

Equitable and Inclusive Education Innovation During the Covid-19 Lockdown: A Real Tribute to Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

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Abstract:

Given the task of writing the 'Innovative suggestion and ideas' to all academic fraternity including students and teachers to boost e-learning and intensifying online education in India that has become the need of an hour during the long lockdown; with a campaign of "Bharat Padhe Online" initiated by Hon'ble Minister of Human Resource Development has inspired me to prepare this paper. This initiative is to ensure uninterrupted teaching/learning at home and to make productive use of the lockdown period. The online teaching learning focuses on minimizing the academic loss by leveraging the potential of ICT, on pooling of e-resources and enhancing the online education systems in the country. Hence, to make this noble initiative of on-line classes Universal and inclusive, as has been advocated by one of the finest educator Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. who relentlessly worked towards making 'Right to Education' be realistic by making it available to most deprived, discriminated and vulnerable sections of the society like Women, SCs, STs, and other backward sections. There are several challenges to cherish Ambedkar's vision of universal education based on 'equity and inclusiveness. Hence, this paper gives few suggestions both on-line modes along with cost effective measures like use of mass media to educate the children during lock down.

Keywords: Innovative; e-learning; equity; mass media, universal education, inclusiveness, Deprived.

Introduction

We have very recently commemorated the 129th birth anniversary of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who is perhaps not only best known as the principle architect of the Indian Constitution but the great emancipator through education. Deriving from his own personal experiences of discrimination and exposures to different harsh realities of life; he concluded that "education is the sole way to the emancipation of the most deprived, marginalized and vulnerable section of the society". These sections of the population are the dire victim of an organized and carefully-designed social order by some self-acclaimed powerful sections of the society, for their vested interest. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar evokes strong thrusts on 'Education' with his slogan of 'Educate, Agitate, organize' knowing that education is the necessary precondition for the reconstruction of the society on the principles of equality and justice. The inclusion of Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy reiterates towards

the same goal so that no child is left illiterate. The Article 45 got translated into an enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) on 4 August 2009 under the Article 21A of the Constitution that led our country to become one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child when the act came into force on 1 April 2010 that paved the great way to tribute the venerated contributions of Honorable Baba Saheb to envisioned Universal access to education regardless of a person's social class, caste, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity background or physical and mental disabilities.

The ongoing pandemic situation in the wake of the COVID-19 has brought down the whole world to an unprecedented and uncertain long halt with a complete lockdown to maintain the social distancing to prevent widespread community transmission. The virus is seen to be taking on people's lives stronger on every passing day to put all of us on a speculation that the Government is on a plan for some indefinite shut down of the schools and colleges until the effect of virus becomes zero. Since, nothing is precious than life and every other thing can wait besides the wellbeing of the people. Therefore recently the MHRD has developed a link of digital platforms to ensure continuous teaching/learning from the home and to enable fruitful use of the lockdown situation to help focus on reducing the academic loss by resorting to potential use of technology i.e. by harnessing ICT and make it accessible to all teachers and learners by pooling of e-resources to enhance the online education systems in the country through Bharat Padhe Online campaign. Therefore, as an educationist from the field of Social work; I'm really glad that the Government of India has made special effort to engage the 'potential future citizens of the country' through an on-line mode. But the question has arisen as how about the 'education of children of 'Have Nots'' in the nook and corners of the country that are not even able to afford proper meal a day. The on-line mode of education ones again going to cater to only the children of the family who are 'Have All' backgrounds from both the Private and Government sectors.

The recent National Education Policy- 2019 also has reiterated the vision of the great Educationist Dr Bhim Rao that has planned an India-centered education system that would transform our country sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society providing access to high quality education emphasizing on Equitable & Inclusive Education aiming to shape an education system that benefits all children of the nation irrespective of their different backgrounds. The primary objective of this paper is to suggest few Innovative ways to educate the children at all levels with emphasis on equity and inclusiveness during the COVID-19. Also, it aims at finding out if the Bharat Padhe Campaign can help realise the visions of Constitution (with special reference to NEP-2019) during the lockdown situation in order to pay real tribute to a great educationist who strived hard to make the education, Inclusive for all, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar..

Methods

The research designs used for the paper are analytically descriptive and exploratory. Here in my study, I have tried to analytically describe the Constitution of India that is reflected in the formulation of National Education Policy-2019 towards the Goal of Equitable and Inclusive

Education. Exploratory design, as the paper tries to find new areas and alternatives, which can be undertaken for solving the problem of education during the lockdown with equity and inclusiveness as the important focus.

Secondary sources of data has been used for the paper while analyzing the constitutional mandate and the National Educational Policy-2019 and exploring the solutions towards the equitable and inclusive alternatives or solution for the On- Line education.

