



## Ambedkar, Human Rights and Empowerment of Dalit's Education

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**Abstract:** *As the unquestioned leader of the depressed classes and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, the name of Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar will always be remembered in Indian history. Indian society is a gradation of castes forming an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt, a system which gave no scope for the growth of the sentiment of equality and fraternity so essential for a democratic form of government. The caste system is not just a division of labour, but a hierarchical division of labourers which is not based on natural aptitude or spontaneity but on the caste of the parents. In 1920, Ambedkar started a Marathi weekly paper called 'Mooknayak' to champion the cause of the depressed classes. He founded the 'Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha' on July 20, 1924 for the upliftment of the depressed classes. The aim of the Sabha was to educate, unite and agitate. He was firmly convinced that without the right knowledge (education) no fruitful purpose is served. Also, however well educated without unity of action (unity) the goal becomes distant.*

**Key words:** Education, philosophy, Empowerment

### Introduction

*"Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of every one. 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*

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1891. He belonged to 20<sup>th</sup> century and his educational philosophy struck roots in the western pragmatic philosopher called John Dewey's theory of education. According to Dewey, education in its broad sense is the means of social continuity of life. This is the turning point of ideas of Dewey as the basis for his educational philosophy. He

established 'depressed classes educational society' to organize the school education of his community with this philosophy. Education according to Ambedkar was a blend of pragmatism of Dewey and 'dhamma' of Buddha. Education is not only a layer for their social mobility but also opens the doors for their modernization. Education as a instrument for Dalit Education.

The Government of Bombay constituted a committee in 1928 to enquire into the educational, economic and social conditions of the depressed classes to recommend measures for their uplift. Dr. Ambedkar was a prominent member of the committee. There are some points which reflect his views about education:

1. Give up the idea that parents give 'janma' to the child and not destiny



(*karma*). They can mould the destiny of their children by giving them education.

2. Knowledge is the foundation of man's life.

3. Education is as necessary for females as it is for males.

4. If one's education is detrimental to the welfare of the poor, the educated man is a curse to the society.

5. Character is more important than education.

Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of education aims at creation of a liberating consciousness, which is not just formal education, but the conscientisation process of education, agitation and organization, put together. However, there is much confusion about the order of the slogan 'Education', 'Agitation' and 'Organise'. Apparently the confusion has arisen due to the imperfection in translation. When agitation is translated as '*sangharsh*', the question arises as to how *sangharsh* is possible without 'organisation', and thus 'organise' is sought to be put before 'agitate'. But the word 'agitate' not only means 'sangharsh', but also the agitation of the mind and then awareness, which should precede organization. But 'organise' is also something mistook for 'unite'. These words have different connotations. Organisation is based on a 'consciousness of kind', but unity is possible with a 'consciousness' of a different kind for a limited objective. Further, when Ambedkar give a call 'agitate', it should be seen in the light of his formulation of the 'pathetic contentment' of the Indian mind and the need to have a 'divine discontentment'. So there should not be any confusion. The central slogan, then,

is very clear – 'Educate, Agitate and Organise'.

### Concept of Empowerment

In this paper, we concentrated on two issues like education and empowerment. The word empowerment is borrowed from feminists and it defined as the 'ability to do or affect something or anything to act upon a person or thing'. It is the simple process of increasing personal or political power so that individuals, families and communities can take action to improve their situations. The power can be exercised through domination and subordination. It also depends upon the social structure, historical setting and nature of both state and economy. It is exercised through specific actions like promises, threats, controls and commands and so on. Education is the important bases of power in the modern society. Therefore, our understanding of education is: a source of power and also as an agency that empowers people. From the individual point of view, the empowerment is defined as building confidence, insight and understanding, and developing personal skills. For example, being able to analyze situations and communicate more effectively to others. Being empowered presupposes some level of common sense and emotional maturity and access to appropriate

information and know how; it also implies someone who cares about others and is tolerant of other's views and behavior. From the view point of group or community, empowerment can be taken to involve building trust, co-operation and communication among the members. There must be opportunities for people to meet and exchange views



and opinions and ways of recording what is agreed and done; and there must be scope for having fun and celebrating achievement. Empowerment refers to increase in the spiritual, political, social, racial, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities. The term empowerment covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines ranging from psychology and philosophy to the highly commercialized self-help industry and motivational sciences. Sociological empowerment addresses that the members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through, for example - discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion or gender.

Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism. Empowerment is the process of obtaining the basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by the people or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging and developing the skills for self-sufficiency with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. It is a process which enables the individuals/groups to the full access of personal/collective power, authority and influence and also to employ that strength when engaging with other people, institutions or society. In other words, 'Empowerment is not giving people power; people already have plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificent. It encourages people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life

or work environment and ultimately help them to develop themselves or the society'. Empowerment is the enhancement of the political, social, economic or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream society. Empowerment may also have a negative impact on individuals, corporations and productivity depending upon the individual's views and goals. It divides the genders or the races. Strong skills and critical capabilities are often held back to open doors for those who meet the empowerment criteria. Those who use empowerment as a selfish advantage tend to become difficult, demeaning and even hostile colleagues. There are two approaches in understanding the role of education in empowering people. One: the radical approach of using pedagogy as a conscientization process of the oppressed. The second approach: a transformative project of creating opportunities in the mainstream education to those who are previously denied access to education. Ambedkar was very much influenced by Dewey's ideas on scientific method, experimental approach, democracy and pragmatism in the field of education. He insisted that to his Dalit people, 'Educate to organize and to Struggle' for their own betterment using whatever educational facilities. Education is not only a layer for their social mobility but also opens the doors for their modernization. Ambedkar has been described as a philosopher, a patriot, scholar or a writer, the constitution maker, a social revolutionary, a humanistic thinker, or the socialist and he had also contributed a great deal to the cause of education. He mainly



emphasized that the education as a vital force for individual development and social change. Ambedkar envisaged that, education was an instrument for the change of the lives of untouchables. He declared that the elevation of the depressed classes was recognized to be the cause of all the enlightened people in the country. He thought that education would enlighten his people and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor to which the untouchables belong. Education plays an important role. It is an effective instrument of mass movement to safeguard life and liberty. Education could encourage the oppressed ones to fight and remove injustice and exploitation and pave ways for the free thinking. He recognized that, lack of education was the main cause for the backwardness of poor people. Educate, agitate and organize are three final words of our savior. According to Ambedkar one must get educated before he is conducting agitated thoughts for the movement, so that people can organize with his support. A singular role that Ambedkar played in the upliftment of the untouchables in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the importance that he gave to modern education for their betterment deserves special emphasis. In conferences, lectures and also in meetings, Ambedkar encouraged untouchable youth to acquire education in order to raise their social status and image. His educational contribution starts on a wider scale of educating classes as well as masses starts with this work. For Ambedkar, education was the main key to open the doors of light, vision and wisdom. He himself said, 'Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of every one. 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 continuous to be literate throughout the rest of his life'. Ambedkar's ideas for the untouchables was to raise their educational standards so that they may know their own condition, have aspirations and rise to the level of highest Hindu and be in the position to use political power as a means. This is best reflected in Ambedkar's famous slogan of Educate, Agitate and Organize.

### **Educate**

Education has an immense impact on the human society. One can safely assume that a person is not in the proper sense until he is educated. It trains the human mind to think and take the right decision. In other words, man becomes a rational animal when he is educated. By the way of education only the knowledge and information received and spread throughout the world. An uneducated person cannot read, write and he is very close to all knowledge and wisdom like a window. In contrast, an educated man lives in a room with all its windows open towards outside world. Simply getting education does not mean to acquire the knowledge and getting academic designation. Education must get through by the way of free mind and free thinking.

### **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 mind, as Dr. Ambedkar presumed, would force educated people to



form organizations and they would act to fix the problems. Many people, quite often, who profess Dr. Ambedkar, limit his slogan to these three points. But to this author, the actual message of Dr. Ambedkar lies in 'have faith in your strength.'

