

Rhetoric of Women's Agency in Postcolonial India: Temple Entry Ban and 'Love Jihad' - An Ambedkarian Reading

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Introduction/Ambedkar and Questions of Women's Rights

This paper investigates women's rights and agency through B. R. Ambedkar's vision of gender reform, as articulated in his critical writings on caste, gender, and social stratification. Focusing on two contemporary controversies—the Sabarimala temple-entry dispute and the discourse of "Love Jihad"—the study explores how the intersections of caste, gender and religious hierarchies continue to shape women's lives in postcolonial India. Drawing on Ambedkar's temple-entry movements, particularly the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha, the paper argues that the exclusion of menstruating women from temples is rooted in the categorical concepts of 'purity-impurity' debate that sustain both caste-based untouchability and gender-related exclusions. It further analyses the ideology of "Love Jihad" as a mechanism for regulating women's autonomy and preserving caste and community boundaries, and to nullify and stigmatise any inter-religious marriage. Engaging with Ambedkar's *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman* (1951, Vol. 17, Part 2), the study investigates how Brahminical patriarchal institutions have historically curtailed women's agency and

continue to influence contemporary social and religious practices. Therefore, this work would re-engage with the question of women's rights and agency, investigating whether such instances of Temple Entry ban or the viciously constructed idea of "Love Jihad" are deepening traditional Hindu patriarchal values of gender subservience in contemporary India.

Sharmila Rege, in her book *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahminical Patriarchy* (2013), has argued that the current feminist debate and curricula are almost entirely disengaged from Ambedkar's writings and politics, though Gandhi, Nehru, and Lohia enjoyed a longstanding place in the same discourse. She, in her opinion, demands a feminist turn to Ambedkar, which will reclaim and renovate his theoretical articulations to understand how 'Brahminical patriarchy fashions sameness, intersection, discreetness, and interdependent differences along a gradation of ascending reverence and descending contempt' (Rege 2013, 20). Though B.R Ambedkar has generally been categorized as a champion of Dalit activism and reformer who fought for graded caste inequality in the social and political domains, his contribution to the cause of women's rights was an inclusive approach for human rights and social justice. His tireless advocacy for the empowerment of women on social and political planes has been much overlooked. He realized that the existing Brahminical social order and poisonous orthodox patriarchal forces were responsible for the subjugation of Hindu womenfolk; therefore, his reformative measures justified the necessity of Hindu religious reform, suggesting new women-friendly civic laws that came in the form of the 'Hindu Code Bill'. The 1973 *Dalit Panthers Manifesto* has broadened the category of 'Dalit' to incorporate gender as the deprived section of society, as they mentioned 'women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion' (Dalit Panthers Manifesto 1973, 8) would be treated as Dalit. So, any kind of marginalization in the name of caste, class, gender, and religion would be looked at as the perpetration of injustice and violation of rights against people's

democracy. Thus, Dalit Temple Entry movements and Women's Temple Entry to Sabarimala demonstrate the margins of exclusionary mechanisms where the intersection of caste, religion, gender, and law regulates the temple entry rights. In both cases, notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' ('impurity') manifest most strikingly in determining the right to enter into the religious places for Dalits as well as for women in India. Dalits and Women are marginalized and excluded to a large extent due to social, cultural, and religious conditioning in which various forms of hierarchies in society have been constituted and renegotiated in daily practices. Louis Dumont, in his classic book *Homo Hierarchicus* (1988), sparked debate on 'purity' and 'impurity', which are essential elements in maintaining a socio-cultural hierarchy in Hindu ideology and society. Likewise, the matter of Temple Entry historically became a site of contention rooted in the concept of 'impurity' or 'asuddhata'. This 'impurity/pollution' is "more deeply embedded in one's bodily substance and nature, and is what scholars have commonly considered to be a more 'ritual form of purity' contrasted with ritual-spiritual-bodily purity (suddhata)" (Lamb 2005, 216). Incidentally, lower caste or Dalits are considered as 'asuddha' or 'impure' than higher castes, and women in menstruating condition pertain to 'ashaucha' (Sridhar 2018, 32) have a more polluting existence than men. Ancient Indian dharmashastras, religious texts, and customs portrayed menstruation or 'rajasraava' as a physio-psychological process and equated it with 'ashaucha' or impurity, which becomes one of the reasons for the exclusion of women from all social and religious activities. This socio-religious exclusion of Dalits and Women folk in the name of retaining 'purity' to secure the Brahminical patriarchal order yields to larger social inequalities in the system. Temple Entry issue for Dalits and women kept this argument historically alive for sustaining this Brahminical patriarchy in the new socio-cultural setting. Thus, both for Dalits and women, such socio-cultural imposition of exclusionary disabilities or untouchability in the case of Temple Entry has been based on the strategic formation of 'purity and pollution' discourse, which is against the values of Constitutional morality and devaluation of the dignity of both.

