Systematic Development of Indian Education System with special reference to National Education Policy, 2020

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to discuss the systematic development of the Indian education system while analysing the prospects of *NEP, 2020* in reviving India's educational traditions and ensuring universal quality education in the era of smart technologies. At various informal centres, education was offered and it was accessible to the masses during ancient and medieval times. Educational disciplines included learning values, mental and physical training, theological ideas, etc. In the British period, Indian educational policies were directed toward promoting English education. English education could only be afforded by the affluent section of society. Private enterprises made entries into the Indian education system. Under colonial subjugation, many did not even have access to modern western education. In post-independent India, much effort was given to illiteracy eradication and to making education accessible to all. Absence of any major reform since the *1990s* with time made the Indian education system static and irrational in this age of technological diffusion. So, a major reform was badly needed for a long time.

Keywords:

Indian Education System, NEP, Value Systems, Global knowledge landscape, Education policy, National Educational Technological Farm, Digital infrastructure,
Ministry of education, e-contents, Character building, Foundational numeracy, Literacy, Enquiry driven studies, Multilingualism, Use of technology, Institutional autonomy

Introduction:

Education aims at attaining the full human potential of an individual. India had a well-structured education system from the very beginning. Since *Rig Vedic* times the, *development of* one's *inner and outer self* was the prime focus of Indian education. *Value systems*, *physical* and *mental training* were integrally connected with the curriculum. The medieval Indian education system emphasized popularising Islamic values and ideas while imparting knowledge. In both the ancient and medieval periods, education was offered at various informal places and as education was accessible at all levels of society, it could easily be afforded by the common masses. Education that was a subject to public enterprise or patron support during the ancient and medieval periods in India later went to the British policymaking table. They opted for a 'top to down model' for educational development in modern India. The British made a systematic effort to offer quality English education to those who could afford it. Their idea was that from these English-educated people, education would percolate down to all levels of society. After independence, the Government of India through its policies until the *1990s* mainly tried to fix the issues created by the long British rule in India like eradicating the inequality in the Indian education system and achieving universal access to education. Taking into account rapid

changes taking place in the '*global knowledge landscape*' and '*technological advancement*', a rational education policy was much awaited to address all the contemporary issues and to induct traditional values in the Indian education system. With this sole purpose, the *New Education Policy* has been launched by the Government of India in 2020.

Relevance of NEP, 2020 in Reviving the Traditional Status of Teachers in Society and Values in Students:

Centuries-old values of our country towards teachers; considering a teacher as a '*guide to higher consciousness*' has started to fade away in this age of information. Today '*Gurus*' are rarely considered as the '*supreme consciousness*' by students. Abundant online sources make them feel that without a doctor they are well suited to self-treat themselves in the journey of life. Thus, the lack of values in our modern education system makes students materialistic from the very beginning. Their purpose for study then becomes not to learn something, but rather lies in competing with others for procuring a seat in a well-known institution and securing a degree, which they hope, will make them fit to earn more money. Despite being a process to make a better person, the modern Indian education system sometimes contributes to the root causes of social evils like bribery, cheating, and the unhealthy rat race to stay on the top.

While addressing these issues, *NEP, 2020* firstly aspires to revive the centuries-old values towards teachers and re-establish them as the most respected members of society. The teachers according to the policy recommendations must be placed at the centre of educational reforms and they should be guaranteed livelihood, dignity, respect, and autonomy which will enable them to offer the best outcome in education. Traditionally Indians used to believe that the purpose of education is not to get employed only but to acquire Gyan (knowledge) and Pragya (wisdom) in pursuit of Satya (Truth). Through teaching students Values at all levels of Indian education, NEP, 2020 thus aims at reviving the traditional values of the Indian education system.

