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Right to Education: From the perspective of **National Educational Policies In India**

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“The highest education is that which does not merely gives us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence”

Rabindranath Tagore

Abstract

National Education Policy 2020 is a revolutionary education policy. When implemented shall revamp the whole of education sector. The policy is a blend of foreseeability and sustainability. Foreseeability, for it proposes to prepare the student for the future. Various changes, both globally and locally, happening around the world have made the existing ways of living obsolete, and if not adapted to the changing ways, be it of living or doing work, man shall be at peril in the coming days. The policy is sustainable in the sense that it proposes to teach the children to live in harmony with the people and society around him. The policy focuses much on the character development of the child. In contrast to purely bookish knowledge, the policy gives thrust to practical learning. The policy aims making students learn through “learning by doing”. Emphasis under the policy is also given to the training of teachers and reconstitution of educational boards and institutions. The policy is the much needed reform that India was expecting. India as a country holds a very crucial position in the global arena. The latest reforms, in other sectors, brought about in the country, have brought it into the eyes of the other countries which are eyeing to do business with India. To grasp such an opportunity, India must prepare its workforce today. The reforms proposed by the policy shall not only help India in preparing a skilled workforce but shall bring it at par to the other developing countries. The Constitution of India pledges to provide education to all irrespective of any caste or economic differences, education is enshrined in the constitution as a right, under Article 21A as well as an obligation under Article 51A, the new education policy is hoped to stand up to the true spirit of the provisions of the Constitution and make quality education accessible to all.

Once again the debate regarding significance of education has started. This has been so because of the release of New Education Policy by the Government. The New Education Policy (NEP) is seen as one of its most ambitious education policies till date. It is believed to overhaul the existing education system as prevalent in our country. Education policies attract most of attention and hold great significance of any country. It is something that directly relates to the people. Today is the era of democracies. Democracies work best only with smart and educated people. Democratic government serve as welfare governments that work to uplift the lives of its people. Various welfare schemes pertaining to food, clothing, housing, sanitation, medical and many others are run by such government with the aim to uplift the standards of its people. Education is one such important aspect of such welfare schemes. Educated and smart people are gems for any countries. countries spend crores of rupees only on education to ensure that their people get the best of education possible. A good and quality education is imperative for democratic countries for only a well-educated person contribute his part in governance of his country (prudently exercise his right to vote), appreciate or disagree with the policies or can claim his rights or acknowledge his duties towards his country. Countries spend crores only on education policies to ensure that it is backed by a population which is learned, skilled and visionary.

Education systems in the past

Quality education has been an important aspect of policies since the ancient days. A remarkable feature of which was the Gurukul system which was a model of overall development of the student. Gurukul system was similar to the boarding school system wherein the student was supposed to live in the Gurukul along with the other students. In the Gurukul system the student's education was not just confined to the theoretical and practical knowledge of prescribed subjects, but along with that students were also taught to help in the day to day working of the gurukul activities. Students were made to clean their rooms, collect woods to be used for cooking, assist in distributing food during lunch, cleaning their own utensils and like activities. This way students were able to connect to their Gurukul on a deeper level, acknowledging it not just as a place of their learning but also as their home and just as members of a family jointly contribute and share the work of the house, so did the students, by discharging their share of responsibility towards the ashram. In this way students learned to live with cooperation and harmony with one another and the society as a whole.

This education system was severely paralyzed by the successive invasions witnessed by India. The education system got eventually replaced by the British model of education. The model of education as established by the Britishers, was primarily focused on filling the clerical post with the

Indian population. Major emphasis was given to subjects like science and mathematics with the intent to get people work in factories. Subjects like literature and arts were not focused upon and rather were neglected. A major jolt was given to the education system by the introduction of compulsory learning of English language. Religious and educational texts and literature were all in either Sanskrit or Hindi and both these languages did not find much approval with the British education system. Removal of Sanskrit made the rich text of Indian culture inaccessible to students. In one of his speeches in Round Table conference in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi commented, “the beautiful tree of education was cut down by you British”,

Education after Independence

India at the time of Independence was, suffering from the vulnerabilities of hunger, poverty and illiteracy. The task of the newly elected government was to reconstruct India and help her gain her stability and pride once again. Education was identified as a potent method of initiating the reconstruction process. Major thrust of the Government was at that time to make education accessible to all.¹ The Government proceeded with the establishments of Commissions to suggest methods to boost education. In 1948 two commissions, University Education Commission and Mudaliar Commission were set up to look into university education and secondary education. The University Education Commission (1948) was first and the foremost commission to be appointed in Independent India. It was chaired by S. Radhakrishnan. The main task of this commission was to:

