UNIT 9: DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION: DEWEY AND B.R AMBEDKAR

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to,

- Understand the relationship between democracy and education,
- Understand Dewey's conception of education and democracy,
- Understand B.R Ambedkar's understanding of education and democracy.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Education and democracy are inextricably linked with each other. Democracy, in its historical and contemporary forms has influenced and shaped education. Also education helps in shaping the foundations of democracy from time to time. Thus there is continuous bargaining taking place between these two interrelated concepts. Education is imagined, scripted, and enacted with relation to philosophic, programmatic and pedagogic dimensions which are in turn shaped by the competing conceptions of democracy.

To begin with, let us understand the concepts of democracy and education. Democracy is a form of government in which there prevails the rule of majority. It is government of the people, by the people and for the people. Apart from its political understanding, democracy also has a

economic and social meaning attached to it. Economically, it is a system where no one is exploited. It provides equal share and benefits for the entire community at large without focusing on private bodies. Everybody is assured a standard of living, where there is equal opportunity of work based on one's abilities and capabilities. Socially, it connotes absence of all biases based on class, creed, language, race, gender, birth or possession of money. Everyone is guaranteed basic fundamental rights and equality of opportunities is given for the fullest development of the personality.

Thus, social justice and equality forms the cornerstone of a democracy. There exists paramount faith in the worth of a common man. Everyone has a share in a democracy. It is a way of life where there is discussion, argument, deliberation, persuasion and transaction of views rather than coercion, violence, distrust and conflict. In the light of this argument, there is an inseparable relationship between education and democracy. Democracy depends upon the character and intelligence of all its citizens. Bernard Shaw states, The role that education and democracy plays in shaping each other is very crucial for a society. Democratic ideas should be reflected in the aims, curriculum, methods of teaching, administration and organization, discipline, the school, the teacher etc. On the other hand, the society should be educated enough to create a democratic environment and keep the true ethos of democracy alive in a society. In the unit we will learn about the views of dewey and ambedkar on democracy and education in detail

9.3 DEWEY ON DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

John Dewey (1859- 1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist and an educational reformer. He is associated with philosophy of pragmatism and is known as one of the fathers of functional psychology. His ideas have been influential in progressive education, liberalism and social reforms. His other interest includes epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, art, logic, social theory and ethics. He was a major educational reformer of the 20th century. His ideas revolved around the theme of democracy, be it in political, education, communication or journalism.

In his book *'Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education',* 1916, John Dewey starts by distinguishing between living and inanimate objects. For him, the reaction towards an action showed by living and inanimate objects is different. An inanimate object will not reciprocate the action by imbibing the action of the others. In case of a living being, the action of others becomes a contributing factor to its own continued action. Life is a self- renewing process through action upon the environment. And this process continues in increasingly complex forms as reproduction goes on in continuous sequence. Continuity of life means continual re-adaptation of the environment to the needs of living organisms.

Dewey uses the twin concepts of life and experience to understand continuity. The recreation of beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, misery and practices goes hand in hand with renewal of physical existence. The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. Everyone is born immature in this world without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Also the carrier of life-experience of these groups passes away with time. Yet the life of the group goes on. In order to understand the gap between mature and immature beings, Dewey brings in the necessity of education. On one hand, there is the contrast between the immaturity of the new-born members of the group who are the future sole-representatives and the maturity of the adult members who possess the knowledge and customs of the group. On the other hand, there is the necessity that these immature members be not merely physically preserved in adequate numbers, but that they are initiated into the interests, purposes, information, skill and practices of the mature members: otherwise the group will cease its characteristic life. Even in a savage tribe there is a gap between what the immature groups can achieve without the guidance of the mature adults. This gap increases with the growth of civilization. Education and alone bridges the gap.

Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive. It is a social necessity to educate the immature members of the society. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. It modifies the disposition of both the parties who takes part in it. The main objective of every human association is to share and educate the immature members of the society. Every social arrangement is educative as long as there is connection between the older and the younger generation of a society. As learning becomes more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases. According to Dewey, with the growth of formal teaching and learning, there is a gap created between direct associations of learning through experiences and what is acquired in schools.

The young individuals should take part in direct activities with the social environment in order to educate themselves. According to Dewey, it is the unconscious learning that creates more deeper and intimate educative formation. As the society becomes more complex this education is made formal by creating special social environment to nurture the capacities of the immature. Dewey lists down three important functions of this special environment which includes:

- Simplifying and ordering the factors of the disposition it is wished to develop
- Purifying and idealizing the existing social customs
- Creating a wider and better balanced environment than that by which the young would be likely, if left to themselves, to be influenced.