Relevance of NEP, 2020 in the age of Technology

In today's world, it is impossible to ignore the importance of technology in the education system. After the pandemic, Ed-Tech companies in India have attracted huge foreign investment, and in the near future are expected to expand at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 17.19%. [1] Despite the market for e-learning in India expanding rapidly, only 40% of school students in India have access to it. [2]

To ensure that the contemporary realities do not create any *Digital-divide* in the country, it has been said in NEP, 2020 that a body called '*National Educational Technological Farm*' will be formed to promote online education. This body is to coordinate between '*digital infrastructure*' and '*capacity building*'. '*Ministry of education*' will be in charge of '*digital infrastructure*' while the accessibility of quality '*e-contents*' will be catered by '*capacity building*'.

1. *India Online Education Market Report 2021-2026, press@researchandmarkets.com*

2. *Report by the Azim Premji Foundation, India Today Web Desk, Nov 15, 2021, 06:31 IST*

NEP, 2020 in reviving the traditions of the Ancient Indian Education System:

Since the Rig Vedic times the ancient education system in India had focused on the development of one's outer as well as inner self. The ancient education system was informal. Young students

were guided in the pious ways of life by their '*gurus*' in temples, '*Pathsalas*', '*Gurukuls,*' and '*Chatuspadis*'. Teaching imparted in the *Vedas*, and *Upanishads* emphasized one's duties to fulfil towards his family, society, and self. Besides learning, physical activities were also encouraged. There were provisions for '*vyayamaprakara*' (exercises) and '*yoga sadhana*' (meditation) in the ancient Indian education system. A student was taught different subjects like history, mathematics, the art of debating, law, medicine, etc. Education was aimed at the inner enrichment of an individual's personality. The learning outcome of students was assessed by organising learned debates or '*shastrartha*'. During ancient times, kings as well as societies actively worked towards promoting education. As a result, many famous ancient universities like *Nalanda*, *Takshashila*, *Vikramshila,* etc came into prominence where students could attain knowledge by the means of debates and mutual discussion. Occasionally noted scholars from these renowned institutions were summoned by the kings to a gathering for exchanging their views through debates.

This is why NEP,2020 is directed toward revitalizing the philosophy that the highest human goal in life is to spend one's life in the *pursuit of knowledge*, *truth,* and *wisdom*. According to its recommendations, education thus must not focus only on the development of '*cognitive capacities*', rather education must make a student capable of critical thinking as well as *social*, *ethical,* and *emotional capacities*. Besides general studies, for the development of the mind, a student will also be taught subjects such as *yoga*, music, dance, sports, etc.

NEP, 2020 in reviving the traditions of Medieval Indian Education System:

The ancient Indian education system experienced great transformations during the medieval period. The sole purpose of the Islamic education system in India was to promote the teachings of Muhammad while extending knowledge. Eventually, '*Maktabs*' and '*Madrassas*' became an integral part of the medieval Indian education system. Among the renowned '*Madrassas*', mention can be made about Abul Fazl's '*madrassa*', situated at '*Fatehpur Sikri*', *Firuzi '*madrassa*'* in Delhi, Muhammad Gawani's '*madrassa*' in *Bidar* etc. Due to the growing need for Islamic administration, ancient India's Vedic and Buddhist education systems were eventually replaced. Taking into account the changes in social contexts, students were prepared to both earn their livelihood and cope with challenges in life.

It has been recommended in NEP, 2020 that while imparting qualities to ensure employability, learners must be encouraged to become *rational*, *ethical,* and *compassionate*. Along with learning useful *skills* for getting employed in this contemporary world, education will also focus on the *character-building* of a learner.

NEP, 2020 in addressing the issues in the Education System of Modern India:

With the advent of various European powers, the modern education system began to emerge in India. The first initiative was taken by the Portuguese through Roman Catholic missionaries. The educational institutions opened by the Portuguese in India can be classified on the basis of the purpose of education they offered. (See Table-1)

Table-1 Classification of education institutions opened by the Portuguese in India

Elementary Education	Skill based Education	Higher Education	Theological Education
Latin Schools Portuguese Schools	Training in Agriculture Industrial Training	Jesuit Colleges	Training in Priesthood