- Report on the status of university education
- Propose improvements and extensions to the existing systems as well as suggest futuristic path for developing the education sector

The commission insisted on establishing universities, framing an education model that is in tune with the vision of the Indian Constitution.²

Mudaliar Commission

The task of Mudaliar Commission was to scrutinize the secondary education system. The suggestions given by this committee were significant in development of secondary education. It suggested introducing Higher Secondary Scheme with three-year degree course and giving vocational and technical training, for which it suggested the idea of opening such specialized schools that could impart education in these areas.

¹Under the British system education was a privilege of few generally the richer section of the population . Education as such was not available for the masses. As such majority of the population remained illiterate.

²Providing free and compulsory education, ensuring equal opportunities to all.

Kothari Commission

The Mudaliar Commission was followed by Kothari Commission, under the Chairmanship of D S Kothari. The committee was to suggest guidelines for drafting a national education policy.

It was on the recommendations of the Commission that India's first education policy the National Policy on Education 1968.

With the recommendations of Kothari Commission began the era of national education policies. The basic aim of each education policy was to ensure accessibility to education.

National education policy 1968

Being the first education policy of India, it was expected to set a benchmark for future education policies. This education policy insisted on radical restructuring of the education system. By affording equal opportunities to all, the policy aimed at achieving national integration and greater cultural and economic growth. Some salient features of this policy has been:

Compulsory education of children up to the age of 14 years³

Gave special emphasis on giving specialized training to the teachers.

Focus on learning regional language, suggesting three language system in secondary system.

Instruction in English Language, the official language where the school was based and Hindi

Emphasis on Sanskrit education

Increased spending on education to 6 per cent.

National Policy on Education 1986

The new policy aimed removal of disparities, ensuring equal opportunity with special focus on education of women and scheduled caste communities. Provisions were made to give scholarship to the poor, imparting adult education, recruiting teachers from oppressed classes. Operation Black Board was also launched under this policy.

Operation Black Board:

A basic hurdle in imparting education was the lack of basic amenities in schools and colleges. The schools lacked proper infrastructure like tables and chairs. Under operation black board the aim was to provide these amenities to the schools. The scheme aimed at installing black boards in all schools. Education has been enshrined as a fundamental right in our constitution, this required that every education policy drafted should stand up to the provisions enshrined in the constitution. As the resources are limited it is a directive for governments to distribute the resources in an equitable manner ensuring access to all. Operation black board was a major step towards ensuring the

³ Article 21A

achievement of this directive. It was thus an onerous duty⁴ upon the then governments to ensure that government run schools also have all the necessary basic amenities for imparting education. Operation black board thus became an integral part of micro planning.

Some salient features of operation black board were⁵:

- It mandated appointment of atleast 50 percent of women teachers. It was believed to have great impact on retention of female students in schools.
- Training programs for teachers
- Providing library essential teaching equipment
- Segregation of toilet for boys and girls
- Special focus to schools that were in SC/ST regions

Special focus was given to recruiting of trained teachers giving them pre service and in service training. Provisions were also made to provide them with academic and resource support. Institutes like District Institute for Education and Learning DIET and State Council for Education Resource and Training were established.

In 1994 the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) was launched aiming to revitalize primary education. The funding of this program was shared between center (85 percent) and state (15 percent). The goal of this scheme was to prevent primary drop out and achieve the learning achievements of primary school students.

On 15th August 1995 the Government launched an ambitious programme of providing mid day meal to children of primary schools from classes 1 to 5, under the banner title of “National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education”⁶. A cooked mid day meal of 300 calories and 12 grams of protein was planned under the scheme. Mid day meal programme was sought to prevent drop out of students as well as to motivate the students to attend the classes. In September 2021 the scheme was renamed as Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman. Yet another scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched by the Government to ensure quality primary education. Padhe Ga Bharat Badhe Ga Bharat, a sub programme under sarva shiksha abhiyan aims at improving comprehensive early reading, writing and mathematical skills of children of classes I and II.

⁵Development Of Education In India After Independence <available at <https://www.iassite.com/development-of-education-in-india-after-independence-upsc/>>

⁶Renamed as National Programme of Mid Day Meal in October 2017.

