

Education for Social Emancipation: In agreement with Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar

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Abstract

Ambedkar has in his credit not only to be described as a philosopher, a patriot, a scholar, the constitution maker, a social revolutionary, a humanistic thinker but he was a great educationist as well, trained under the then distinguished scholars- John Dewey, Charles Beard, and R. A. Seligman. 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 discrimination in society and birth-based oppression for which he thought education was the chief instrument. Ambedkar's struggle against discrimination doesn't imply that his thoughts are limited to the cause for a particular section of the society, instead, they stood for the cause all. The exhaustive text of the Indian Constitution projects Dr. Ambedkar as a leader of all Indians, who strongly believed and worked for the secularity of the nation. Yet Dr.Ambedkar remains just a constitution maker for millions, his social and educational thought remains surprisingly neglected in Indian educational discourse. It's astonishing to realize that Ambedkar's opinions and perceptions on education aren't recognized to their highest potential. This paper is an attempt to bring to light his consistent and untiring efforts to make education an instrument of social emancipation and justice.

Keywords: Social Emancipation, Education, Social justice

Introduction

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A Pragmatist Thinker

Education according to Dr. Ambedkar is the main key to opening the doors of light, vision, and wisdom. He viewed education as a blend of pragmatism of John Dewey one of the greatest educationists of the 20th century and 'dhamma' of Buddha. The influence of John Dewey, on Ambedkar, appears to be deep and permanent. He was greatly influenced by Dewey's ideas on the scientific method, experimental approach, democracy, and pragmatism in the field of education. Therefore, Ambedkar approached the problem of the educational upliftment of the masses as a pragmatist. Ambedkar wanted the people to cultivate the values of freedom and equality among themselves which is possible only through education. The basic themes of his philosophy of education are inculcating the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, and moral character among the boys and girls. Getting educated is to stand up for equal opportunities in society and for social justice. Through education, he aims at removing the barriers in the religious caste system and the development of backward caste as well as all marginalized communities. He believed that education was necessary to shake off their mental sluggishness and satisfaction with their existing predicament. Babasaheb Ambedkar recognized the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the underprivileged not to lose any opportunity, and said that "*We may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our rights and opportunities to reap the benefits of highest education to the fullest extent.*" He put all his efforts to guarantee education without any discrimination to all the citizens of independent India.

His educational contribution starts on a wider scale of educating classes as well as masses. Education is something, which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone. He opined that the Education Department is not a department, which can be treated on the basis of *quid pro quo*. Education ought to be cheapened in all possible ways and to the greatest possible extent.

Different 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. Economically speaking or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped in a manner in which no other community is handicapped.



Babasaheb, therefore, advised that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case.

Ambedkar was very particular in developing primary education. He himself said, “*Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone. 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 continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life.*” He discussed various issues related to education and also the reasons for the failure of the education system.

” The wastage in the educational effort is immense and most educationalists are of opinion that there is no solution to this problem of wastage in educational effort in India, but compulsion. The total wastage of educational effort and its concurrent dissipation of educational funds in the primary classes is about fifty percent of the total energy put forth.”

He opined that more money should be spent on primary education, if for nothing else at least for the purpose of seeing that what he spends bears some fruit ultimately. Unless we spend a sufficient amount of money, to see that every child that enters a school reaches the fourth standard, what we have already spent upon him is of no purpose whatsoever.

Aims of Education: Self and Social Emancipation

Babasaheb Ambedkar lists two purposes of education: first, to acquire it for the betterment of others, and secondly to use it for one's own betterment. This implies that education has a dual purpose to serve i.e. as a means of social change and as a medium for individual development. The latter according to him is pursued by a larger circle of people than the former. The realization of existence is not the only valid standpoint, but the realization of struggled existence of the 'others' is also equally important. Thus on one hand education should work towards the objectives of self-actualization and on the other towards creating a just society.

➤ Betterment of Others

Dr. Ambedkar considered the betterment of others as the first and foremost aim of attaining education. He was a great nationalist. For him before self comes the idea of social equality and justice. In view of this approach, he made insurmountable efforts for the upliftment of the depressed classes in society. He recognized education as the major tool of the discriminated masses to stand up and claim their rights. He thought that the base of education would provide the rationale, strength and perseverance, and the ability to distinguish between truth and cultured



opinions. He advocated education to play a role in conscientization and awaken the citizens towards the perils of society motivating them to challenge its customary norms and practices even when establishing themselves. Ambedkar ardently supported schooling that inculcates human rights education, education that teaches human dignity and justice in India.

➤ **Betterment of Self**

Next to the betterment of others is the aim of self-betterment. According to Babasaheb, one should always struggle to improve his position in society and to live his life with dignity and self-esteem. For him *"Self-respect is a most vital factor in life. Without it, man is a mere cipher. To live worthily with self-respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence, and recognition."*

Education should not be limited to the achievement of bookish knowledge and gaining degrees and certificates. For him, education and its continuation through implementing it in one's life are necessary for constant and meaningful learning. In this respect, education provides strength and courage and elevates one's status to the position of self-worth.

