

# Caste relations in student diversity: Thinking through Dr Ambedkar's perspective towards a civic learning approach in higher education

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*The chairman of the drafting committee of the modern Indian Constitution, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, emphasized that education cultivates democracy in society, strengthens the roots of democracy, and brings about social transformation. The social transformation includes a way of life that will promote liberty, equality, and fraternity, which are Dr Ambedkar's "key elements of an ideal society". This paper discusses the implications for higher education campuses for achieving an ideal society in light of the emerging evidence on peer group formation around identities and issues of discrimination associated with caste in the context of increasing student diversity. The paper also emphasizes the important role of a civic-learning approach to higher education; meaning an active engagement with values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. There is a shared belief that higher education has a great potential to be a social laboratory for civic learning and to inculcate democratic values and foster peaceful interactions among members of diverse groups.*

*Keywords: B R Ambedkar; higher education; caste; student diversity; socially excluded groups; civic learning; India*

## INTRODUCTION

Ambedkar, the chief architect of the *Constitution of India 1950* and the one who led the social movement to secure human rights of the oppressed in the Indian caste system, believed that education cultivates a culture of the practice of democratic values in society, and brings about social transformation. For Ambedkar, social transformation included a way of life that promoted values of liberty, equality, and fraternity in consonance with principles of democracy. He considered these three values as key elements of an ideal society (Ambedkar, 1936). According to Ambedkar, the real remedy to social problems was social reconstruction as understood as a participatory and pluralistic experience, replacing social relations governed by a caste system with one based on democratic values of equality, justice, freedom, and fraternity.

Ambedkar (1936) was much influenced by his teacher in Columbia University, John Dewey (1916), who believed in the transformative role of education for establishing a

democratic social consciousness. Thus, Ambedkar identified education as a key instrument of liberation from the oppressive structures of Hindu caste-patriarchy, as well as for the reconstruction of a new social order. This paper presents the relevance of the philosophical and educational views of Ambedkar in light of contemporary challenges related to caste being encountered in higher education institutions (HEIs).

It is argued that caste- and untouchability-based forms of practices and inter-relations on higher education (HE) campuses not only result in access inequalities to basic human and social rights but also causes prejudice, and a lack of fellow feeling and empathy amongst students from diverse social groups. This, in turn, raises barricades against the potential role of HEIs to function as a laboratory to nurture democratic skills for participating in a pluralistic socio-cultural society. In addition to preparing students to become effective workers, as is by and large the current focus of HE (Thorat, 2013), we believe that HE can increase its social relevance and its role in the creation of a democratic society if it also works to address the caste problem.

This paper will first discuss the educational views of Ambedkar on the influence of the caste system on inequalities in access to human rights and how it leads to an absence of a sense of fellow feeling based on humanity. By extension, such absence leads to a negative impact on social solidarity and democracy. The discussion will then present current empirical evidence on the persistent problems suffered by social groups who are historically positioned lower in the social order in the caste system and who attempt to access the HE system. The final section of the paper considers the possibilities of a civic-learning approach in HE from the perspective of Ambedkar in and for contemporary times.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE CASTE SYSTEM THROUGH AMBEDKARS' THEORETICAL LENS**

Ambedkar (1987a) viewed the caste system as a social system that was the source of mass-illiteracy and denied people the opportunity to protest if they suffered wrongdoing. Historically, the caste system divided people into groups, called “castes” in which the civil, cultural, educational and economic rights of each individual is pre-determined or ascribed by birth and made hereditary. The assignment and entitlement of rights among castes were unequal and assigned in a hierarchal manner – the rights reduced the lower in the hierarchy, resulting in social exclusion and the denial of equal access to rights and entitlements (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

Ambedkar located the problems of the lower castes in the historical denial of basic human rights, including civil, cultural, religious, educational, and economic rights; the denial being rooted in the oppressive social order and in the social code being practised against the lower castes, with prescribed penalties (social and economic ostracization) for breach of the codes in order to preserve the social order. The caste system, as an institution, creates prejudices which made members of the society observe the distinctions of high and low/clean and unclean. Ambedkar believed that the hardships and disabilities inflicted on the lower castes by the social system were so rampant and effective that it was as if they were being imposed by the law of the State.