### **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. Ambedkar had also given lot of emphasis on getting education. He had given prime importance to education. He further added that, 'The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits of civilization but we cannot forego our rights and opportunities to reap the benefits of the highest education fully. That is the importance of education. From this point of view he advised the backward classes to realize that without education their existence is not safe.' In Ambedkar's idea on educate, agitate and organize Ambedkar's idea of giving education and equal opportunity to the people aims at removing the barriers in Indian Hindu religious caste system and development of backward caste as well as all marginalized communities. According to the social work students, educate agitate and organize means create power in people to experience basic rights in the society, to achieve success in the life and also struggle for social justice. In the social work field Ambedkar's idea about educate agitate and organize is very

much relevant in the current context because in the Indian society, people are illiterate and they are not aware about education as well as their basic rights of the life, still people are facing caste discrimination in society and lack of support and motivation. Educate, Agitate and organize must be maintained to see the effective results of the movement for the upliftment of our people. For the upliftment of the depressed classes he developed a programme of education as a part of the general manifesto of Indian Labor Party before the general elections of 1937. To stamp out the illiteracy, he emphasized the necessity of full and compulsory and liberal education. He emphasized that many pupils from depressed classes did not have money. To overcome the financial problem which is acting against their studies, he stressed the necessity of scholarships in educational institutions.

### **An Educational pragmatist**

The influence of John Dewey, one of the greatest educationists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on Ambedkar appears to be deep and permanent. Therefore, Ambedkar approached the problem of educational upliftment of the masses as a pragmatist. He says that education is one of the basic needs along with food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Ambedkar was very particular in developing the primary education. Ambedkar was mainly concerned about the uplift and political struggle of the untouchables. He believed that education was necessary to shake off their mental sluggishness and satisfaction with their existing plight. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar recognized the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the under-privileged 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 the educational without any discrimination to all the citizens of independent India.

### Conclusion

Ambedkar wanted the people to cultivate the values of freedom and equality among themselves; it is possible only through education. He regarded education as a means to reach the doors of light and perception to remove the regions of darkness and ignorance. Ambedkar emphasized on secular education for social emancipation. The basic theme of his philosophy of education is - inculcating the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, justice and moral character among the boys and girls of all shades. By the way of his educational philosophy, we shall view that by experiencing full freedom of education without the barriers of any caste, creed and race; it is the best way for the enlightenment of human beings from ignorance.

The Maha Parinirvan of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who was recognized internationally as a crusader against caste system, a vigilant fighter for the human rights of all the oppressed and enslaved and the emancipator of humanity from social and economic injustice, occurred on 6th December 1956. In the condolence message, on Ambedkar's death in Parliament, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said; "Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of the Hindu society". His dream of society based on gender equality is yet to be

realized and therefore his thoughts are important for the social reconstruction that favours women's empowerment. The Nation honoured Baba Saheb Ambedkar by offering Bharat Ratna posthumously to him which was received by his widow Savita Ambedkar in 1990. Dr. Ambedkar Foundation was set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on 24th March 1992 for the purpose of promoting and propagating his ideology of social justice so as to reach the common masses. The Foundation implemented Schemes such as Dr. Ambedkar National Memorial, Dr. Ambedkar National Public Library, Dr. Ambedkar Chairs in Universities/ Institutions, Dr. Ambedkar Award for Social Understanding and Upliftment of Weaker Sections and the Dr. Ambedkar International Award for Social Change. It made a feature film on Ambedkar and published 144 volumes of his speeches and writings so far in various languages. Dr. Ambedkar Chairs have been set up in nine universities/institutions. Baba Amte was given Dr. Ambedkar International Award for Social Change in 1999 and Remy Fernand Claude Satorre Bonhomme of Spain has been selected for the year 2000. As Lord Casey said, Ambedkar stands as the "fountainhead of wisdom and knowledge" in modern India also.

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