Again, another form of violation against women's rights has been detected in the strategic conceptual construct of 'Love jihad' or 'Romeo Jihad', an alleged campaign launched by the right-wing Hindu fundamentalists. This concocted narrative, entrenched with patriarchal values, created hysteria surrounding women's victimhood for exercising greater control over their agency and their right to choose. Such exploitation of Hindu women's rights had long been discussed in Ambedkar's revolutionary reformist work on the Hindu Code Bill of 1949, which was debated in the Constituent Assembly, where he attempted to codify Hindu Personal Laws, seen as a remedy for all forms of disparities and inequalities sanctioned by Hindu Scriptures. Therefore, this paper, in the first section, will address the issue of prevalent socio-cultural 'untouchability', the question of gender rights, and Ambedkar's take on them. The second segment would contain the agenda for social reform and Ambedkar's understanding of the convergence between caste and gender categories, through a conjoined reading of the Temple Entry satyagraha and the contemporary, controversial issue of the Sabarimala Temple Entry ban on menstruating women. In the next section, this paper will try to unravel Ambedkar's argument on the dangers of endogamous marriages by questioning the present narratives of 'Love Jihad', an alleged campaign of the right-wing Hindu fundamentalists who deny the agency of women at the forefront. Subsequently, this paper will explore Ambedkar's revolutionary views on gender reform, which prioritize constitutional measures over communitarian laws, through an analytical reading of his brilliant writing, "Rise and Fall of Hindu Women: Who was Responsible for It?" (Ambedkar Vol. 17, part II, 2014, 109).

Ambedkar, Socio-cultural Untouchability and Gender Question

The question of Dalit Temple Entry movements and women's Temple Entry to Sabarimala threw up a complex intersection of caste, gender, religion, and law in Indian society. In both cases, socio-legal reform

envisioned by B.R. Ambedkar, with a sustained approach to Constitutional values against Brahminical patriarchy, is the locus of intervention where the question of rights was compromised. Again, inter-faith marriages in India are challenged by the notion of 'love-Jihad', a regulatory method of Brahminical patriarchy, which poses a threat to the idea of civil marriage defined by Ambedkar's ideals of social integration scheme. Contemporary instances of Sabarimala Temple Entry and cases of 'love-jihad' posed a potential threat to inter-religious marriages in India, which had roots in the exclusionary mechanisms of 'untouchability' and the strategic socio-cultural hierarchy strengthened by Brahminical patriarchy. Thus, recent temple entry bans and 'love-jihad' cases can be studied in light of Ambedkar's vision of Temple Entry movements in the 1930s, his scheme and support for 'Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages' (Dr. Ambedkar Foundation: F.No.34-1/2013/DAF 2020, 1), and 'Civil Marriages'. B. R. Ambedkar, who is well-known mostly for raising his voice for 'antyaja' (caste untouchables) or marginal sections of society, also talked about women and how they had been the victims of socio-cultural discriminations and exclusions in every realm of Indian Society. In his book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Ambedkar was concerned about eradicating the caste system or 'jati vyavastha', which has been plaguing Indian society for so long, and suggested a real remedy of social integration through inter-caste marriages:

I am convinced that the real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens — created by caste will not vanish (Ambedkar, 20.5, 216).

