

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

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Abstract

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, "Education is the birthright of every person and this right cannot be denied to anyone." He also said, "Education is what makes a person aware of his existence, potential and power." Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the highest educated man, professor and educationist, and a leading global thinker. There are many aspects to his personality, but This article is about 'Education and Ambedkar'. Dr. Ambedkar gave utmost importance to education in his life and he stressed that only through education a man can prosper. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was of the view that education is the birth right of every individual and nobody can be denied this right. No plan for the future development of the country can be deemed to be complete which does not provide for technical and scientific training. This is the "Age of Machine", and it is only those countries in which technical and scientific training has risen to the highest pitch that will survive in the struggle that will commence when the War is over, for maintaining decent standards for of living for their people." – Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Labour Minister, Viceroy's Executive Council.

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Introduction

Ambedkar's writings on education include his deposition before the Indian Statutory Commission in the Bombay Presidency on "State of Education of the Dalits". His deposition forms part of the compilation *Dr Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 4). In addition, his article titled "Subsidy for Education" has been included in *Dr Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 3); this is based on his speech to the Bombay Legislative Council, delivered on 12 March 1927, in which he pleads for increased subsidy from the government on education and also underlines the need for inexpensive education for the deprived sections. In *Dr Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 19), among other concerns of the SCs, their concerns on education are also listed. They are divided into two parts – under 'lack of assistance for higher education' and 'lack of facilities for technical training'.

Dr Ambedkar's struggle for Dalits' education

Whenever we talk of freedom, we forget about the freedom of Dalits. Shortly, we are going to celebrate the anniversary of our freedom from the British. This is the perfect time for

talking about the freedom of Dalits. The Dalits were victims of double slavery – and it was Ambedkar who freed them from it. Shaken to the core by Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement, the British Government convened a Round Table Conference in London on 12 November 1930. A young barrister attending the conference startled everyone by refusing to acknowledge Gandhiji as the leader of all Indians. His name was Dr B.R. Ambedkar. He said that most of the Congress leaders believed in caste-based discrimination and they would not allow the Dalits any say in constitutional processes. That was why, he added, there was a need for separate electorates where the candidates and the electors both would only be Dalits. On 6 August 1932, British prime minister Ramsay Macdonald announced the Communal Award, under which the Dalits were recognized as distinct from the Hindus and a provision was made for a separate electorate for them. At the time, Gandhiji was incarcerated in the Poona jail. He saw this announcement as a conspiracy to alienate Dalits from the Hindus. On 20 September 1932, Gandhiji began a fast-unto-death in protest against the Communal Award, sending the nation into a tizzy. Dr Ambedkar was urged to save the life of Gandhiji. Bowing to the pressure mounted on him from all sides, Ambedkar agreed for a compromise but on the condition that the Dalits are provided reservations at all levels. Gandhiji agreed, and he broke his fast on 26 September. In the second half of the 19th century, social reformers had launched an acerbic attack on brahmanical rituals through their books. Jotirao Phule's *Gulamgiri* was one of them. In the South, Periyar and Narayan Guru sounded the bugle against the Varna system. A few decades later, Ambedkar was given the responsibility of drafting the Constitution of the newly independent India in due recognition of his merit and scholarship. He became the country's first law minister. Since then, Ambedkar's thoughts have grown in relevance with each passing year. Even before Independence, he was recognized as a jurist of rare intellect. He raised some pertinent questions about education in Indian society while speaking in the Bombay Legislative Council on 12 March 1927. He was deeply concerned that India was lagging behind in education.

'Educate, unite, struggle'

Dr Ambedkar's views on education have yet to be studied deeply – this despite the fact that he had been working in the field of education since he founded the Hitkarini Sabha in 1924. Ensuring that more and more of the backward classes got an education was among the priorities of the Sabha and with that purpose, it established a number of colleges, hostels, libraries and reading centres. At the initiative of the students and under the guidance of the Sabha, a monthly titled *Saraswati Belas* was launched. The Sabha established hostels in

Sholapur and Belgaun in 1935 and a free reading centre, a hockey club and two hostels in Bombay. In 1928, Dr Ambedkar constituted the Depressed Classes Educational Society. In 1945, he founded the Lok Shaikshik Samaj for to ensure that the backward classes got higher education. This organization started a number of colleges and middle schools. It also extended financial assistance to hostels. In brief, the Lok Shaikshik Samaj played an important role in making higher education accessible to the Dalits. Dr Ambedkar's writings pertained not only to economics, the law, the Constitution and political science, but also to sociology, philosophy, religion, anthropology, etc. He also had an abiding interest in education. It was not limited to theorizing.

