



# Reconstructing Womanhood in Ambedkar's Vision: Gender Equality within Caste and Modern India

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## Abstract:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's idea of social justice wasn't just getting rid of caste; it also included rebuilding womanhood in a society that was highly patriarchal and based on caste. Ambedkar saw that caste and gender injustice were linked, and that women were put down twice as much as men. His criticism of Brahmanical sexism, especially as it was written down in old books like the Manusmriti, showed how controlling women's sexuality and freedom was a key part of keeping the caste system in place. Ambedkar paved the way for gender equality by fighting for women's right to education and equal rights in marriage, property, and job. He not only went against religious norms, but he also put women at the center of India's democratic and constitutional ideas today. Modern feminist research shows that Ambedkar's ideas still motivate people to fight for gender equality, especially Dalit women who are still pushed to the edges of society because of their caste and sexism. This essay makes the case that Ambedkar's reimagining of womanhood is a key model for rethinking gender equality in modern India. It connects the historical fight against caste with the current feminist movement for women's freedom and honour.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, womanhood, caste, gender equality, patriarchy, Manusmriti, Dalit feminism, social justice, modern India, women's autonomy.

## Introduction:

In India, the question of what it means to be a woman is tied to the ways that caste and sexism have shaped women's lives, identities, and social roles throughout history. As a lawyer, social reformer, and the main person who wrote the Indian Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar saw that keeping women down was a key part of keeping the caste system in place. His criticism of Brahmanical patriarchy, especially when he burned the Manusmriti in 1927, showed a strong rejection of the religion and social norms that supported women's subordination. „The rules of Manu are not only a code of caste but also a code of gender slavery” (p. 261), Ambedkar wrote in his 2014 book *Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar believed that breaking down caste was an important part of rebuilding womanhood based on the ideas of equality, respect, and independence. Ambedkar believed that educating women, giving them economic freedom, and giving them equal rights in marriage and property were all important for building a democracy society. “Let every girl who marries stand up to her husband, claim to be his equal, and refuse to be his slave” (Keer, 1990, p. 349), he said in a speech to the All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference in 1942. This statement showed Ambedkar's view that empowering women was not an add-on, but an essential part of the bigger fight for social justice. Through political activism and changes to the law like the Hindu Code Bill, he paved the way for a new definition of female equality in modern India.

Feminist experts today say that Ambedkar's reinterpretation of womanhood is still very important, especially when it comes to Dalit feminism. Sharmila Rege (2013) says that Ambedkar “put women at the center of maintaining caste and therefore put their freedom at the center of any political struggle for freedom” (p. 55). By putting women in the middle of caste and gender, Ambedkar created a framework that still challenges both traditional beliefs and current systems of inequality. His vision goes beyond time and urges India today to rethink gender justice not as a separate problem but as one that is deeply connected to democracy, caste, and class.

## Ambedkar's Understanding of Caste and Patriarchy:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's criticism of caste was linked to his criticism of patriarchy, since he saw women's submission as a key part of maintaining caste. For Ambedkar, the caste system wasn't just a way to divide people into groups; it was also a way to control women's sexuality and freedom so that endogamy could continue. “The superimposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste” (Ambedkar, 1979, p. 11) in his 1916 article *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development* (1916). He also said that endogamy had to be enforced by strictly limiting women's freedom, especially when it came to marriage and choice. This made patriarchal control an official part of society in order to keep caste borders. Ambedkar's criticism of Brahmanical patriarchy showed how the authority of scripture, especially works like the Manusmriti, made it official for women to be ruled over. He made it clear that women were mistreated not just occasionally, but all the time. He wrote, “The codes of Manu are not only a code of caste but also a code of gender slavery” (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 261). Ambedkar found sexism to be both a cultural and structural part of caste society by drawing attention to this intersection. Feminist experts like

Sharmila Rege (2013) agree with this view. They say that Ambedkar “put the question of women at the very heart of caste” (p. 55), which means that freeing women must be a part of any fight against social hierarchy. So, Ambedkar had a very extreme view of caste because he believed that to get rid of caste, patriarchy had to be taken down. Ambedkar paved the way for a new way of thinking about womanhood in modern India, not as a passive category set by custom but as an active force for equality, dignity, and freedom. She did this by putting women’s autonomy at the center of social justice.

