



11. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his educational Philosophy, with special reference to University and Higher Education

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Abstract

Bharat Ratna Dr. B. R. Ambedkar laid great emphasis on the education as an important tool for the eradication of caste system and for the better prospects of Democracy in India. The basic thrust of his philosophy of education is to inculcate the values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and moral character among the boys and girls of all shades. He considered education as the basis of social, economic and political revolution in India. His educational ideology mirrors the three fundamental principles inherited from Gautam Buddha, namely Prajnya (Wisdom), Sheel (Character), and Karuna (Compassion). He believed that the mental lethargy, the reconciliation with social norms and satisfaction from present were the impediments in the mind of the depressed class from being emancipated and empowered. Thus, he stated that the social evils could be destroyed through knowledge and education could be the only means to achieve it.

Dr. Ambedkar's triad of 'educate, agitate, and organize' stands as a potent instrument. Education serves as the foundation, furnishing rationale, fortitude, and discernment, differentiating between truth and cultured opinions. Ambedkar not only stood for primary universal education, but he also urged and emphasized the need of a well-organized university education to meet the social requirements of the poor and the weaker sections of our society. He encouraged to take higher education for their progress. An important aim of education is to make a person capable of earning a living or making him self-dependent. To conclude, it can be said that educational philosophy of Dr Ambedkar is the blend of ancient and modern education. The paper aims to discuss on Dr. Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy with special thrusts on University and Higher Education.

Keywords: Education, Philosophy, Buddha, University, Higher

"Education is not only the birthright of every human being but also a weapon of social change." – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

1. Introduction :



Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar stands as a profound intellect, an academic luminary, a philosopher, a legal expert, and a distinguished intellectual. Born into a destitute Mahar family, a marginalized untouchable community in Maharashtra. He emerged from the depths of the social hierarchy known as *atishudra*. Amidst inhumane conditions marked by physical and moral adversity, he dedicated himself to India's service, assuming leadership to uplift the downtrodden, underprivileged, and marginalized segments plagued by poverty, injustice, illiteracy, exploitation, tyranny, and oppression.

2. Objectives of the paper

The paper aims to discuss on Dr. Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy with special thrusts on University and Higher Education.

3. Social Philosophy

Dr. Ambedkar's social and philosophical perspectives were anchored in egalitarian principles. Central to his ethos were human dignity and self-respect. His vision was to harness education as a means to establish justice, equality, fraternity, freedom, and fearlessness within society, advocating for a transition from a society based on birth to one grounded in values.

Undoubtedly, the cultivation of these moral values hinges on education. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that the true purpose of education lies in fostering human happiness, prosperity, societal advancement, and stability. He posited that rational thinking, good behavior, and ethical conduct are products of education, experience, and dialogue.

Aligned with his broader social, economic, and political objectives, Dr. Ambedkar ardently championed a pedagogy rooted in logic and science. He laid great emphasis on the education as an important tool for the eradication of caste system and for the better prospects of Democracy in India. Thus, he said that education a key to eradicate all types of inequalities and to achieve social democracy [Keer, 1954(1981): 488]. He said :

"If you want to develop the society then you need to spread up the education. Education eradicates the bias of people which results on to minimize the exploitation, domination, of those people who try to take the benefit of the so called illiterate people. If the people get knowledge through education then they can face the problems created by the dominators. Education reforms opinions, it tries to remove the walls built among the people. The biggest gift that is given by the education is that it creates self-confidence among us which is considered as the first stage of our development" (Bhagwan, 1999: 23).

Education must focus on serving human interests and achieving social amelioration. The basic thrust of Ambedkar's philosophy of education, in brief, is to inculcate the values of justice,



liberty, equality, fraternity and moral character among the boys and girls of all shades.. For Dr. Ambedkar, education alone creates a sense of new thinking and awakening among the hitherto oppressed people Dr. Ambedkar believed that to achieve progress in socio-economic and political arena, there is no other effective tool other than education. He considered education as the basis of social, economic and political revolution in India. He wanted it for all, and not restricted only to a few classes of society (Waghmare, 2016:12).

