill the vacuum created by the decline of
conventional and theological standards and it provides an inspiration for
the belief in the creative possibilities of human being.

The Anubhava Mantapa was mainly based on the principles of
humanism, supplemented with ethical idealism. It stressed the moral
virtues and the incorporation of emphasis was on pure means for the
realization of its ends. This is the essence of democracy, because resort
to violence to bring about internal social change would spell the doom of
democracy. Anubhava Mantapa had as its foundation sound principles
and healthy social values. Instead of personality pattern that delights in
petty mundane experiences and is fanatical about personal
gratifications, the members of the Anubhava Mantapa had sober
temper, acted with equanimity and balance, were disinterested in
personal gains and were devoted to the good of all.

The shivasharana’s total personality was integrated in terms of the
orientation of will and action to the realization of the ultimate values
which the Anubhava Mantapa stood for. The shivasharanas stressed the
primacy of spiritual norms. But, by spiritual integration they did not mean any reassertion of creeds and dogmas. They stressed the moral and spiritual dimension of the human being. Hence, it can be stated that members of the Anubhava Mantapa did not consider man simply as a mere physical and chemical assemblage of matter and energy. They emphasized that the man has in him an inter sanctuary of spiritual tranquility and repose. All this clearly shows that the Anubhava Mantapa emphasized the truth that the individual is the bearer of the torch of moral and cultural values and on no account is he to be treated as a mere means.

Hence, it provided an opportunity to every individual to realize his destiny as an end and not as a means. It aptly makes clear that Anubhava Mantapa provided an opportunity to every individual to fully develop and use his human qualities, intelligence, talent and conscience and to satisfy his spiritual needs. The essence of discourses held in Anubhava Mantapa was that; it was necessary for an individual to live in society as a free individual with dignity and respect, to realize his full potential and to attain his full stature as an individual and also as a member of the society and thereby contribute his maximum to the total good of the society. Since denial of any of this would prevent from developing his talent to the full the therefore, from making his maximum
contribution. This indicates that the Anubhava Mantapa stood for the principle that the minimum required to be guaranteed to everyone.

Anubhava Mantapa held the view that the promotion of individual freedom was most essential for the well-being of society. Basaveshwara accepted that there was the operativeness of necessity and determinism in nature and history. Man was a theatre of bondage; man could attain freedom and spontaneity in the spiritual world. This free spiritual realm is a world of creative abundance. This surplus of overflowing creativity born out of the powers of spirit is the source of freedom and it has spiritual roots. Thus, according to Basaveshwara, it is possible to effect a transition from necessity to freedom. He, therefore, pleaded for liberty of thought and action and of conscience. He loved the sole antidote to mechanical conventions and narrow social creeds. He loved the free autonomy of human spirit. He, however, has a spiritual conception of freedom. The essence of freedom is the illumination of soul by a process of self-realization. It lies in the attainment of universality. Hence, love is the pathway to freedom. Aloofness and alienation create maladjustment in the economy of the world. Sympathetic co-operation, compassion and trustful understanding bring to man the blessings of freedom through the development of his faculties. Only a spirit of
sympathy and comprehension can release the hidden powers of creative spirit.

Hence, one can say Basaveshwara was prophet of individuality and not of domination. He was also thereby upholding the religious freedom and equality of every individual. Basaveshwara stressed the need of independent thinking, of testing everything on the touchstone of one’s reason and conscience. He, therefore, revolted against the popular attitude of unquestioning acceptance of manmade laws as God-ordained. He preached and practiced knowledge in action. For knowledge divorced from action would be futile. Perfection came out of determination based on knowledge. Basaveshwara had in mind the postulate that spiritual freedom would lead to social liberation the postulate that spiritual freedom would lead to social liberation of the entire humanity. A society is composed of individuals and individuals are the ultimate components of society. Hence, Besaveshwara stressed that noble virtues like manliness a sense of human dignity and honor should be cultivated by all individuals and these individualistic qualities had to be supplemented with a positive feeling love of the neighbor; without a deep sense of selfless service it was mere prattle to talk about an ideal society and fraternity. He harmonized the individualistic and the social approaches, with the scales tipped in favour of the moral growth of an
individual. He raised the cry that social uplift was possible without raising the moral status of the masses. The natural law of human nature is sociability. In fellowship man finds his refuge in society. Basaveshwara stressed fellowship in the following vachana:

“Will not the crow sighting a morsel, call its kith and kin? Will not a hen sighting something to pick, call all its brood? Being a devotee of Shiva, if one is not a portion of devotion, One is much sores than crow and hen, Oh! Lord Kudaiasangama.”

