Research Article

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Brahmanical Patriarchy and Voices from Below: Ambedkar's Characterization of Women's Emancipation

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Abstract: Western feminism created a revolution on the international stage urging the world to look at things through the perspective of women who were historically suppressed because of their gender, yet in many instances, it failed to address the issue of women in the Indian subcontinent because of the existence of social hierarchies that are alien concepts to the western world. As a result, the impact of western feminist thinkers was limited to only the elites in the Indian subcontinent. The idea of social hierarchy is infamously unique to the South Asian context and hence, in the view of the authors, this evil has to be fought through homegrown approaches which have to address these double disadvantages that women suffer in this part of the world. While many have tried to characterize Ambedkar's political and social philosophy into one of the ideological labels, his philosophy was essentially 'a persistent attempt to think things through'. It becomes important here to understand what made Ambedkar different from others; what was his social condition and his status in a hierarchal Hindu Society. As a matter of his epistemology, his research and contribution did not merely stem from any particular compartmentalized consideration of politics or society, rather it encompassed the contemporary socio-political reality taking into consideration other intersectionalities like gender and caste. The paper argues for a system of convergence of casteism and sexism rather than an isolated approach to counter the gender inequalities. This convergence is important to be considered because most of the Indian feminist thinkers of our times are qualifying patriarchy with the term 'Brahmanical'.

Keywords: Gender; Caste; Emancipation; Women Rights; Ambedkar; Feminism; India.

1 Introduction

As an avid thinker, reformer and social engineer, Dr Ambedkar was one of the strongest symbols of revolt against the oppressive features of Hindu society¹. While many have tried to characterize Ambedkar's political and social philosophy into one of the ideological labels, his philosophy was essentially 'a persistent attempt to think things through'². It becomes important here to understand what made Ambedkar different from others was his social condition and his status in a hierarchal Hindu Society. As a matter of his epistemology, his research and contribution did not merely stem from any particular compartmentalized consideration of politics or society, rather it encompassed the contemporary socio-political reality taking into consideration other intersectionalities like gender and caste. Unlike his other counterparts, Ambedkar was neither merely a dogmatic scholar nor merely a normative thinker. Rather, he challenged

1 See generally, Matthew Thomas, *Ambedkar: Reform or Revolution*, (New Delhi; Segment Books, 1991); Mahesh Ambedkar, *The Architect of Modern India: Dr Ambedkar*, (New Delhi; Diamond Books, 2012).

2 A. M. Rajsekhariah and Hemlata Jayaraj, "Political Philosophy of Dr Ambedkar," (Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1968), p. 358.

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the social order using a pragmatic and relativist approach and argued that the inhuman treatment of women in Indian society cannot be seen in isolation and hence has to be viewed from within the social hierarchy.

This paper attempts to discuss the discourse of Ambedkar's ideas focusing on the interaction between caste and gender which often put women in a situation of double disadvantage. In the discussion, the authors argue that while western feminism did bring a revolution on the international stage to look at things through the perspective of women who were historically suppressed because of their gender, yet in many instances, it failed to address the issue of women in the Indian subcontinent because of the existence of social hierarchies that are an alien concept to the western world. As a result, the impact of western feminist thinkers was limited to only the elites in the Indian subcontinent. The idea of social hierarchy is infamously unique to the South Asian context and hence, in view of the authors, this evil has to be fought through homegrown approaches which have to address these double disadvantages that women suffer in this part of the world. In conclusion, the authors argue for a system of convergence of casteism and sexism rather than an isolated approach to counter the gender inequalities. This convergence is important to be considered because most of the Indian feminist thinkers of our times are qualifying patriarchy with the term 'Brahmanical'. This recent trend in understanding the oppression of women kind of summarizes the interaction between caste and gender in itself.

A Brahmanical social order in itself is based on a certain hierarchy attached to people based on their birth and gender. Hence it becomes important to trace the nature and basis of this subordination of women, especially in cases of women from a lower caste. In the discussion, the authors have reaffirmed the importance of Ambedkar's relevancy in the contemporary scenario. In this section, the authors argue that Ambedkar's ideas for women's emancipation are not merely helpful in making the current discourse more effective, but is something that the 21st-century feminist movements in this part of the world should turn to. The last portion of the paper deals with the conclusion based on the abovementioned discussions.

