

Reimagining Education For The Disadvantaged: Ambedkar's Perspectives

Dr. D. Vishwa Prasad

Assistant Professor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University,
Hyderabad – 500 032 azadvishwa@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Flipping through the pages of the biography of Dr B R Ambedkar, we find a man of strong conviction and a leader par excellence in him. He wanted an egalitarian society in India, which had been the dream of every disadvantaged. He felt that education was one of the tools to achieve the long-cherished dream and emerged a man of vision and a leader of the marginalized.

Dr Ambedkar had expressed his opinion about Indian education – from policy-making to managing educational institutions. Interestingly, he was the one who proposed privatization of educational facilities long ago. He presented his ideas logically to support his views and proposed to build up a nation with an Indian education system and technological advancement.

This paper reflects on Ambedkar's perspectives, and foresightedness on various aspects of Indian education like school education, life-long learning, inclusive education and privatization of educational facilities.

Keywords: Universalization of primary education, school education, scholarship, life-long learning.

INTRODUCTION

At the outset, I wish to draw your kind attention to the fact that Dr. Ambedkar advocated the importance of education in the lives of the disadvantaged, throughout his life, being a student of John Dewey, an American educationist, who believed that Education is life itself. The impact could be perceived in the educational issues raised by Dr. Ambedkar.

Ambedkar was a visionary, and an unparalleled leader ever born in this country. He suggested many things to improve the quality of education in India based on societal needs and the future of this nation. Surprisingly, it is now, that we are trying to realize the significance of the issues raised by Ambedkar in UNICEF and the apex educational bodies of India.

The most important of them are being dealt with here.

1. Universalization of Primary Education

For the past three decades, we have been discussing elaborately the issue of Universalization of Primary Education, which concentrated more on three aspects:

- a. Universal Accession
- b. Universal Enrollment
- c. Universal Retention

As early as the 1920s, Dr. Ambedkar stressed the need for the Universalization of Primary Education. He said, “The objective of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school.... Education is something, which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone”. We have to mark the phrases, “every” and “within the reach of everyone” here. His idea of primary education was universal and he felt that children should not have any difficulty in seeking admission to primary school, which helps India become more literate and educated.

Most advanced economies in Europe and North America have reflected and implemented free and compulsory education irrespective of region or religion, rich or poor. Optimistically, the idea has delivered dividends in geometrical propositions.

2. Life-long Education

The second important issue that he touches upon is life-long education. He says, “Every child that enters...primary school should leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life”. This sentence speaks volumes about his understanding of knowledge and how a society can be developed based on the efforts of all the citizens to learn and sustain in a society, which is dynamic and which edges towards attaining a knowledge-based society.

Presently, we are in a world of knowledge explosion, India feels that a society, which is built on the foundation of knowledge

will help us flourish in the time to come. In this context, the Chairperson of the Knowledge Commission of India has written to the Prime Minister that knowledge is inevitable for the sustenance of future generations. To this effect, we are trying to promote the value of lifelong learning, and even UNESCO placed a lot of importance on it. At this juncture; we have to understand the futurist in Dr. Ambedkar.

3. Inclusive Education

Dr Ambedkar felt that India belongs to everyone and they are important in nation-building. Be it scheduled castes, minorities, differently-abled or tribes, everyone has the right to get an education and it is the responsibility of the state to provide education to every citizen of this country. He says, “We shall soon see better days and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with the female education the fruits of which you can very well verify in your own daughter”. In another statement he says,

It may be remembered 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 Mohammedans. 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 equality and to give favoured treatment to those who are below the level.

He was a man of progressive thinking. He advocated equality between genders and among communities in terms of education. He always strove for the nation, which was worthy of appreciation.

In an unequivocal term and an authentic tone, he says, “We are making indeed a slow progress in the matter of education of our children...if the progress of education goes on at this rate it will take 40 years for boys and 300 years for girls of school-going age to be brought under education”. He made this statement in the early 1920s and his assessment was correct. Even today, despite our UPE and SSA we could not achieve 100% literacy. We are in a drastic and deplorable state. Ambedkar pointed out rightly that a fool-proof system should be in place for the effective execution

and evaluation of educational programmes. We are so sluggish that we have hibernated our attempt to monitor our education programmes.

4. Scholarships and Privatization of Educational Facilities

My enquiries and my experience show that the method of giving scholarships is really a waste of public money...The scholarship is looked upon by the parent as a family aid to meet their expenses. It is certainly not made available for the education of the boy... Secondly, Sir, with the scholarship I have found that the boy is never able to reach the goal...a boy of the depressed classes is growing up in an evil set of surroundings...without proper direction he succumbs and gives up his education and money spent upon him is lost. I would, therefore [suggest]...to spend this money in promoting hostels which either Government may open of its own accord or which may be opened by private agency for the promotion of the education of the backward classes. Sir, it will be a double saving. A hostel, first of all, weans the boy from evil surroundings. It provides effective inspection. And when a hostel is managed by private agency, it will mean some saving of money to Government.

The above statement points out that any government should properly utilize the resources and ensure that its programmes are effective and achieve the primary objectives formulated for the purpose. Framing policies or spending money for public good is appreciated but the government should implement programmes which are fool-proof and national goals should not be lost. Tenacity and consistent efforts are required to achieve the goals, even if it means to privatize educational facilities to make India vibrant. Dr Ambedkar felt that privatization should be done for the sake of the nation and the good of every citizen of this country. Unfortunately, privatization has become an abusive term due to the selfish motives of a few, who used privatization as a machine to mint money at the cost of our development.

In addition, he makes a pertinent point that the government should take the initiative to pave the way for disadvantaged students to get a good education and values, which are essential to running a democratic nation like India, especially during the precarious situation we are in currently.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Ambedkar had a unique way of perceiving educational issues, and his solutions were phenomenal. His meticulous observation holds up the mirror to his intellectual acumen and foresightedness. His speeches in the legislative bodies reflected his understanding of what India needed then and for the future.

The most unfortunate fact is that we never bothered Dr. Ambedkar. If we looked into the issues that he had brought forth for discussions and solved them then, I think, we would have overcome all the educational problems that are challenging us today.

Hopefully, Dr. Ambedkar's perspectives on education need some attention to offer a world-class education to our masses. It is already late, without further ado, we have to reflect on our educational policies and change them as per our needs to be the beacon of enlightenment to the world.

REFERENCE

1. Dr. Ambedkar on Education system in India
2. <http://mulnivasiorganiser.bamcef.org/?p=129>. Retrieved on 25 November 2012
3. Nithiya, P. (2012). Ambedkar's Vision on the Empowerment of Dalit Education. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research Vol 1, 2.