This reflects that the individual cannot lead on isolated life and as a member of society he should have the sense of fellowship brings him joy. “When man is related to which his neighbors in all respects, when his relationship pervades the home and the world beyond, its greatness itself brings him joy. We find our deepest satisfaction where it is not merely a practical relation, not a relation of convenience or of business, but a relationship of friendliness transcending self interest. There man may be deprived of everything, but he has an abundant satisfaction in the human soul.” According to Basaveshwara, a society could progress, if the moral level of the individuals was high. Hence he stressed the need for each individual to adhere to the path of the good. “The social order depends upon fundamental morality the morality of proper words and action.” Basaveshwara condemned the actions
actuated by feelings of selfishness, egoism, anger or lust. He also condemned persons having tendencies like stealing, killing, debauchery, idling etc. He pointed out that such actions were detrimental to the progress of human society.

“Do not kill do not steal, do not tell a lie, 
Do not be wrathful, do not be intolerant to others’
Do not praise yourself nor reprimand others,
This is internal purity.
This is external purity. This is the only way by which you can commend yourself to good and win his approval.31

Basavanna meant that it is through proper behavior and good actions that purity of man’s mind and body is reserved! Basaveshwara stressed conduct more than anything else and he said that right and proper actions were necessary for right and attitude of love, sympathy, kindness, tolerance and mercy etc., are right ones; they are the ones that would help foster the unity of mankind. Basaveshwara pointed out that every individual should realize that the happiness of others was as when the individual desired the happiness of his neighbors as well as of his own. He pointed out that there was nothing like a rebirth or a world hereafter: what was important was good conduct in this world.

“The Lord's mint, this world - when you issue
His impress borne,
Shall find Heaven acknowledge his mould
If found wanting here below,
Likewise above the reckoning show! Lord
Kudalasangama”

Hence, Basaveshwara stressed actions which promoted healthy human relationships and were mutually beneficial. He prescribed meticulous observance of social virtues known as five acharas, viz., Sadachara, Lingachara, Sivachara. Ganachara, Bhrutyachara, which together constituted the ways of right living “Basava’s teachings emphasize right action. The concept of Panchachara is important in this connection. Panchaharas are the five ways of conduct, the Lingachara as worship of Istalinga expresses a mental preparation of the devotee for spiritual development Sadachara enjoins us to be disciplined in our vocation and do our duties assigned to us. Keeping in view the spiritual responsibilities of a layman, Sivachara enjoins us to workshop Siva as the one God. It is monotheistic. Bhrutyachara is the devotee’s attitude of humility towards Siva and his devotees. And, Ganachara emphasizes the social aspect of virtues.” Basaveshwara believed that every human being was capable of practicing these primary virtues. Society will be harmonious and well integrated if organized on that basis. This clearly makes us know that Basaveshwara stressed the fundamental idea that an ideal society can never be realized except by strict adherence to certain human values and standards of conduct. The concern of the
members of the Anubhava Mantapa for the protection and promotion of human rights is very much evident from the fact that the members of Anubhava Mantapa made repeated references to human rights and fundamental freedoms in their vachanas.

**Contributions of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for Women Empowerment.**

Dr. Ambedkar had great love for his fellow-creatures and also an urge to serve them. Pursuing the path of “Bahujana Hitaya, Bahujana Sukhaya” (gain of the many, welfare of the many), he worked with full vigor and zeal for the emancipation of all, though the untouchables received his special attention for obvious reasons. He was keen to ameliorate the condition of women who, also like the Shudras bore Manu’s wrath. Dr. Ambedkar championed the cause of women as well as the miserable plight of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes throughout his life. He put forth a number of problems of Indian women and sought for their solutions in Bombay Legislative Council, in the Viceroy’s Executive Council, as a Labour Member, in the Constituent Assembly as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and in the Parliament as the first Law Minister of Independent India.

