

THOUGHTS OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S ON EDUCATION AND PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR DALITS

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Abstract: Indian scripture held a supreme position over and above all other secular sciences including astronomy and grammar. Being predominantly religious, it has always been held in India that religious consciousness is supreme, and that the religious point of view must be dominant in all the affairs of life.

Keyword: Education and Primary Education for Dalits, Indian culture.

INTRODUCTION

Written by Rishis in Sanskrit, the language of the military conquerors who had totally destroyed the Indus Valley cities and exterminated or pushed back the indigenous people into the forests. Thus, originated the Dasas or Dasyus or their likes who were contemptuously described as black skinned, noseless, malignant and non-sacrificing, in contrast to the warrior class who were tall and fair, with prominent noses. These expressions of superiority have been noticed during the British Raj, also. The language of the rulers, namely English was considered to be superior to the regional languages and dialects. English customs and culture were superior to Indian culture. Indians were heathens, called an inferior people.

Most of the scriptures including Vedic hymns, the Upanishads, Puranas, Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, etc., were written in the language of the victor, and were regarded as superior over and above the other languages. Instructions were given to the writers, poets who were largely Brahman rishis, how to write and what to write! Even in the Brahminic literature. Anything written in violation of these guidelines was not to be regarded as literature. Sanskrit had its authoritative position. More than this: literary dictums were given: 'who would be the characters and what would be the subject matter/ According to Bharatmuni's Natya Shastra "Only Gods, Kings, Rishis and Brahman priest would be the heroes and the characters. They would speak the language of the conquerors - Sanskrit." Inferior characters such as women and low caste, would use "prakrit," the language spoken by lower caste people. An exception was the playwright Shudrak.

His "Machchha katic" (Earthen Plough Cart) had a peculiar hero who was a thief, but this play was regarded "goun" (inferior, secondary), according to Bharatmuni's norms. He declared that Ashwaghosh's (Ashwaghosh was a Buddhist) "Rajpntri (Princess), Jayant's Agamdambar and other plays in which Buddhist doctrines and characters were depicted, were

'goun' (inferior). The first revolt against the tyranny of the literary tradition was, through Shudrak's "Machchha katic".

HUMAN RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Every woman, man, youth and child has the human right to education, training and information, and to other fundamental human rights dependent upon realization of the human right to education. Equality of access to all levels of education is crucial to empowering women and girls to participate in economic, social and political life of their societies. Education unlocks a woman's potential, and is accompanied by improvements in health, nutrition, and well-being of women and their families.

Despite widespread agreement that all people have the fundamental human right to education, 100 million children, at least 60% of them girls, do not have access to primary education. 960 million adults in the world are illiterate, and more than two-thirds of them are women. Women and girls continue to face discrimination at all levels of education, a fact which poses tremendous obstacles to their advancement.

Human rights relating to education are set out in basic human rights treaties and include:

- ❖ The human right to free and compulsory elementary education and to readily available forms of secondary and higher education.
- ❖ The human right to freedom from discrimination based on sex or any other status in all areas and levels of education, including access to scholarships and fellowships, and to equal access to career development, continuing education and vocational training.
- ❖ The human right to information about health, nutrition, reproduction and family planning.
- ❖ The human right to education is inextricably linked to other fundamental human rights - rights that are universal, indivisible, interconnected and

interdependent including:

- ❖ The human right to equality between men and women and to equal partnership in the family and society. Realization of this human rights depends on eliminating gender-based stereotypes in education which deny women opportunities for full and equal partnership.
- ❖ The human right to work and receive wages that contribute to an adequate standard of living.
- ❖ The human right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.
- ❖ The human right to an adequate standard of living.
- ❖ The human right to participate in shaping decisions and policies affecting one's community, at the local, national and international levels. \

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The influence of John Dewey, one of the greatest educationists of the 20th century, on Ambedkar appears to be deep and permanent. Ambedkar himself has claimed Dewey as his mentor and quoted him in almost all of his works relating to social and philosophical issues. Dewey, who taught Ambedkar at the Columbia University in the USA, was a pragmatist and humanist, also was one of the signatories of the first International Humanist Manifesto. Ambedkar seems to have realized the significance of democracy in human society due to his teacher's influence. It is interesting to find Ambedkar quoting Dewey's work on 'Democracy and Education' at several places of his studies on social philosophy though he appeared to be a student of Harold Laski in London. Therefore, the influence of Dewey on Ambedkar is indelible. Perhaps, this influence might have prompted Ambedkar to search for a rational and democratic religion to adopt. He finally embraced Buddhism claiming that it was the only religion that was built on democratic principles. Even, as a researcher, one can find in Ambedkar the influence of Dewey.