The natural or native impulses of the young do not agree with the life-customs of the group into which they are born. They have to be directed

or guided. This control is not coercive in nature. It consists in centering the impulses acting at any one time upon some specific end and in introducing an order of continuity into the sequence of acts. This creates a common permanent and effective method of understanding between participants in an action. This common understanding of the means and ends of action is the essence of social control. It is indirect, or emotional and intellectual, not direct or personal. Also, it is intrinsic to the disposition of the person, not external and coercive. To achieve this internal control through identity of interest and understanding is the business of education. Books and conversations are relied upon more exclusively in achieving this social control. Schools require for their full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a social sense of their own powers of the materials and appliances used.

Growth is another important concept provided by Dewey in understanding education. According to Dewey, power to grow depends upon need for others and to learn from experience. This learning from experiences leads to the formation of habits. Habits give control over the environment, power to utilize it for human purposes. Habits take the form of habituation and capacities to readjust activity to meet new conditions. The former furnishes the background of growth and the latter constitute growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. The criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective.

For Dewey schools failed in providing continuous growth to its pupils by promoting passive and compliant pupils rather than reflective, autonomous, informed decision makers. He believed one absolutely critical function of education is to develop the intellect, motivation and wisdom of young people so that they become mature and effective citizens able to transmit culture from one generation to the next and transform it in the face of change. For Dewey, what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life.

For Dewey democracy is not about voting rights, but also equipping citizens with the ability to take on the responsibility to make informed, intelligent choices and decision leading to the public good. He believed that democracy is not just a political system but an ethical ideal with active informed participation by its citizens. If democracy, is to work it required informed, knowledgeable and wise citizens and therefore education has a moral function of its own. Classroom teachers and schools have a responsibility to nurture character as well as teach knowledge and skills. Teachers were viewed by Dewey as needing to be creative professionals demonstrating not only understanding of their subject matter but a passion for knowledge, intellectual curiosity, an understanding of the learning process and the children in their care. Dewey understood that excellent teachers responded to student responses as indications of their current level of understanding, a direct consequence of constructivism.

Dewey's understanding of constructivism as a theory explaining how deep learning is, has become the established paradigm. It includes engaging and challenging students, relating learning to experience and listening to the voice of the learner in order to understand students' thinking and adjust teaching accordingly. Dewey's concern that a focus on learner's interests need to be balanced with the need to develop powerful knowledge and understanding continues to matter today in debates about how to organize curriculum. According to him it is important to help the young cope with uncertainty well, to learn how to learn from life, and to understand that education is a moral enterprise concerned with developing informed citizens capable of making informed choices and decisions.

Thus through a functional understanding of education, Dewey tries to explain the relationship between education and democracy. For him, through education, the adult generation prepares the younger generation to think critically and become informed citizens and help in democratic decisions of the society.

9.4 B.R AMBEDKAR ON DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement and campaigned against social discrimination towards the Dalits. He was independent India's first law and justice minister, the architect of the Constitution of India, and the founding father of Republic of India.

Ambedkar's education was funded in America during the years 1913-1916 at Columbia University. It was here that Ambedkar learned from an array of top scholars. Among these teachers, John Dewey had a great influence on Ambedkar. It can be noticed in his political work where he emphasized on his dialogue with Dewey. For Christopher Queen, one can trace Dewey's presence in the texts and theories of Ambedkar, especially in relation to how Ambedkar reconstructs Buddhism. Unlike Dewey, Ambedkar was focused on large-scale public communication in his conception of education. Dewey was interested in reforming formal schooling for better transmission and revision of society. Ambedkar was often focused on experiential means of forming and reforming society outside the classroom. Whether we are trying to educate or not, societal experience has a certain inertia and a specific educative force among its members. Ambedkar sensed this in regard to the social settings created by religion, specially the form of Hinduism that did not allow contact and communication among certain social groups. This was reflected in his activism in the 1920's and early 1930's intended to recraft social environments through caste integration of temples and water source usage as well as inter-caste dining. Like Dewey, he clearly connected democracy with communication. For him progressive educational communication would prove to be a way of dissolving old and disseminating new ideas among the masses and to guide it and make it more effective.

Ambedkar upheld the democratic concept in education propounded by Dewey. Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members. Thus it is the responsibility of the society to impart education. Ambedkar himself was an example of what education could do the under-priviledged section of the society. Education helps in reducing the dependence on the rural elite and offers a chance for occupational change. It makes people aware of humiliation and enslavement they experience. For Ambedkar, the way for salvation of the oppressed and 'untouchables', lies in higher education, higher employment and better ways of earning a living.