The decades after independence have seen tremendous and historical changes in the status and the position of women in Indian society. In fact, in no period of history such revolutionary changes took
place, as taking place today. But the change from a position of utter degradation of women in the nineteenth century to a position of equality in the middle of the twentieth century is not a simple case of progress of women in the modern era.

In Indian Society, especially in Hindu Society, a female has a low social status, because she is treated as the “door of hell”, i.e., Narka ka dwar. It was Dr. Ambedkar who raised his voice against the deplorable conditions of womenfolk in Hindu Society. Looking into the social history and the rules of Shastras, he introduced the “Hindu Code Bill” in parliament to empower the womenfolk by giving them legitimate rights, relating to property, marriage, divorce, maintenance, etc. Although the Bill could not get due regard, yet most of the clauses were passed by the Parliament. This way Dr. Ambedkar fought for the equal rights to womenfolk in Hindu society.34

The advent of B.R. Ambedkar on the social and political scene of India did contribute a great deal to the cause of women’s emancipation. He respected women’s dignity without belittling their roles as mothers and wives. His ideas were remarkably similar to those voiced by the women’s liberation movement all over the world. He propagated equality in family and dignity of women’s personality in society. As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly, he advocated
several measures to free women from age-old subordination and subservience imposed by the Hindu social laws authored by Manu. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm belief that unless the women themselves did not come forward to fight for the eradication of the social evils, their position in society would not improve, he was very much conscious of the fact that the religious scriptures, particularly the Manu smriti, contributed a great deal to the deplorable condition of women. Under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, a number of processions were organized in which Dalit women took part. On 19-20th March, 1927, under the leadership of Babasaheb, Dalits in large numbers went to the Chowdar tank of Mahad and drank water from it. They then went to the Kalaram temple of Nasik and gained entry into it by force. The Dalits also entered temples in other cities like Poona, Lucknow, Madras, etc., the important point to note is that under the inspiration of Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalit women too did not lag behind. Among the Dalit women who took an active part in these processions, the names of Shantabai Darii Gita Bai Gayakwad and Meena Bai Shivaraj stand out prominently. Dr. Ambedkar took a firm resolve to burn a copy of Manu smriti on 25th December 1927. Subsequently when he became the Law Minister and member of the Constitution Drafting Committee, he tried his best to give equal rights to women in society.35
Dr. Ambedkar, expressed the view that women were denied the right to acquire knowledge (which is the birth right of every human being) and the right to realize their spiritual potentiality. This was a cruel deal for women. By admitting women to the life of Parirajaka, the Buddha by one stroke, removed both these wrongs. He gave them the right to knowledge and the right to realize their spiritual potentialities along with men. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in Indian which allowed them liberty and dignity. Manu, among the greatest opponents of Buddhism, wanted to make sure that the growing popularity of Buddhism did not adversely affect and influence the Hindu women. He therefore, imposed strict restrictions on women and openly advocated the policy of gender discrimination. Ambedkar thus concludes that it was in fact Manu and not the Buddha, as is generally believed, who was responsible for the deterioration of the position of women in India.\textsuperscript{36}

Ambedkar argued that the inhuman treatment meted to women in Hindu society is related to the caste as an institution. Thereafter, the question of women cannot be isolated from the question of caste. Thus instead of taking up women’s issues in isolation, he also chose to attack the institution of caste, which he felt contradicted the basic human values. In fact he realized the need to change the Hindu Society
radically. It was essential for him, therefore, to be critical of the existing order and its fundamental premises. Women’s question for Dr. Ambedkar was related to the system of organized exploitation inherent in the Hindu social order. This social order aimed at establishing dominance of the Brahmanical class through a complex mechanism represented by the institution of caste. Women, along with Shudras, became victims of such an order, which first placed Brahmanical class in a position of dominance; secondly, developed an in-built mechanism of its maintenance, of justification and reproduction and; thirdly, placed women and Shudras at a sub-human level.37

