

# The New Education Policy 2020: The Good and The Bad and What is Left to be Done

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**Abstract:** *Education for a nation not only contributes to national solidarity, scientific temper, mental and spiritual independence but also builds one's character. These goals and visions compose the New National Education Policy. To educate, encourage, and enlighten is its motto, which implies encouragement to go to school and pursue an education that will enlighten oneself and help resolve the problems of the larger population. It builds on the 1968 and 1986 national policies. This policy comes as a silver lining to the stagnant and outlived education policies; however, critics argue that the policy boasts about impracticable, utopian and unattainable goals. This paper attempts to analyse the policy holistically.*

**Key Words:** *National Education Policy, School Education, Higher Education, 21<sup>st</sup> century education, Education Technology, Inclusive Education*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Demystifying the understanding of the notion of 'Vidya' or knowledge or erudition or education symbolises the 'third eye' of humans, which gives it a vision or an insight into all concerns and teaches one how to perceive the world, situations and circumstances. It leads one to salvation: in the mundane domain, it leads one to all round progress, opulence and development. The uses of education are too myriad to be reckoned with exhaustively; it nourishes one like a mother, gives the guiding path like a father along with pleasure and delight like a true friend/ soulmate. It increases one's frame and makes one pure and conscientious. In seclusion of a journey, it serves as a valued companion. It is thus a veritable desire-yielding tree (kalpvriksha).

The New National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) continues the objective of determining the destiny of the nation and its population through a holistic classroom. The education policy got upgraded after three decades. Thereby, this policy comes as a reform mechanism for rebuilding the education system of India for meeting the demands of the new millennium and addressing the aspects of education that were left unfulfilled by its predecessors. Any nation's education policy sets the framework, rules, and principles for the development of the country's educational system for the following few decades. A critical understanding of NEP 2020 provides a thrust which would be instrumental in shaping the future of the youth of the country to meet the demands of being a citizen of 21<sup>st</sup> century India in a more sustainable manner. In a country of 1.3 billion (United Nations Population Division, 2021) population, with 67 percent (ET Bureau, 2022) of its population in the working age group, a maladroitness education system as a product of an inept Education Policy stands as a gigantic gaping hole between the dream of an empowered India and the realisation of that dream. With a background of such a critical understanding, the aim of NEP 2020 for India is to have an education system by 2040, 'which is unparalleled, with equitable access to education of a fine quality regardless of one's social or economic background' (MHRD, 2020). The policy aims to tackle a multiplicity of issues at every level of the Indian education system - be it high dropout rates; gender disparity, or mechanisms of financing education or revamping the infrastructure. It envisions fixing the urgent difficulties in education, which can be the master key to resolving the equally immediate challenges in other areas, all of which are impeding India's development into a 'Viswa Guru' (MHRD, 2019).

The article is divided into three parts, analysed critically, (of factual recommendations of the policy document and its draft) both its long-term implications and visions along with its setbacks. The first part deals with the provisions dealing with the formal schooling age group of 3-18 years (erstwhile 6-14 years under the Right to Education Act of 2009). Here provisions for making the schools of India uniform and equitable by giving it a national common structure of 5+3+3+4 (foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary) and bringing about structural, administrative and curriculum changes are dealt with. The second part deals with provisions pertaining to higher education, whereby graduation would be for Four years with the fourth year dedicated to research work, the establishment of a common regulator to address the problems of overlapping and overburdening administrative mechanisms. In this section, the diminishing line of separation between education and politics is contemplated through an understanding of the incidents of declining ideological debates on university campuses, the centralising tendency in a federal nation, etc. The last part questions the very thrust of the policy i.e., the idea of 'inclusive/ness' that appears fourteen times in a document of 66 pages, which the critics interpret goes against the state's philosophy of 'sabka sath sabka vikas' oriented inclusion, thereby giving rise to greater exclusion.