He gave importance to character formation through education. Ambedkar established the 'Bharatiya Samaj Seva Sangh' whose motto was to read, read out and hear, understand, realize and give realization. He felt education was necessary to instill among the downtrodden a sense of self-respect and dignity and it could hasten their assimilation into the mainstream society. He was of the view that the curriculum should go a long way in developing rationality among learners. Rationality tends to give the capacity to distinguish truth from untruth.

Ambedkar in expressing his views on the syllabus was of the view that universities should provide a broad outline regarding the syllabus of a course and teachers should be given full freedom in expressing their views and utilizing their methods of teaching. The teachers of a university out under proper safeguards should have entire control of the education and examination of their students. Also teachers of a particular course should work together as a homogenous group to produce good results. He believed in interactive teaching and learning where the teacher is a facilitator and guide, to facilitate the learning of a student. He severely criticized the examination system as he regarded it as a means to reach an end.

Dr. Ambedkar considered education to be essential for all men and women irrespective of their social and economic status. All men and women must get atleast the minimum education so that they may know how to read and write. The primary education caters to the minimum essential need of educating the masses. Ambedkar encouraged everyone to take

higher education for their progress. He thought that the progress of a community always depended upon how its members advanced in education. That is why he laid more stress on higher education than on primary education. He further put stress on university education, library as an educational institution, legal institution, technical education etc. Women education was also very important for Ambedkar. According to him, the downtrodden's progress would be greatly accelerated if male education was pursued side by side with female education.

The educational thoughts of Ambedkar are more realistic pragmatic than idealist. He never believed in mere bookish education. He knew the importance of informal education along with formal education. He believed that education was one of the strongest means to uplift his community as well as the whole nation. He equated this value of education in understanding democracy. According to him democracy is 'one person, and 'one vote, one value'. For him democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to her/him. And this for him can be achieved through education.

For both Dewey and Ambedkar, education related to democracy insofar as democracy denotes a habit of interacting with others and in solving problems along with one's peers. Democracy is a habit or a way of life and it was for Dewey an intensely personal affair that conditioned and created publics. This notion of democracy as a way of life among others resonated with Ambedkar. He tried to fit in Dewey's understanding of democracy in the Indian scenario to address issues of caste and religion. Thus democracy and education are interlinked in both Dewey and Ambedkar's idea of a just society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1) What is democracy according to Dewey?

Q2) Where does B.R Ambedkar apply Dewey's understanding of democracy and education?

Q3) What methods do Dewey and Ambedkar use in conceptualizing Democracy and Education?



9.5 LET US SUM UP

- Education and democracy are inextricably linked with each other.
- John Dewey (1859- 1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist and an educational reformer.
- Continuity of life means continual re-adaptation of the environment to the needs of living organisms.
- Dewey uses the twin concepts of life and experience to understand continuity.
- The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life.
- Everyone is born immature in this world without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards.
- In order to understand the gap between mature and immature beings, Dewey brings in the necessity of education.
- Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger.
- It is a social necessity to educate the immature members of the society. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication.
- For Dewey democracy is not about voting rights, but also equipping citizens with the ability to take on the responsibility to make informed, intelligent choices and decision leading to the public good.
- If democracy, is to work it required informed, knowledgeable and wise citizens and therefore education has a moral function of its own.
- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), popularly known as BabasahebAmbedkar, was an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement and

campaigned against social discrimination towards the Dalits, while also supporting the rights of the women and labour.

- Communication was educative, and education transmitted and continued social forms of life for Ambedkar.
- Unlike Dewey, Ambedkar was focused on large-scale public communication in his conception of education.
- Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members. Thus it is the responsibility of the society to impart education.
- According to Ambedkardemocracy is 'one person, one vote' and 'one vote, one value'. For him democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to her/him. And this for him can be achieved through education.
- For both Dewey and Ambedkar, education related to democracy insofar as democracy denotes a habit of interacting with others and in solving problems in concert with one's peers.
- Democracy is a habit or a way of life and it was for Dewey an intensely personal affair that conditioned and created publics. This notion of democracy as a way of life among others resonated with Ambedkar. He tried to fit in Dewey's understanding of democracy in the Indian scenario to address issues of caste and religion.



9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Democracy is a way of life.

Ans to Q2 : In his understanding of Indian society and its problem of caste and religion.

Ans to Q3 : Pragmatic method.