Accessibility, Inclusivity and Shortfalls of the NEP 2020

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We would be reaching our 75th year of independence soon. Still, our education system's condition is not even close to the kind of future our forefathers imagined for our country by this time. To make things worse, the coronavirus pandemic worked like putting oil in a fire and further endangered our unsteady situation. The National Education Policy 2020 was introduced to change the future of the country's education system. Our contribution in this project consists of stating & analysing its various criticisms and in what ways it can improve, keeping the positives aside. We see whether this policy might have unknowingly put a language barrier on the general school-going population's learning capabilities, whether this leads to a path of centralization of our countries activities, whether it furthers the vast-urban rural divide, whether it dubiously promotes students' dropping out, whether it is inclusive enough or whether it promotes child labour in sorts and lastly, we see whether there would be a boost in our country's research capabilities finally or not.

Keywords: *education, policy, accessibility.*

INTRODUCTION

"If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people."

– Chinese Proverb

This proverb very rightly puts forward the dream we as countrymen aspire to achieve in all spheres of our lives, be it education, medical, food, technology, or any other sector going forward. We would be reaching our 75th year of independence soon. Still, our education system's condition is not even close to the kind of future our forefathers imagined for our country by this time. To make things worse, the coronavirus pandemic worked like putting oil in a fire and further endangered our unsteady situation. In the middle of all this commotion, when the whole country was in lockdown, and the schools and colleges were conducting classes online, which seemed to be the 'new normal, the National Education Policy 2020 was introduced to change the future of the country's education system.

No doubt, the Government has tried to bring in a sea of change with the introduction of this policy. It will provide a lot of flexibility and convenience to the students, but how much it will be useful and how aptly it will be implemented might be a spectacle to behold. This was an essential step needed so that the Institutions can at least place them at par with the other Higher Education Institutions established internationally.

Now, there is a ton of other positives that we have been promised. Still, we have many grey areas that might become problematic if they go without being debated in Parliament. So, let's get to the task and see the key takeaways from the NEP 2020:

A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN THE MAKING?

The regional languages have been given due importance, especially in a country like ours, where we are proud of our diversity. This was a step in that direction through the National Education Policy 2020. However, if we look at the other side of the coin, language seems to have a nagging negative factor as historically, India has been having the continuous problem of teacher and student ratio, so introducing mother languages in academic institutions for each subject can be a problem. To Find a capable teacher is a challenge sometimes.[1] Plus, now the

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[1] Sentinel Digital Desk, 'NEP 2020: Opportunities & Challenges' (*The Sentinel,* 10 November 2020) <https://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/nep-2020-opportunities-challenges-510894> accessed 20 May 2021

challenge is to find and make study material in mother and regional languages. The Indian Government wanted to follow other countries like China, Germany, France, where international students have to learn the language of their land to understand the country better. However, India has 22 active languages and not one national language like in other countries.

The new policy can further increase the differences between the different sections of society and cultures. The students of the government schools may now be taught in their respective regional languages, while the students in private institutions will still be introduced to English in their earlier classes. This will probably increase students who may find it harder to get comfortable with English as they will be introduced to this subject about seven years later than when a lot of other students in private schools would.

A SECRET PATH TO CENTRALIZATION & PRIVATIZATION?

Before the policy was introduced, higher education was regulated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and 14 professional councils such as the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) and the Medical Council of India (MCI), and the Bar Council of India. The single higher education regulator plan has moved back and forth several times. Still, it has finally been approved in the new NEP. [2]

Having a single regulatory body will make it more structured and efficient to analyse and monitor the education system as it would all be in one place. Now let's admit that it did get much positive response but just based on some useful words and pretty promises can we impose this significant initiative on the entire population of this diverse country? Moreover, when due to the ongoing pandemic and lockdown, there could not be a parliament session conducted. Can then we say that it was correct to pass the policy without debating on the final draft? Doesn't this look like an imposition of the wants of the centre on the entire country?

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[2] Edex Live, 'NEP 2020: No More UGC, AICTE, NCTE — to Be Replaced by a Single Education Regulator' (*New Indian Express*) <https://www.edexlive.com/news/2020/jul/29/nep-2020-no-more-ugc-aicte-ncte--to-be-replaced-by-a-single-education-regulator-13572.html> accessed 20 May 2021

Also, establishing foreign universities in India can be quite an expeditious task, so will the Government lessen their spending on the government schools because it is already common knowledge that there is not enough money in the budget which can fulfill all the aims, we aspire to achieve with the help of this policy. If this happens, then much good work will be undone.

A VAST URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE?

It might not have created much of a difference if not for the pandemic, which played spoilsport. We can easily choke on from guilt to see how rural people have had to face more difficulties than urban people in this age of the 'new normal' of online education. One of India's most significant disparities is the internet divide, which is a mighty prick in the path of justice to the people. According to TRAI Figures[3]Urban Internet Subscribers are 439.99 Million despite being just 30% of the country's whole population, and the rest were Rural Internet Subscribers of 247.63 Million. This means that Urban Internet Subscribers per 100 people is a whopping 104.25, and Rural Internet Subscribers per 100 people is a meagre 27.57.

