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STATUS OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020: A VIEW OF INDIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract of the Paper

The National Education Policy 2020 may provide a runway for the education sector to take off despite challenges posed on account of the pandemic. Announcement of the NEP attracted criticism from industry experts, but it may place India on the global map for sought-after educational haven of the world. The National Education Policy 2020 replaces the old education policy which was framed in 1986 and ushering in an era of new educational reforms. This is the first policy that seeks to unshackle students from the tyranny of administrative constraints with multiple-choice, multidisciplinary learning, and multiple chances. However, the policy has been scrutinized and dissected by industry experts and thus have witnessed conflicting views. The policy aims to create a robust digital infrastructure in the education sector that ensures uninterrupted learning even during unprecedented circumstances. The National Education Technology Forum (NETF) will be established for ensuring that the technology is integrated adequately and efficiently in the education process and ensuring the enhancement of the access of education to all sections of the society even in these tumultuous times. Various contours of this policy aim to radically improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education and to achieve the objective of 100% youth literacy. Moreover, the said policy has also been predicted to reduce social and economic gap between students, which has magnified in wake of the pandemic. This research paper to be discussed about the Status of National Education Policy 2020: A view of Indian Experience.

Key words- *New Education Policy, 21st Century Skills, Effective Learning, Holistic Approach, Discussion and Analysis Approach, Effective Teaching Profession, and Knowledge Resource.*

Statement of the Problem

"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think."

Albert Einstein

Theoretical Physicist & Philosopher

The last national education policy was created in 1986. During these 34 years, the world has changed in unprecedented ways. Revolutionary alterations in the world's political economy, fuelled by technological developments, have significantly contributed to the dismantling of the barriers of gender, class, caste, culture, geographical distance, and so forth. All this has created a strong sense of aspiration and hope among the people. Rapid economic developments after 1991, the year when India opened economically, have triggered a high demand for knowledge and specialised skills. During the two-and-a-half decades since economic liberalisation, no comprehensive national vision could be conceived to address the gross systemic inadequacies impeding the momentum of an aspirational and restless India.

This is the background in which our government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has given priority to a broad-based and futuristic national education policy. The framing of this policy has been a mammoth exercise. Two committees undertook the task. Feedback from the grass-roots was meticulously collected and stakeholders widely consulted. The state governments were always a part of the loop. The policy document was vetted and sharpened several times before being sent to the cabinet for approval. In India, a new education policy typically comes along only once every few decades. The first education policy was in 1968, introduced by the administration under Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This was replaced by the National education policy in 1986, by her son Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who was Prime Minister at that time. A few years later in 1992, it was slightly modified again by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao. And now in 2020, approximately three decades later, a new education policy with drastic changes has been brought in by the ruling government. The details of the policy were released to the nation after cabinet approval on 29th June. It



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was said that this National Education Policy or NEP 2020, would be a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in the country.

The NEP 2020, which proposes sweeping changes has caused quite the buzz since its introduction. The policy is supposed to address seven key issues of educational development namely easy access for the students, ease of participation, quality of courses offered, equity, system efficiency, governance and management, facilities of research and development, and financial commitment involved. Does NEP 2020 truly satisfy these criteria? What are the hits and misses of the policy? It is also suggested in the policy that the medium of education until at least grade 5 should optionally be in the regional language, mother tongue or local language. Sanskrit, an Indic language of the ancient Indian subcontinent, will now be mainstreamed in schools as one of the language options in the present three-language formula. Indian Sign Language (ISL) will also be standardized throughout the country and a new curriculum will be developed for deaf children. The new policy proposes a shift from an assessment that is based on the outcome of a program to a year-round assessment structure. This entails reduction of curricular content and rote learning and supplements it with conceptual learning, experimentation, and critical thinking. The aim is for this era of Indian students to receive a holistic model of learning, well equipped with cutting edge skills necessary to excel in the 21st century.

