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DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S PHILOSOPHY ON EDUCATION

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“The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life.”

-B.R. Ambedkar

Ambedkar negated the external intervention in space of education (globalization and education), and directed towards a socialist model of education according to Buddhist ideology. This also examines the relevance of his philosophy of education with the movements of liberation of depressed classes, which are in turn based on education. The educated can assert their rights and be motivated for development. This paper will study Ambedkar's educational philosophy in regards to other Indian educational philosophers where Ambedkar has disappeared from such discourse. His vision and ideas on education necessitate a study of Ambedkar while seeking to amplify the ignored voices through education.

History of Indian Education System

The philosophy of education is considered as one of the fields of philosophy, where the philosophical approaches like metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology, aesthetics and ethics are comparatively examined. Educational philosophy cooperates with the above approaches and also propagates processes to provide knowledge to individuals based on their abilities. The aim and objective of this philosophy is to create skills, responsibility, and respectable, knowledgeable and reasonable citizens for nation states. The function of educational philosophy is to address the teacher- learner interactions where the teachers carry a philosophical nature when they enter a class room (Ibid).

In the Indian context, educational philosophy envisages more or less the same approaches, objectives and functions. Going back to its roots, there were influences pertaining to history (the Vedic and post-Vedic periods); the *Astikas* system represented an orthodox belief and the *Nastikas* system was heterodox. In the orthodox system, there is Vedic religious philosophy discussed in different schools of *Mimansa*, *Vedanta*, *Sankhya*, *Nayna*, *Yoga* and so on. In *Nastikas* schools are included *Charvaka*, *Buddha* and *Jaina*. The educational values imparted according to the schools of thought and other antecedents are hegemonic and destructive in nature. These philosophical traditions have been blanketed from the western philosophical sphere.

The Islamic influence in medieval India was also reflected in educational values, where institutions like *Madarsas* and *Maktabas* were created to provide education. Other religious schools also provided learning to individuals. The Islamic medium of learning was Persian and subjects like maths, logic, reasoning and languages were taught by respective teachers. The aims and objectives of education were to provide religious and vocational learning to the individual. The other part was to provide military training which could create options for livelihood.

The British invasion of India further impacted the education system of country. The Christian philosophy of education was introduced in this period. In fact, this was the beginning of the modern period in India where spreading modern values introduced by the British through various reforms brought in education. The reforms included: Indian Universities Commission, 1902, Indian University Act, 1904; National Education Policy for 1912, Hertog Committee Report in 1929. In these reforms, a public education system was part of the western ideas for creating an administrative system. However, the appraisal of the Indian reformists criticized the British. Sri Aurobindo, Swami Dayanand, M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Jawaharlal Nehru, M. N Roy, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, M.G Ranade- they all demanded educational reforms for the nation. They believed that the British education system is against the interests of the Indian citizen. Their aim and objective behind education was that the education policies of the British presented an alternative and a different philosophy of education. They wanted new national educational policies for the country (Gupta S. 2005). But Mahatma Jotiba Phule was the first one who raised the issue of education for backward castes before the Hunter commission. And then there was another towering personality, the constitution maker for free India, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who

strived to secure rights for the depressed classes and fought for their liberation. He was the first untouchable student who pursued higher education from abroad and become the father of modern India. His philosophy of life was influenced by Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj and so on. He presented his reformist suggestions on the educational rights of the depressed classes. His philosophical determinants have not been cherished by academicians of the country nor has his liberation ideas for the depressed classes discussed on a national platform by the upper castes. He wrote on various issues but the textbook academia of India have ignored his theories. Ambedkar remains just a constitution maker for millions of people of this country, not even upper caste media is sensitive to his ideas on education and liberation.

His philosophy of education should have been discussed separately and implemented in India's education system. It will take some time to address the educational process that Ambedkar's pedagogy teaches for the students of this country. If his ideas in the field of education, whether it was primary or university education, were accepted they would make great a new addition to India's educational philosophy.

Ambedkar suggested several policy measures for the development of education starting from primary to university that can be found to be relevant today to make the education sector effective and accountable. His ideas are full of innovations and quite pragmatic. His emphasis on the economic value of education that is the utilization of scare resources for the development of education, the idea of pooling the teaching resources of both city colleges and universities to avoid duplication and to improve efficiency etc. are still very relevant.

Relevance of Dr. Ambedkar philosophy's of education

Education has been seen as conducting an emancipatory role in each person's life. The current education system has drawn inspiration from opinions which are cultured from the authoritative powers of the dominating classes, and seems divorced from exploring the rationale for its relevance in society at large and the youth within it.