Above all, Ambedkar believed that the denial of rights to education to the lower castes and untouchables, “was the most cruel wrong” (1987a, p. 126). In his essay on Philosophy of Hinduism (Ambedkar, 1987b), he asked:

But why make one person depend upon another in the matter of his vital needs?  
Education everyone must have. (p. 69)

Ambedkar (1936) also believed that the denial of educational rights resulted in the lack of consciousness that one was suffering injustice:

The result of the denial of educational rights is that no one is conscious that low condition is grounds for grievance; the consciousness is that no one is responsible for the condition; the group reconcile to eternal servitude and accept it as inescapable fate. They could not think out or know the way to their salvation. They were condemned to be lowly and not knowing the way of escape and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate. (p. 63)

The group that was most wronged, and on whom the entire burden of the caste system fell, were the scheduled castes (formerly called “untouchables”) who were placed at the bottom of the caste system. Untouchables suffered from a final handicap, that of “untouchability”, in the graded assignments of rights in the caste system, making them even distinct among the “lower castes”. Ambedkar noted that untouchability is not merely considered in the literal sense of the term, where pollution takes place by touch, but also has a notional sense of impurity justified by the religious system of belief. The notional form of untouchability involved forced non-association and, in turn, lack of participation in various spheres of society, culture, and economy (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2015).

Ambedkar (1936) argued, in his essay on the annihilation of caste, that:

Not only the untouchability arrested the growth of personality of untouchables but also comes in the way of their ‘material well-being’. It deprived them of certain civil rights. The untouchable is not even a citizen. Citizenship is a bundle of rights such as personal liberty, personal security, right to hold private property, equality before law, liberty of conscience, freedom of opinion, and speech, right of assembly, right of representation in country’s government, and right to hold office under the state. The untouchability of untouchables puts these rights far beyond their reach. (p. 256)

### **Equal rights, legal safeguards and affirmative action**

Ambedkar (1948) insisted foremost on access to equal rights as a necessary institutional condition for control over economic and productive resources. He argued that not providing access to equal citizenship rights was a denial of citizenship rights, and is rooted in the denial of basic human rights essential for the growth of human beings. He viewed access to equal rights as citizenship rights and bestowing political and educational privilege on the untouchables was a way to social equality. Ambedkar incorporated “equality before law” (GOI, 1950) as a constitutional provision overturning the customary rules of the caste system.

Ambedkar advocated for a general framework which involved the acceptance of the principles of non-discrimination, legal abolition of untouchability (GOI, 1955), and enactment of legal measures to prevent violence and caste-based atrocities (GOI, 1989).

Importantly, Ambedkar ensured the recognition of the problem, particularly recognition of the educational and economic 'backwardness' of the low castes. In view of the historical exclusion and isolation of the lower castes, Ambedkar advocated for the nation-state to become responsible for the protection of the interests of the 'scheduled castes' (SCs), ensure their fair access to economic and social spheres, and take measures to uplift them through affirmative action policies and pro-active measures to ensure their due share in nations' growth and development.

As a result, the government of India, based on various constitutional provisions employed legal safeguards against untouchability-based discrimination and caste-based atrocities. In addition, the government has initiated affirmative action measures in the form of a reservation policy in the legislature, public employment, higher education and other government spheres, like public housing, to improve the economic and educational status of the untouchable castes. Affirmative action policies have also been developed for other lower castes and groups; that is the scheduled tribes (STs) and the other backward classes (OBCs), which have suffered exclusion in one form or the other. The OBCs are *shudras* or the lower castes, but not untouchables in the caste system. The STs include ethnic and indigenous groups that have suffered from physical and social isolation.

### **Annihilation of caste, nurturing fraternity and the role of education**

Ambedkar emphasized that political power gained through representation in the legislature cannot be a panacea for all the ills inflicted on the lower castes and untouchables. Political power must be rooted in the form of society free from rigid social barriers and founded on democratic attitudes of mind. Ambedkar stressed that democratic attitudes involved individuals treating each other as equals, being prepared to provide the same liberty claimed for oneself to others, and developing a fellow feeling for one another as the pre-requisites of a democratic society and for sustaining equality, liberty, and collective social life.