Additionally, rigid demarcation of streams or subjects will be removed. There will now be flexibility to choose from interests within arts and sciences, vocational and academic streams as well as curricular and extra-curricular activities. Vocational education will begin from grade six and include 'Bagless days' or internship. This will open a real-world understanding of their subject of interest from local experts and inculcate sundry skills at an early age. Another new feather in the new policy is adding coding as a subject from grade 6. In this increasingly technological era, coding may become the language of the future. And being well equipped in this will ensure no hindrances to innovation and creativity whilst promoting analytical and logical thinking. This new structure will not only be beneficial to school children but also be in tune with the best global practices for the development of the mental faculties of a child.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that the new education policy will transform millions of lives towards making India a knowledge hub in an era where learning, research, and innovation are important. However, is there more to this policy that was unceremoniously approved by the Union cabinet without any discussion and debate? In India, education is a lucrative field for politicians as it gives them political and ideological mileage for years. While vital reforms needed in the education sector, such as widening the availability of scholarships, strengthening infrastructure for open and distance learning, online education and increasing usage of technology are reflected in the new policy, it is also a political document which can be apprehended from comments of political and ideological organizations. The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, released on 29 July 2020, is a historic and ambitious document. With an eye on the future, it speaks to all aspects of education during our times. This policy is in many ways radically different from all its predecessors, and it looks at our educational requirements in a new way. One of the essential as well as fundamental issues that had been left unaddressed until now is Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The holistic development of any individual essentially starts with his or her nourishment and nurturing during the early years. The Policy says, "over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in early years." This idea is based on strong evidence produced by the latest researches in the field of neurosciences and brain development. The early years are the most crucial for the development of the brain. The later cognitive, intellectual and skill advancements are built on capacities unleashed during the crucial early-childhood years. Unfortunately, crores of children are still deprived of quality early childhood care and education due to various socio-economic disadvantages their families face.

With this perspective in mind, the policymakers have reimagined pre-primary education and have envisaged to integrate this stage of a child's physical, mental and cognitive development with the extant formal schooling pattern. Hence the 10+2 model is proposed to be replaced by a 5+3+3+4 model of ECCE and schooling. Allow me to explain this important change at some length. ECCE shall take place from the ages of 3 to 6 in Anganwadis, Balvatikas and play-schools. This will be followed by Classes 1 and 2 in school. Together, the ECCE years and the first two years of schooling form the first five years of the new model. These five years constitute the *foundational* stage of education. This will be followed by Classes 3 to 5 (3 years), 6 to 8 (three years) and 9 to 12 (four years). This restructuring of the whole span of schooling has been proposed keeping in mind the developmental needs and interests of learners at different stages of their physical, mental, emotional and psychological development. This proposed structure is in sync with the age ranges or developmental stages of children. As the policy proposes, 'the overarching goal would be to ensure universal access to high quality ECCE across the country.' This will not only provide nutrition and care for healthy physical and mental growth but will also 'focus on developing cognitive, affective, psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.' A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPF-ECCE) will be developed by the National Council of



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Educational Research and Training (NCERT). This will focus on several important aspects of ECCE including high quality ECCE teacher preparedness. The manner in which the Policy emphasises ECCE can be gauged from its plan to bring four crucial central ministries together for 'smooth integration of early childhood care and education into school education'. These ministries are: Human Resource Development (i.e. Ministry of Education), Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs. Once effectively implemented, as envisaged by the framers of NEP 2020, ECCE will be the biggest gamechanger in education.

Holistic Approach of Knowledge Resource

With respect to school education, the makers of the policy have given special emphasis on learning to be holistic, experiential, integrative, and enjoyable. The Policy aims at 'real understanding and towards learning how to learn'. It is particularly anguished about the persistence of rote learning, something that the National Curriculum Framework of 2005 had tried to cure. Rote memorisation and mindless regurgitation in response to questions that are neither analytical nor reflective is nothing but the storing of sterile and unconnected pieces information in the mind. This is cognitively taxing and, more often than not, an exercise in futility. The proposed curricular and pedagogic approach underscores critical thinking and learning based on inquiry, discovery, discussion and analysis.

Furthermore, it does not recognise stubborn distinctions between different curricular areas, and among curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular areas. Art- and sports-integrated education will be important strands in this cross-curricular pedagogic approach. Flexibility in course choices will be another curricular advantage for students. The thought behind this curricular overhaul is to create 'holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills.' In a brilliantly written contrarian book, *The Fuzzy and the Techie*, Scott Hartley argues that technologists (the techies) do not drive innovation alone; it is the humanists and the social scientists (the fuzzies, perhaps coined pejoratively!) who play as much of a role in creating successful business or policy ideas.

