

BREAKING BOUNDARIES: DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

The legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's advocacy for higher education in India as a tool for social reform provides a convincing approach for educators to prioritize diversity and representation in their educational Programme. As an educational pragmatist, he made a significant contribution by guaranteeing that everyone oppressed, impoverished, or deprived had access to higher education. He believed that "Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone." He says, "Cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence."

He made significant interventions to the Bombay University Amendment Act and the University Reforms Committee in 1925, emphasizing higher education and research, the inclusive examination system, the fundamental functioning of the university, college and university partnership, strengthening university administration, government financial support for higher education and research, and emphasis on the economic value of higher education, and inclusivity of marginalized section and women.

The main purpose of this paper is to showcase Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's groundbreaking approach and its current relevance in developing higher education in India. This study also aims to bring his enormous contributions to higher education into academic discourse as an innovative and pragmatic way to promote equity, equality, and access.

Keywords: *higher education, transformation, pragmatism, educational advocacy.*

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has been referred to be a humanistic thinker, philosopher, writer, academic, social revolutionary, and patriot. He had made significant contributions to the field of education as well. He dedicated his life to social justice. However, he also worked to ensure that everyone who was oppressed, impoverished, or deprived had access to education. He presented the issue of acquiring subsidies for higher education before the Bombay Legislative Council, and he debated on several points, such as: 1. From 1921-22 to the present, education expenditure has climbed by around 39 lakhs. 2. The amount of rise in education expense and the increase in the number of students in the schools; the increase in the number of students is unquestionably not proportional to the increase in education expenditure.

Moreover, the data from 1916-17 to 1922-23 shows that, even with a 29% increase in the student population, educational spending has increased by about 100%. Due to the tremendous financial constraints this administration has faced, we are unable to demand a speedy increase in education at this time, but we can ask for one thing. Two departments are working against each other under this presidency. The purpose of the Department of Education, a legitimate organization, is to moralize and socialize the public. (Moon, 2005). As a result, the goal of this department should be to make higher education as accessible as possible for the lower classes, which includes high schools, middle schools, and universities.

In his letter to the Honorable Minister of Education, Ambedkar raised several very clear concerns about how education is being managed under this administration. The president's census report divided the population into four groups to compare the educational development made by various locations. First, there is a class known as "advanced Hindus," and second, there are "intermediate Hindus," which includes individuals who have been politically classified as non-Brahmins, such as Marathas and related castes. Sophisticated Hindus, Mahomedans - the depressed classes, Hill Tribes, and Criminal Tribes are all part of a third class known as the backward classes.

Taking these divisions into account, there is a huge disparity in the relative progress of these diverse communities in terms of education. Moon (2005) compares different social classes based on their respective

population and educational attainment. The system is the ultimate entity in its entirety. The University Commission of 1902 recognised this fact, and the bill that followed its report recognised that the statute that established the university needed to be amended to allow it to engage in direct teaching in addition to its regular function of evaluating students who took its exams. The university was naturally precluded from pursuing higher education by the existence of a set number of colleges that were already in place when the Act of 1904 came into effect. Since 1912, the University of Bombay has followed suit, establishing a department known as the School of Sociology and Economics to serve students interested in pursuing postgraduate studies in that field. The only thing the University could do was claim the field of post-graduate work for itself. To carry out the tasks imposed by the Act of 1904, the university sought to establish a few more post-graduate faculties. The university stole the postgraduate work for itself. It uses the inspection committee's report to impose its mandates on the colleges. It was clear that this inspection committee regularly makes a visitation tour and reports on the flaws in the college organisation.

The university's standing committee receives this report and then presents the syndicate with an assessment of the issues revealed by the inspection committee. That is all that is currently being done to enforce the university's discipline rules for managing the colleges. If the colleges disobey the university's orders based on the inspection committee's report, the university's only real control over them is the option to dissociate them. It was the enormous power that caused destruction. In reality, the university cannot alter the practices of its colleges. To put it another way, the University can only establish or dissolve a college under its current control structure (Moon, 2005). During a meeting in the Bombay Legislative Council, the great leader Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar brought up the issue of revolutionary reforms to be implemented in the Indian educational system, particularly at the University of Bombay.

Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy:

Ambedkar's educational philosophy is a hybrid of Dewey's pragmatism and Buddha's "dharma". He believed that education might enlighten people and close the gap between the upper classes and the untouchables. He also saw education as a vehicle for societal reform and a means to remedy wrongs. He advocated for societal liberation, self-respect, and personal growth in his educational philosophy. He thought that education ought to promote enlightenment, better lives, and the growth of self-respect in individuals. Additionally, he thought that moral principles like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, and moral character could be upheld through education.