Ambedkar was an impeccable leader, who took up the leadership to light the lamp of enlightenment. With his immense reading and clarity of thoughts and arguments, he countered the oppressive and discriminatory caste based practices. Ambedkar's last words emphasized: 'Educate, Agitate and Organize'. He was a person with high intellect and was trained under the then distinguished scholars like John Dewey, Charles Beard and R. A. Seligman (Sirswal, 2011). It's astonishing to realize that Ambedkar's opinions and

perceptions on education aren't recognized. Since 1920, when he actively became a part of the public platform till his death in 1956, Dr.B.R. Ambedkar had constantly been on the forefront of the movement to eradicate birth based oppression where the basic amenities like education, housing choices are restricted for the benefit of the few. With his expertise in world thought and his broad education he accomplished in a short span of time he initiated new ideas in the process of engagement with the learning process.

Ambedkar's thoughts are not only limited to the cause for a particular section of the society, but they have been wifully neglected. All this while it is forgotten that the exhaustive text of the Indian Constitution was for all and Ambedkar can be seen as the leader who strongly believed and worked for the secularity of the nation.

Equal Opportunity for all

Ambedkar, who developed an almost doctrinal belief in the efficacious and transformatory character of education, held that education must be available to all, irrespective of caste or status. "Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone." (Ambedkar 1982: 40) He examined the education policy of the British in India and found that Education in India had always remained restricted to the members of the upper stratum of society.

Ambedkar's important contribution to the education sector was his belief that 'Education is something, which ought to be brought within the reach of every one'. He urged this plea because he felt that, "we are arriving at a stage when the lower orders of society are just getting into the high schools, middle schools and colleges, and the policy of this department therefore ought to be to make higher education as cheap to the lower classes as it can possibly be made." (Ambedkar 1982: 40-41)

Ambedkar was against the great disparity in the advancement in education of the different classes in India. He quoted statics from the report of Education and Hunter Commission to point out that depressed classes are the worst sufferers in education sector in proportion to their population. (For details see Ambedkar 1982: 39-44) He stressed that depressed classes should be treated as minority and similar benefits should also be extended to them as Muslims were earlier given in education sector. He also suggested other pragmatic ways to promote literacy among the depressed classes during the Legislative debate, "The second thing that I wish to say about the depressed classes is that I find a as a certain sum

has been set aside in the budget for scholarships for the backward communities.”
(Ambedkar 1982: 43-44)

During the discussion, Ambedkar also developed logical argument in favour of equality of opportunity to be provided to all the vulnerable communities in the society which can be further developed in the context of different controversies raised on the issue of reservations after independence. “I must here emphasise that this country is composed of different communities. All these communities are unequal in their status and progress. If they are to be brought to the level of equality then the only remedy is to adopt the principle of inequality and to give favoured treatment to those who are below the level. There are some I know who object to this and adhere to the principle of equality of treatment. But I say Government has done well in applying this principle to the Mohammedans. For I honestly believe that equality of treatment to people who are unequal is simply another name for indifferentism and neglect. My only complaint is that Government has not yet thought fit to apply this principle to the backward classes.”
(Ambedkar 1982: 42)

Primary Education for All

Ambedkar was convinced that primary education is very important for the vulnerable sections as it provides them necessary platform to enter into public life. Ambedkar recognized the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the under-privileged not to lose any opportunity, ‘We may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our rights and opportunities to reap the benefits of highest education to the fullest extent.’ As a member, Ambedkar submitted detailed report about the deplorable condition of the Backward Communities to the Bombay Legislative Assembly, suggesting steps for the prevailing iniquitous educational System. He made a historical appeal for more grants to develop primary education for all sections during 1927 in his Legislative Council Debates in the Bombay Assembly.

Ambedkar pointed out that, “The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life.” (Ambedkar 1982: 40)

Ambedkar also cautioned regarding the trend of dropout rate at the initial stage, “...if we take the statistics, we find that out of every hundred children that enter a primary school

only eighteen reach the fourth standard; the rest of them, that is to say, 82 out of every 100, relapse into the state of illiteracy.” (Ambedkar 1982: 40)

Ambedkar was also against the commercialization of education and criticized the existing government, “out of the total expenditure which we incur on arts colleges, something like 36 per cent is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on high schools, something like 31 per cent is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on middle schools, something like 26 per cent is derived from fees.” (Ambedkar 1982: 40)

Importance of Higher Education

Ambedkar made important interventions during the Bombay University Amendment Act and gave his views on university education that are still very relevant to promote higher education in India. Ambedkar also utilized the opportunity to give suggestions on higher education by submitting written evidence before the University Reforms Committee in 1925.

“...it must be realised that the University cannot succeed in promoting research or in promoting higher education, if it makes the examination system the be-all and end all of its existence.” (Ambedkar 1982: 45-46)

According to Ambedkar, “One of the fundamental functions of the University, as I understand it, is to provide facilities for bringing the highest education to the doors of the needy and the poor....I look upon the University primarily as a machinery, whereby educational facilities are provided to all those who are intellectually capable of using those facilities to the best advantage...”. (Ambedkar 1982:61) As a result Ambedkar argued for the adequate representation of different communities in the senate to control the university affairs.