Despite a radical curricular and structural redrawing, the outcomes of the new policy cannot exceed the professional capacity and vision of the teachers. Teachers' capacity cannot be enhanced unless their pre- and in-service education, service conditions, and terms of recruitment and deployment do not receive renewed focus and uplift. The policy treats these concerns in a detailed and sensitive manner. To attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, it proposes a large number of merit-based scholarships for pursuing quality four-year integrated B.Ed. programmes, with special focus on rural areas. It is also proposed to strengthen Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) with respect to the assessment of several parameters: subject-content and pedagogy, classroom teaching, passion and motivation for the profession and proficiency of teaching in the local language. These tests will therefore include teaching demonstration and interview components.

In order 'to maximise the ability of teachers to do their jobs effectively,' the menace of excessive and arbitrary transfers will become a thing of the past and teachers will not be involved in assignments that have no bearing on their work. Teachers' professional autonomy will be restored, and a comprehensive 'merit-based structure of tenure promotion, and salary structure will be developed.' The policy also envisages that teacher education will be gradually moved (by 2030) to multidisciplinary colleges and universities. A new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education will be prepared by the National Council of Teacher Education by 2021, in consultation with the NCERT. The makers of the policy have been as versatile regarding higher education. A distinctive feature of higher education is that it produces *knowledge resources* through which all education takes place, resources used by society to chart out its progress over time. The concerns of higher education are quite diverse and complex. In order to keep pace and be ahead of others, we need to focus more rigorously on the complex matrix of higher education.

Debate on NEP 2020

The policy's causes for concern are being debated on all over social media with #RejectNEP2020 trending on twitter. According to the Indian constitution, regulations of different sectors of society are demarcated by three different lists, namely the Union list, the State list, and Concurrent list. As these names suggest, the Union government makes laws on matters in the union list, the state government makes laws on issues under the State list and both the union and state government govern matters under the concurrent list. When laws are to be made on topics under the concurrent list, it is first put up as a draft for a threshold period. This threshold period is to encourage suggestions and discourse from the states or eminent personalities from the respective field of the draft bill. Education is listed as a concurrent subject. However, the NEP 2020 was bypassed in the parliament, thereby violating the above code of conduct. A new policy introducing such substantial changes must undergo discourse in the parliament. The government



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bypassed oppositions and objections of various State governments. Could this be a drive to substitute an already broken system of education with a centralized, communalized and commercialized education system?

The English language is not only paramount value for global outreach, but it is also essential in connecting and communicating with people from other states within India. Career building, outsourcing technical support and skills are dominated by western conglomerates where English has utmost importance. In the new scheme, English will only be offered from the secondary level. Children from families who cannot afford to polish their children's English competence will lose out on opportunities. Discontinuing English as the main medium might make fluency in English based on whether you can afford private tutors, thus disadvantaging the lower caste population who see English as a way to escape caste hierarchy. Mainstreaming Sanskrit in India would be synonymous to the west mainstreaming Latin. Biblical Latin is a dead language, similarly, Sanskrit is used by less than 1% of the Indian population. Mainstreaming this ancient language would only be seen as a regressive step. At the time of the 2001 census on bilingualism and trilingualism, the number of English speakers in India was at 125 million and this number ought to have increased since then. The English language is what has given India an edge over a majority of south-east Asia. Even the Chinese government, who until recently only promoted the Chinese medium, is bringing in reforms and introducing the English language in their education system.

Under the new policy, private and self-governed colleges will receive more autonomy. When these colleges hand out certifications unchecked, corporatism will follow. This will create a situation where higher studies become a privilege only for those who can afford it. A centralized education system will amount to a stepping stone to social exclusion and dilution of the Right to Education Act. The government stated that it is proposing to improve the quality and autonomy of higher education, however, in a completely backward move, it is dismantling the University Grants Commission (UGC) which was a core structural and regulatory body for higher education. This will only accelerate the commodification and centralization of education, which is perilous considering the probability of the ruling party pushing its ideological and capital requirements. This is in fact not the first time such a move was attempted. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government tried to bring in similar reforms but was met with strong opposition. The present education reforms have come into being only as it was passed through the backdoor without the consent of the parliament.

Organizations and institutions when vested with educational structure and financial autonomy will be enabled to create additional courses and departments. However, without funding from government bodies, institutions will naturally turn to the students. The tuition fee will substantially increase, not just for students in that particular department, but all the students attending that institution. This coupled with another feature offered by the NEP, i.e., multiple exit options at universities will increase the dropout rates. Under the multiple exit and entry option, if a student decides to leave mid-course, he/she will receive appropriate certification for credits earned until that point which will be digitally stored in an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). A 'certificate', a 'diploma', a 'Bachelor's degree' and 'Bachelor's Degree with Research' respectively will be awarded for each year of a four-year course. With financial autonomy resulting in financial burden on students and availability of certification each year, more students will be prompted to dropout. This creates an immense disparity between financially able and disabled students. Financially better-off students will get higher chances for studies and be able to acquire better opportunities. This would again amount to dilution of the Right to Education Act.