As per Ambedkar's perspective, "Education is a weapon of creation of mental and educational development, weapon of eradication of social slavery of economic development or political freedom." (Pralhad, 2011: 77). His educational ideology mirrors the three fundamental principles inherited from Gautam Buddha, namely Prajnya (Wisdom), Sheel (Character), and Karuna (Compassion). These principles held immense significance to him, and he endeavored to impart them to the masses. He emphasized that "Knowledge is the foundation of a man's life," aiming to instill 'Samyak Dyan' (Right knowledge), as propagated by Gautam Buddha in his eightfold path, especially among the downtrodden" (Ibid.). His educational philosophy accentuates the holistic development of individuals and their surroundings. Ambedkar advocated that ' Education is the foundation of civilization and culture', aiming to instill hope, confidence, and ethical fortitude through his educational doctrine (Ibid.:13).

According to Ambedkar, the root cause of all evils is ignorance, so he took the first step towards removing illiteracy and ignorance. According to Ambedkar, "Illiteracy and ignorance is the greatest hurdle in development of humanity" (Mishra, 2010:40) and through education one can end the ignorance of life. As a humanist, Dr. Ambedkar was in favour of imparting education for the development of human personality. Dr. Ambedkar recognized the paramount importance of education for both societal advancement and the cultivation of individuals with strong character. He compares education with the milk of tigress and adds that one who will drink it won't seat calm. It ought to aim at human development for which remolding the mind must be the major concern of education. He put forwarded his theory that education is an important mean to develop one's rationality, conscience, scientific temper and consciousness which leads to the personality development. He further elucidates that labor devoid of knowledge is aimless and ineffectual. He held the conviction that engaging in work without education is tantamount to squandering human potential.

3.1 Universalisation of education:

Dr. Ambedkar upheld the democratic concept in education propounded by his mentor John Dewey of Columbia University and his view on "Democratization of Education". For the smooth functioning of Democracy in India he laid greater emphasis on education. Due to the western impact and his own experience in democratic countries, he understood the dire necessity of education for the country like in India. He interrelated caste, democracy and education in his



own manner and tried to give solution for eradication of caste system. To educate those who wish to perpetuate the caste system is not to enhance the prospects of democracy in India; rather, it places our democracy at even greater risk.

The prevailing social inequalities in India were the reason for illiteracy. A large Indian society, especially women and individuals belonging to lower castes, was deprived of education. Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members. Thus it is the responsibility of the society to impart education.

3.2 Emancipatory in nature

Dr. Ambedkar's educational philosophy isn't concerned with the afterlife. Instead, it emphasizes secular education for social liberation, advocating for equal educational rights and opportunities for everyone. It promotes self-respect and personal growth. He viewed the primary goal of education as the moral and social development of individuals, advocating for a societal transformation against the injustices of social bondage, untouchability, caste discrimination, oppression, and other systemic issues. This includes addressing economic vulnerability and disparities in life. It is only through education that one could enlighten oneself and organize social forces against tyrannical and oppressive elements of traditional societies in India.

He changed the entire mindset of the lower strata of the society towards the education. His philosophy of education was emancipatory in nature. Ambedkar thought that education was of tremendous importance as a foundation of progress. He believed that due to people's disregard for the material necessities of life and their indifference towards the knowledge required to attain them, our nation lagged behind and its advancement halted.

He did not visualize education simply as a means for the development of a child's personality or as a source of earning one's livelihood. Instead, he regarded education as the most potent catalyst for instigating desired transformations within society, essential for orchestrating any modern social movement. He viewed education as a tool to emancipate the Dalits from illiteracy, ignorance, and superstitions, empowering them to combat all manifestations of injustice, exploitation, and oppression. He felt if the Dalits are educated then they could leave their traditional occupation and take up secular occupations thus breaking the age-old caste based structure of divisions of labour in our society. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule also articulated the essential nature of education for the upliftment of the Dalits in the following manner "For want of education, their intellect deteriorated for want of intellect, their morality decayed, for want of morality, their progress stopped for want of progress, their wealth vanished all their sorrows sprang from illiteracy". (Keer, Dhananjay; 1954).

He believed that the mental lethargy, the reconciliation with social norms and satisfaction from present were the impediments in the mind of the depressed class from being emancipated and



empowered. Thus, he stated that the social evils could be destroyed through knowledge and education could be the only means to achieve it.

