

CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR TO INDIAN EDUCATION

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History of Indian education is inseparably linked with the contributions of B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was a great scientific humanist and prophet of human rights. His war against untouchability and inhuman codes of Hinduism had no parallel in the history of India. He was a multi-faceted personality. He was an eminent parliamentarian, great economist, a brilliant academician, an erudite scholar albeit a veritable genius. He was a great constitutional expert and an eminent journalist and barrister; moreover he was a historian. It is no wonder that Ambedkar always stressed the importance of education of the great section of Indian society. As an educationist, he believed that education was the weapon of psychological revolution.

Ambedkar always took up the cause of educating this deprived section of Indian society. Ambedkar's deep concern was, for the education of the downtrodden. In one of the speeches Ambedkar said: "I find that the intermediate class namely non-Brahmins who were first in order on the basis of population, are third in college education, third in secondary education and third in primary education. The backward classes who are second in order of population are fourth in order of college education fourth in order of secondary education and fourth in order of primary education."¹

Ambedkar emerged as the great missionary and visionary in India, at a historical juncture. He propounded the education based on scientific humanism. His own bitter experiences in the process of getting educated was a distinct history. "He regarded the humiliations of his people as his personal humiliations and therefore, he owed to make self respecting citizens out of the virtual slaves."²

His Ideas of Education

According to him education gives birth to self respect and free thinking in man. To him "education is evolution of the interlectuality, and it must prepare the student to ask a new question per day to his teacher."³ In his opinion education is nothing but a spirit of inquiry, making the men, question old habits, ideas, and practices. Ambedkar gave greater importance to education which was the key to all success in life. He always exhorted his followers to give proper education to their sons and daughters. In a letter written by him from Newyork in 1913, to a friend of his fater he made it clear: "we must now entirely give up the idea that parents give birth or 'Janma' to a child and not destiny that is 'Karma'. They could mould the destiny of their children and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is pursued side by side with female education."⁴

He opined that if one's education is detrimental to the welfare of the poor, the educated man is a curse to the society. Ambedkar fully endorsed, Dewey's emphasis on education "as a means to change the world and not merely to understand it, education should be capable of creating human values which have universal applicability". He was of the view that education must aim at culture and self help.⁵ Therefore he suggested the education department to expand liberal technical education. As a pragmatist Ambedkar held that education must train the individuals in skills. He had great belief in the uses of education and its potentialities to alter the value of individuals and prepare them for change. Greatly moved by Dewey's ideas on education and also experiencing the value of individual freedom and dignity in American Universities and society Ambedkar developed almost a doctrinal belief in the efficacious and transformative character of education. According to Dhananjay Keer⁶, Ambedkar believed that impediments in education would enhance the abjuration of traditional values and would also inculcate value preparation for change. Education coupled with law would usher in a great degree of social change, for law was the essence of the State.

To Ambedkar, nothing was more sacred than learning. Because he made systematic and practical efforts to impart education to the downtrodden for the first time. He mobilised the sources for it by public donations and grants from the municipalities and district boards. He opened hostels for 'untouchable' students. Such hostels were founded at Panvel, Pune, Nasik, Sholapur, Thane and Dharwad. It is interesting to note that Ambedkar had anticipated that Dharwad⁷ would become one of the educational centres and he started one boarding here by the support of his followers. He also desired that this city must develop as centre for higher learning. He made recommendation to the Education Minister in this regard.

He was a great champion of universal free and compulsory primary education. He told the Education Minister of Bombay Presidency, that the transfer of education to the local bodies was wrong. He said: "I may mention, sir, that the primary education act is a great wrong. It is wrong because the responsibility of education is transferred to the hands of those who are not enlightened enough".⁸

Ambedkar's contributions to higher education is noteworthy. He made several suggestions with regard to University Education. While talking about the Bombay University Act, he says "one of the fundamental functions of University as I understand it, is to provide facilities for bringing the highest education to the doors of the needy and the poor. I don't think that any University in any civilized country can justify its existence merely dealing with the problems of examinations and granting of degrees. Now it is the duty of a modern University to provide facilities for the highest education to backward communities."⁹ Then, with this intention only, he urged that some power must be given to backward communities, like membership in the Senate etc. He continued, "I think it must be accepted as a corollary, that the backward communities should have some control in the University affairs."¹⁰

Conclusion

The present system of education needs scientific structural changes in organization, planning, and policy making, etc. Ambedkar desired for secular education. He believed that communal educational institutions were harmful to national integration: he asked ban on universities like Aligarh Muslim University, Banaras Hindu University etc. He urged that "A secular State has to refrain from religious promotion of any kind, arrange for secular education free from all religious teachings."¹¹ Ambedkar as a keen thinker and patriot predicted the present crises in those days. He was of the opinion that unless there was practice of secular education could not integrate in true sense. The present policy makers of Education should learn lessons from Ambedkar's Philosophy and apply his relevant thoughts to solve present crises.

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