Being a liberal in approach, Dr. Ambedkar believed that individual is the ultimate goal of the society and growth of the individual is the most important pre-requisite of a free social order. Ironically, he found that the Hindu social order did not provide the basis for development of individuality, mainly because the social order did not recognize the individual-it is the group, the caste that is the unit of Hindu Society and not the individual. “The Hindu social order does not recognize the individual as a centre of social purpose. For the Hindu social order is based primarily on class or varna and not on individuals.” Logically thus, the suffering of Shudras and women is related to their being part of their caste and sex respectively.38
The inferior position as meted to women and the inhuman treatment given to them, therefore, explained by Dr. Ambedkar, in terms of the very nature of the social order does not respect the value of equality among individuals and which does not recognize the worth of human dignity. As against the principles of equality and fraternity, the Hindu social order, in the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, is based upon three different principles: the principle of graded inequality, fixity of occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity and; the principle of fixation of people within their respective classes. Among these, the first principle, that of graded inequality, Dr. Ambedkar finds as the most significant. To quote Dr. Ambedkar "the principle of graded inequality is a fundamental principle is beyond controversy. The four classes are not on horizontal plane, different but equal. They are on a vertical plane, not only different but also unequal in status, one standing above the other. In the scheme of Manu, the Brahmin is placed at the first in rank, below him is the Kshatriya, below the Kshatriys is the Vaishya, below Vaishya is the Shudra and below Shudras is the Ati-Shudra or the untouchable."³⁹

Dr. Ambedkar challenged the authenticity of Shastras and he was bold enough to challenge the very much-accepted Hindu ideals. He felt that educating the society in the principles and values of democracy
could bring about a lasting change but this called for the destruction of the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras. The authority of Shastras had to be discarded because traditionally there was no the authenticity of Shastras. He laid special stress on education of women. Exposure to Western literature made Ambedkar to champion women’s crucial role in social transformation. He noted their key position in the family and realized that their educational advancement would give a big push to the society. He focused his attention on the need to provide education to Dalit women who suffered exploitation both by virtue of their being Dalits and illiterate.

Right from Mook Nayak and Bahiskrit Bharat, oppression of women remained a major plank of Dr. Ambedkar’s movement. The focus of Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha was social, cultural and economic advancement of the untouchables. He welcomed women in all the social struggles. In Mahad Satyagraha, women participated in large numbers. About 500 women marched at the head of that historical procession to assert the right of untouchables to drink water from the public tank. The temple entry movement, which continued for a long time, was a social process of action and retrospection through which his views on Hindu philosophy and society crystallized. In this process, Dr. Ambedkar made an analysis of the Smritis and Shastras in depth, the basics of Hindu
faith. For him Manusmriti was the obnoxious concoction that ordained graded socio-religious, economic and cultural status to the ‘Chaturvarnya’, put women in the Shudra category.\textsuperscript{40}

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Women Empowerment

Dr. Ambedkar aimed at two fold social reforms; one, the reform of the Hindu family and the other, the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The problems of sati, widow remarriage, child marriage, etc., related to the social reform of the Hindu family. The abolition of caste system, abolition of unsociability, changes in the laws of marriage, adoption, and succession relate to the social reform in the larger sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. Women were denied the right to education and the right to property, they were treated as objects to seduce men and they were said to be created to please man. Dr. Ambedkar criticized Manu for conferring inferior status upon woman. Woman has been meted out ill treatment in every walk of life.

Dr. Ambedkar was nominated as member of the Bombay Legislative Council on 18\textsuperscript{th} February, 1927. He regularly participated in the Legislative debates and delivered a number of speeches on the budget, education, Panchayat, local boards and industries. His arguments on the Maternity Benefit Bill and on Birth Control were quite
relevant to recognize the dignity of women. He vehemently supported the maternity bill. His argument was “it is in the interest of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the prenatal period and also subsequently, and the principle of the Bill is based entirely on that principle...” “That being so Sir, I am bound to admit that the burden of this ought to be largely borne by the Government, I am prepared to admit this fact because the conservation of the people’s welfare is primary concern of the Government. And in every country therefore, where maternity benefit has been introduced, you will find that the Government has been subjected to a certain amount of change with regard to maternity benefit.”

Ambedkar and Abortion Act

The age-old discriminatory attitude developed against women continues after the birth of a female child and ends with even her death. Undue harassment, which may even lead to the death of woman for bringing insufficient dowry is another aspect of life where woman has been denied equality and liberty for which Dr. Ambedkar fought throughout his life. Dr. Ambedkar’s efforts to uplift women have proved futile because even today woman is not considered the owner of her own body, as in case she wants to get her pregnancy terminated, it is
the husband or the in-laws who decide whether the foetus should be flushed out or not.