2 Limitations of Western Feminism and Need for a Home-grown Approach

Most scholars divide western feminism into four major waves. Highly successive, these waves not merely theorize differently on the idea of women's emancipation but also try to address the loopholes present in their preceding waves. The first wave of feminism emerged out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics with the goal to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage³. This wave essentially addressed the formal equality question, with a focus on equal pay for equal work and overall general treatment of women for equality of opportunity. However, there were many issues which went unaddressed during this wave. These issues were subsequently brought up by the Second Wave, which emerged during the rise of the New Left movement making it increasingly radical focusing mainly on the questions of sexuality and reproductive rights⁴.

The second wave is often characterized as a Marxist movement, as it brought in the class theory of Marx to criticize the major forces such as patriarchy which was re-strengthened by contemporary capitalism. However, this movement, being too radical in approach, was easily side-lined. The Third wave came into picture aiming at destabilizing older notions common to the first and second waves of feminism like "universal womanhood", body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity⁵. This wave out-lived most of its predecessors because of its omnipresence on nearly all the fronts. However, the third wave allegedly lacked a cohesive goal and was often seen as an extension of the second wave⁶. There still exists doubt as to whether this wave could be termed as a 'wave' or merely an extension of the second wave⁷. The Fourth Wave of feminism for many started with the use of social media in 2012. A number of feminist thinkers call it neo-imperialistic feminism where the women in power try to re-strengthen the patriarchal framework by use of market

³ Martha Rampton, *Four Waves of Feminism*, (Pacific University Press, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rowe Finkheiner and Kristin, *the F Word: Feminism in Jeopardy*, (Emeryville; Seal Press, 2004), p. 85.

⁷ Jennifer Baumgartner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, (New York; Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 77.

forces. For many, the fourth wave is inherently 'classist' and 'ableist', created by and limited to, giving the biggest voice to those who can afford and use technology⁸.

While the above discussion encompasses major accomplishments and limitations of the waves of western feminist understanding, various other scholars argue that such a wave construct of feminist philosophy is against the idea of feminism itself⁹. These scholars argue that the idea of a wave construct in itself ignores the important progress between the periods¹⁰. For example, 'wave construct' focused on white women's suffrage and continued to marginalize the issues of women of colour and lower-class women¹¹. However, as Nancy Harstock has remarked, '*at the bottom, feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women*'¹². It becomes important to consider feminism as not an all-pervading single universal thought of womanhood but also to include the various underlying nuances which every society offers in different ways. Hence, feminism should be seen not merely as a political theory aiming at woman empowerment but also as a treatise of women's experiences over centuries and across civilizations.

The inherent flaws in western feminism limit it when it comes to exploring the intersections which are not recognized internationally by communities. These flaws also extend to the idea of first world feminists dictating terms for the empowerment of women in third world countries like India¹³. For instance, caste is still not a vulnerable category under International Law. Although various third world jurists from this part of the world have tried to bring it into consideration on the international stage, yet the international community has failed to recognize it.

This ensures that most of the international forums, resulting from feminist movements across the globe, aiming to improve the standards of life of women globally by making laws for their empowerment, do not explore the caste question. The best example for this is the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The double discrimination that the women have to face in the name of gender as well as caste and the affirmative action required for their upliftment often goes unnoticed and is neglected when an international community makes a uniform law at these global platforms for the upliftment of women.

Hence, in light of the above discussion, it becomes important to develop conducive homegrown approaches towards women's empowerment. The roots of homegrown approaches often trace themselves to sociological and realist school of thought. The homegrown approaches essentially focus on problems native to a certain social order. For the proponents of this movement, every society has its unique system and a universalized system of supranational theory or law cannot be applied in every circumstance. This essentially furthers the idea that feminism is itself a collection of women experiences across civilizations and over centuries of oppression. It is not a political or legal theory in the most traditional sense as there is no one-size which fits all. At this point, Ambedkar becomes relevant when it comes to understanding women's emancipation in the Indian context. The difference between the previously discussed western feminism and a homegrown approach towards women's emancipation is that while one might lead to 'entitlement' but the other leads to true 'empowerment'. It is important to understand and appreciate that any policymaking at the international level, which is highly western-centric cannot be applied universally in every part of the world. Hence, it is important to understand and implement any particular policy in the context of local conditions, making contextualism more important than universalization of methods to achieve women empowerment.

⁸ Ragna Rok Jons, "Is the '4th Wave' of Feminism Digital," (Bluestockings Magazine, 2013).

⁹ Catherine Harnois, "Re-Presenting Feminisms: Past, Present and Future," (NWSA Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008), p. 73.