3.3 Motivational force

Dr. Ambedkar exhibited a profound interest in the militarization movement. Encouraging the youth within his community, he advocated for the suspension of their academic pursuits, urging them instead to prepare for military service to uphold their esteemed martial heritage. Recognized as a social revolutionary, Dr. Ambedkar was acutely aware that the resolution of the untouchability issue did not solely hinge upon widespread education or rational persuasion. Rather, it necessitated the eradication of privileges, self-interest, and the distinct mindset prevalent among the high-caste Hindus.

Hence, he implored the Depressed Classes to take assertive action, demonstrating to the caste Hindus that perpetuating untouchability was as perilous as holding live coals on their tongues. Dr. Ambedkar perceived that these caste Hindus were impervious to conventional resolutions or appeals made during conferences, remaining oblivious to the gravity of their transgressions until they encountered a tangible threat to their status quo.

Drawing attention to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, he portrayed it as a struggle for cultural supremacy. Emphasizing that the balance of power rested within their grasp, he urged them to strategically utilize their resources for the advancement of their social and political rights. Dr. Ambedkar believed that education and civilization could permeate from the privileged to the marginalized classes, thereby infusing renewed vigor into the nation through enhanced communication.

4. Ambedkar's Movement for Equitable Education

During Ambedkar's era, the educational plight of the untouchables was exceedingly dire. Ambedkar believed that through education and knowledge, Dalits will gain self-motivation and self-confidence which will give them power and strength to fight against the unjust social order. Ambedkar believed that education is a movement. If it does not fulfill its objectives, it is useless. Another feature of Ambedkar's educational policy was not to beg for donations from industrialists or businessmen; he asked the management to run educational institutions out of fees along with government grants. He was of the view that education is such an indispensable thing that it should necessarily be within easy reach of all. It should be cheap also so that the poorest of the poor may acquire it (Waghmare, 2016:14).

According to him separate schools for Backward Class Students is not advisable as this in turn would widen the gap between the Caste Hindus and the Untouchables. He thought that books should be published in simple language, circulating libraries should be provided to night schools,



special bonus and prizes should be given by the Government to teachers who were educating the Backward class pupils.

4.1 Educate, Agitate and Organize

He attributed immense importance to education, positioning it as the foundational element in his three-pronged strategy encapsulated in the slogan "Educate, agitate, and organize." According to Dr. Ambedkar, education forms the bedrock, furnishing reason, fortitude, and the discernment necessary to distinguish between truth and mere cultured biases. This trio of actions was Dr. Ambedkar's prescribed approach for the societal advancement of the Depressed Class. "Educate" is the first word of his famous slogan. The reason is education's undeniable role in the building of human character and consciousness. Only an educated person can understand his class interests and bring about class unity. The term 'agitate' doesn't imply physical agitation; rather, it signifies a revolution of the mind. It doesn't advocate for reckless street protests without prior education. Instead, after acquiring education and comprehending Babasaheb's ideologies and strategies, individuals can embark on a mental agitation. Educated and stirred minds are aptly equipped to orchestrate collective action for a shared purpose. Therefore, it's imperative that we educate ourselves and stimulate our thoughts, fostering a collective capacity for organization. Unified by agitated minds working towards a common mission, individuals can unite and steadfastly strive towards their collective objectives as a cohesive force. In Ambedkar's idea on educate, agitate and organize idea of giving education and equal opportunity to the people aims at removing the barriers in Indian Hindu religious caste system and development of backward caste as well as all marginalized communities. 'Educate, Agitate and organize' must be maintained to see the effective results of the movement for the upliftment of our people.

Ambedkar's aspiration, as expressed in this speech, extended beyond the mere enactment of laws; he underscored the imperative of their strict enforcement. He was cognizant of the substantial financial investment required for compulsory education. Entrusting this responsibility to local self-government often leads to financial constraints, ultimately undermining the efficacy of such legislation. However, the reality is that our education system is currently overseen by individuals lacking expertise in the field. Thus, the remedy lies in ensuring free and compulsory education, liberating it from the grip of those ill-equipped to manage it. Dr. Ambedkar's perspectives on education warrant a more profound exploration, despite his extensive involvement in the educational realm dating back to the inception of the Hitkarini Sabha in 1924. In 1928, Dr. Ambedkar established the Depressed Classes Educational Society. A primary focus of the Sabha was to ensure increased educational opportunities for marginalized communities, leading to the establishment of numerous colleges, hostels, libraries, and reading centers. *Saraswati Vilas*, a monthly magazine, was launched under the guidance of the Sabha, nurturing a passion for learning among the youth through the initiative of students. In 1935, the Sabha



expanded its efforts by establishing hostels in Sholapur and Belgaun, along with a complimentary reading center, a hockey club, and two additional hostels in Bombay.