Objectives of education

Ambedkar's social-philosophical views rested on the bedrock of egalitarianism. Human dignity and self-respect were central to his social philosophy. He wanted to use education to establish justice, equality, fraternity, freedom and fearlessness in society. He wanted to replace the birth-based society with a value-based one. It goes without saying that these moral values can be promoted only through education. Ambedkar was deeply influenced by Buddhist philosophy and he advocated development of morality in all people. He said only such objectives of education are meaningful that aid in making humans happy and prosperous and helping society progress. He was also in favour of making education relevant to employment. Education can help make society stable. Good behaviour and good conduct arise from logical reasoning and that can be acquired only through education, experience and dialogue. Ambedkar's objectives of education were the same as his social, economic and political objectives. He was a strong proponent of logical and scientific education.

The ideal teacher

In Dr Ambedkar's scheme of things, the teacher had a big role to play in the process of learning and imbibing. He himself was deeply influenced by his teachers; in fact, he had added the surname "Ambedkar" of one of his teachers to his name. That teacher, incidentally, was a Brahmin. This shows the great respect Ambedkar had for his teachers. He was not against the Brahmins as a caste. He was against brahmanical ideology. Talking about the ideal teacher, Ambedkar said, "He must not only be well-read but also a good orator and an experienced person." In Dr Ambedkar's view, "It is not necessary that we should agree with the conclusions of our teacher, and the teacher who recognizes this fact is the true teacher. The teacher's job is to understand the mental abilities of the students and to develop them. He should guide his students. A good teacher is the friend, philosopher and guide of his

students.” According to Ambedkar, a teacher should be knowledgeable about the reality of society so that they can interperse their teaching with anecdotes and make it relevant to the real world. Such a teacher deserves the respect of his students.

Women’s education

For Dr Ambedkar, the lack of education among women was the biggest problem facing Indian society. He held Brahmanism responsible for the pitiable state of women in India. He believed that Brahmanism and masculism were inextricably linked. “There is no social evil and no social wrong to which the Brahmin has not given his support. Man’s inhumanity to man, such as the feeling of caste, untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability is a religion to him. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that only the wrongs of man are a religion to him. The Brahmin has given his support to some of the worst wrongs that women have suffered from in any part of the world. In India widows were burnt alive as suttees and the Brahmin gave his fullest support to the practice. Widows were not allowed to remarry. The Brahmins upheld the doctrine. Girls were required to be married before 8 and the husbands were permitted to claim the right to consummate the marriage at any time thereafter.” It is believed that women enjoyed many rights in the Vedic age, but that their position deteriorated afterwards. Dr Ambedkar showed that the *Manusmriti* had accorded women a status even lower than that of servants. They were deprived of education and the right to own property was snatched away from them. He insisted that women be treated with dignity and given adequate opportunities for growth.

Scholarships for Dalit students

Dr Ambedkar demanded scholarships for Dalit students. Then, scholarships were being given only to students of religious minorities. He said, “Without government aid, the Scheduled Castes will never be able to gain access to advanced education in science and technology and it will only be just and proper that the Government of India comes forward to extend help to them in this regard.” He proposed that: “1. Such Scheduled-Caste students who take admissions in science and technology courses in universities or in other scientific and technical training institutions should be given scholarships worth Rs 2 lakh per year. 2. Rs 1 lakh as grant-in-aid should be provided to SC students for studying science and technology in universities in England, Europe, America and the Dominion.” Dr Ambedkar also showed to the government the way this could be done. He proposed that the instead of grants, scholarships should be given in the form of loans.

Reservations for Dalit students

Reservations proved to be the most successful instrument for ensuring the representation of Dalits in institutions of higher learning. Ambedkar proposed “reservation of some seats for such boys of Scheduled Castes who have attained the minimum standard of education for seeking admission.” He proposed setting aside of 10 per cent of the seats for such students. His objective was clear – to give representation to Dalit students. He also wanted similar participation of the Dalits in statutory bodies. He raised the issue of representation of SCs in the Central Education Advisory Board.

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