Educationally backward, socially and economically dependent, this crippled creature, who was assured the unique pride of motherhood of man and unparalleled influence in the shaping of society, has lived through suppression, exploitation and ill-treatment at the hands of man throughout the ages.\textsuperscript{42} The tenets of Dr. Ambedkar’s slogan- Education, Organization and Agitation was well suited to women as it was to the downtrodden. The position of women not being much different from that of the downtrodden, their mental and physical inhibitions being similar, their symptoms being the same, their diagnosis and treatment could not be different. The movement of Dr. Ambedkar for the uplift of the downtrodden gave a fillip to women’s liberation too, it inspired more than ever a feeling among the enlightened women that they too needed to be emancipated and the principle of equality advocated by him for the downtrodden must apply equally to them,\textsuperscript{43} Dr. Ambedkar pointed out:

“Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy... (which) means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life.... (These principles) form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy.... We must begin by
acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in Indian society. One, of these is equality on the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which, there are some who have immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty. On 26 January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality.... How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy, which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.”

For him social justice meant the taking of collective measures for the uplift of the downtrodden and weaker sections like women. Social justice of equality was denied to women by treating them unequally in every field. Equality before law and equal protection of law is a fundamental right provided under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. Article 15 of the Constitution of India provides the fundamental right of equality by prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of race, religion,
caste, sex or place of birth. Article 39 of the Indian Constitution provides directives to the state to see to it that; its citizens-men and women equally have the right to adequate means of livelihood, that ownership and control of material resources of the community are so distributed as to serve the common good, that operation of economic system does not result in concentration of wealth and the means of production to the common detriment and further that there shall be equal pay for equal work, etc. Abortion was narrowly allowed under the Indian Penal Code. Dr. Ambedkar had viewed that attempts at abortion, resorted to for the prevention of unwanted progeny, exacted a heavy toll on female lives. 45 His view was relevant at that time when abortion could arrest population which was needed to be increased and abortion was dangerous for the life of the mother. Moreover, under Indian Penal Code abortion was treated as crime.

Women’s Organizations and Ambedkar

At the All India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1940, Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that there could not be any progress without participation of women. He thus spoke, “I am a great believer in organization of women. I know what they can do to improve the condition of the society if they are convinced. In the eradication of social evils they have rendered great service.” 46
underlined that women should learn to be clean and keep themselves away from all vices. They should educate their children and instill high ambition in them. The children’s mind should be inculcated with the ideas that they are destined to be great. The sense of inferiority complex should be eliminated from their mind and heart.

**Dr. Ambedkar’s Support to Birth Control**

Dr. Ambedkar was very much worried for the overgrowth of the population in India and he wanted certain measures to be introduced for birth control. Viewing the contemporary situation he remarked.... “The present keen struggle of life renders timely marriage impossible for many and they expose them to various diseases and habits. Many women become invalid for life and some even lose their lives by the birth of children in their diseased condition or in too rapid succession. Birth control is the only sovereign specific remedy that can do away with all these calamities. Wherever a woman is disinclined to bear a child for any reason whatsoever, she must be in a position to prevent conception and bringing forth progeny, which should be entirely dependent on the choice of women. Society would in no way profit by the addition of unwanted progeny.”

Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the Hindu women are tied up with bandage of superstitions until their death. They are also
responsible for inculcating these wrong notions learnt by them through baseless traditions and preaching of the shastras in the budding mind of their off spring. Otherwise also the women in India have remained a matter of joy and a source of amusement at such she was used and misused by men guest to serve their evil ends. She has been used just like a machine for procreation. It has also been mentioned in Hindu Shastras that women is the bond slave of her father when she is young to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is mother.48

Ambedkar and Devadasi Women

Dr. Ambedkar made an impassioned appeal to cast off evil practices and customs among certain sections of the depressed classes at a meeting at the Damodar Thackersey Hall, Bombay in 1936. The meeting was largely attended by men and women belonging to the Devadasi, Patraje, Bhute, Aradhi and Jagiti Communities and was held to accord support to the mass conversion move inaugurated at Yeola. Dr. Ambedkar made a fervent appeal, especially to the women. “Whether you change your religion along with us or not, it does not matter much to me. But, I insist that if you want to be with the rest of us, you must give up your disgraceful life. You must marry and settle down
to a normal domestic life as women of other classes do. Don’t continue to live under conditions, which inevitably drag you into prostitution”?