Review of Literature

1. Dr. Ambedkar's drafting of the Indian Constitution has prohibited all forms of discriminations based on sex, religion, caste etc. He can be truly entitled as the Principal architect of the Indian Constitution. But as we witness the evidences of wide discrimination on the basis of caste, gender religion, the vision of construction of a democratic social arrangement still remains unfulfilled. Therefore, the author has reiterated that until and unless, the constitutional mandate of 'Equality and Social Justice prevails at all levels across all spectrum of life and living, society and its structure and functioning, reaching of all provisions as per the policy framework to the marginalized, have-nots, historically discriminated groups, weaker sections; the country can never fulfill the vision with which the Constitution of the country has come in force.

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2. The National Education Policy – 2019, aims at equitable & inclusive education for every child in the country, with a special focus on under-represented groups (URGs). The historically marginalized group who have been discriminated in an organized manner; have been deprived in all aspects and were not included in the process of change towards progressive life and they are not benefitted through the process of development. Till now, the policy has covered the attention only in paper but the real work happens, when it gets implemented in real sense at the ground level at any given situation. (Draft National Education Policy 2019: All you need to know) retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/draft-national-education-policy-2019-divd-1606269-2019-10-04>

3. The Union Ministry of Human Resources Development launched Bharat Padhe online campaign that comes amid complete lockdown across the country to control the spread of coronavirus on April 11, 2020. This on-line campaign was to crowdsource ideas for improving the online education ecosystem of India. The week-long campaign was launched by HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal. The main objective of the campaign is to invite experts from across India to share suggestions or solutions to overcome the challenges and constraints of online education while promoting the existing digital education platforms. All schools, colleges and other educational institutions have been closed across the country, forcing many institutions to start taking online classes to ensure that the studies of the students do not suffer. But, the on-line system has to be fully operational irrespective of the class, cultural and background differences. Bharat Padhe Online: HRD Ministry launched week-long campaign to improve online education retrieved

from <https://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/bharat-padhe-online-hrd-ministry-launched-weeklong-campaign-to-improve-online-education-1586589696-1>

4. It takes courage to break free from the shackles of social inequality. It takes enormous amounts of courage to believe that things can change. It takes a leader to fight these inequalities and establish a new social order. It's really great to know the leader who in spite of all his challenges, he has faced ever since his childhood. The only reason was that he was born in the family of a Dalit. But the experience of discrimination, atrocities, humiliation that he and his family and the community he belonged to has borne gave a positive inspiration to him to gain the maximum from the education and work towards awakening the deprived class to receive the rightful education for a new social change and to make the social justice a reality in the country like India. Our Inspiration Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar: Indian National Congress retrieved from <https://www.inc.in/en/our-inspiration/dr-b-r-ambedkar>.
5. The Constitution of India clearly talks about the 'Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections'(Article 46). The study conducted in 2012-13 by the author clearly shows that more than 90% of the child labour who do not attend the school, all belong to the children from a very low socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The scenario clearly indicates that the great country like India has not been able to fulfill the promise and mandate given in the world's largest Constitution that was perceived by the Constitution making committee being chaired by the greatest visionary and social reformer the history has ever seen i.e. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. Dr. Chandrakala Diyali, 'The philosophy of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and scenario of child labour (dalit) in uttarpradesh - an empirical study'. Volume: 7, Issue: 05, May 2018, ISSN: 2277-7881, JISRAF Impact Factor 5.818, Index Copernicus Value 5.16 and International Scientific Indexing Value: 2.286, IJMER.
6. As per the Constitutional mandate (Article 14-Equality before law)-The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. But the report given in this article shows only 8% of homes with young members have computer with net link. Hence the Indian education can't go online. The Pandemic due to Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown how the structural imbalances are rooted between rural and urban, male and female, rich and poor, and different cultural background even in the Era of digitalization. With the existing digital divide, expanding online education will push the digital have-nots to the periphery of the education system; thereby increasing inequity in educational outcomes. Digital Divide Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/960939/indian-education-cant-go-online-only-8-of-homes-with-school-children-have-computer-with-net-link>.

Therefore, in order to make the On-Line mode of Education 'Equitable & Inclusive' here are few suggestions to enable all children at all level, irrespective of Socio-Economical and Cultural background to productively use the lockdown period in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak

The steps that can be taken for the students of all levels amid the nationwide lockdown that is imposed to curb the spread of novel coronavirus are:

- Use of On- Line Mode of Teaching - Learning

As has been proposed in the Education Policy of 2019 that aims at appropriately integrating technology into all levels of education. The Quality, innovation and research will be the pillars on which India will become knowledge super power. Teaching work is to be done in universities and colleges with the help of e-learning, Google class room, Zoom application YouTube, MS Team etc.

- Use of Virtual learning Platform

The virtual learning platform has to be developed with e- tablet application. It offers syllabus for all the courses from different universities. A virtual learning environment (VLE) in educational technology is a Web-based platform for the digital aspects of courses of study, usually within educational institutions. They present resources, activities and interactions within a course structure and provide for the different stages of assessment.

- Online Professional or Practical based courses and others.