The government has introduced vocational and polytechnic education for school students through the new policy under the title 'Reimagining vocational education', which aims to remove the hard separation between academic and vocational streams. Vocational subjects will be introduced as early as grade 6, including internship opportunities from grades 6 to 12. This however ignores the importance of ensuring basic mainstream education to all students till at least grade 10. Students opting for such courses will certainly not be from privileged backgrounds. Children who are economically backward and belonging to lower castes who struggle in English, coding, etc would end up opting for these streams. Introducing this at such an early age will form a barrier for first-generation learners and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to access higher education.

While NEP 2020 aims for many much-needed positive changes, the backdoor passing of the bill and the possibility of amplifying existing fault lines in Indian society needs to be looked into. The policy will seemingly increase the economic divide in a country that is already divided by religion, caste, gender, and wealth. It makes it nearly impossible for disadvantaged classes to climb up the social ladder. The NEP supposedly envisages decolonizing young Indian mind; however, in reality could that translate to the saffronisation of education? Earlier this year crucial topics for students, such as democratic rights, challenges to democracy, citizenship, food security, gender, religion, caste, and secularism were dropped from the syllabus. Are all of these moves stepping stones to achieve saffronisation? In this scenario holistic, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, overall learning could possibly be a front to cover all the above aspects. It will take years before the policy goes into full swing and only then will these complexities become apparent. The method of implementation will determine its successes and failures. The flaws in this policy need to be addressed with deliberation through proper code of conduct to reduce the current shortfalls. The Committee working on the policy has succinctly



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identified the role of higher education as ‘promoting human as well as societal wellbeing and developing India as envisioned in its Constitution—a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured and humane nation, upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all.’ According to the makers of this policy, some of the salient problems encumbering the higher education system in India are rigid separation of disciplines, limited teacher and institutional autonomy, lack of focus on quality and relevant research and poor institutional governance.

Recognising these and other problems impeding the effective functioning and progress of higher education institutions in the country, the policy envisions a ‘complete overhaul’ of the system. It was naturally anticipated that revamping of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and educational administration would be recommended by the policy framers. It must be mentioned that the policy lays out a fairly radical reformation of the higher education structure. Multidisciplinarity, flexibility and autonomy are central to this reform. Through these key ingredients, freshness and vitality are accorded to this stage of education. The decision to do away with the adamant walls between different disciplines and the provision of freedom to exit and enter courses, as these will be credit based, will truly liberate learners. The policy grants them freedom to choose what to learn, how to learn and when to learn. Now, one can opt to study Sanskrit along with Mathematics or Music with Physics. The earlier segregation of streams, rather regimented, did not allow for any formal or institutional interface between the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. This did not allow for a wholesome development of individuals. The Policy’s proposal to integrate engineering courses, at institutions such as IIT, with the arts and the humanities in order to move towards holistic and multidisciplinary education, would surely enthuse every thinking being. This is a holistic approach and should lead to the blossoming of various human capacities—intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional and moral—in an integrated manner. On multidisciplinary, the principal thrust of the policy is to curb fragmentation of higher education through restructuring higher education institutions into large multi-disciplinary universities, colleges and higher education institution (HEI) clusters or knowledge hubs. Though all such multi-disciplinary universities are envisaged to carry out ‘teaching, research, and community engagement’, some would develop as teaching-intensive universities and some as research-intensive ones.

Research is at the foundation of knowledge creation and it plays a key role in sustaining and further uplifting any human society. Research both in fundamental and applied disciplines is essential for progress, especially in today’s fast-developing world. In order to create a robust ecosystem for high-quality research, the policy envisages the creation of a National Research Foundation (NRF). One of the salient thrusts of this Foundation would be to enable a culture of research to permeate through our universities. The Foundation’s main objectives will be to identify priority areas or themes for research and coordinate with different academic institutions and funding agencies in order to ‘ensure synergy of purpose and avoid duplication of efforts.’ While looking at the nuances of higher education and research, the policy framers have been sensitive to the needs of our vast population and the national economy. Large-scale employment creation as well as the creation of higher knowledge is our necessity. Our ever-expanding and ever-evolving economy requires workers and professionals with diverse and specialised skill sets. It is quite disconcerting to realise that despite Mahatma Gandhi’s emphatic underscoring of vocational education, we have not been able to create any effective synchronisation of vocational education and ‘mainstream’ education. We have considered vocational education inferior and ‘meant for students who are unable to cope with the latter.’

