

6

*ON GRANTS FOR EDUCATION

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Mr. President, I do not wish to take much time because I know that the time that we have at our disposal is very short. All the same, I wish to present certain points for the consideration of the Honourable the Minister for Education.

The first point that I wish to bring to his attention is the fact that we are making indeed a very very slow progress in the matter of the education of our children. The recent report issued by the Government of India on the progress of education makes a very sad reading. It says that if the progress of education goes on at the rate at which it is going on today it will take 40 years for boys and 300 years for girls of school-going age to be brought under education. I beg to submit, Sir, that that is a very dark-prospect for this House to contemplate. The Honourable the Finance Member on the day on which he presented his budget told us that from the year 1921-22 to the present day, the expenditure on education had increased by something like 39 lakhs. Sir, taking into consideration the amount of increase of expenditure on education and the increase in the number of pupils in the schools, I find that the increase in the number of pupils is certainly not commensurate with the increase of expenditure on education. If we take the statistics from 1916-17 to 1922-23, we find that the expenditure on education has increased by something like 100 per cent. while the increase in the number of pupils during the same period is only 29 per cent., Sir, I know that there is a great financial stringency in this presidency, and that we are not at present situated in a position to ask for a rapid increase in education, but we can certainly plead for one thing. We have in this presidency two departments, which if I may say so are working at cross purposes. We have the Department of Education, the purpose of which is to moralise and socialise the people. We have on the other hand the Department of Excise which is working, if I may say so, in the reverse direction. Sir, I think that it is not asking too much if I plead that we should at least spend on education the same amount that we take from the people in the form of excise revenue. The amount of expenditure that we incur per individual in this presidency on education is only 14 annas, but

*B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XIX. pp. 971-76, dated 12th March 1927.

the amount of money that we recover in the form of excise revenue is Rs. 2-2-9 (Rs. 2.17), I think it is only fair that our educational expenditure should be so adjusted that we should spend on the education of the people as much as we take from them in the form of excise.

Another matter which is more or less analogous and to which I want to draw the attention of my honourable friend the Minister for education is that, at present the amount of money which we are spending on primary education is to a large extent really wasted. The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life. But if we take the statistics, we find that out of every hundred children that enter a primary school only eighteen reach the fourth standard; the rest of them, that is to say, 82 out of every 100, relapse into the state of illiteracy. What is the remedy for this state of affairs? Sir, the comments made by the Government of India in its report on the review of education, I think might, without much excuse be read to this House. The report says : —

“The wastage in educational effort is immense and most educationalists are of opinion that there is no solution to this problem of wastage in educational effort in India, but compulsion. The total wastage of educational effort and its concurrent dissipation of educational funds in the primary classes is about fifty per cent of the total energy put forth.”

I therefore request the Honourable the Education Minister to spend more money on primary education, if for nothing else at least for the purpose of seeing that what he spends bears some fruit ultimately. Sir, this argument is not very different from the argument that was urged from the official benches in the matter of Back Bay reclamation. We were urged to spend more money on Back Bay because we were told that if we do not spend more money on Back Bay what we have spent will be an utter loss. I think the same argument might be utilised in this case, as well, and we can say that unless we spend a sufficient amount of money, to see that every child that enters a school reaches the fourth standard, what we have already spent upon him is of no purpose whatsoever.

Sir, the third matter to which I wish to draw the attention of the Honourable Minister for Education is this. Going over the figures which give us information as to the manner by which we finance education in this presidency I find that out of the total expenditure which we incur on arts colleges, something like 36 per cent is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on high schools, something like 31 per cent. is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on middle schools, something like 26 per cent. is derived from fees. Now, Sir, I submit that this is commercialisation of education. Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of every one. The Education Department is not a department which can be treated on the basis of *quid pro quo*. Education ought to be cheapened in all possible ways and to the greatest

possible extent. I urge this plea because I feel that we are arriving at a stage when the lower orders of society are just getting into the high schools, middle schools and colleges, and the policy of this department therefore ought to be to make higher education as cheap to the lower classes as it can possibly be made. I therefore wish to draw the attention of the Honourable Minister for Education to this rather glaring fact in the administration of education in this presidency.