He was against the practice of endogamy, which clearly defines his support for inter-community marriages, which would reduce 'untouchability' in the name of caste, class, and religion, and would promote 'Constitutional Values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, etc., in the society' (Dr. Ambedkar Foundation: F.No.34-1/2013/DAF 2020,1).

Besides, in the year 1947 when Constituent Assembly discussions and debates were going on, the clause on choosing one's own partner was taken up under the Fundamental Rights by the Draft Committee where one member Minoo Masani proposed the basic right to have a marital partner irrespective of caste, class or religion: 'no impediments to marriages between citizens shall be based merely upon difference of religion' (V Shruti 2021, 5). This proposal was fully supported by some members of the Committee, such as B.R. Ambedkar, Hansa Mehta, and R. A. Kaur, but unfortunately, it was lost due to the disagreement of the remaining members. Afterwards, Ambedkar, as the first law minister of Independent India, sought to introduce civil marriage as a matter of law, irrespective of caste, creed, community, or religion, with the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill, which would recognise the importance of 'civil marriage' alongside 'sacramental marriage'. Though the caste question was one of the determining principles of Ambedkar's discourse, his rationalist arguments, combined with progressive legislative measures, would be helpful for understanding this contemporary crisis of interfaith marriages (vilified as 'love-jihad') in India. The aim of Ambedkar's lifelong struggle was to break the hierarchical system of graded inequality prevailing in society by abolishing any form of 'untouchability', ensuring that every individual (including women and Dalits) had equal rights and access. However, socio-cultural exclusion of Dalits and women from Temples hits the root cause of 'untouchability' or 'impurity'. If we read and consider our religious foundations (like *Manu Smriti*, *Angirasa Smriti*, *Dharma Sutra*, *Parasara Smriti*, etc.), the concept of 'impurity' or 'ashaucha' (ritual impurity) for menstruating women and caste 'impurity' for Dalits served one purpose, which was to ensure Brahminical Hinduism and patriarchal regulation in the society. Ambedkar's vision of socio-cultural cohesion and integration through temple entry agitations for reinforcing rights in the 1930s is a moment through which we can study and question caste and gender-based atrocities and violations in the current situation as well, while achieving his Constitutional Values of liberty, equality, and fraternity in the Indian society at large.

Conjunctive Reading of Ambedkar's Temple Entry Satyagraha and the Contemporary Incident of Sabarimala Temple Entry Ban

According to Ambedkar, in order to break the wall of caste and gender hierarchy, it was important to get access or entry into religious places like temples, which have been considered as one of the starting points of discrimination. Thus, it is necessary to demolish the caste-centric custom of selective Temple entry for upper-caste Hindus by entering temples prohibited for untouchables. For this cause, the Kalaram Temple Entry mobilization event (1930) was planned. Ambedkar mobilized the untouchables to fight their own battles and used the tenets of 'satyagraha' to secure the right to worship and access religious places that had been banned for years. Mahatma Gandhi was also initiating the civil disobedience movement, called 'satyagraha', at that time. Prior to the Kalaram Temple Entry movement, Ambedkar made two major attempts in Maharashtra: the Ambadevi Temple Entry Satyagraha in 1927 and the Parvati Temple Entry movement in 1929, but both nearly stalled for lack of support from all sections of society. In March 1930, Ambedkar started the famous Kalaram Temple Entry Movement as part of the Dalit Liberation Movement at Nashik. The Satyagraha Committee was formed, involving many personalities like Patit Pavan, Mr Pandurang Jivaji Sabnis, and Mr Bhaurao Krishnarao. Gaikwad and other C.K.P. leaders, Pradhan brothers, to name a few, had joined hands with Ambedkar in this movement. This mobilization continued till 1934, and it was a struggle to achieve human rights for the untouchables. It was a movement of the masses and involved the active participation of people from nearly all sections of society. Ambedkar tried to fight for the fundamental rights of Dalits who were treated as untouchables both socially and constitutionally. This 'satyagraha' helped Dalits to remove the tag of 'untouchable' by giving them equal rights. Ambedkar observed that we should have the right of entry even if we don't want to enter temples. In Kerala, the fight for temple entry was known as the Vaikom Satyagraha (1925), led by Kelappan, which also attracted country-wide attention to the