The research studies of Ambedkar up to 1923 appear to be serious academic pursuits. His studies on currency and finance have been acclaimed as very important contributions to Economics during that period. Further, Ambedkar's methodology in approaching a problem is another significant contribution to social sciences. In all his serious writings, Ambedkar has adopted the deductive method, i.e., first approaching the issue from its historical context, explaining the theoretical under-pinnings behind the issue and finally providing the necessary information and data in support of his arguments. The conclusions drawn by Ambedkar in these works are well supported by meticulous research. In this respect, the contributions of Ambedkar as an academic researcher excel and are well comparable to that of Dadabhai Naoroji and other first generation economists of the 20th

century.

Information in English language on Ambedkar is inadequate to understand him as a teacher. But, the little information that is available in print suggests that as a teacher in Sydenham College of Commerce (as Professor of Economics) and Government Law College (as Professor of Jurisprudence), he was very popular. Students studying in the neighbouring colleges, it is said, used to attend his eloquent lecture sessions in these colleges. He has also worked as the Principal of Government Law College, Bombay. He has used his practical experiences as a teacher and administrator in discussing issues relating to education in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Ambedkar studied the most prestigious subjects of his times in the world famous universities in Europe and USA. One can see the significance of his degrees which the dalits fondly attach to his name as if it is a historical revenge against a society that denied them education, but achieved by their leader in one generation.

COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

The major contribution of Ambedkar to the field of education in general and to depressed classes in particular is his memorandum submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission in 1928 by the Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha. Quoting extensively from the report of the Board of Education and Hunter Commission, Ambedkar had argued that Mohammadans are given due share in the education sector by considering them as a minority and similar benefits should also, be extended to the depressed classes. It may be relevant here to quote him saying that, "I am not making this statement in any carping spirit nor grudge the efforts that government have made in the matter of the education of Mohammadans. I must here emphasize 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 treatment. But, I say government has done well in applying the principle to the Mohammadans. 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. Economically speaking or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped. I, therefore, think that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case."³ In the context of the recent controversy on reservations, it is necessary to make the anti-reservationists (including

the government) to read these lines of Ambedkar for its logical and rational argument developed in favour of equality of opportunity.

EDUCATION FOR DALITS

The major contribution of Ambedkar to the education sector in general and to the depressed classes in particular can be examined in the memorandum submitted by him to the Indian Statutory Commission in 1928. Quoting extensively from the report of the Board of Education and Hunter Commission, Ambedkar had argued that Mohammadans are given due share in the education sector by considering them as a minority and similar benefits should also be extended to the depressed classes. He has also given the necessary data to prove his point. In Table 1 we have provided the enrolment of students at various levels of education in the Bombay Presidency during 1923-24 (as calculated by Ambedkar). The figures indicate that there were 18 boys per 1,000 population in primary education and less than one in secondary education and at the collegiate level there were none among the backward classes. If we compare the enrolment of students of various castes at different levels of education in 1881-82 (Table 2) with that of the enrolment in 1923-24, we can find that there is a decline in the educational status of all communities in the Presidency. However, there is slight increase in the enrolment, rather the presence of the backward classes in the secondary education. But, the enrolment of the backward classes is found to be zero at the collegiate level both in the years 1881-82 and also in 1923-24. This has encouraged Ambedkar to argue that the backward Hindus are found to be in the order of 2nd position in population and in education they are at the 4th position. He has concluded from the statistics that, (1) the state of education of the backward classes in this Presidency is deplorable: while in the matter of population they occupy a place as high as second, in the matter of education they occupy a place which is not only last but which is also the least; (2) that the Mohamedans of the Presidency have made enormous strides in education; so much so that within the short span of 30 years, they have not only Molen a march over other communities such as the intermediate and the backward classes, but have also come close to the Brahmins and allied castes.⁴ The main reason for this progress .in long the Muslims, according to Ambedkar, is the 'IK ouragement and unequal treatment given by the government.