On 25 November 1949, in an Assembly debate, Ambedkar said:

We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them. (p. 64)

He appealed for a new social order based on the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and incorporated these values in the constitution of a free India. Ambedkar (1936) called for the annihilation of caste because he viewed it as a great hindrance to both economic reform and social solidarity. He asserted that caste was not based on the

division of labour but was a division of labourers. Ambedkar (1987c) observed that one of the unique features of the caste system was the spirit of isolation and exclusiveness. Isolation and exclusiveness make the caste group anti-social and inimical towards one another. It is the spirit of isolation and exclusiveness which brings about an anti-social spirit and, in turn, is the worst feature of the caste system.

For creation of a unified proletariat, he argued, it was important for mental attitudes and feelings towards fellow workers to be based on foundations of equality, fraternity, and, above all, justice. Along with inter-caste marriages, Ambedkar saw education as one of the means for building up and re-constructing the society based on reasoning, as opposed to anti-democratic traditions of the caste system.

Fraternity, or fellow feeling, was particularly a value that Ambedkar drew on and considered the moral responsibility of education in nurturing it. In the context of India, he defined fraternity as a sense of common 'brotherhood' of all Indians – of Indians being one people. It was essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow citizens. He considered fraternity to be the principle which gave unity and solidarity to social life; in other words, for the *social endosmosis* necessary for the creation of a democratic form of society. For Ambedkar, democracy was not merely a form of government, it was also primarily a mode of associated living and conjoint communicated experience (1952a). Ambedkar viewed fraternity as another name for democracy, where many interests could be consciously communicated and shared. He prioritised the value of developing a fellow feeling, or feeling of common humanity, amongst those who constitute the nation-state for the unification and protection of common citizenry, their social elevation and establishment of social democracy.

It was education that Ambedkar considered as an instrument for developing fraternity among caste groups in India. He saw education as the weapon of social change. He recognized education as the mechanism through which democratic attitudes could be transmitted and nurtured in people. Ambedkar was of the view that education would help people work out their own political destiny, pruning the useless and preserving the useful in their societies. Drawing from his teacher, John Dewey, Ambedkar (1936) observed, for instance, that:

Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse. As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as it makes for a better future society. (p. 79)

Ambedkar emphasized that education is an instrument that cultivates democracy in the society by providing skills for associated living, secular ethical thinking, and enhancing capabilities to engage in a democratic way of life. Along with political independence, Ambedkar urgently called for the reform of the social order because not to do so, he cautioned, would result in persistence of social problems associated with the caste system in varying forms across diverse spheres of the society in India.

In light of the widely recognized transformative role of HE to train young people in democratic values (UNESCO, 1998), the objective of the rest of this paper is to present the problems currently faced by the socially excluded groups, such as the SCs, OBCs and the STs in HEIs in India and how HE is dealing with the tensions caused by an increase in student diversity. The response of HE to the identified problems will

influence its potential to re-build Indian society based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity that Ambedkar emphasized.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The empirical findings described in this paper draw from research on social inequalities in HE by Sabharwal and Malish (2016), which employed a mixed methods approach to gain a holistic understanding of the HE experiences of students and faculty members from socially excluded groups in India. The study employed a HE multi-institutional case study approach of 12 HEIs across six states: Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, located in the eastern, western, southern and northern parts of India – that is, situated across different spatial zones.

A pragmatic triangulation, mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) was used, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and combined to arrive at the research findings. Quantitative data was collected to reveal the differences between experiences of diverse groups of students, while qualitative data helped to reveal the drivers of social exclusion and processes involved in causality. Quantitative data was collected through a detailed questionnaire-based survey of 3,200 students selected from the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Qualitative data was collected from 70 focus group discussions with students and 50 solicited diaries from students, and 200 in-depth interviews with teachers, administrators, and decision makers in the case-study HE institutions.