¹⁰ Shira Tarrant, *When Sex become Gender*, (New York; Routledge, 2006), p. 22.

¹¹ Catherine Harnois, "Re-Presenting Feminisms: Past, Present and Future," (NWSA Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008), p. 73.

¹² Nancy Harstock, "Feminist Theory and the Development of Revolutionary Strategy," Z. R. Eisenstein (Ed.), (New York; Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 58.

¹³ Karen Engle, "Feminism and It's (Dis)contents: Criminalizing Wartime Rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina," (The American Journal of International Law, Vol. 99, No. 4, 2005), pp. 778-816.

3 The convergence of Casteism and Sexism as a revolt against Brahmanical Patriarchy

The recent trends in gender studies in the Indian context have shifted the focus from the ‘status’ of women to the ‘nature’ and ‘basis of gender relations’¹⁴. Previously, most of the social reform movements for women’s emancipation in India focussed essentially on the aspects pertaining to property, marriage, conjugal rights etc. However, with recent trends, this has shifted to more nuanced questions of extent and form of subordination conditioned by the environment and society in which women have been put historically¹⁵. The approach and method now adopted by feminist scholars are to look into the interaction between patriarchy and social structure¹⁶. While social reforms pertaining to women empowerment are not new to the subcontinent, the approaches taken by the previous reformers and Ambedkar differ in the same context as described above. The reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Mahatma Gandhi did advocate for the emancipation of women but their approach did not explore the nuances of caste. These reformers never challenged the social hierarchy as one of the fundamental forces which reinforce the patriarchy through religion and customs.

The Indian Civilization has historically maintained its power dynamics by controlling three primary things- territory, the sexuality of women and the piousness of rituals. These three things can still be found in the right-wing narrative of Indian policymaking. As Lerner¹⁷ observes that even in early Mesopotamian society, total control of women’s sexuality by men of the dominant class was a crucial element. While women seemed to have greatly differing statuses, some holding high positions and enjoying economic independence, their sexuality was essentially controlled by men¹⁸. This intersectionality is well explored in the works of Ambedkar. Ambedkar was different from other reformers because he challenged the social structure as in his view it reinforced the subordination of lower castes as well as women.

As historical accounts of discrimination, general reading of *Manusmriti* or *Arthshastra* is good evidence to explore the control exerted by upper-caste males on the sexuality of women. Brahmanical patriarchy conveys similar ideas that are deep and complex. It describes how we live in societies that are shaped by gender, caste, and economic relationships, and in turn shape them through our decisions and actions¹⁹. In light of the emerging notions of neoliberal feminism²⁰, where feminist reformers take to social media to register their concerns as well as protests against patriarchy, it becomes more important to focus on those who do not have access to such means and technology. As a note of caution, the authors do not completely neglect the idea of neoliberal feminism, but to a great extent, this west-centric feminist philosophy becomes irrelevant in the context of marginalized women, especially in Indian society. As Sharmila Rege observes, “*the inseparability of caste and gender in Dr Ambedkar’s conceptualisation and his interpretations of history and the place and role of marriage in the social construction of graded inequality provides an important understanding of the issue of women’s emancipation in the Indian context.*”²¹ Hence it has to be understood that the issue of women’s empowerment is very complex and multidimensional. Mere provision of rights and creating awareness does not solve the problems of women. What is required is to see women’s issues as a part of the broader issue of development²².

While most of the international instruments claiming to empower women seek to address the issues of women coming from all the factions of society, this is where their limitation begins. The idea of intersectionality becomes important here. A universal model law made in the green rooms of these international platforms dictating terms for the empowerment of women cannot, however, adequately address the issues on a social order which is rooted in religious understanding. They can be good when it comes to rhetoric, but in practice, the exercise has to be undertaken differently

14 Uma Chakravarty, “*Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, No. 14, 1993), pp. 579-585.

15 Ibid.

16 See generally, Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1986).

17 Ibid.

18 Uma Chakravarty, “*Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, No. 14, 1993), pp. 579-585.

19 Vasuda Katju, “*Brahmanical Patriarchy: A Term That Opens Up In Changing, Painful But Ultimately Liberating Way*,” (Firstpost, 2018).

20 See generally, Catherine Rottenberg, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, (London; Oxford University Press, 2017); Linda Colley and Catherine White, *Neoliberal Feminism, The Neoliberal Rhetoric on Feminism by Australian Political Actors*, (Willy Journal, 2018).