He also opposed the distinction between undergraduate teaching and postgraduate teaching. He said, “... if the object of the bill is to promote higher education and research, the best method would be not to separate the colleges from the University as has been done now but to make a synthesis in which the University and the colleges would be partners on terms of equality and would be participating in promoting together, both the undergraduate and the post-graduate studies.” (Ambedkar 1982: 48) Ambedkar also stressed the importance of research in the universities. The separation of postgraduate work from undergraduate work means the separation of teaching from research. But it is obvious that where research is divorced from teaching research must suffer. (Ambedkar 1982: 298)

Ambedkar was perhaps the first educationist who wanted power to be given to the academic council in matters of academic affairs in the university. (Quoted in Aryama2007: 348-349) He emphasized that a teaching university should really function as a teachers university in the sense that teachers hold all academic and administrative posts. (For detail see Ambedkar 1982: 292-312)

The People's Education Society's objective is not merely to give instructions, but to impart such education as promotes intellectual, moral and social democracy. This is what modern India needs and this is what all well-wishers of India must promote, held Ambedkar. The motto of the People's Education Society is 'Knowledge and Compassion'. The Society had made good progress in this direction; running a number of colleges. (Kadam 1993: 210-211)

In brief, the People's Education Society has significantly contributed to the spread of higher education among the vulnerable communities. The colleges gave monthly scholarships, provided cheap accommodation and paid immense attention to student's problems and encouraged progress. On the other hand, the students, after completing their education, have been working in villages and cities in various capacities in various bodies and offices. Ambedkar's voluntary efforts also included educational modernization but he said that it's a task that the state should undertake. Thus, in state socialism, he allocated a major role to the state in discharging its duties in respect of education of the unlettered millions of citizens in the country. (Foe detail see Ambedkar 1979)

Ambedkar wrote a letter to one of his father's friends when he was in America to pursue both male and female education in order to live a life of dignity. " We shall soon see better days and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is pursued side by side with the female education..."(Keer 1991: 27) Later on, when he came back to India, he continuously advised his fellow brethren to educate themselves and their children. Ambedkar seems to carry forward the legacy of Mahatma Phule on the issue of education for girls. (Pratima 2003: 359) For Ambedkar, education was an important instrument of bringing social change and to help women to alleviate their position. Addressing a gathering of women during the Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar advised them, "...Send your children to schools. Education is as necessary for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be." (Keer 1991: 104)

Conclusion

Ambedkar had a deep relation with education and his writings show expertise and indepth analysis of the subject. The great leader has been restricted to the narrow position of being just a Dalit emancipator. His contributions towards education and his vision towards it should be traced and nurtured. Ambedkar realized education to be a priority for the society and for growth of individuals with character. Educational philosophy stresses on development of persons and their environment. Ambedkar also saw education as something that can create radical changes in an oppressed society and create avenues for change which are equal for all. Ambedkar's thoughts resonate with the current academic discourse and hence make him relevant, to bring in a perspective which has been missing. The perspective which is generated through struggled learning. That learning needs to be recognized and captured in textbooks, cutting across boundaries.

Meanwhile, teachers and the trainers also need to establish a bond and promote an education that works towards the objectives of self-actualization and a just society. With such collective efforts, education can play a role in the conscientization and creation of citizens who are aware of the perils a society faces, motivating them to challenge its customary norms and practices even when establishing themselves. To contextualize educational philosophy in India we must remember that learning was barred for a large section of society, wherein the texts and writings which govern them were permitted to be read and to be interpreted by a few born in a specific community. This exclusiveness to a particular community for learning further translated into children from the 'lower' section of the community being kept away from education in order to maintain the purity of the 'sacred learning' of the few.

Education can hence create a realization among the masses of them being subjected to a hegemonic force. In a speech at the All India Depressed Classes Conferences on July 1942, he highlighted the considerable progress in education and a greater degree of political consciousness acquired by the Dalits in India. Above all the progress made by the untouchable's women was encouraging and astonishing.

Ambedkar has deliberately included Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy that, "the state shall Endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." The government of India has passed the bill of Right to Education Act 2008 and paid a great tribute to the contributions of Ambedkar to mass education. The policy of the Government of universalization of

elementary education focusing particularly on marginalized groups, poorer sections and the girl child, enhancing enrollment in secondary education as well as its commitment to expand education facilities will empower and equip youth to face the future with hope and confidence. There are several challenges to cherish Ambedkar's vision of universal education. There is need to frame such policies starting from the primary stage to the higher stage that help to realize the vision of Ambedkar.

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