Sir, the fourth point that I wish to bring to the attention of my honourable friend the Minister for Education is the great disparity in the comparative advancement in education of the different classes in this presidency. But before I go to that, I wish to explain one fact, namely, that the census report of this presidency has, for the purpose of comparing the advancement of the different communities in the matter of education, divided the total population into four different classes. The first class is called "advanced Hindus", the second class is called "intermediate Hindus" and it includes those people who for political purposes have now been designated as non-Brahmins i.e., Marathas and allied castes.

There is a third class called the backward classes which includes the depressed classes, Hill Tribes and the Criminal Tribes. Then, we have the fourth class which covers the Mahomedans. Bearing these divisions in mind, one sees a great disparity in the comparative advancement of these different communities in the matter of Education. Comparing these classes of people, according to the order in which they stand on the basis of population and according to the order in which they stand on the educational progress, what do we find? I find that the intermediate class, namely, non-Brahmins, who are first in order on the basis of population, are third in college education, third in secondary education and third in primary education. The Backward classes who are second in order of population are the fourth in the order of college education, fourth in order of secondary education and fourth in order of primary education. The Mahomedans who are third in order of population are second in the order of college education, second in the order of secondary education and second in order of primary education. The advanced Hindus who are fourth in order of population are the first in order of college education, first in order of secondary education and first in the order of primary education. Now, Sir, I have given an idea of the comparative disparity in the educational advancement of the different communities. But the figures do not give us the range of disparity in the advancement of the different communities in our presidency. I will, therefore, present the following figures to the Honourable the Minister for Education for his serious consideration. Taking first the primary education, we find there are—

Advanced Hindus	...	119 students per 1,000 of their population.
Mahomedans	...	92 students per 1,000 of their population.
Intermediate Class	...	38 students per 1,000 of their population.
Backward Class	...	18 students per 1,000 of their population.

That is the state of the primary education. Coming to the secondary education, we find—

Advanced Hindus	...	3,000 in one lakh of their population.
Mahomedans	...	500 in one lakh of their population.
Intermediate Class	...	140 in one lakh of their population.
Backward Class	...	14 in one lakh of their population.

That is the state of the secondary education. Now, coming to the college education we find—

Advanced Hindus	...	1,000 in two lakhs of their population.
Mahomedans	...	52 in two lakhs of their population.
Intermediate Class	...	14 in two lakhs of their population.
Backward Class	...	Nil (or nearly one if at all).

That is the state of the backward class, as far as the college education is concerned, when their total population is something like 37½ lakhs. Sir, these figures show two things conclusively : one, that the different communities are not on a par in the matter of education. They also show another thing to which I should like to draw the attention of the honourable House, namely that the Mahomedans have stolen an enormous march in the matter of education. Sir, this is not an imaginary statement. The statistics I have given to this honourable House are from the Report of the Director of Public Instruction for Bombay for 1923-24, and in support of this argument I may cite the opinion of no less a person than Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola who made the same remark from the presidential chair of the Mahomedan Conference. It may be remembered that I am not making this statement in any carping spirit nor grudge the efforts that Government have made in the matter of the education of Mahomedans. I must here emphasise that this country is composed of different communities. All these communities are unequal in their status and progress. If they are to be brought to the level of equality then the only remedy is to adopt the principle of inequality and to give favoured treatment to those who are below the level. There are some I know who object to this and adhere to the principle of equality of treatment. But I say Government has done well in applying this principle to the Mahomedans. For I honestly believe that equality of treatment to people who are unequal is simply another name for indifferentism and neglect. My only complaint is that Government has not yet thought fit to apply this principle to the backward classes. Economically speaking or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped in a manner in which no other community is handicapped. I, therefore, think that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case. As I have shown, their position is worse than that of the Mahomedans and my only pleading is that if the most favoured treatment is to be given to those who deserve it and need it most, then the backward classes deserve more attention of Government than do the Mahomedans. That is the question which I prominently, wish to place before this House, and I urge upon the Honourable the Minister for Education that he should adopt the same