Online Professional or Practical based courses have to be introduced for student trainees pursuing Professional or practical based courses and others. The different organization and agencies could be hired to give the first hand exposure and experience to the students.

- Use of Social Media and Technology

The students are encouraged to actively use social media and other technology platform so that no student has to face adverse impact on their study due to COVID-19. For example; the websites, e-mail and sharing through social media apps like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook etc

- Use of Mass Media like TV (Door Darshan), Radio like or any specialized channel

On-line classes are very good medium for the students by their faculty who can afford to use the internet. But those children who cannot afford the on- line classes and where the internet connectivity is an issue in the nook and corner of the country. The lecture by specialized faculties should be broadcasted with the use of mass media like TV(Door Darshan), Radio like or any specialized channel that can be created which would work 24x7 with different lectures delivered by an academician from different specialized subjects with different time slots.

- Voluntary engagement of senior citizens as an on-line Mentor from different fields of Specialisation.

The proficient senior citizens of the country those retired and staying at home or are in some part time engagements can be sorted for voluntary engagement as an on-Line mentor for any group of students or institution from different parts of the country to enable disadvantaged

students to get the provision of on-line guide to help them broaden their horizon of aspiration and to channelize their focus on their area of interest and flare.

- CSR Projects can be channelized for sponsoring of different poor educational Institution.

Develop the on- line forum to adopt any institution to not only sponsor in cash but even help the students learn different professional or skill based training for their economical sustainability. The CSR Projects can be mainstreamed for the same.

- Use of different specialized stakeholders through E-resource.

Different specialized stakeholders like NGOs, Institutions and Departments can play a very important role in helping through on-line mode to give their inputs in their areas that can be saved in E-resource form to make the education reach to the unreached.

- The integrated E-Library on a single E-platform

The E-Library of different university can be integrated on a single E-platform to make it accessible to the students to have a wider accessibility to different books, materials journals, data for innovative and applicable Research work. In order to cope with the present situation, librarians are shifting towards new media, namely electronic resources for their collection developments that the documents of users are better fulfilled. The e-resources on magnetic and optical media have a vast impact on the collections of University libraries. These are more useful due to inherent capabilities for manipulation and searching, providing information access is cheaper to acquiring information resources, savings in storage and maintenance etc. and sometimes the electronic form is the only alternative

- Concept of 'Donate knowledge' by Pooling of E-Resources

An interested individuals to disseminate their Specialised knowledge through the E-platform to help the aspiring students in that field of study. E-Resources is an electronic resource that requires computer access or any electronic product that delivers a collection of data, be it text referring to full text bases, electronic journals, image collections, other multimedia products and numerical, graphical or time based, as a commercially available title that has been published with an aim to being marketed. These may be delivered on CD ROM, on tape, via internet and so on.

- Adopting online, digital and multimedia methods of teaching-learning process through webinars and Guest lectures.

The webinars and Guest lectures can be organized and broadcasted through the use of mass media to reach to the inaccessible and disadvantaged groups as well. To ensure continuity of the study programmes of the learners enrolled with any institution from their homes without any interruption by adopting online, digital and multimedia methods of teaching-learning process.

- Provision of printed Self -Instructional Material ALONG WITH THE digitized learning material on some dedicated web portal

In addition to printed Self Instructional Material an institution can provide the digitized learning material on some dedicated web portal e-Gyankosh, live IVR sessions through GyanVani and regular broadcast of academic content through GyanDarsan, GyanDhara and SwayamPrabhachannels .

Provision of On-line Skill Development Courses

The Government of India had initiated a multi-tiered campaign to promote skill development training programs across the various states that lead to the conception and operation of the National Skill Development Mission in 2015. Many institutions across the nation are engaged in highly specialized academic and industry training programs to promote skills among its students and youth, with a greater emphasis on the improvement of employment opportunities and research activities. Therefore, the Government can think of converting these programmes on-line that can be broadcasted using mass media or can reach the unreached through E-resource. Over the past few years, a numbers of techniques and related standards have been developed which allow documents to be created and distributed in electronic form.

Conclusion

The lockdown due to the Pandemic has already affected Education system. The schools and other higher education institutions that could afford to start the on-line teaching and learning have already geared up for the same ensuring no loss on knowledge gain. But in this process the major chunk of the children termed 'Have Nots' have no counting on the loss on education just by the virtue of their birth in a kind of family for whom loss on all aspects of life is seen as their destiny or misfortune then to ponder on the historical organized discrimination, education exclusion so on and so forth.

Hence, when the country is planning on any front, it should have equity and inclusion as its basis as reiterated by revered Baba Saheb. Therefore there are many ways to teach and learn on –line that has been already suggested but to make the education go cost- effective and wide spread in nature, the use of mass media like T.V broadcasting; is the biggest platform which can be reached to the poorest home if government enables it free of cost to benefit all learners at all levels of class, socio-economic and cultural background to make the dream of Dr. Bhim Rao come alive in true sense.

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