

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

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the question of women's rights and agency through Ambedkar's vision of gender reform as enunciated in his writings on caste and social stratification. I have taken up here recent complex debates on Temple Entry Ban for Menstruating women and on so-called "Love Jihad" – controversies that were generated on the intersecting terrain of caste, gender, and religious hierarchies in postcolonial India. Borrowing from Ambedkar, I will show the interface of caste and gender in the traditional custom of disallowing menstruating women to enter temples, something that came into our notice in recent years through the Sabarimala Temple entry controversy. Similarly, through Ambedkar, I shall also engage with the notorious coinage of the term 'love jihad' by Hindu ultra nationalist forces to launch a campaign to nullify and stigmatize any inter-religious marriage. Temple entry movements initiated by Ambedkar in the 1930s, such as 'the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha', were positive steps to empower women by enabling them to reclaim their social rights against all forms of 'untouchability'. Interestingly, the recent Sabarimala temple entry ban for women during menstruation rekindled the debate of 'untouchability' as the entire controversy revolves around the idea of considering menstruating women as 'impure'. Therefore, my paper would critically look into the present form of exclusionary practices based on categorical concepts of 'purity-impurity' – categories that determine caste-related untouchability and gender related exclusions. Taking up the cue from Ambedkar's Temple Entry movements, I would try to show whether there is any convergence along the lines of caste and gender in thinking about banning women's entry into a temple. Through Ambedkar's essay, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman* (1951, Vol-17, part 2), this paper would also investigate how structured Brahminical patriarchal institutions played a significant role in the exploitation of Hindu Women's right to exercise greater control over their agency. Therefore, I would re-engage with the question of women's rights and agency, investigating whether contemporary instances of Temple Entry ban or the viciously constructed idea of "Love Jihad" are deepening traditional Hindu patriarchal values of gender subservience.

**Keywords:** Women's Agency, Postcolonial India, Sabarimala Temple Entry Ban, 'Love Jihad', B.R. Ambedkar