### **Ambedkar’s Vision of Womanhood:**

Ambedkar’s idea of a woman was based on equality, autonomy, and respect. She didn’t agree with the Brahmanical view that women should be subservient. He always said that freeing women was an important part of any social justice movement. He said, “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved” (Ambedkar, 1992, p. 132). This quote shows how strongly he believed that empowering women was not a side problem but a basic requirement for social change. Ambedkar said that women should be educated and able to support themselves financially so that they could be more independent. “Let every girl who marries stand up to her husband, claim to be his equal and refuse to be his slave” (Keer, 1990, p. 349) was what he said in his speech to the All-India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference in 1942. By saying that men and women should have equal rights in marriage, Ambedkar was challenging patriarchal ideas that said women should only obey and rely on men. His vision included changing the law. For example, he worked on the Hindu Code Bill, which tried to give women equal rights in property, divorce, and inheritance. These were considered revolutionary steps at the time (Jatava, 2001, p. 87). For Ambedkar, reconstructing womanhood also meant freeing women from the oppressions of caste and sexism, which worked hand in hand. Sharmila Rege (2013) says that Ambedkar “put the question of women’s emancipation at the very center of the struggle for democracy” (p. 57), because he knew that democracy could not exist without equal rights for men and women. As a result, Ambedkar saw women not as a passive cultural ideal but as a force for justice who could change Indian society into one based on freedom, equality, and brotherhood.

### **Ambedkar’s Reform Initiatives for Women:**

Ambedkar worked to improve things for women because he believed that social democracy could not happen without fair treatment of women. Through his activism and political work, he tried to break down the structural inequality that kept women down in caste society. As a politician and social reformer, Ambedkar put women’s rights at the top of his political agenda. He pushed for equal rights in marriage, schooling, and property rights. “I believe that women must be freed from the shackles of the Hindu code, they must be given the right to property,” he said (Ambedkar, 1989, p. 100). This sentence shows how strongly he believed that women’s freedom depended on their ability to support themselves financially. The Hindu Code Bill, which was introduced in the late 1940s and tried to completely change Hindu personal rules, was Ambedkar’s most important legislative work. The Bill wanted to give women the same rights as men when it came to inheritance, property, marriage, and divorce. These changes went against

the traditional male-centered beliefs of Hindu culture. In Parliament, Ambedkar defended the Bill by saying, “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved” (Ambedkar, 1992, p. 132), which was another example of his goal of equal rights for men and women as a measure of social progress. After he quit in 1951, only part of the Bill was put into effect, but it set the stage for later law changes that helped women in independent India.

Beyond passing laws, Ambedkar was also very interested in getting people to work together to change things. He told women’s groups, like the All-India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference in 1942, that they should demand equality in marriage and refuse to be subservient. He told them to “stand up to [their] husband, claim to be his equal and refuse to be his slave” (Keer, 1990, p. 349). Ambedkar saw change not as a kind thing to do, but as something that had to be done in order to make India fair and democratic. He did this by connecting women’s freedom with the end of caste.

### **Feminist Responses to Ambedkar:**

Feminist scholars have always seen Ambedkar as a revolutionary thinker whose social and political theory was based on empowering women. His view that caste and patriarchy are inextricably linked has had a big impact on Dalit feminist thinking. According to Sharmila Rege (2013), Ambedkar’s belief that controlling women’s sexuality was key to maintaining caste has made him an important source for Indian feminism (p. 61). This point of view changed the way people talk about women’s rights in India by showing how gender inequality is strengthened by caste systems instead of existing on its own. Feminist replies also show how far-reaching Ambedkar’s ideas were when he pushed for changes in the law and society that gave women more power. According to Gail Omvedt (1994), Ambedkar’s reformist plans, especially the Hindu Code Bill, “were nothing short of revolutionary, seeking to change centuries of institutionalized patriarchy” (p. 112). His demands for women’s right to education, property rights, and equal marriage rights went against both Brahmanical sexism and the lack of concern for gender justice in colonial India. Even though he fought against these changes at the time, they are now seen as important steps toward the current feminist battles in India. Dalit feminists have also said that Ambedkar’s legacy builds a framework that connects battles based on gender, caste, and class. According to Uma Chakravarti (2003), Ambedkar understood that caste could not exist without managing women, so she believed that freeing women was essential to getting rid of caste (p. 26). With this honour, Ambedkar is seen not only as a political leader, but also as a female thinker whose ideas are in line with intersectional approaches to oppression. Feminist responses to Ambedkar show how his ideas about womanhood changed the way we think about agency, autonomy, and justice in current debates about gender equality. Feminist research and action are still influenced by Ambedkar’s ideas, especially among Dalit women, who see in them both a critique of patriarchy and a way to get freedom.