Dr. Ambedkar’s impassioned love for the “fallen” women, as a whole community and his advice to rescue them from the despised and disgraceful life were quite meaningful. Dr. Ambedkar accorded equal status to women and men in every sphere and he also warned the women against the misuse of their rights. Therefore, it would be appropriate to regard Dr. Ambedkar as one of the saviours of Indian women. His contribution is unique and cherishable by the women of India. It should be the foremost duty of women’s associations, groups and organizations to actively participate in the processes of social change and welfare. The women’s movement needs to be strengthened to overcome the artificial divisions and boundaries created by geography, economy and ideology.

Dr. Ambedkar and Mines Maternity Benefit Act

Ambedkar was very much pained at the indignities suffered by women, particularly those working in mines in extremely difficult conditions. This is evident from the views expressed by him on the Maternity Benefit Bill. Ambedkar strongly felt that it was necessary to amend the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941. His arguments in this regard are given below: Under the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, a
women working in the mine is entitled to maternity benefit for a period of 8 weeks is divided into two parts of four weeks each, one part preceding delivery and another part succeeding delivery. The four weeks before delivery is a period of optional rest during which a woman may work and get full wage or absent herself and get the maternity benefit. With regard to the four weeks succeeding delivery it is a period of compulsory rest during which the woman must not work. In fact it is unlawful and criminal for her to work, and be content only with the maternity benefit. Section 5 of the Maternity Benefit Act provides for the payment of maternity benefit and if Honourable member will refer to the works as they stand in line 9 of that section, they will find that the words as they are absent from work. Now, it has been suggested that these words, particularly absent from work or rather from work are ambiguous and it is suggested that these words from work introduce a certain amount of ambiguity.  

As per Section 5 with the five different provinces and these words from work do not exist. Consequently, it has become necessary to remove this ambiguity by removing these words. The amendment is sought to be carried out by two different amendments. One is to delete the words, which have caused this ambiguity from Section 5 and make the section read to the effect that for every day during the four weeks preceding delivery the woman would be entitled to maternity benefit.
With regard to the days on which she choose to attend-and the four weeks preceding delivery are periods of optional rest when she may choose to go and claim full wages or stay at home and be content with maternity benefit-we have added a proviso that she shall not be entitled to any maternity benefit at all.”

The Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941 passed after consideration. Another Bill related to women working underground in the Coal Mines was also initiated by Babasaheb for the benefit of women that was Lifting of Ban on Employment of Women on Underground Work in Coal Mines. Babasaheb argued “women working underground to which they had given their consent in the year 1939 and had within four years withdrawn from it. The Government of India brought in a Bill for the amendment of the Indian Coal Mines Act. The original purpose of the Bill was very limited one. It was a purpose merely to introduce safety measures in coalmines, but when the measure was take to the Select Committee, the Select Committee in its judgement thought that the Government of India ought to go forward and take a bold step and claim power in the Act in order to prohibit the working of women underground. In the Select Committee the Government of India accepted the principle but they framed regulations with the definite and deliberate object of eliminating women labour from working underground. As the house will
know, the Government of India had laid down a definite programme of annual decrease in women underground. So much so, that two years before the ratification took place in this house, we had, under the policy of the Government of India, no women labour working in the mines at all. The fact is this that women should not work in the mines and has taken definite steps to bring that state situation to a close”.

He pleaded in the house to consider the lifting of the ban on women working underground has a direct reference to coal. Therefore, let us not forget that we dealing with an emergency and the lifting of the prohibition from allowing women to work underground is not an idle Act or a wanton Act on the part of the Government, but is an Act, which is amply justified by the facts and circumstances of the case. It is quite clear to everyone that work under coal mines is the most uncongenial work, even dangerous. It is for the first time that in any industry the principle has been established of equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex. Women shall not be required to work in a gallery which is less than 5 and 1/2 feet. Only male labourers should be sent to the coalmines. The Government of India had taken certain steps practically from 1929 with a view to close the employment of women underground and, as the House will remember, they had laid down a proportion a
dwindling proportion so that according to that programme women would have ceased to work in coal mines in 1937.  