Guruvayoor Temple in British Malabar, where this agitation was launched. Gandhi spearheaded the Temple Entry agitation by sending a telegram to the Maharaja of Travancore, highlighting the need and legitimacy of the cause of Dalits, or untouchables. This celebrated Vaikom movement saw the active participation of women when *ati-Shudra* (more marginalised untouchables) women were denied entry into the Temple. In 1924, for the first time in Kerala, a group of five Shudra and *ati-Shudra* women (including Nagamai, Periyar's wife) decided to protest this, but were halted at the entrance and prohibited from entry for their lower social rank. Now we can see how caste, gender, and orthodox Hindu religion are intricately woven together to form injustices towards the larger and more inclusive category of Dalits. We may recall that, according to the Dalit Panthers Manifesto (1976), even women and peasants were included within the broader category of Dalits. Afterwards, other Dalit temple-entry events were triggered in line with Ambedkar's ideals, such as at Meenakshi Temple in Madurai (1939) and at Jagannatha Temple in Keradagada, Odisha (2005).

Ambedkar on the Women's Question

Ambedkar tried to understand the caste system through women's roles and the everyday discrimination they had to face in Indian society. There were many movements in different parts of the country, including the recent Sabarimala Temple Entry issue, where menstruating women are prohibited from entry on the basis of pure biological reasons. The whole notion of 'purity-impurity' is invoked to justify orthodox patriarchal religious cultures and practices in which women are being deprived of their fundamental rights. This question of "purity" and "impurity" is also attached to the question of untouchability when it comes to the inhuman system of segregating Dalits in Indian society. Therefore, the Dalits and the women's question share a commonality in the Indian context. The legal case of S. Mahendran vs the Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board (in 1991)

filed a petition for banning women's entry into Sabarimala Temple, which treated 'women as impure and polluted during their menstruation cycle' (Writ Petition of Sabarimala Case 2016, 39). This kind of gender stereotyping is one form of untouchability or discriminatory practice, which is barred by Article 15 in our Constitution. Banning entry for women of a certain age group into the Sabarimala Temple promotes a form of socio-religious disability on the basis of an alleged custom that considers menstruating women as impure. Apart from the Sabarimala Temple Entry ban, other temples still exist in India that impose the same kind of prohibitions on women, such as the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala, the Lord Annappa Temple in Karnataka, the Lord Kartikeya Temple in Pushkar, the Patbausi Satra in Assam, the Bhavani Deeksha Mandapam in Andhra Pradesh, etc. Even examples are there where Temple Entry bans had been evicted, and women are permitted to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple after a long battle, such as Shani Shingnapur Temple in Maharashtra (given entry to women in 2011), Kolhapur Mahalaxmi temple in Maharashtra (evicted ban on women's entry in 2011). The Post-colonial State had taken significant legal measures under the Temple Regulation Act, such as the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorization of Entry) Act of 1965, to recognize the right of temple entry for all classes of Hindus. But, Rule 3 (b) under the Act of 1965 denotes some prohibitions on women, saying 'Women at such time during which they are not by custom and usage allowed to enter a place of public worship' (Chandrachud, 204, 2018 Judgment). Thus, the Act of 1965, while expanding its horizon against the caste-based 'untouchability', fails to address the gender-based exclusion in the name of the 'impurity' factor.

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution promises equality and justice against any form of 'untouchability' on which Ambedkar said on the draft of 1947: "Untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law." (268, Chandrachud, 2018 Judgement). In the Constituent Assembly, the