Therefore, Ambedkar argued that the same protectionist policy be extended to the backward classes on the merits of its economic value to the beneficiaries. However, he said, "I am not making this statement in any carping spirit nor grudge the efforts that government have made in the matter of the education of Mohammadans. I must here emphasize 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 would object to this and adhere to the principle of equality treatment. But I can't say that the government has done well in applying the principle to the Mohammadans. 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."

Economically or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped. I, therefore, think that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case.⁵ In the context of the recent controversy on reservations, it is necessary to read these lines of Ambedkar for its logical and rational approach developed in favour of equality of opportunity in education.

LEGISLATIVE DEBATES ON EDUCATION

In the Bombay Presidency debates of 1927 and 1928, Ambedkar has raised several issues relating to education which became important for policy formulations on education. In his memorandum to the Simon Commission on "Concerning the State of Education of the Depressed Classes in Bombay Presidency", submitted on behalf of the Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha, he gave numerical data to bring out the miserable condition of the untouchables in the education sector. He has pointed out that enrolment of the dalits constitute 0.87 per cent of the total primary education and 0.14 per cent in secondary and zero in higher education. Therefore, he wanted protection for the dalits through education guarantee by making the education of the depressed classes as the first charge on the state revenue. In his budget debates he has also projected the practice of untouchability in municipal schools of Bombay where separate 'lotas' were given to dalit boys. This, he said, made them to drop out from schools. This is a great economic wastage.

In his memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission on behalf of the Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha, Ambedkar had provided for the first time an authoritative account of the educational underdevelopment of the mass of people in India. (The data as presented by Dr. Ambedkar is given in the next chapter). In his detailed note Ambedkar mentioned that education under the British rule in the Bombay Presidency must have a beginning with the foundation of the Bombay Education Society. It was later named as Bombay Native Education Society and was headed by

Mount Stuart Elphinstone. But, the progress achieved by this society was, according to him, minimal. After presenting the data, he has pointed out that "what do these figures show? They show that although mass education was the policy of the government, the mass were as outside the pale of education as they were before the years, 1854 and that the lowest and aborigine classes of the Hindus still remained lowest in order of education".⁶ The problem with the British policy of education, according to him, was its partial attitude in favour of the elite. The Court of Director's Report on Education mentioned that "it is our anxious desire to afford to the higher classes of the natives of A People's Movement for Universalization of Education

India the means of instruction in European sciences and of access to the literature of civilized Europe. The character which may be given to the classes possessed of leisure and natural influence ultimately determines that of the whole people".⁷ Thus, he found that the education in the British India was confined to few upper classes only. Ambedkar here provided the information and the arguments to show that the landlords, the higher employees and the Brahmins were the real upper classes who were benefited by the British education. Therefore, he wanted that the subsidy given by the British to education, in fact, should provide opportunities to everyone of the depressed classes much less the untouchables.

Mahatma Phooley, who was considered by Ambedkar as his guru, was the first Indian who raised the issue of educational development of the mass of people before the Hunter Commission in 1882. It was four decades later that Ambedkar provided sufficient data to prove what Mahatma Phooley had brought to the notice of the British in 1882. In fact, he has extended the argument of Mahatma Phooley as his spiritual heir, asking for the British support for universalizing education. In his debates in the Bombay Presidency Legislative Assembly, he has opposed the introduction of Compulsory Primary Education Act as it shifted the responsibility of educating the people from government to the school boards. He pointed out that the school boards would again implement the mandate of the elite as they are dominated by higher classes and with little funding. It is irony that the country is still debating on the free and compulsory education to the mass of people even after sixty years of independence.