Dr. Ambedkar argues against professional learning which aims at creating a clerical nature of workers, inculcating a non-questioning attitude as the objective of learning. The argumentative capability reflects a person's thinking prowess and his ability to reach the truth and identify it through a procedure. One should constantly struggle towards self-betterment with education as a means.

Principle of Emancipation: Educate, Agitate and Organise

Educate, agitate and organize are three final words of our great leader. According to Dr. Ambedkar, one must get educated before he is conducting agitated thoughts for the movement so that people can organize with his support. Create power in people to experience basic rights in the society, to achieve success in life, and also struggle for social justice.

➤ **Educate**

Education plays a crucial role both in an individual's life and in society. In Babasaheb's view getting an education does not mean merely acquiring the knowledge and getting academic designation but education trains the mind to think freely, take the right decision, implement his thinking to achieve freedom against discrimination, and maintain social equality. An educated man has an open mind who welcomes and accommodates diverse views and opinions and perceives the world differently from the people who are uneducated. An educated man's



approach is rational and he is able to view the situation in an objective way. His decisions are free from biases and prejudices. Education is the only means to spread and propagate knowledge and information one receives through generations.

➤ **Agitate**

The word 'agitate' does not mean that, to agitate physically; it is a mental revolution in its place. It does not mean to go out and start protesting violently on the streets, without getting educated. After getting educated, by understanding Babasaheb's thoughts and strategy the individual can start agitating mentally. Agitated minds, as Dr. Ambedkar presumed, would force educated people to form organizations and they would act to fix the problems.

➤ **Organize**

Educated and agitated minds will easily organize for a common mission. We must get ourselves educated and our thoughts agitate so that we can collectively organize. Agitated minds for a common mission will help them to unite and struggle for their common goal as one force. Only education can bring this change.

People who are illiterate and uneducated are unaware of their basic rights in society. Even today such illiterate and uneducated people are facing innumerable discrimination problems in society and lack of support and motivation accelerates their pathos and worsens the situation. The idea of the watchword 'Educate, Agitate and organize' must be respected and observed for effective results of the movement for the upliftment of such people.

Education as an Instrument of Social Emancipation

Dr. Ambedkar had explained the importance of education in his written testimony before the University Reform Committee set up by the Municipal Government regarding Mumbai University reforms. Highlighting disparity in the level of education of various communities he submitted a report throwing light on the educational advancement of different communities in the Bombay Presidency in 1923 to the Indian statutory commission on 19th March 1928. For the upliftment of the depressed classes, he developed a programme of education as a part of the general manifesto of the Indian Labor Party before the general elections of 1937.

Babasaheb recognized that lack of education was the main cause for the backwardness of people and education can serve as an important instrument for uplifting their position in society and thereby changing the lives of untouchables. According to him education would enlighten the people and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor to which the untouchables belong. It is



an effective instrument of a mass movement to safeguard the life and liberty of the people. Education could encourage the oppressed ones to fight and remove injustice and exploitation and pave the way for free-thinking. Education is not only a layer for their social mobility but also opens the doors for their modernization. In conferences, lectures, and also in meetings, Ambedkar encouraged untouchable youth to acquire education in order to raise their social status and image. Ambedkar's ideas for the untouchables were to raise their educational standards so that they may know their own condition, have aspirations and elevate their position in society and be in the position to exercise political power as a means to this.

Babasaheb Ambedkar established various educational institutions in Maharashtra, especially for weaker sections of society. These included Siddharth college, Milind College, and other similar schools for untouchables and women. He contributed to a plethora of books and journals. His speeches and writing are a valuable source for the process of truth-finding and its expression. Through his thoughts, words, and actions Ambedkar raised the consciousness of Dalits regarding the wretchedness and the injustice of their social condition and awakened them to the possibilities of establishing a society in which they could live like equals. Thus he allocated education a revolutionary role so as to accelerate social progress and to establish a just and equal society. Education was identified as a key instrument of liberation from oppressive structures of Hindu caste-patriarchy as well as of reconstruction of a new social order.

"The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forgo material benefits, we may forgo material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forgo our rights and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent. That is the importance of this question from the point of view of the backward classes who have just realized that without education their existence is not safe."- (BAWS- Vol.2, 1982).

Conclusion

Though the great leader has been restricted to the narrow position of being just a Dalit emancipator, his contributions towards education and his vision towards the subject owe great significance in today's world. Belonging to a socially expelled community Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas were looked down upon as threatening and misleading by the fundamentalists. Still, Dr. Ambedkar through his words and writings created a significant impact and agitated the society to stand up for their rights and to emancipate themselves from the bondage of age-old social evils.



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