## II. WHAT NEP MEANS FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION?

### *Restructuring the System*

India consists of 22 percent of the world's population with nearly 100 percent of all children aged 6-14 years being enrolled in schools, it is rhetorical that at the same time it is home to the highest number of illiterates (Wang, 2016). In this low-spirited scenario, the

incumbent policy seeks to restructure the Indian education system both at the structural as well as curricula levels to achieve the set targets in the next ten years. NEP 2020 expands the purview of the Right To Education Act of 2009 to the age group of 3-18 years (MHRD,2019), which also implied a transition from 10+2 to 5+3+3+4 system, thereby, not only focusing on primary and upper-primary education (6-16 years) but also a large part of the population that was left out by the Act. Thus, bringing a larger section of the population into its shelter. The recommendations include beginning formal schooling at the age of 3 years, through formal Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) which would mould the child in a qualitative framework; as it is scientifically proven, a child develops 80 percent of his/her social and cognitive skills by the age of 6 years. For the purposes of ECCE, *Anganwadis* or *Balwadis*, under the aegis of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is to be strengthened and integrated with the formal school system. In addition to providing children with basic cognitive care and development, these centres have played a significant role in promoting nutritional growth, health awareness, immunization, basic health check-ups, etc. along with empowering the ICDS worker who in most cases are 'women' (Guruswamy & Kuruganti, 2018). Thus, perspectives on education get encapsulated in the wider conception of development, with the objective of improvising the human development indicators. The increased emphasis on ECCE is a positive development, however, with the current arrangement of under-resourced ICDS centres, can one hope to usher in a pedagogic revolution as indicated in the policy? It is unrealistic to expect that all *Anganwadi* workers and volunteers, who are paid a pittance, will be replaced by 'professionally trained' and 'qualified child educators' paid a living wage (MHRD,2019). It would have been more beneficial had the policy concentrated on reforming the education component of the ICDS programme through increased resource allocation.

Further, the policy calls for curricula reduction and increased flexibility - as well as a renewed emphasis on constructive rather than rote learning - which must be accompanied by parallel changes to school textbooks and pedagogical practices (MHRD,2020). The findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2020 published by NGO PRATHAM; provided bewildering data; that only 16 percent of children in standard I of the surveyed children in 26 rural districts could read texts at the prescribed levels, while a large portion of 40 percent failed to even recognise alphabets (Correspondent, 2020). This poor condition of the cognitive development of the country's valuable resources has been one of the major reasons for the overhauling of the learning culture.

The above-mentioned target-oriented recommendations on the surface appear to be an interesting proposition as it gives ample space for developing aptitudes. A deeper examination of both these aspects reveals that this restructuring is purely hypothetical, serving only as a guide for academics for developing the redesigned curricular framework, while the delivery mechanisms on the ground remain unchanged.

#### **Vocational/ Skill Education**

NEP 2020 gives vocational/skill learning the profound 'respectability' and a 'proper status' and integrates it with the formal curriculum. It is true that vocational education is seen as a last resort, not just by the youth but even by their parents; primarily because of the social stigma attached to it. The power structure of Indian society values graduates with higher degrees (even if unemployed) over manual worker (with/without a degree) who might be well-skilled and have a rich Pandora of knowledge and experience (Arora & Rai, 2014). The NEP 2020 address such psychological biases by recommending for integration of vocational/skill-based courses along with academic ones, delinking skills from labour, and merging them with education. These steps would not only help close the divide between the educated classes and the masses by sensitising the educated and economically prosperous classes to the social realities and by making education more productive but will also help conserve India's heritage craftsmanship. The roots of such a philosophy (ending the dichotomy between work and knowledge) can be traced back to Gandhi's *Nai Taleem* in which he proposed that the prolific work of the oppressed classes and castes should be reconciled with the school curriculum, which pedagogically can be a basis of knowledge achievement, value development and skill foundation. Vocational education from the school level helps one build up practical skills. However, Anil Sadgopal (2016) critically analysed the National Skill India Mission and the attempts of the manipulative education system for pushing a greater number of children out of school. Such an exclusion would lead to a rise in the labour available, willing to work at lower costs. Thus, providing a thrust to the dwindling Make in India Mission and eventually lowering of budgetary allocations to education (Sadgopal,2016).