methods and principle towards the uplift of the backward classes as have been adopted towards the uplift of the Mahomedan community. Sir, I may refer the Honourable Minister to the instructions issued by the Government of India in 1885 on the Report of the Education Commission of 1882. There were several proposals put forward for improving the education of the Mahomedan community; the proposal on which the Government of India, however, laid stress was the appointment of a special inspecting staff to look to the educational wants of the Mahomedan community and to bring home to it the necessity of education. I think there is an equal urgency for special inspecting staff to look after the education of the depressed classes. I may mention, Sir, that the Primary Education Act is a great wrong. Perhaps honourable members may not agree with me, but I say it is a wrong, it is double wrong. It is wrong because the responsibility of education is transferred to the hands of those who are not enlightened enough to understand that education is a great necessity. If there are any people who realise the necessity for education they are not to be found in this Council. The members of the local boards are too uneducated to realize that education is a necessity. Therefore, I say this Council has done a great wrong in transferring the responsibility for education to the hands of those people who do not feel for education. Again, the transfer of education to local bodies is a wrong because the burden has thereby been transferred to shoulders less broad to bear it. Sir, education of the masses, we all realize, is a matter of great cost and if there is any body which can be said to be able to bear it, it is this Council with its revenue of 15½ crores and not the local bodies with their meagre revenues of a few lakhs. I feel, Sir, that this Council in transferring education to the local bodies has practically postponed the spread of education among the masses *sine die* and in doing so has gravely erred. But, Sir, this is only preliminary to, the point which I wish to make, namely that the people who are the greatest sufferers by this wrong are the depressed classes. With great respect to the Honourable the Minister for Local Self-Government, I am impelled to say that his local boards are conceived after the fashion of money houses in a museum where the aim of the curator is to make room for one individual of every species. Sir, there is only one representative of the depressed classes provided in each local body. What is the utility of having only one representative of these classes? I cannot understand. If, for instance, the representation of the depressed classes in a local board is intended to force upon the local board the policy which is in the interests of the depressed classes, it is futile. For, certainly, one man cannot count in a body of ten or twelve. I hear complaints from all parts of the presidency that, under the present regime, the depressed classes find themselves in a most helpless condition. They are surrounded by people who by no means share their aspirations or their desires for advancement and betterment. There is, therefore, all the greater necessity, I say that this Government should employ certain inspecting agency under their direct control which will see that the depressed classes are not neglected by the bodies to whose charge such an important subject like education has been entrusted.

The second thing that I wish to say about the depressed classes is that

I find a certain sum has been set aside in the budget for scholarships for the backward communities. Now, Sir, I cannot understand the connotation of the words "backward classes" as used in the budget. I would have very much wished that the Honourable Minister had adopted the same-phrasology which the Director of Public Instruction adopts in his report, and I should very much like to see that he allocates a separate and distinct sum to each of the different communities which he proposes to include in the term "backward classes." We would then be in a position to know how the intermediate Hindus, backward Hindus, and the Mahomedans progress year by year. Now-a-days we are lumped together, when, as a matter of fact, there is no reason to lump us all together, because we are certainly different from one another however much we might wish to say we are one.

And the third thing which I wish to point out and which I hope the Honourable Minister will give his best consideration to, is the method of giving scholarships to the boys of the depressed classes. Now scholarship as an aid is better than no aid at all. But my honourable friend the Minister for Education will take it from me that my enquiries and my experience show that the method of giving scholarships is really a waste of public money. The depressed class parents are too poor, too ignorant, to understand that the help given by Government is really the help for the education of the child. The scholarship is looked upon by the parent as a family aid to meet their expenses. It is certainly not made available for the education of the boy as such, which is the primary object of the scholarship. Secondly, Sir, with the scholarship I have found that the boy is never able to reach the goal. There are a variety of reasons for that. First of all, a boy of the depressed classes is growing up in an evil set of surroundings.

An Honourable Member: Who is responsible for that ?

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: God knows. He is brought up in circumstances which are by no means desirable, and when a boy gets a scholarship, he is an easy prey to all sorts of evil influences. Without proper direction he succumbs and gives up his education and money spent upon him is lost. I would, therefore, put it to the Honourable Minister whether it will not be better for him to spend this money in promoting hostels which either Government may open of its own accord or which may be opened by private agency for the promotion of the education of the backward classes. Sir, it will be a double saving. A hostel, first of all, weans the boy from evil surroundings. It provides effective inspection. And when a hostel is managed by private agency, it will mean some saving of money to Government.

Sir, these are the three suggestions which I wish to make in the very short time that is at my disposal. I hope that my honourable friend the Minister of Education will carefully consider them and do the needful in the matter.