The policy aspires to dismantle this status hierarchy and aims to integrate vocational education with mainstream education. Starting with vocational exposure in the middle and secondary classes, ‘quality vocational education will be integrated smoothly into higher education’. This will ensure that every individual learns at least one vocation and is able to develop a sense of the dignity of labour and respect for various vocations. This will also enable us to tap our demographic dividend and address skill-deficits of the economy. The policy envisions that the ‘development of vocational capacities will go hand in hand with development of ‘academic’ or other capacities.’ Highlighting the equal importance of vocational education and higher learning, the American public intellectual and statesman, John W Gardner had made a seminal point in his book, *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?*: “The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy; neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.” In conclusion, I would like to argue that the New Education Policy, 2020 appears to be truly visionary and comprehensive. Its success, however, lies in its effective implementation. The government will not leave any stone unturned in this national rebuilding project.

Challenges of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 may provide a runway for the education sector to take off despite challenges posed on account of the pandemic. Announcement of the NEP attracted criticism from industry experts, but it may place India on the global map for sought-after educational haven of the world. The National Education Policy 2020 replaces the old education policy which was



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framed in 1986 and ushering in an era of new educational reforms. This is the first policy that seeks to unshackle students from the tyranny of administrative constraints with multiple-choice, multidisciplinary learning, and multiple chances. However, the policy has been scrutinized and dissected by industry experts and thus have witnessed conflicting views. The policy aims to create a robust digital infrastructure in the education sector that ensures uninterrupted learning even during unprecedented circumstances. The National Education Technology Forum (NETF) will be established for ensuring that the technology is integrated adequately and efficiently in the education process and ensuring the enhancement of the access of education to all sections of the society even in these tumultuous times. Various contours of this policy aim to radically improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education and to achieve the objective of 100% youth literacy. Moreover, the said policy has also been predicted to reduce social and economic gap between students, which has magnified in wake of the pandemic. A system that promotes meritocracy, equal opportunity and equity is good, but there lies a gap between theory and practice. In addition to this, the NEP elucidates the need of homeschooling and multi-language learning whereby until the 5th grade and in exceptional circumstances, no later than 8th grade, the mode of education shall be in the mother tongue/local language of the student. Despite the all-encompassing façade of the new policy, its success shall be put through a sceptical lens with rising concerns for the students during higher education and in their professional journeys. It is particularly problematic in light of the right of the people to move from one state to another since the inter-state movement shall result in the change of the local language and the mode of education.

The policy has also been criticised due to the legal complexities surrounding the applicability of two operative policies namely The Right to Education Act, 2009 and the New Education Policy, 2020. Certain provisions such as the age of starting schooling will need to be deliberated upon, in order to resolve any conundrum between the statute and the recently introduced policy in the longer run. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to note that past attempts at parliamentary legislations under the erstwhile regulatory set up have not been successful. The failure can be attributed to the role of regulators and the intended legislative changes being out of alignment, as in the case of Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010, which lapsed; and the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Act, 2018 which remained did not reach the Parliament.

Summing Up

The contours of NEP is expected to revise the regulatory avatar of the Higher Education Commission of India ("HECI") being set up with a wide role in Indian higher education. The HECI is likely to have four verticals under its umbrella, including: a) National Higher Education Regulatory Council, intended to be a single point regulator for the higher education sector; b) National Accreditation Council, which will deal with accreditation of institutions; c) Higher Education Grants Council, which will be tasked with carrying out funding and financing of higher education; and d) General Education Council, the final vertical, is expected to have a more academic based-role, as it will frame expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes. Foreign universities coming into the country will also fall under the purview of this framework. While the Universities Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education have played a major role in this direction until now, questions pertaining to the role of the UGC and AICTE remain unanswered under the new policy. It is evident that NEP 2020 is provides a fresh canvas to paint on and opens up avenues for home-schooling and foreign universities alike, in India. For the new policy to succeed a staunch intent to move out of comfortable doldrums and facilitate increased involvement of foreign universities and increased literacy levels is a must. While this objective is expected to see significant regulatory overhaul for its successful implementation, it would lay a successful path ahead for institutions as well as the student community and place India on the map of an educational haven.

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