21 Rahi Gaikwad, “*Need for Feminists to Reclaim Ambedkar Seen*,” (The Hindu, 2010).

22 K. Vijay Kumar and Vanaja Rani, “*Empowerment of Women; A Myth or Reality*,” (Journal of Social Changes, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2001), pp. 42-52.

in a much realist and pragmatic manner. In this regard, it is right to mention the words of Sharma²³ “that women should not be treated as a homogenous category, with regard to their development. The development programmes and policies, which aim at women's empowerment, should categorise women based on their age, caste, class, region (rural or urban), education etc.”²⁴ Hence, as discussed in the earlier section, Ambedkar's approach exploring this intersectionality between caste and gender becomes important.

The feminist movement in India up till recently has primarily been dominated by the women of upper caste. Right-wing orthodoxy and global consumer capitalism have fostered populist feminism where politics and media play an important role²⁵. The problems presented as ‘problems of Indian women’ have mostly been limited and have not extended their ambit to include the problems of marginalized women²⁶. Therefore, for many, the mainstream feminist movement in India has followed and drawn theories from western feminist movements which have made it irrelevant to the cause of marginalized women.

In the 1980s, with the emergence of ‘Dalit feminism’, more limitations of the mainstream feminist movement in India were exposed. This movement, often regarded by many scholars as the “feminism of difference”²⁷, created an altogether parallel theoretical interface quite successfully suggesting existing lacunae and loopholes in the mainstream feminist movement of India. As Gopal Guru observes in his article, “*Dalit women justify the case for talking differently based on external factors (non-Dalit forces homogenising the issue of Dalit women) and internal factors (the patriarchal domination within the Dalits)*”²⁸. Guru's twofold observation justifies the double disadvantage argument discussed earlier in the previous section in a more nuanced way. Further to support this, as Gabriele Dietrich notes in her essay²⁹, “Dalit women have been targets of upper-caste violence. At the same time, Dalit women have also functioned as the “property” of Dalit men”³⁰. Scholars like Rege³¹, take this approach to one step forward by going beyond Guru's focus on authenticity and Dalit women's voice and suggests—in the spirit of critiques by women of colour in the United States about the relationship between race and gender—that Dalit feminism carries the potential, more generally, to transform upper-caste feminists' understanding of gender and feminism³².

However, her approach doesn't go unchallenged. Chhaya Datar³³ critiques the position taken by Rege, argues that the focus on “difference” and identity ignores the centrality of economic exploitation and market fundamentalism in disenfranchising women³⁴. It can be said that coming from the Marxist school of thought, the ideas of Chhaya Datar have been highly influenced by the class theory and the economic exploitation narrative. However, here the position of Rege seems much more relevant as caste and gender is one such intersectionality where problems cannot be countered by merely focusing on economic empowerment. Even the women who are economically empowered, have their own set of problems which the Marxist narrative ignores by calling it the part of neoliberal feminism which is often wrongly seen by many as a perversion of the original feminist thought³⁵. Similarly, the politics of identity and difference is one such problem which is suppressed in the Marxist narratives. Rege's position which tries to reclaim Ambedkar's ideas at the beginning of the 21st century asserts that *the major problems in the present mainstream feminist narrative in India are that it has ignored a vital contribution by Ambedkar who highlighted the intrinsic relationship between gender, sexuality*

23 S. L. Sharma, “Empowerment without Antagonism, A Case for Reformulation of Women's Empowerment Approach,” (Sociological Bulletin the Journal of Indian Sociological Society, Vol. 49, No.1, 2000), pp. 19-39.

24 Ibid.

25 Roshan G. Shahani and Shoba V. Ghosh, “Indian Feminist Criticism, In Search Of New Paradigms,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.35, No. 43, 2000), pp. 3813-2816.

26 Ashwaq Masoodi, “Dalit Women Brewing Their Own Social Relations,” (Livement, 2018).

27 Gopal Guru, “Dalit Women Talk Differently,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 20, No. 41, 1995), pp. 2545-2550.

28 Ibid.

29 Gabriele Dietrich, “Caste, Class and Patriarchy,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 10, 1993), pp. 389-391.

30 Ibid.

31 Sharmila Rege, “Dalit Women Talk Differently a Critique of Differences and to was a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 33, No. 44, 1998), pp. 39-46.

32 See generally, Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste*, (New Delhi; Kali for Women, 2003).

33 Chhaya Datar, “Non-Brahmin Reading of Feminism in Maharashtra- Is It a More Emancipatory Force,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 34, No. 41, 1999), pp. 2964-2968.