## Relevance in Modern India:

In modern India, where gender inequality and caste oppression still happen, Ambedkar's ideas about rebuilding women are very important. Even though the law says that everyone is equal, women, especially Dalit women and women who are already on the outside, still face violence, exclusion, and discrimination. "Caste is not merely a division of labour; it is also a division of labourers" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 23) is still true today, as women's bodies and work are still controlled by caste in both rural and urban areas. His insistence on breaking down Brahmanical patriarchy serves as a model for modern feminist and Dalit groups that are fighting for justice for everyone. Caste-based violence against women still happens, which shows how important Ambedkar's warning that "the progress of a community must be measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved" (Ambedkar, 1992, p. 132) is today. Feminist experts say that Ambedkar thought about intersectional ways of dealing with oppression a long time before the term became popular in feminist conversations around the world. Sharmila Rege (2013) says that Ambedkar "put women's emancipation at the very center of the struggle for social democracy" (p. 57). This is a concept that is still important in today's campaigns to stop sexual violence, protect property rights, and give women from disadvantaged groups access to education.

Also, Ambedkar's reformist projects, especially the Hindu Code Bill, which he never finished, continue to spark discussions about personal laws, tolerance, and gender justice. Author Gail Omvedt wrote in 2004 that Ambedkar's work to democratize gender relations "remains the most radical attempt in Indian history" (p. 72). In modern India, where gender inequality and caste-based violence are on the rise, his vision gives women a moral guide and a political road map for rebuilding womanhood in a democratic and equal way.

## Critical Balance:

Some people praise Ambedkar's ideas about remaking womanhood because they are seen as a radical challenge to caste and patriarchy. However, other experts warn against taking his ideas too literally and idealizing them. In a historic break from Brahmanical norms, Ambedkar pushed for women's education, property rights, and involvement in public life. However, Sharmila Rege (2013) says that Ambedkar's framework was limited by the social and political prospects of his time, even though it was very different. (page 64). The problems with the Hindu Code Bill, which he pushed for but was watered down because of opposition from politicians, show that even a progressive agenda had to deal with structural problems. Feminist scholars also say that even though Ambedkar saw caste and gender as being connected, his works didn't always talk about how women's experiences were different depending on their class, religion, and region. As Uma Chakravarti (2003) says, "Ambedkar spoke powerfully about the intersection of patriarchy and caste, but the specifics of how women deal with these structures in their daily lives needed more feminist elaboration" (p. 30). This acknowledgement doesn't take away from Ambedkar's important work; instead, it places it in a larger conversation that feminism is still growing. Dalit feminists, on the other hand, say that criticisms of Ambedkar should not overshadow the fact that he did so much to make the anti-caste fight about women's freedom. It is true that Gail Omvedt (1994) says, "No other national

leader of his time placed women's liberation so centrally within a project of social democracy" (p. 115). To get a critical balance, we need to recognize both how Ambedkar's vision can change things and how it needs to be reinterpreted in light of modern feminist and social justice battles.

## Conclusion:

Ambedkar's ideas about how to rebuild women are one of the most radical changes in Indian social and political thought today. By showing how caste and patriarchy were linked, he made clear the ways that women's freedom was traditionally denied. His belief that caste is just another word for controlling women is still a strong reminder of how gender inequality keeps hierarchies in place. Ambedkar fought for women's right to education, property rights, and changes to the law like the Hindu Code Bill. These actions showed that he wanted to change the way people thought about women so that they weren't seen as inactive or subordinate, but as active, independent, and important to social democracy. Sharmila Rege points out that Ambedkar's feminist legacy is not stuck in the past; it is still influencing Dalit feminist thought. His definition of "Brahmanical patriarchy" as a system that controls women's sexuality to maintain caste gives this idea power. Today's fights against sexual abuse based on caste, economic exclusion, and unfair laws show that Ambedkar's work is still important, but it's not finished. Uma Chakravarti tells us that the job of feminists is to apply Ambedkar's ideas to the many ways that women live their lives in modern India. In Ambedkar's view, remaking womanhood is not just a historical success; it is also a political process that is still going on. It wants to keep tearing down structures of caste and patriarchy and stressing how important women are to gaining social democracy. For modern India, Ambedkar's warning that the progress of any society must be judged by the progress of women serves as both a critical standard and an ethical obligation. His vision is still a way to think about gender equality, because it sees the end of rank and the freedom of women as two goals that go hand in hand.

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