Pregnant women used to work underground in mines until the ninth month and again a fortnight after childbirth. There has been certain number of accidents to women working underground. Under Mines Maternity Benefit Act, employment for a period of four weeks following her confinement was prohibited. Further, a woman was entitled to leave of absence for a period of one month before she expects to deliver a child. That the Bill further to amend the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941. When the Act of 1941 was passed it was intended to cover cases of maternity benefit for women working on surface. Coming to the question of maternity benefits to be paid to a woman working underground, the Select Committee has made the following changes: Originally the Bill had laid down two conditions which a woman working underground was required to satisfy before she became entitled to maternity benefit. Those conditions were, firstly, a minimum period of work extending to six months in a mine before confinement, and the second condition was minimum of 90 days work underground during such period of six month. The Select Committee has removed the first condition, namely, the requisite period of six months of service in a mine, so that under the amended Bill all that a woman need do is the
period of six months prior to delivery and she becomes entitled to maternity benefit.  

The Select Committee has also made certain amendments with regard to the period of benefit. In the original Bill, the period of benefit was ten weeks before confinement and four weeks after confinement. The Select Committee has changed the period of benefit after confinement from four weeks to six weeks. Similarly changes have been made in the amount of benefit. Originally the amount of benefit was eight annas per day. The Select Committee changed it to six rupees a week, which are a little less than four annas a day. Then the whole of the period of benefit is now declared to be a period of authorized leave, of that during this period an employer is not entitled to dismiss a woman who comes under the present Bill.  

Another important provision made by the Select Committee is to require that the medical examination of a woman entitled to benefit shall be by a woman doctor if the woman demands it, a provision that did not exist in the original Bill. I might also draw the attention of the House to the fact that during this period of thirty six weeks of prohibition on work underground, a woman is free to work otherwise than on work underground during a period of thirty two weeks and supplement her earnings, which was not provided in the original Bill. The only period
during which she will not be free to work is four weeks after delivery. So that under the Amendment Bill, a woman is not only entitled to get the maternity benefit of a woman working on the surface from eight to twelve annas. That is to say, she has also got an increase of fifty per cent over the previous benefit, admissible to her under the original Act.\textsuperscript{57}

These are some of the important changes, which the Select Committee has made. All the same Government do not propose to raise any difficulty with regard to the amendments and having regard to the peculiar circumstance of the case they are quite prepared to accept the Bill as amended by the Select Committee. That the Bill further to amend the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941, as reported by the Select Committee, be taken into consideration.

**Health Insurance for industrial Workers**

It was suggested that a Labour Welfare Committee\textsuperscript{58} should be set up to deal with functions of the actual problems arising in the various industries, and to bring into such committee representatives of various important industries. The labour Conference and its Standing Labour Committee should confine themselves to terms and conditions of employment, labour legislations social security, etc., looked at on broad lines and from an All-India standpoint. It was agreed that a sub-committee should be appointed to examine these proposals.\textsuperscript{59}
At the All India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference held at Nagapur on 20th July, 1940, Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that there could not be any progress without participation of women. He spoke, “I am a ‘great believer in women”’. He spoke, “I am a great believer in women’s organization. I know what they can do to improve the condition of the society if they are convinced. In the eradication of social evils they have rendered great services. He underlined that women should learn to be lean and keep themselves away from all vies. They should education their children and instill high ambition in them. The children’s mind should be inculcated with the ideas that they are destined to be great. The sense of inferiority complex should be eliminated from their mind and heart. Ambedkár addressed the Dalits at a meeting at the Damodar Thakersey Hall, Bombay in 1936. The meeting was largely attended by men and women belonging to the Devadasi, Patraje, Bhute, Aradhi and Jagiti inaugurated at veola. Babasaheb made an appeal, especially to the women.”60

“Whether you change your religion along with us or not, it does not matter much to me. But I insist that if you want to be with the rest of us, you must give up you disgraceful life. You must marry and settle down to a normal domestic life as women of other classes do. Don’t continue to live under conditions, which inevitably drag you into
prostitution. The Mine Creches Rules, 1946 was passed keeping in view the young children of women workers. The ordinance empowered the central Government to make rules requiring the mine owners to establish and maintain crèches for the children in this establishment where women were ordinarily employed. Specific arrangements were made for the care of infants and children of women miners working inside the mines. Only few mines crèches with female attendants had been provided.⁶¹