5. University Education:s

As Dr. Ambedkar worked as a professor and after-wards as a Principal of a college, he studied the state of University Education in our country as well as abroad. Ambedkar not only stood for primary universal education, but he also urged and emphasized the need of a well-organized university education to meet the social requirements of the poor and the weaker sections of our society. He himself was the fellow of University of Mumbai. He said the chief aim of University should be spread of education amongst the subaltern masses. Even in regard to higher education, Dr. Ambedkar held that “it is the duty of a modern University to provide facilities for the highest education to the backward communities” and as a necessary corollary suggested that “the backward communities should have some control in the University affairs”. He regarded the University primarily as a mechanism through which educational opportunities are extended to all intellectually capable individuals. These are individuals who, due to financial constraints or other adversities in life, are unable to access such opportunities despite their potential to derive maximum benefit from them. He strongly recommended nomination of members of backward communities on the University senates which functioned like legislative bodies and were supposed to put forth the needs of the backward communities and to suggest the facilities that were necessary for meeting them.

He was of the opinion that Colleges should not be separated from the University. Colleges should be partners on terms of equality and participate in promoting together the cultural progress of both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. He wanted that the undergraduate and the postgraduate faculties should work in an integrated fashion. If both the faculties run together in a University, the students at the undergraduate level may get the opportunity to attend the lectures of the senior and distinguished professors. The senior teachers may also get the opportunity to select the best students and train them properly from the very beginning. Dr. Ambedkar said that the aim and function of the University education should be:

1. Ensuring that the instruction provided caters to adults;
2. Maintaining a scientific, objective, and unbiased approach;
3. Prioritizing the stimulation of individuality and mental exertion over rote memorization of facts or theories;
4. Facilitating critical analysis of prominent authorities, supplemented occasionally by direct sources of information;
5. Instilling a commitment to thoroughness and fostering a reverence for the pursuit of truth (Ambedkar, 1982: 292-295).



He felt that University should not mould the students but that it should provide the atmosphere for the students to mould themselves through independent investigation of Truth. Modern University Education is an expensive thing and the portals of the college are closed to the clever students, whose guardian cannot foot the bill. The ambition of such a student dwindles into the bleak reality of an office clerk and typist. The idea of Morning College was introduced by him for the benefit of such students. He thought that education should be given much a manner that it promotes intellectual, moral and social democracy.

India is a country of villages. Majority of the down-trodden masses is scattered in villages. For getting higher education they have to come to cities. Taking into consideration this fact Ambedkar always stressed on hostel facilities to be attached to high schools and colleges. Ambedkar suggested that the Government can form these hostels and run these, or make private bodies or institutions for backward community to establish and run these. He saw 2 advantages in this: i) Dalit boys would be away from uncongenial surroundings and, ii) It would save the booty of the Government (Ibid.: 337-71).

According to him a Professor “should not only be learned: he must speak in a clear tone. He must be well versed”. He also opined that Professors should constantly seek knowledge and try for truth and practice it. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar spoke at the annual assembly of students at Elphinstone College on December 16, 1952, addressing "the challenges faced by contemporary students." He urged students to overhaul university education to align with the demands of the modern era, emphasizing the transformation of universities into centers of knowledge rather than mere training grounds for clerical work. Dr. Ambedkar delivered numerous speeches advocating for reforms in higher education and promoting social inclusion (Waghmare, 2016:17).

6. Higher Education:

Dr. Ambedkar, as a visionary figure, not only delves into the realm of primary education but also extensively explores higher education. He was aware of the fact that only primary education was not enough for the upliftment of the down-trodden masses, so he encouraged them to take higher education. In his view, the extension of primary education to higher levels nurtures versatile leaders who propel us toward improvement. (Haribhau, 2014:59). He encouraged them to take higher education for their progress. He thought that the progress of a community always depended upon how its members advanced in education. That is why he laid more stress on higher education than on primary education. In the realm of higher education Dr. Ambedkar was in favor of giving teachers necessary freedom to frame their own syllabi and assess the performance of their students. He was opposed to prescribing and following a rigidly structured syllabus. He viewed that the entry in the public service should be secured to the depressed classes otherwise there would be no inducement for them to take to education. He believed in the necessity of providing special accommodations for the education of the Backward classes, such



as establishing hostels and offering scholarships for higher education through governmental initiatives. However, he acknowledged the futility of solely focusing on higher education for the Depressed Classes without simultaneously prioritizing the development of primary education.