debate arose over whether gender ‘untouchability’ and other forms of discrimination would be covered by this Act, a question raised by members such as K.T. Shah and Naziruddin Ahmed. But at this stage, Ambedkar ignored the concern and the amendment proposed by Ahmed and Shah, which has remained a contentious point of litigation under Article 17 of the Constitution till now. This argument, centered on gender ‘untouchability’ based on menstruation, even remains relevant today and became a matter of key Constitutional contention in the Sabarimala Temple Entry case. While the historical Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha led by B.R. Ambedkar began as a social reform movement against the exclusion of Dalits, the contentious ban on Sabarimala Temple Entry for menstruating women stigmatizes women and legitimizes the age-old Brahminical patriarchal belief of ‘impurity/untouchability’ against the Ambedkarian tenets of Constitutional justice. Temple Entry Movements remained as a major turning point in the socio-religious history of India, in which Ambedkar not only struggled for social reforms but ensured the constitutional validation through the enactments of Articles no. 14, 15, 17, and 25, etc. In the next section, I will engage with another area of violation of women's rights in which Hindu Women are being prevented from going for inter-sect marriages in the name of the so-called idea of ‘Love Jihad’. What helps an Ambedkarian reading of this discrimination against women and their conjugal choices is the inclusive reading of the category of the Dalit itself, as referred to earlier in light of the Dalit Panthers Manifesto (1976), which includes women and other peripheral groups as Dalits. The political ploy of characterizing any case of inter-religious marriage in India in the last decade as “love jihad” is a case of a heinous crime against women when it comes to their own right to make conjugal decisions of choosing their partner for life. Ambedkar had a lot to say on the practice of endogamous marriages in India, and in what follows, this paper will explicate it further to show its connection with the issue of marital choice and the system of discrimination in India.

‘Love Jihad’: Endogamous Marital Practices and the Women’s Question

Now, to understand the present phenomenon of ‘Love Jihad’, we need to engage with what Ambedkar argued about the nexus between caste and gender (again entangled with religious practices) through his critique of endogamous marriages. According to Ambedkar, endogamy or marriage within the specified group has been one of the central factors for the perpetuation of caste hierarchy in India. Ambedkar, in one of his academic papers, “Caste in India: Their mechanism, Genesis and Development” (1917), expressed concern about women and clearly stated his concern about the vicious bonding between caste and gender, by which the forceful imposition of endogamy has been made on exogamy. This concocted design is not divine or of natural origin of the caste system, but ‘Brahmins of ancient India craftily designed it by enclosing their class through means of controlling and subjugating their women’ (Ratnesh Katulkar 2008, 2). Endogamy, which has been regarded as the principal source in retaining caste, is also used to control female sexuality by restricting them within caste boundaries, which is controlled by ‘brahminical patriarchy’ (Janaki Abraham 2014, 58). Controlling female sexuality is not just about preserving ‘purity of caste blood’ or ‘maintaining privilege and power, or asserting caste pride’ (Janaki Abraham 2014, 58), but is also the utter violation of women's agency for not being able to choose their own partner. Orthodox Hindu nationalists and Brahminical patriarchal forces have treated women as the ‘gateways of caste purity (Chakravarti 2003, 66). In this context, Ambedkar even refers to customs like the idolization of sati, the enforcement of widowhood, and child marriage, which help in enforcing and implementing this notion of endogamy. These patriarchal practices play a large role in the production and maintenance of this caste structure. Ambedkar brings about a significant solution to this problem of caste question, which is also an attempt to relook into Dalit ideology: “The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste” (Ambedkar’s saying quoted by Janaki Abraham, 56). Again, it has to be understood that

Ambedkar never promoted forceful advancement of such practices but a rational promotion of them, as he observed that Hindu marriage has started to become an engagement without 'love' and 'personal choice' because of the evil of the caste system. He argues:

Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so. (T. Sowjanya, Round Table India).