## **PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS**

In India, along with rising social demand for education, increasing school participation rates and expanding educational supply options, a range of affirmative action measures have contributed towards improving social diversity in student composition (Varghese, Sabharwal, & Malish, 2018). Measures such as the reservation policy, scholarships, and relaxation in admission requirements have resulted in HEIs in India expanding their access to students who have traditionally been under-represented in HE, such as the SCs, STs, and the OBCs. In addition, there are clear state directives (related to regulations against discrimination) to HEIs for institutionalizing protection of students from discrimination (UGC, 2012).

Student composition has moved from being homogenous - largely composed of upper caste – urban male – to a more diverse student group belonging to rural background and socially excluded groups, and to women (Sabharwal & Malish, 2016). In 2016, the student social composition in HE in India comprised 6% STs, 15% SCs, 42% OBCs, and 38% higher castes (NSSO, 2014). In other words, traditionally disadvantaged social groups comprise the single largest group, making up more than 60% of total enrolments.

While more students from traditionally socially excluded background are going to HEIs, a CPRHE study (Sabharwal & Malish, 2016) shows that exclusionary practices prevalent in the society (see also, Borooah, Sabharwal, Diwakar, Mishra., & Naik. 2015; Thorat & Newman, 2010) are reproduced and reflected on HE campuses. The evidence indicates caste to be a source of separation in teacher-student relationships and peer-to-peer interactions. Experiences with caste-based patterns in teaching-learning

relations and division in peer groups based on caste identities result not only in marginalization of students from the socially excluded groups on HE campuses, but also in the preservation of separate class-consciousness amongst diverse groups.

### **Caste-based patterns of teaching-learning relationships**

Empirical evidence generated through focus group discussions and the student survey showed that students from the disadvantaged social groups expressed a strong feeling that they did not receive adequate academic support and were ignored in classroom transactions. While physical segregation in terms of classroom seating was no longer in practice, caste-based segregation reflected through the amount of attention, support, and guidance received from teachers was prevalent. For example, the correlation analysis of the survey question: “I receive adequate academic support compared to rest of the students”, showed that students from the SC group felt that they did not (Pearson  $r = -0.37$ ,  $p=0.05$ ), while higher caste students felt that they received academic support, (Pearson  $r=0.62$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Likewise, while students from the SC group indicated their teachers did not encourage students to respect different beliefs (Pearson  $r = -0.45$ ,  $p=0.05$ ), higher caste students indicated the opposite (Pearson  $r = 0.65$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ).

The focus group discussions revealed that students from the SC and ST group felt ignored in two aspects. First, they felt the curriculum did not have an adequate representation of experiences and symbols of subaltern groups and was over-represented with examples of the life, world, and cultural practices of dominant social groups. Second, they felt that classroom transactions were dominated by the socially excluded groups being portrayed in a deficit way, resulting in a feeling of being marginalized. On the feeling of being marginalized in the classrooms, one student in the group discussion noted, “many times during teaching if teachers are using examples from Hindu scriptures/texts then they accept the responses from higher castes students. They don’t consider our responses or argument because they think we don’t have knowledge of Hindu rituals.”

Positive correlation coefficients for both SC and ST students (for SC group, Pearson  $r = 0.042$ ,  $p=0.05$ ; for ST group, Pearson  $r = 0.051$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) also indicate that they felt teachers from their own background gave them more attention than other teachers. Interviewed faculty members who belonged to the SCs and STs acknowledged that they encouraged students to meet them to discuss their personal issues. However, it is to be noted that a significant majority of teachers of case study institutions were from the upper castes (Sabharwal, Henderson, & Joseph, 2020). In addition to caste-based patterns of teaching-learning relations, the beliefs of most faculty members were rooted in the ideology of merit, and considered that an increase in student diversity as a result of the reservation-based policy (and not merit) was causing a decline in the overall “quality” of HE. This attitude left students from the socially excluded groups less integrated into the teaching-learning process, and left them with a feeling of not being welcomed by their teachers or their institutions.