Girls who could go to school in rural areas are now confined to their houses' corners and serve their families as these families cannot afford online education. There is no initiative to support this condition. There should be a discussion on these issues.

A HINTED GLORIFICATION OF CHILD LABOUR?

A great and novel addition to this policy is that of vocational training. Now, in this new setup of 5+3+3+4, there is an introduction of some window of internships and courses these class 6-8 children can do and definitely, it might be a learning curve and a chance to develop their personalities for some but let's take the example of some students from the lower sections who are not so economically safe.

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[3] Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 'The Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators' (*Telecom Regulatory Authority of India,* 2020) <https://trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/PIR_08012020_0.pdf> accessed 22 May 2021

Don't you think one can get inclined towards more work and start giving less time to studies just because one can experience one's getting good grades out of those hours one puts in while working while getting marks in tests and studying hard is a long and time-taking process? If the child begins to think that anyway, he needs to earn when he grows up, so why not give up studies and start doing these little jobs and, in turn, help the family. They should not get addicted to the same practice growing up. This can cost a considerable learning curve for them and also a chance to get out of their isolated position. There should be a good counsellor allotted to children from whom they can ask for help and make the right decisions.

IS IT INCLUSIVE ENOUGH?

For the Minority Sections

There were considerable discussions in the Draft NEP 2019. Still, now in the actual policy, there was not even a mention of madrasas, maktab, gurukul, pathshalas despite being heavy emphasis in real life. It is even sadder to see that the word 'Minority' itself was just mentioned twice in the final draft of 66 pages, where it was dealt with only in one page and that too in a single point, the 6.2.4 of the policy.[4] Can we ignore about 25% of our country's population this easily when their future can lie in these prestigious institutions? The NEP talks about the regional languages, but it does not enlighten us about Madrasa, etc.

Although these were the only institutions imparting education in the country before the British introduced the formal school system, no serious attempt seems to have been made to study these institutions' functioning and assess the support they needed from the Government.[5] Maktabs and Madrasas have to be reinvigorated to fulfill the challenge of the modern world. Strong emphasis must be laid on education quality and expanding the base of science, information, and technology. This is the requirement of our present era of competition.

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[4] Ministry of Human Resource Development, 'National Education Policy 2020' (*Government of India*, 2020) <https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf> accessed 24 May 2021

[5] Vishal Pajankar, 'Maktabs and Madrasas in India: A Look at Statistics Based on 8th All India School Education Survey' (2017) 7 Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities 1

For the Disabled and SC/ST population

We are happy that this policy, which came 34 years after the last education policy, addresses the problems of the disabled in an authentic sense and seems to help them in a lot better manner. It is a substantial step-up because with the help of the vocational training courses.

There is a focus on shaping up skills, which is a massive boost for even the mentally challenged children and children with special needs as the curriculum can be made a lot easier. With the help of outstanding instructors, they can get better and feel a sense of achievement during the pandemic. Although online education for deaf and blind children has remained a challenge, and there are many protests to make the online process and modules more inclusive for these special children too.

It is also good to see that the Government is coming forward to help and educate people from SC/ST community. Still, we all know that because of their backwardness and isolation, these people suffer a lot and are the most vulnerable people in education. We all know that many of them live in forest areas and keep themselves confined to themselves, and do not interact much. There are reservations to bring them to the fore, but sadly, most of them stay away from the globalized world. However, in this policy, the Government has mentioned that they will include them and work for their upliftment, but precisely no such steps are mentioned in the policy.

A DUBIOUS PROMOTION TO DROP-OUT?

Under the new system, one has an option to study for four years to complete their graduation. This seems to be a very nice step to encourage people to take up higher education. If any problem arises in their family, they can act accordingly to support their families. However, the question arises as to why the student will continue with the program if he/she can get the diploma in two years? If one leaves the program mid-way in two years, then one could easily have two years of work experience, which will be valuable in the long run. So, all in all, we need to be wary of this hidden problem, but otherwise, it is a significant step if all loose ends get tied up.

CONCLUSION

When the online medium is getting difficult to sustain, and the pandemic does not seem to be halting any soon, we need to continue striving forward while treading carefully and March towards an India that becomes the idol for many. For this, we don't have to keep on doing the large things but actualize righteously what we have already at our disposal. It is sufficient to propel ourselves onto the worldwide scenario. The noticeable changes in school education's curriculum under the NEP 2020 resonates with none other than Mahatma Gandhi's education ideas.[6] Be it the elimination of distinctions between academic and vocational streams, or to instill a sense of admiration towards multilingualism, or making it flexible for students to opt for streams and knowledge as per their choice, or efforts to inspire the local communities to participate in the process. Gandhi believed that separating education from work led to the birth of many social injustices in society.

This speaks enough to tell that we are moving on the right path, and our destiny awaits us with open arms. We need to go out there, stay consistent, and grab our opportunities with both hands. Let's strive towards a future we would be proud to present to our posterity.

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[6] Aditi Thakur, 'Resemblance of Gandhi's "Nai Talim" in NEP 2020 Is Unmissable' (*TheQuint*, 11 August 2020) <https://www.thequint.com/news/education/resemblance-of-mahatama-gandhis-nai-talim-in-nep-2020> accessed 25 May 2021