#### **Language**

The use of an indigenous or regional language or the mother tongue has been visualised as a solution to problems of dropouts, communication gaps resulting from a language barrier, unavailability of literature, etc. Efforts are to be undertaken both by the Central and State governments to engage in the utilisation of all of the country's regional languages, especially those included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution (MHRD,2020). This is a welcome step, as India needs to conserve its linguistic heritage and utilise it for its expansion. However, this might lead to a conflict of terminologies as none of the three i.e. mother tongue, regional or local language has been explained rather left upon the government of the day for its interpretation. Another problem that might emerge is the domination of the majority's language, as the numerical majority determines a regional language. Thereby the entire idea to use one's mother language for better comprehensibility in the early years comes to a standstill. Another, hindrance to its success lies in the attitude of society. Parents prefer to send their children to 'English-medium' schools irrespective of the quality of education imparted, because of the perception that success in life (employment opportunities) comes only to 'English speakers'. No doubt, in the globalised world of today, English is not only a language but also social capital, a tool to create relationships and gain access to otherwise inaccessible career and educational opportunities. Thus, if changes are made both at the levels of attitude and aptitude; pedagogical changes supplemented by trained teachers who can engage with multiple languages in the classroom; can then only multi-lingual education be successful.

At the school level, the policy motivates and acknowledges education as a conscious process of socialisation and development of the individual, society, and nation, thus it being a lifelong learning process and it is these 18 years of formal schooling that build the character of a child.

### III. WHAT NEP MEANS FOR THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION?

#### *Mismatch of Demand and Supply*

Today there is an acute and widening mismatch between supply and demand in the employment sector. The problem lies at two levels, first, as highlighted by Digumarti Bhaskara Rao (1996), the system fails in providing career-oriented skills or work environments that foster a sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction not only the highly skilled engineers but also to the skilled and semi-skilled labourers (Rao,1996). This has resulted in a significant amount of 'brain drain and labour drain'. Thus, not only do relevant skills need to be a part of the curriculum but also an apt working environment needs to be generated. Second, is the lack of knowledge amongst the youth that they 'can use'. The curriculum of most of the Universities in the branches of Humanities and Social Sciences are watertight and redundant (my own experience), thus the system is pushing the 'young brains into the drains'. For this reason, the policy restructures the bachelor's level making it a broad-based, multi-disciplinary, holistic 3 or 4-year education with flexible curricula inculcating scientific temper, critical thinking along with creativity, innovativeness, aesthetics and art. The creative combination of disciplines, integration of vocational education, and various admission and withdrawal options with proper certification are some of the other amendments under the NEP.

#### *Politicization of Education*

Like its predecessors, the NEP 2020 has also been criticised for it is a political gimmick in the name of public welfare. There is some truth in the fact that every policy is backed by political interest, perhaps this is the reason why the 1968 national education policy could not bring about the 'radical restructuring' of education as it envisaged. Knowledge systems and political offices should be kept away from each other, but the policy goes against this established principle. The policy maligns the federal spirit of the nation. It has played a lot with nomenclatures, like a transition from the term Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD) to Ministry of Education; shows a collaborative federal approach, as none of the 28 States has HRD ministries rather have a Ministry of Education. While on the other hand, the creation and overpowering of central organisations like NCERT, National Research Foundation, National Assessment Center (now named as PARAKH), National Testing Agency, Higher Education Commission etc. show a move towards a centralisation of education; which otherwise is a concurrent subject as per the country's constitution.

A reminder of the political nature of an education policy would be the entire revamping of the educational curricula under the previous government in 2013, or the 'Four Year Undergraduate Programme' (FYUP). It also implemented a 4-year undergraduate course with multiple exits and entry options and provided the students with an option to choose multiple subjects of their choice. With the change of the government, the entire system was rolled back in 2015.