### **Campus culture embedded in caste norms**

Outside classrooms, the nature of campus culture was found to be deeply embedded in caste-based stereotypes and beliefs, which shaped the attitudes and behaviours of faculty members, administrators and peers, influencing their interactions with the

students from the socially excluded groups. Similar to the beliefs of the faculty members, dominant beliefs of the upper caste peers of the socially excluded groups (SC/ST/OBC) were negative towards the reservation policy and its social justice justification. In addition to hostility towards reservation-based provisions, extra-curricular activities, in which students from disadvantaged social groups participated, faced stigmatization. As a result, social divisions in friendship, lack of inter-group formations for activities on campuses, and the absence of informal interactions with teachers were not uncommon.

For example, students across campuses formed their friendship groups (friends with whom they interact with most often) largely based on their caste, ethnicity, and regional backgrounds. Peer groups were influenced by the position of peers in the caste hierarchy with higher castes mostly interacting with each other and not with the students from other social groups. Only 9% of the higher caste students reported that their best friend was from the SC group. The data suggest that SCs also mostly form their friendship groups within their own caste (37%) or with the OBCs (22%); interestingly, the identity-based peer-group formation among the SCs was found to be a consequence of fear of discrimination and exclusionary behaviour from others and acted as a supportive mechanism against a non-inclusive institutional environment. In the case of higher caste students, this was due to same group preference, helping to maintain groups exclusivity, which was considered as a virtue.

Importantly, the student union, which is an important social space outside the classroom, experienced caste-related fissures. Such unions, in our sample of HEIs were either not allowed to be formed by the administrators with a restriction on student election, or, where they existed, student elections were contested on the basis of caste. This represents an extreme form of peer-group formation based on group identity with serious negative implications on capacities to develop civic-mindedness, leadership skills, facilitation of access to resources offered by the institutions, and the creation of a sense of belonging.

Challenges faced by students from the socially excluded groups were accentuated by unsupportive administrative structures and weak implementation of institutional mechanisms, such as the equal opportunity cells, which are meant to support and protect their interest. Ineffective implementation of such administrative mechanisms and lack of inter-group interactions resulted in students from the socially excluded groups being less likely to participate in orientation programmes and engage in extra-curricular activities, clubs, and societies, thus furthering their marginalization and resulting in their poor performance.

Implications of caste-based discriminatory practices on HE campuses are a systemic denial of equal academic and social learning opportunities and rights to democratic participation of disadvantaged groups in campus life. Prejudiced attitudes and peer groups formed on the basis of identities are indications of separate class consciousness and an absence of fellow feeling which, in turn, is a barrier to achieving the *social endosmosis* required for solidarity, including broader goals of social transformation through HE.

The potential of the civic learning approach in HE will be discussed next, taking into account Ambedkar's argument that the role of education should be to foster democratic attitudes and a change to the social system.



## **A CIVIC LEARNING APPROACH IN HE**

The above analysis suggests that community-determined values, often contradictory to democratic norms, influence behaviour and actions of groups on HE campuses. Group disparities, exclusionary tendencies, and group divide across caste identities are a consequence of behaviour based on customary values that are largely shaped through informal learning and socialization in the family and society. These behaviours are contrary to the democratic values that Ambedkar prioritized. Against the background of pieces of evidences of prejudice and exclusion, this section turns to a construction of the civic learning approach in HE.

In addition to formation of human capital and developing productive workers, it is now increasingly recognized that HE has the potential to cultivate democratic norms of behaviour and develop a sense of civic identity (Rubin, Hayes, & Benson, 2009). Late adolescence and early adulthood, that is, the college-age of students, are unique times when the nature of experiences affects the emerging sense of identity and when personal and social identity is formed (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). Colleges can be spaces that support young adults through this identity development stage.

Research literature suggests that HE, through civic learning, can develop citizens that have the capacity to live and act in a diverse socio-cultural world (Hurtado, 2003). Civic learning equips students with the competencies to consider each other as equals and respectful of diverse view-points; it equip students with the means to solve conflicts and differences of opinion in a non-violent manner (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2013). Education for civic learning and democratic engagement has received positive policy attention in the US (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2011) and Europe (Hoskins, Villalba, & Saisana, 2012; Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, & Burge, 2011).