Ambedkar's Recommendations for Mass Education in 1928

It is instructive here to know what Ambedkar has recommended for the success of compulsory education of the depressed classes in 1928. They are as follows:

1)Unless the Compulsory Primary Education Act is

abolished and the transfer of primary education to the school boards is stopped, the Sabha fears that education of the depressed classes will receive a great setback.

2)Unless compulsion in the matter of primary education is made obligatory and unless the admission to primary schools is strictly enforced, conditions essential for educational progress of the backward classes will not come into existence.

3)Unless the recommendations made by the Hunter Commission regarding the education of the Mohammedans are applied to the depressed classes, their educational progress will not be an accomplished fact.

4)Unless entry into the public service is secured to the depressed classes, there will be no inducement for them to take education.

5)In making these comments upon the management of the educational affairs of the Presidency under the reform in their bearing upon the depressed classes, the Sabha is not oblivious to the special provisions made for the education of the depressed classes in the form of a few hostels and a few scholarships for higher education. But, the Sabha begs to point out that it is useless to make provision for higher education of the depressed classes unless steps are taken to ensure the growth of primary education. Besides, there is no guarantee that such concessions will continue. On the other hand, they depend a great deal upon the policy of the particular Minister-in-charge of Education and upon the voting strength of the depressed classes in the Legislative Council, both of which are uncertain factors and cannot be depended upon."

CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDY

Satisfied with the progress made by the dalits during the British rule in the area of mass education, Ambedkar has deliberately chosen to include the compulsory education for the age group 6-14 in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India. It is mentioned in the Article 45 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". It is a matter of great satisfaction to all of us that the present government is serious in bringing the Free and Compulsory Education Act soon. There are a few weaknesses in the draft Bill which need to be corrected at the time of framing rules. For instance, the definition of habitation in the Bill is not clear as it does not include the dalit bastis, which are not generally recognized in revenue records. There is also no mention about the opportunity costs of education of dalit children. In the process of recruitment of teachers as envisaged in the Bill there is no mention about reservations. As the problem of dropouts is basically

related to the disadvantaged groups in the rural areas, it is necessary to incorporate some inputs in the curriculum that familiarize and empathize the teachers about the problems of disadvantaged children.

The people's education movement, initiated by Mahatma Phoolley, was taken up by his legitimate spiritual heir Ambedkar. He has, in fact, strengthened the movement with his incessant observations both in the legislative debates and outside. Like his predecessor, Ambedkar started the People's Education Society in 1946 to fulfil some of his obligations to the society and to put in practice what he was preaching. His vision for universal compulsory education to democratize not only education but also the Indian polity is bearing fruit now in the form of Free and

Compulsory Education Bill, which is pending before the Parliament from 2003. This would not have been possible had he not put strategically Article 45 in the Constitution. We are sure, the proposed Act will become a great tribute to the contribution of Babasaheb Ambedkar to mass education, when it is materialized.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that primary education among the masses in this Presidency has been very much neglected. Although the number of primary schools now in existence is greater than those existing a few years ago, yet they are not commensurate to the requirements of the community. Government collect a special cess for educational purposes, and it is to be regretted that this fund is not spent for the purposes for which it is collected. Nearly nine-tenths of the villages in this Presidency, or nearly 10 lakhs of children, it is said, are without any provision, whatever, for primary instruction. A good deal of their poverty, their want of self-reliance, their entire dependence upon the learned and intelligent classes, is attributable to this deplorable state of education among the peasantry.

In the present state of education, payment by results is not at all suitable for the promotion of education amongst a poor and ignorant people, as no taste has yet been created among them for education. I do not think any teacher would undertake to open schools on his own account among these people, as he would not be able to make a living by it. Government schools and special inducements, as noted above, are essential until such a taste is created among them.

With regard to the few government primary schools that exist in the Presidency, I beg to observe that the primary education imparted in them is not at all placed on a satisfactory or sound basis. The system is imperfect in so far as it does not prove practical and useful in the future career of the pupils. The system is capable of being developed up to the requirement of the community, if improvements that will result in its future usefulness be

effected in it. Both the teaching machinery employed and the course in instruction now followed, require a thorough remodeling.

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