Citing a Government of India report, Dr. Ambedkar noted that if the current pace of educational advancement persisted, it would require 40 years for boys and a staggering 300 years for girls of school-going age to attain educational inclusion. Dr. Ambedkar said :

“We have in this presidency two departments, which if I may say so, are working at cross purposes. We have the Department of Education, the purpose of which is to moralise and socialise the people. We have, on the other hand, the Department of Excise which is working, if I may say so, in the reverse direction. Sir, I think that it is not asking too much if I plead that we should at least spend on education the same amount that we take from the people in the form of excise revenue. The amount of expenditure that we incur per individual in this presidency on education is only 14 annas, but the amount of money that we recover in the form of excise revenue is Rs 2.17 [35 annas]. I think it is only fair that our educational expenditure should be so adjusted that we should spend on the education of the people as much as we take from them in the form of excise.” {Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar, vol 3, 1993 (2013) : :55-56 }

Today, when, besides students, other pro-change sections are also taking to the streets demanding more budgetary allocation for education, Ambedkar’s thoughts can show us the right direction.

6.1 Job-oriented and skill-based education:

Dr. Ambedkar was also in favour of making education relevant to employment. In other words, education is to make a person capable of earning a living or making him self-dependent. For education gives him an additional interest in the retention of the caste system namely by opening additional opportunity of getting a bigger job. He acknowledged that employment or earning livelihood is very important in a person’s life. He believed that education would be considered completed only when some skill would be associated with it and such skill would generate some employment for the person. Hence, he emphasized on technical education and considered it necessary for the rise of the deprived and backward classes in the society.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that educational philosophy of Dr Ambedkar is the blend of ancient and modern education. The contribution of Dr. Ambedkar is significant as he highlighted the requirement of educational development of a large section of Indian society that has long been deprived of education. Dr. Ambedkar played a major role in formulating many laws of education and social emancipation of downtrodden people at the time of constitution-making. It’s



important to realize that if a large part of society is deprived of education, then society will never be able to develop holistically. Bridging the social divide is very necessary; otherwise social harmony cannot be established in society. Dr Ambedkar, therefore, stressed that the state should provide the people with universal quality education and also provides technical education so that social and economic equality can be established in our society and our country can make progress.

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education was the blend of rational and secular philosophy of Gautam Buddha and the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey. Dr. Ambedkar's three word formula – 'educate, agitate and organize' is a powerful tool of social change even today. Ambedkar made conscious of the rights of the depressed classes, which was denied to them for centuries. This in turn would provide the necessary cultural basis for their progressive assimilation into the mainstream of an enlightened national life. In his perspective, education held the potential to serve as a potent tool for a widespread movement aimed at safeguarding life and liberty. It had the power to emancipate individuals from societal ills, alleviate the suffering caused by ignorance and poverty, and inspire the oppressed to combat injustice and exploitation, freeing them from dogmatic beliefs.

Ambedkar was given the responsibility of drafting the Constitution of the newly independent India in due recognition of his merit and scholarship. In constitution, he prescribed many articles for the spread of education. Free and compulsory education was also made as state responsibility under Directive Principles of State Policy. He holds that the greater responsibility for providing educational opportunities should be that of government. The government should also see that these facilities are effectively utilized. He knows that the easier are the government opportunities for education to the poor people, the more are the chances for individual development and said progress. He wanted to solve the educational problem through governmental efforts and agencies. He gave importance to both political and educational movement equally because he knew that without education Dalits cannot capture the important post which will elevate their social position. He believed that education will establish equality between men and women. To end the caste based discrimination he suggested having uniform schools and joint schools for both upper caste and lower caste people rather than separate schools for Dalits. He firmly asserted that knowledge equates to power in all aspects of life. According to him, the Scheduled Castes would not achieve their aspirations of freedom and liberty unless they fully embrace all forms of knowledge (Waghmare, 2016:16).

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