Political education is essential for generating competency and caliber amongst future leaders of the country for strengthening democracy, but the politicization of education is completely uncalled for. Education is a lifelong learning process; a capital investment, thus policies must not be for short-term political gains but for long-term resource creation generated through public consensus. There are several ways in which 'human resources' can be created, the most obvious one being through the process of education. Thus, one needs to be sceptical about how far will this policy be implementable. As highlighted by Dr. Anil Sadgopal in a webinar titled *Anil Sadgopal on NEP 2020: National 'Exclusion' Policy*, though the policy claims to have taken into consideration the suggestions provided by the citizenry, however as identified by him, the draft circulated in 2019 for suggestions was different from the one published on the government website in the following year post the clearance by the cabinet (Collective,2020). Suggestions and consensus were only therefore taken on the draft circulated in 2019, not the one which got published in 2020. This proved the fallacy of the claim that policy was a product of the populace of India.

#### *Citizenry Participation*

Since education is a national responsibility and the non-availability of resources has pulled back its reach; philanthropic efforts provide an alternative means. In this regard, NEP provides the needed framework that seeks to reconcile the efforts made by both public and private entities in this regard. One must also recognise the fact that the policy comes as the first policy in a neo-liberal era, thus the role of the private sector cannot be negated. The process of state withdrawal began across the country during the neoliberal regime from the early 1980s but reached its zenith from the 1990s onwards. In the report of the National Knowledge Commission (2008), an emphasis was laid on the need for private investment in education to drastically enhance enrolment in higher education (National Knowledge Commission,2008). This recommendation was backed by the evidence that government financing was insufficient for supporting the expansion and inclusion of educational opportunities needed at the time.

Indian ethos views imparting knowledge as a universal service to humanity, walking on these lines, NEP encourages private philanthropic efforts with the aim of further expanding access to high-quality higher education through a proposed model of Public-Philanthropic Partnership for such institutions (MHRD,2020). Society is also an equal partner in educating its children. Though very vaguely used, the word 'philanthropic efforts' can be interpreted in two ways, first referring to education as a 'commercial good', thereby, establishing universities charging high capitation fees. The second interpretation includes the selfless efforts made in the form of technical, financial or infrastructural support. The best example to support this stands the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in Bhubaneswar, Odisha whereby private philanthropies have helped provide quality, equitable and accessible educational services to the students from the tribal belts of the state. However, the term 'public-spirited philanthropy' raises

concerns, it is a misnomer in the era when education has been commodified and is part of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Apart from that, no mention has been made regarding any efforts for regulating this profiteering. Further, in essence, the policy talks of equitability of education; if private colleges are promoted over poorly managed public ones, how can this equity or equitability be assured when parents' pocket would decide their child's destined education centre? (Collective,2020).

The new policy regulates public and private colleges and universities with the same set of rules to prevent the commercialisation of education. Education is commodified by making it a business and producing 'commodity'. The policy criticises the current regulatory bodies for promoting mediocrity and corruption and recommends the replacement of multiple regulatory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education, etc. with by a single regulator which would promote 'light but tight' regulation for higher education. Such a measure would ensure public-spiritedness, justice, efficiency, openness, financial stability, integrity, as well as efficient and effective governance. (MHRD,2020).

### **Autonomy**

The policy recognises the importance of conceding graded autonomy to colleges (MHRD,2020). Autonomy is essential for the progress of any person, society, or nation. Autonomy means liberty from undesirable dependencies. If the genuine character of education in a nation is to be examined, it must be freed from political, administrative, and market stimulations. This autonomy would be both academic as well as administrative, backed by adequate public finance. Nonetheless, it is equally important to examine if the institutions' limited autonomy is being employed productively. In the majority of states, colleges relish innumerable forms of autonomy. For example, a number of institutions enjoy great autonomy in the formulation of the curriculum. But, what efforts do they indulge in for improving it periodically? Another significant question arises, how much curriculum improvement to date has been brought about by the colleges awarded autonomy by the UGC? The truth is the curriculum and examination system in these colleges have not improved much (Kothari, 2022). The study finds that the majority of these autonomous colleges have imposed exorbitant fees in the guise of autonomy (Kothari, 2022). Another side to autonomy is whether or not this autonomy offered would be further decentralised. This is a significant issue, especially in a country where parents choose the educational path for their children and management committees instead of the principal take decisions (Kothari,2022). If education is to be reasonably made autonomous, it is indispensable to include both top - to - bottom and bottom - to - top perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the topic of autonomy holistically. Another side of granting autonomy to institutions is with respect to the current recruitment process; which takes into account applicants' qualifications, reservations, and other characteristics. Granting autonomy might disrupt the fair procedure and facilitate corruption in the form of nepotism and corporate or lobbying (Priya, 2020).