The Coalmines Pitheads Bath Rules, 1946, were finalized during the period when Dr. Ambedkar held charge of the Labour Department. The Indian Mine Act empowered the Central Government to make rule requiring the mine owners to provide, adequate sanitation facilities with separate bathing places for men and women workers. Stressing on the need and importance of the measure Dr. Ambedkar said that it was bound to improve the self-respect of the worker and he/she should return home as a clean person, if possible with clean clothes.⁶²

The Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1945 increased the benefit period of the underground women workers to 16 weeks—ten weeks before confinement and six weeks after confinement. The period of authorized absence was made still longer, that is 36 weeks—26 weeks total and ten weeks partial, that is, only four hours works, where crèche
was not provided and more than four hours, but not more than four hours at a stretch, where crèche was available. The quantum of payment was also increased substantially from 50 paise daily to Rs. 6.00 a week to underground women workers and from 50 paise to 75 paise to women employed on the surface. The intention of the measure appears to be to place restrictions on the employment of women in underground mines. Since the removal of ban in August, 1943, for checking declining coal output, the Government was under fire, as the ban could not be reimposed without British Government concordance, this recourse was taken to pacify the public opinion. In the meantime, as admitted by Lord Wavell in one of the communications, Dr. Ambedkar kept on pressing him to obtain her majesty Government’s consent to re-impose the ban. The ban was re-imposed in February 1946. Being Labour Minister Babasaheb passed the rule for Government accommodation for those women who were earning more than Rs. 600/- p.m.63

After independence in 1947, Babasaheb became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar attributed the low status of women in India to the gender discriminatory principles laid down by Manu and in order to improve this he suggested a number of provisions in the constitution. The idea was not to deprive the women of
their rightful due in the society. Articles 14, 15, 6, 39(a), 39(d), 39(e), 41, 42 and 44 were basically directed at improving the social status of Indian women as can be placed below\(^64\):

**Article 14:** Equality before Law to all citizens.
**Article 15:** The State shall not discriminate any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth.
**Article 16:** Equality to get employment/appointment to any office under the State.
**Article 39(a):** Equal rights to have an adequate means of livelihood.
**Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work.
**Article 39(e):** Protection of health and strength of workers.
**Article 41:** The State shall guarantee with its economic limits to all the citizens the right to work, to education and public assistance in certain areas.
**Article 42:** The State makes provision for just and human conditions of work and maternity relief,
**Article 43:** Provision of uniformity in civil code to all the citizens.

In addition to the above rights, Babasaheb proposed the Hindu Code Bill in order to codify Hindu Law, which lay scattered in Smritis in regard to the following aspects:

1. The right of property of a deceased Hindu, who has died intestate without making a will, both male and female.
2. The order of succession among the different heirs to the property of a deceased dying intestate,
3. The law of maintenance,
5. Divorce.
6. Adoption.
7. Minority and guardianship.

**Hindu Code Bill**

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 to property and adoption, which were denied, to them by Manu. It put men and women on an equal footing in all legal matters, he insisted on self-reliance of women by postulating their economic independence Dr. Ambedkar said that it is our duty to repair those parts of Hindu system which have became dilapidated. Hindu Code Bill did face stiff opposition both in the Constituent Assembly and the country. The critics felt that the Hindu Code Bill would shatter the magnificent structure of Hindu culture and stultify the dynamic and catholic way of life that had wonderfully adapted itself to changes for centuries. Pandit Malviya and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee were the promised critics and N.V. Gadgil, Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru supported the Bill. His success in overcoming the stiff resistance to the Bill was the first victory for women’s struggle for equality gained in the long course of Indian history. Through the Hindu Code Bill, Ambedkar became the pioneer of
women’s movement in India. Today, the position of women in the Indian society is much better as compared to what it was in earlier times. One can see women making their presence felt in almost all the important areas of specialization. One can find women holding high positions both in the Government and private sectors. Credit for all this goes to a considerable extent to the efforts made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in generating a new spirit among millions of women in the Indian subcontinent.65
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