34 See generally, Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste*, (New Delhi; Kali for Women, 2003).

35 Michael Ferguson, “Neoliberal Feminism as Political Ideology: Revitalizing the Study of Feminist Political Ideologies,” Journal of Political Ideologies, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2017), pp. 1- 15.

and caste³⁶. Ambedkar himself believed that the absence of intermarriage or endogamy is the one characteristic that can be called the essence of caste and hence he famously remarked that “endogamy is caste and caste is endogamy”³⁷.

Hence in light of the above discussion, it is pretty much evident that the tools through which Brahmanical social order exerts its control over the women are manifold. These tools include regulating individual choices, subordinate role and status to men, the institution of marriage, other sacramental rites and rituals, etc. Ambedkar’s contribution to women’s emancipation can be realised by understanding the context in which a Dalit forced the upper caste parliamentarians to consider and pass the Hindu Code Bill. Ambedkar, who wanted to have one civil code for the entire nation, couldn’t do it because of the appeasement policies of the contemporary parliamentarians³⁸. With protests against Brahmanical Patriarchy taking the mainstage lately, it becomes important to revisit Ambedkar and his philosophies.

Discrimination in itself is an outcome of religious and social practices. While addressing such practices, it becomes important to understand the dichotomy between entitlement and empowerment. While entitlement is merely formal and legal, empowerment comes through affirmative action to be taken by State agencies to restore equality. What must be understood further is that while dealing with the issue of women’s empowerment it is important not to derogate from the principles of equality and chase secularism simultaneously. While attaining one, the other might be affected, and rightly it has to be. None of the ‘essential practices of the religion’ should be allowed in the name of secularism if they tend to violate the very basic principle of equality enshrined in the constitutional framework of this country. The recent debate on Sabrimala issue³⁹ is a classic example of secularism and equality being placed at exact contradictory positions.

In modern times, it is not wrong to say that men in power tend to maintain their power through the principles of secularism by moulding it into their favour. As Ambedkar said, “*it is by placating the sentiments of smaller communities and smaller people who are afraid that the majority may do wrong, that the British Parliament works. Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody. But whatever that maybe, if our people want to carry on, they must not forget that there are majorities and there are minorities, and they simply cannot ignore the minorities by saying, ‘Oh, no. To recognise you is to harm democracy.’ I should say that the greatest harm will come by injuring the minorities.*”⁴⁰

Hence, Ambedkar’s idea remains relevant in not merely the context of women but in the case of every political minority. The power structure, which essentially dwells in majoritarianism expressed as a will of popular conscience can be located in populist politics, but for an egalitarian democratic society, the essence of good governance should not limit it only to the concerns of ones who have the voice and the means to express it. Democracy belongs to those as well who have been marginalized historically and cannot express their conscience.

4 Conclusion: Ambedkar still relevant?

Based on the discussion in the above sections the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the notions of western feminism based primarily on equitable sharing of economic resources and access to opportunity cannot be a benchmark for the empowerment of marginalised women in the Indian context. In the authors’ view, the approach of western feminism, which is echoed in the corridors of mainstream policymaking is a superficial attempt at providing a solution for the empowerment of women in the Indian Context, which is essentially based on an oversimplification of the problems faced by Indian women.

Second, it is important to appreciate and accept the fact that caste system rooted in Indian social order has become an inherent feature of Indian society and hence a home-grown approach striking at the same is required to bridge the disparity between men and women. This homegrown approach has to take into consideration the double disadvantage that marginalised women suffer as discussed in the above sections, and approach the problem is a much more nuanced

36 Sharmila Rege, “Dalit Women Talk Differently a Critique of Differences and to was a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position,” (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 33, No. 44, 1998), pp. 39-46.

37 B. R. Ambedkar, “Castes in India: The Mechanism, Genesis and Development,” (Indian Antiquary, Vol. XLT, No. III, 1917), pp. 1111- 1150.

38 Vaibhav Purandare, “How Ambedkar and Other Pushed for a Uniform Cord before Partition,” (Times of India, 2017).

39 Indian Young Lawyers Association and Ors vs the State of Kerala and Ors, (Civil, No. 373, 2006).

40 Dr B. R. Ambedkar, *Parliamentary Hanzad*, (Rajya Sabha, 9.2, 1953).

way. The response of the government to the problems of women should not merely be limited to entitlements but should also include pragmatic empowerment.