Religious Educational Institutions:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocated secular education based on non-theistic religious inspiration. He believed that education should be accessible to all, regardless of caste, status, or gender, and that it should incorporate Buddha's "dharma" and Dewey's pragmatism. Ambedkar's educational philosophy emphasised ideals such as liberty, equality, brotherhood, justice, and moral character. He felt that education could help people combat injustice and exploitation while also bridging the divide between the upper classes and the untouchables.

Ambedkar made it very evident during the discussion on permissions to be granted to institutions offering religious education that there should be no limitations on religious instruction and that the province's regional district board should be formed. While the dominant community should be required to pay taxes for these institutions and get religious instruction, other communities will not be bothered to pay these fees and no such education will be made mandatory for pupils in other areas. Instead, residents will be taxed for providing grants to the boards. (Ambedkar, 2020)

Higher Education as the Panacea for all Societal Ills:

On September 1, 1951, a programme was held to establish Milind College of Peoples Education Society, with the first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, as the chief guest at the cornerstone ceremony. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar stated in his speech before the cornerstone-laying ceremony that it was necessary to acknowledge the systematic review of the progress of Siddharth College, Mumbai, which was established earlier in 1946 by the Peoples Education Society and flourished under the umbrella of the University of Mumbai, winning several prizes, awards, and scholarships, among other things. He experienced a similar dream concerning Milind College.

After analysing the development of Siddharth College under the University of Mumbai, the Governing Body decided to open a new branch in the Nizam's Princely State of Hyderabad, which was a backward educational area at the time. Osmania University previously advised Peoples Education Society that the University, which will provide affiliation and financial help to Milind College, would relocate to a location other than Aurangabad to efficiently teach students. Despite being informed, Osmania University moved its office to Nizam's ancient palace in Hyderabad, which was bad news for Milind College. Osmania University's aid grant was given in compliance with the Government Charter for Universities and sponsored by government funds. However, Osmania University did not approve the grant for Milind College, which was extremely concerning. There was a considerable difference in university salary compensation and college salary pay.

Importance of Grants in Aid in Higher Education:

Dr. Ambedkar thought that all Indian citizens, regardless of caste or status, should have equal access to education. He thought that education is a movement that empowers people, makes them aware of their rights, and inspires them to fight for their rights. He also felt that education should be affordable and that the government is responsible for giving equal educational opportunities to all. Expanding autonomy/privatization, geographical advantage, and higher fees, in his opinion, would not solve the problem of departments growing at the expense of colleges. He suggested a solution in the form of an occasional government subsidy given to institutions.

Osmania University recently presented a logical case that the University is not responsible for the expenses of associated institutions in terms of grants. If the annual grant does not arrive on time, the fees for students must be adjusted with the authorization of the university, which will benefit other rival institutions, affordable college students will seek admission to other colleges, and negative consequences will occur. In this approach, the funding and necessary provisions for caretaking by the University and its leadership will benefit all students efficiently.

Reservation Policy and Inclusiveness of Marginalised Sections:

Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati discovered in 1900 that general efforts to provide residential facilities to all students were ineffective for students from the underprivileged class. This insight was strengthened by his personal experience containing a variety of horses in a single spot within a paddock. Always keeping an eye on his paddock, H.H. Shahu Chhatrapati discovered through the behaviour of the horses there that the western practice of leaving the horses, both young and old, weak and strong, free within a compound with a tank of water on one side and a heap of grass on the other, had allowed the younger and stronger horses to eat all the grass and drink all the water, while the older and weaker horses were chased away by the others from the common stock. What he knew was that even beasts could not adapt to a common stay strategy and that students from lower socioeconomic classes would not gain from so-called mixed hostels for all classes since they would receive the same treatment from higher classes as they do in society. So, for long-term benefits, the underprivileged should receive special attention through reservation or reserved quotas, and once their work/studies are over, they can work for the government and contribute to nation-building.

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the economic sector must remember that anti-discrimination regulations such as reservations are necessary for prosperity and justice. It was important to emphasize that anti-discrimination laws will not only provide fair and non-discriminatory access to historically marginalized and discriminated groups, such as Dalits but will also remove caste-based barriers to employment and education, promoting economic growth and competitiveness. This way, the oppressed could be allowed to represent themselves in pursuit of social justice.