The civic-learning approach in HE involves teaching the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social justice by making them part of the curriculum and developing pedagogical approaches to teach such values. Foundation courses, which include lessons on issues of social group identity and justice, make students aware about the problems of society, such as the nature of discrimination involved in caste, ethnicity, and religion. Such courses are ways of enhancing students' civic capabilities. Content that explores the dynamics of privileges and disadvantages by using examples that incorporate subaltern epistemologies, experiences of the marginalized, and perspectives of a wide range of groups from a variety of cultures in the mainstream academic knowledge is considered important to sensitize students to the problems of the meta-narratives that dominate the curriculum and to challenge it (Banks, 1996; Bowman, 2010; Chang, 2002).

Ambedkar firmly believed in the power of knowledge in shaping the thinking of students, and their subsequent actions. On 24 December 1952, while addressing the annual gathering of the students of the Rajaram College, Kolhapur, Ambedkar said: "Knowledge is the foundation of a man's life and every effort must be made to maintain the intellectual stamina of a student and arouse his intellect". He advised students to develop their thinking power and make use of the knowledge they had gained (Ambedkar, 1952b, p. 487). Building the knowledge-base of students with the curriculum content imbued with the rights-based approach and social justice

perspectives is the first step to enhancing the capacities to follow and base their action on democratic values.

Simultaneously, pedagogical methods which create conditions for positive inter-group interactions, promote multi-cultural (caste) friendships, and increase communication among diverse groups of students are equally important to improving democratic skills of engagement. Mixed-peer groups for academic tasks, intergroup dialogues and community-based learning that motivate students for collective action to solve public problems are pedagogical practices that have been documented to have a positive impact on civic learning (Antonio, 2001; Gurin et al., 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006). In 1953, as a way to strengthen university-community partnerships, Ambedkar suggested a community-based activity which involved students interacting and educating the masses to act on the basis of rational thinking, and developing dispositions conducive of social connectedness. Ambedkar said, in May 1953, “The time has come when small groups of students must go to the masses and teach them to lead a rational life”. (Ambedkar, 1953, p. 494).

By creating a civic learning environment, colleges can help students acquire knowledge, abilities, skills, and habits of mind that foster multicultural competencies for working and interacting with people who represent diverse cultures and perspectives, and participating in citizen actions that bridge the gap between the ideals in the constitution and lived realities. Importantly, the purpose of cultivating such democratic values is to promote equitable, non-discriminatory and just HE campuses. In the context of evolving social milieu on HE campuses and for civic learning to be an integral part of HE, education for civic learning will need to move from the margins and constitute the core of the curriculum and teaching. At present, existing programmes, such as the National Service Scheme, courses on human rights and gender, are fragmented and implemented selectively (Thorat, 2013).

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This paper explored Ambedkar’s educational and philosophical perspective on the traditional caste system and the potential role of education in rebuilding the social order to achieve a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality, and fraternity as the principles of life. Empirical evidence discussed in this paper show that HEIs, which are expected to play a transformative social role, resist changing themselves. Study findings showed that the intellectual structures and practices of institutions were rooted in the traditional caste system and values of meritocracy, which lead to social separation on HE campuses.

There is currently a greater diversity in student composition on HE campuses, which is the result of economic and political developments. However, what is missing is educational efforts to construct diversity in a positive way that reflects democratic inclusion and participation, in which the plurality of differences is not only tolerated but appreciated and valued. The paper proposed re-constructing existing learning approaches from the perspective of Ambedkar to respond to the needs of diversity and participation in the pluralistic democracy. The civic learning approach provides possibilities and hopes to constructively address and critically reflect on diverse experiences in increasingly socially heterogeneous HE campuses.

A glimmer of hope on the expectation from education to respond to challenges of our times is reflected in the current draft of the new education policy in India (MHRD, 2019). While it does not directly address the issue of caste experience in connection with HE, it considers prejudice and bias based on gender and social status as a potential axis of exclusion, and calls for training teachers and sensitizing learners on notions of respect and dignity for all. This educational approach symbolizes an intention of movement towards democratic inclusion in education and connects to Ambedkar's idea of an active struggle against an oppressive social order and inclusive participation of disadvantaged groups in all areas of social life.

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