### **Including the Excluded**

Inclusion in this section would mean the manner in which the policy seeks to expand the rims of education. The policy understands the growing power and reaches of technology in recent times whereby COVID -19 pandemic proved to be an eye-opener. For Aristotle, education, 'is the formation of a sound body and mind' (Yadav & Kushwaha, 2020). It embraces a person's overall growth. As the technological landscape continues to evolve, so too have the modalities of education delivery. The policy calls for having alternate modes of high-quality education to supplement the traditional and in-person modes of education. In this sense, emphasis is laid on the critical need of capitalising on the benefits of technology while also understanding the risks and dangers associated with it. Given the continued existence of a sizable segment of the population with extremely restricted access to digital media, current mass media outlets, such as television, radio, and community radio have been envisaged to be actively utilised for telecasts and broadcasts. There is no doubt, the use of technology promotes opportunities and avenues through which excluded ones can become a part of the educational process, however, looking at the availability of resources in the form of internet connectivity, instruments and electrical supply, virtual inclusion of the mass seems to be a distant dream. Thus, the need of the hour is equality and not inclusivity.

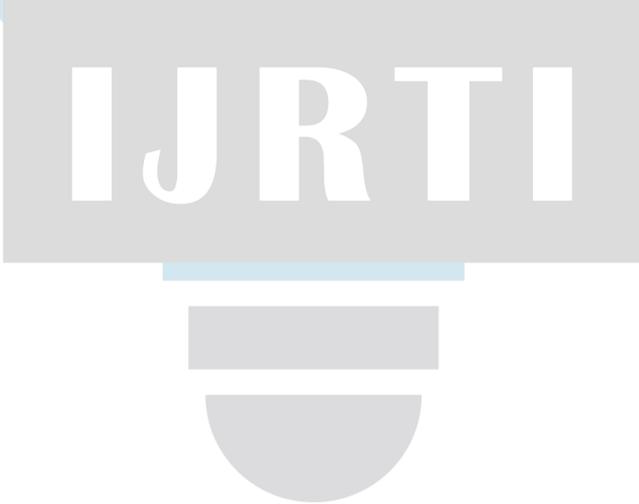
The highlighting feature of this policy is that it addresses the pertaining issues of exclusion and discrimination by including all those children in the education system who belong to the under-represented groups who need special attention from the State and the educational culture. This group includes those sexes that are historically denied education or are passive learners like the females and the trans -genders, those with a backward socio-economic identity, those with special needs, the scheduled caste, other backward castes, tribal populations, minorities within minority groups and the urban poor family (MHRD,2019).

## **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In light of the new education policy, the aims and objectives of education at all levels will experience changes and will have to be replicated in the content and methodology. Spiritually, the individual of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will indeed be identical to the individual of the present. However, the scientific, technological, economic, and social context in which it will be living and working in the future will certainly change from that of the present, and the new forces thus unleashed will inevitably influence its necessities, aspirations, attitudes, and actions. The newly stated policy intends to address the issues and challenges of the times by enhancing the quality of education in all sectors and making its advantages accessible to all individuals. The proposed policy, therefore, poses a unique challenge to Indian education to yield citizens who are, on the whole, physically, psychosocially, and morally healthy; who are aware of their duties and rights and are thus socially well-adjusted; who are motivated to learn on a life - long basis and unremittingly eager to enhance their performance; and who, as a result, are well-grounded contributors to the augmentation of the quality of life in general. The country will awaken and reach newer heights if the incumbent policy is able to make the nation reap the benefits of its citizens, who inherently are not only 'good' but also 'useful'.

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