The Prominent Functioning of the Universities:

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar participated in discussions about the Bombay University Act and the Primary Education Amendment Bill, and he expressed his views on university operations and higher education. He believed that universities should be agents of social revolution and that education should be a top priority for the public. He believed that education should be available to all people, regardless of caste, rank, or gender, and should help them develop their character and rights. He also believed that education should educate people on how to distinguish between facts and opinions, separate issues, and analyse ideas before accepting or rejecting them. He thought that universities should be agents of social transformation and that education should be a top concern for society. He felt that education should be open to everyone, regardless of caste, rank, or gender, and that it should help individuals develop their character and rights. He also felt that education should teach individuals how to discriminate between truth and opinion, separate concerns, and evaluate ideas before accepting or rejecting them. According to him,

“One of the fundamental functions of the University, as I understand it, is to provide facilities for bringing the highest education to the doors of the needy and the poor...I look upon the University primarily as a machinery, whereby educational facilities are provided to all those who are intellectually capable of using those facilities to the best advantage...” (Ambedkar 1982).

Ambedkar consequently campaigned for the senate to have sufficient representation from various communities to oversee university issues. He also used the chance to make recommendations on higher education by providing written evidence to the University Reforms Committee in 1925. He had observed, “...it must be realised that the University cannot succeed in promoting research or in promoting higher education if it makes the examination system the be-all and end-all of its existence” (Ambedkar 1982)

Higher Education for Social Justice and Market Needs:

Ambedkar envisioned a Buddhist-based educational system that would benefit everyone. He thought that moral principles like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, and moral character should be instilled in students of all races, faiths, and social classes through education. According to Ambedkar, education ought to be connected to the demands of the market, and the curriculum ought to be adaptable and dynamic in light of input from the

business community. Additionally, he thought that for Dalits and the general public, technical knowledge and skill development were more significant than a liberal arts education. He thought that distinguishing between fact and opinion, separating topics and concerns based on their merits, fairly stating one's perspective to those who disagree, and carefully considering proposed ideas before adopting or rejecting them should all be goals of university education.

University Education and Research:

Ambedkar's writings and speeches frequently emphasised the value of scientific knowledge and the prospects for social and economic growth. He was a strong proponent of university research and opposed the division of undergraduate and graduate education. He also stressed the importance of research in the universities. He thought that when research and teaching are separated, research suffers. He believed that university research was crucial and that dividing postgraduate and undergraduate work would hinder it.

According to him, advancements in science and critical thinking are necessary for both social and economic development. In many facets of life, he also underlined the significance of reason and evidence. He believed that education was a critical tool for breaking free from caste injustice and patriarchy and establishing a new social order. Additionally, he thought that knowledge was a liberating force that could improve people's quality of life. He was also against making a boundary between teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He said, "... if the object of the bill is to promote higher education and research, the best method would be not to separate the colleges from the University as has been done now but to make a synthesis in which the University and the colleges would be partners on terms of equality and would be participating in promoting together, both the undergraduate and the post-graduate studies" (Ambedkar 1982)

Teaching and research are separated when postgraduate work and undergraduate study are done separately. However, research must suffer when it is separated from instruction (Ambedkar 1982).

Strengthening University Administration:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an economist, jurist, and politician, had diverse perspectives on university administration. He may have been the first educationist to advocate for the academic council to have authority over university academic affairs. As an educational pragmatist, Ambedkar treated the challenge of mass educational upliftment holistically, and his ideas on education appear to have grown with time.

The affiliating university shall serve as a parent or mentor body to the affiliated institutions; the university and vice chancellor shall maintain frequent communication with affiliated colleges to facilitate their educational development. He believed that institutions should not rely solely on the test system, and that research is crucial. He thought that a teaching university should be led by teachers in all academic and administrative roles. He also supported affirmative action policies in schools and universities for scheduled castes and tribes, as well as the Other Backward Classes.

To conclude, Ambedkar criticised traditional teaching techniques used in higher education that emphasised memorization and rote learning, advocating for a more student-centred approach to education. He also felt that higher educational institutions should be a force for social change and that higher education had the power to transform a person's life and the entire society. He believed that education was essential for social and economic empowerment. He felt that education should be made as affordable as possible for the poorer classes and that education and training were critical tools for enhancing people's social position. He also emphasised the significance of technical education and skill development for industrial progress.

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