Therefore, in both cases, be it inter-caste or inter-religious marriages like the present case of 'Love Jihad', women's agency is being hijacked by the patriarchal forces of Hindu nationalists and upper caste Brahminical fundamentalists. Hindu women sadly became the symbolic representation of caste purity, cultural homogeneity, and community honour. In the contemporary cases of 'Love Jihad', an orchestrated campaign of Right-wing fundamentalists is an example of the interplay between caste, gender, and religion. Hindu right wing ultra nationalists in India, who in their attempt to demonize the entire Muslim community, concocted the vicious narrative that Muslim boys in India are strategically enamouring Hindu girls so that they can marry these Hindu women only to indoctrinate them in Islamic terrorist activities. This outrageous narrative led to the prevention of Hadiya from meeting her own husband – Hadiya is a Hindu woman who converted to Islam after her marriage to a Muslim boy, and Hindu ultra-nationalists coerced her not to avail of her conjugal rights. Therefore, Hindu women again became the 'potential site for outrage of family order and Hindu sentiment strengthening the drive for patriarchal assertions and restoration of family and community honour'(Charu Gupta 2009, 14). These fundamentalists are trying to safeguard Hindu women as an exclusive preserve for Hindu men, which is again a complete violation of the dignity, rights, and agency of Hindu women. This 'politics of cultural virginity' (Charu Gupta 2009,15) is

instrumental in forming the narrative of women's victimhood and, at the same time, discarding their choice to choose their own partner.

Ambedkar's ideologies and thoughts regarding marriage were discussed in the Hindu Code Bill, through which he tried to challenge gender discrimination and caste hierarchy among Hindus. In his first move on marriage, he was adamant to abolish restrictions on intercaste marriage from all sections of the Bill, in which Hindus of any caste and sub-caste can marry under either the Civil or Religious (renamed dharmik) marriage rites. He defended his move on the grounds that these changes will be permissible without any legal restriction for those who want to marry outside the specified caste, rather than forcing all Hindus to do so. He removed the rules that give validation of a 'dharmik marriage dependent on the performance of the upper-caste Saptapadi ceremony'(Eleanor Newbiggin 2013, 185), and with the revised Code, he made dharmik marriages that could be held according to the rites and ceremonies of either party involved in the marriage. That means He even acknowledged the legitimacy of custom in one area of the Bill, though only to remove the upper-caste domination established by the Hindu Law Committee. Later, these views were codified in the Special Marriage Act, 1954, which permits marriage between people of different religious faiths without changing their religion. Therefore, Ambedkar's Code Bill was a measure not only for the caste question but also addressed the problem of women's rights in general, which could affect women of any religious community. Recent strategically designed cases of 'Love Jihad' by Hindu Right-Wing fundamentalists, who again try to manipulate the rights and agency of women, can well be analysed from Ambedkar's social, political, and legislative mode of reform as discussed above.

Ambedkar's Version of Gender Reform

Ambedkar's Hindu Code Bill was a vital and logical step towards strengthening women's agency through legal measures that impartially enhance the spirit of true democracy in India. While Ambedkar was

concerned about the legal oppression of Hindu women, his key aim was to eradicate socially sanctioned and religiously justified practices through which caste and gender hierarchy operated in order to establish equal rights of women in general. For this section, the work will analyse one of Ambedkar's important writings on Hindu women, named "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Women: Who was Responsible for It?" (Ambedkar Vol. 17, part II, 109, 2003). He claimed that under Brahminical theory, women are denied the right to acquire knowledge, which is the birthright of every individual being. He had traced the fact that during ancient times, or pre-Manu days, women occupied a very high position in the country's intellectual and social life. Women were even entitled to Upanayana and were taught to read the Vedas (*Atharva Veda*). Paninni's *Astadhyay* bears testimony to the fact that women attended Gurukul(college) and studied shakhas of the Veda and became experts in *Mimamsa*. Patanjali's *Maha Bhasya* shows that women were teachers who taught the Vedas to girl students, and that they debated and discussed with men on the most abstruse subjects, including religion, philosophy, and metaphysics. In this way, he provided enough examples to show that women in the Vedic period could reach the highest pinnacle of learning and education. Then, naturally, the question comes: Who was responsible for the fall of Hindu women afterwards? Ambedkar bluntly replied that it was Manu, the lawgiver of the Hindus (Ambedkar, 122, Vol. 17-II). Then he went on to discuss some laws governing women in the Manu-Smriti to show how low women's status was in Manu's view. The following quotations are from Ambedkar's text:

IX. 2. Day and night, women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. (Vol.17-II, 123)

V. 148. In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent. (Vol. 17-II, 124)

From the above selected quotations by Ambedkar, it is clear that Manu completely denied women's rights and agency as independent individuals. He always defined the role of women in relation to men who held the first position by the right of birth. Women are snatched off their right to divorce- 'Woman is not to have a right to divorce' (Ambedkar, 124). But Manu does not prevent a man from giving up his wife, even permits him to sell her, while preventing the wife from becoming free! This hypocrisy of shastric injunction is, as Ambedkar unequivocally narrates, 'monstrous'. He was appalled by the low status of women pre-decided by the Hindu *Srmritis* and *Dharmashastras*. Manu lowered the status of women to the level of a slave in the matter of property rights.

VIII. 299. A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo (Vol.17-II, 125)

II. 66. Even for a woman, the performance of the *Sanskaras* is necessary, and they should be performed without uttering the *Veda Mantras*. (Vol.17-II, 126)

Ambedkar again quoted lines from the *Manu Smriti* to show how Hindu scriptures dehumanize the position and dignity of women in society. Indeed, men were allowed to beat their wives for smaller mistakes, and women could be treated like slaves. Manu never allows women to have rights over property and even promotes corporal punishment for the same. Ambedkar also pointed out one of the main concerns for women: the denial of educational rights. Even during worship, women are not allowed to recite the mantras of sacred texts such as the *Vedas* and the *shastras*. They had the right to perform ritualistic activities, but the right to knowledge was completely forbidden to them. Instructions were given for worshipping one's husband like a deity or god, even if he lacks good qualities:

V. 154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife. (Vol.17-II, 126)

So, in this way, Ambedkar very logically, through scriptural investigations, explained the root cause for the suffering and subjugation of Hindu women and stated that there is nothing new or startling in the Laws of Manu about women. They are also the view of Brahmins ever since Brahminism was born in India. Before Manu, they existed as a social theory, mostly in an oral form, but Manu converted it into the law of the state. It is in this way that Manu had imposed disabilities upon women and crippled them permanently. Ambedkar, in this writing, strongly advocated Buddhism for women, the downtrodden, and the underprivileged, and discussed how the religion promoted by Buddha is free of hypocrisy and liberates oppressed people. In the next section, this work will discuss how Ambedkar promotes and asserts 'Navayana Buddhism', which strengthens the rights of individual liberty and agency, as well as the right to knowledge, for realising their spiritual potentialities along with men.

Conclusion

Therefore, engaging with Ambedkar not only enables us to understand anti-caste threads of graded inequality but also provides us with his insights into intellectual, political, and social concerns regarding women and their subjugation. Ambedkar pointed out that dharma shastras, caste, and endogamy are three important pillars of patriarchy in Hindu society, and they together were responsible for discriminatory practices against women and their degradation in social status. Through the discussion on various issues like the Hindu Code Bill, Temple Entry Satyagraha, Endogamous marriages, and their contextualization in contemporary events of the Sabarimala Temple Entry ban and 'Love Jihad', this paper has tried to make an interesting reading to understand

the interplay and convergence of caste, gender, and religious hierarchy. Ambedkar has been a vehement critic of the Brahminical patriarchy, which is evident in our discussion about his important writing “Rise and Fall of Hindu Women” that questions the stereotypical feminine roles codified by patriarchal Hindu society. There is no caste without Brahminism, and patriarchy begets its claws from the scriptural legacy set by those Hindu fundamentalists. Ambedkar’s writings reflect his social and political philosophy, which clearly shows the inextricable connection between caste and gender. Ambedkar is unique in his approach to revolutionizing the private sphere or ‘inner domain’, which has been controlled and hijacked by the religious cultural nationalists in their own hands. In this context, Partha Chatterjee’s reading of the women's question in the 19th-century nationalist debate is important to examine, in which he argued that women's subjectivity and agency were compromised by nationalist patriarchy. Ambedkar, in his advocacy of women's empowerment, propagated gender consciousness through various mobilizations against the subjection meted out to them by caste, gender, and religious hierarchies, and, most importantly, provided a legal framework necessary for social change, ensuring women's equal rights and agency with men through constitutional validation.

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