Third, the approaches taken by various mainstream feminist thinkers have limited the diffusion of feminist ideas only to a certain elite population of India as most of the marginalized women have not been able to relate to their demands or their ideas of liberation. The mainstream feminism is challenged by the ones like Rege⁴¹, Guru⁴², Datar⁴³, Rao⁴⁴ etc, who bring in and explore the politics of difference and even go beyond it. They bring in the question of identity which has been missing in the past few decades of the mainstream feminist movement in India.

Fourth, the writings and the narrative of the feminism of difference in India which have been inspired hugely from the methodology of Ambedkar, have been quite successful in organising women coming from marginalised sections. This includes the creation of forums like National Federation for Dalit Women (NFDW)⁴⁵, contribution to political literature in the form of Dalit Feminism⁴⁶, etc. Creation of such organised structures reduces perplexions and makes the voices of the downtrodden much clearer.

Lastly, the contemporary feminist discourse has to go beyond the existing realms of institutions created by the patriarchal society and rather dwell into the question of identity, sexuality and the interactions of intersectionality. For a long time, the mainstream feminist movement has exclusively focused on the problems of a certain group of women and has presented them as the problem of all Indian women.

The relevancy of Ambedkar in the current political discourse becomes even more important. In the light of the growing right-wing Hindutva agenda and simultaneous emergence of opposition to nationalism by the left-oriented scholars, Ambedkar's ideas can be a prudent middle path to walk upon. Ambedkar who was against any form of discrimination unequivocally challenged not merely the flaws in Hindu society but also in the Muslim social order. For Ambedkar, religion and minority appeasement were secondary and the basic notion on which he framed the constitution were the ideas of liberty and equality. In a scenario where mainstream feminist narrative overlooks the origins of patriarchal considerations rooted in minority groups, where utterly unacceptable statements like 'Burqa is my right, Ghonghat patriarchy⁴⁷', become a battle-cry for feminist marches, Ambedkar's absence is felt by those scholars who remain intellectually honest to their research. Feminist scholars who openly claim at media forums that Muslim law is too modern to be brought under uniform civil code⁴⁸, often forget the fact that Ambedkar was not merely against the Hindu social order but also the hierarchies in other religious minorities. Before converting to Buddhism, he studied every religion and their philosophy in a much deeper sense, and after rejecting Islam and Christianity on the account of their foreignness and Sikhism on account of its elitism, he ultimately converted to Buddhism, calling it the most logical and scientific religion⁴⁹. This shows he was not merely critical of the inequalities persisting in the Hindu religion but also other religions as well. This makes it clear that while reforming society, Ambedkar did not merely target the majority group but also tried to break the hegemony created by minority groups within their social systems, by crusading against inequality wherever it existed.

In a time where people are mostly motivated by their ideological leanings which are represented in their academic contribution, Ambedkar-ism, which to a great extent is politically free from such ideologies, becomes more relevant than ever. The feminist discourse in India has not failed yet. Being constantly ranked top in crimes against women and often called as a rape capital, feminism and gender sensitisation is the response which we can have to such atrocities. However, the success or failure of such a discourse depends a lot on where this discourse ultimately turns to. Hence,

41 Sharmila Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently a Critique of Differences and to was a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 33, No. 44, 1998), pp. 39-46.

42 Gopal Guru, "Dalit Women Talk Differently," (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 20, No. 41, 1995), pp. 2545-2550.

43 Chhaya Datar, "Non-Brahmin Reading of Feminism in Maharashtra- Is It a More Emancipatory Force," (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 34, No. 41, 1999), pp. 2964-2968.

44 See generally, Anupama Rao, *Gender and Caste*, (New Delhi; Kali for Women, 2003).

45 United Nations, (OCHCR Document on National Federation for Dalit Women, WG 12, 2006).

46 See generally, Niharika, "the Dalit Feminism Standpoint: Revisiting a Debate on Feminism and Intersectionality," (Political and Economic Weekly, 2017).

47 See generally, Indian Society, "the debate over Burqa and Hijab where activists portray Burqa as a part of their personal preference and not as a tool for the endowment of patriarchy," (TheNewsMinit, 2016).

48 Nivedita Menon, "It isn't about Women," (The Hindu, 2016).

49 Adrija Roychowdhury, "Three reasons why Ambedkar embrace Buddhism," (Indian Express, 2017).

it becomes important to keep our subjectivities aside and look at the women question objectively by not looking at it in compartmentalized isolation in a mere formalist perspective, but by exploring the intersectional interactions and power dynamics beneath it.