An analysis of the education policies reveal that the intent of the governments has been to provide an over all quality education to children with good infrastructures, quality teachers, better prospects of growth and care with provisions of quality meals. The different policies pertaining to education have been timely modified and improved to meet the changing needs of the time. When discussing the various education reforms undertaken, mention must be made of the 86th Constitutional Amendment 2002 and Right to Education Act 2009. The 86th Amendment made elementary education a fundamental right under Article 21A. The states have been obliged under this Article to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of 6 to 14 years. Under Article 45 of Part IV, state id obliged to ensure childhood care to all children until the age of 6 years. Article 51 A inserted states that it every Indian citizen who is a parent and a guardian must provide opportunities of education to children between the age of 6 to 14 years.

The right to Education Act 2009⁷,

- Makes education a fundamental right of children between the age of 6 to 14 years.
- Requires all private schools (except minority schools) to reserve 25 percent of seats for children belonging to poor classes and other classes.
- No child to be held back or expelled or enquired to pass board examination until the completion of elementary education.
- Prohibits capitation and donation
- Special provision for school drop out to bring them at par with students of their age.

The Right to Education became the first legislation to make it the responsibility of the Government for ensuring enrollment, attendance and completion of education of students between the age of 6 to 14 years.

National Education Policy of 2020

The NEP 2020 is first education policy of 2020. It replaces the thirty-four years old education policy of 1986. Foundational pillars of the NEP 2020 are access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability. Striking feature of the policy is that it asserts and focuses on the overall development of the child. The overall development as envisaged by the policy is not confined only to academics, writing exams and securing good marks but also to develop compassion towards society. The policy proposes to achieve this by insisting to give exposure to students to issues of the real world and problems and persons enabling them to learn and feel for themselves the value of hard work and persistence. For example, if a student is taken to the field and made to see for

⁷Known also as Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Act

himself how farming is done, converse with the farmers, he shall be able to understand the problems of farmers and what significance does strong agricultural laws hold for any country. The policy wishes to put in place an education system that imparts knowledge as well as imbibes values to the student.

Some salient features of the policy are as follows⁸:

Ensures access to education at all levels from pre school to secondary. Provides for innovative education centers, tracking of student and his learning, multiple path ways for learning providing for both formal and informal modes of education, open learning for classes 3,5,8 and state open school, introduction of vocational courses, adult education and life enrichment learning lessons.

Paying attention to early childhood care, 10+2 education model has been replaced and a new system of 5+3+3+4 corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14 and 14-18 years respectively, bringing under its ambit children in age group of 3-6 years which has been recognized globally as crucial stage for development of mental faculties of a child.

Changes have been introduced to the curricula and pedagogy, making the students equipped with the 21st century skills. The content of the curriculum has been reduced and focus is given on experimental learning. Separation of courses like arts, science etc. has been done away with, with greater flexibility of choice of subjects to students. Vocational educations including internships has also been emphasized.

The policy adopts a three language formula emplacing teaching in mother tongue or local or regional language at least till Grade 5, preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. Sanskrit shall also be offered as a choice for students.

The new policy encourages regular and formative assessment. The academic session has been divided into semesters and the students shall be assessed in terms of clarity of concept and critical thinking.

Focus has also been given to online and digital learning.

A perusal of the NEP 2020 shows that it is deliberately and consciously drafted to make the students prepared for the future. The reforms in education were much needed. Citizens are the soul of any country. Good citizens make good countries. Over the years the meaning of definition got limited only to acquiring bookish knowledge. The purpose of any education model is to develop the good character. Education policies must be focused on imparting moral values to help in the

⁸National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India <available at https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf> (last accessed on 01/05/2022)

process of character development of the people. When may wonder as to why focus be given to character development? The answer to this question can well be seen around us. Increasing number of Government officers and other professionals getting caught in corruption scandals is a reflection of poor education parameters, neglecting the need to instill the feeling of integrity and honesty. The courage to resist a wrong can come only when is having strong moral and ethical values. A realization of this can be seen from the fact that course curriculum are now focusing on ethical education, introducing subjects like professional ethics.

Though the NEP 2020 is promising, yet a lot shall depend not its effective implementation. It shall take time to mold the age old structures and practices but as goes the saying “where there is hope, there is a way” it is hope of the people of India that the new education policy shall open new dimensions of growth not just for them but also for the country, for in the growth of its people lies the growth of the country.