Indian Education Commission Report, Government of India, 1882, pp. 221-222

Because of the absence of its previous patrons, the native centres of learning got deprived of public endowment and eventually started to decay. When the English arrived in India and won over its political power, Initially, they were not at all eager to take up the responsibility to educate Indians. Some scattered measures followed up which produced some institutions like 'Calcutta Madrasa' and 'Benaras Sanskrit college'. But things got interesting when in 1813 the Court of Directors came up with the Charter Act where a sum of one lakh rupees was allocated for the development of native education. Some among the British advocated that this money should be spent on the encouragement of oriental studies while others were in favour of Anglicist education. Bentinck's government favoured the latter and made a systematic effort through the 'Macaulayian system' to educate a particular section of Indian society with English education. They believed that these English-educated Indians in turn would spread education in all sections of Indian society. In the available reports on educational initiatives, taken by the English in Madras Presidency, it is found that in 1826 out of the total population of the Madras Presidency only about 0.85% could attend elementary schools. This percentage drastically got decreased to around 0.75% in 1829. During 1826 there were around 115 elementary schools in the Madras Presidency per 1000 students. This number also fell to about 49 schools in 1829 per 1000 students. (See Table-2)

Table-2 Educational Initiatives, taken by the English in Madras Presidency

Year	Elementary Schools	Total number of students	Total population
1826	12,498	1,08,650	1,28,50,941
1829	1,705	35,153	46, 81,735

Minute, March 10, 1826, by Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras Presidency

Educational survey in Bombay presidency done under Governor Mountstuart Elphinstone in 1829

Missionary William Adam was appointed by Governor General Lord William Bentinck to conduct a survey in the presidency of Bengal. His report reflects that in the first half of the 19th century, there existed about 1,00,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar i.e., for every three villages there were almost two schools.

During this time, English education could only be afforded by only the affluent section of society. Private enterprises started to make their entries into the Indian education system. By 1854 privately run missionary schools produced twice the number of students in comparison to government-run elementary schools in India. Therefore, Wood's dispatch on the education of 1854 emphasized the spread of mass education through the system of grant-in-aid though it did not focus on the idea of 'universal literacy'. During the latter half of the 19th century elementary

education in India made good progress. Between the 1870s and 1880s, the number of schools in India got increased by about 80% whereas the number of students also increased by about 71%. Per one thousand students, there were about 27 schools in India during the 1870s and the number reached about 40 schools in the 1880s. (See Table-3)

Table- 3 Number of Schools and Students in the 1870s and 1880s in India

Year	No of schools	No of students
1870-1871	16,473	6,07,320
1881-1882	82,916	20,61,541

Ghosh, 2000. pg. 91

The Hunter Commission of 1882-83 came with the recommendation to leave primary education on newly built Municipal and District boards. According to *'Table- 4'*, the number of primary schools run by Municipal and District boards was not so impressive between 1881 and 1882. Out of the total number of primary schools in Bengal between 1881 and 1882, the percentage of schools run by municipal or district boards was less than 1%, in Madras, it was about 15% in Madras and exceptionally it was about 95% in Bombay. It can also be observed that between 1901 and 1902, the situation did not change much. In Bengal, the percentage of privately run schools was still over 99% while in Bombay during this phase, the percentage of schools run by municipal or district boards got decreased to about 71%. This clearly indicates the increase in the number of private schools in Bombay during the 1900s. During this time the Madras presidency also witnessed an increase in the number of private schools which was almost 80% of the total number of schools.

Table-4 Primary Schools in India

Province	1881-1882		1901-1902	
	No. of departmental or board schools	No. of aided private schools	No. of departmental or board schools	No. of aided private schools
Madras	1,263	7,414	2,836	11,125
Bombay	3,811	196	4,670	1,929
Bengal	28	47,374	26	36,046

Mukerji,1974. pg. 157

By the Indian Universities Act of 1904, the government's control over the universities was extended. In the resolution on education policy in 1913, provincial governments were urged to offer free elementary education to poor and backward people by encouraging private efforts. Students were recommended to be categorised between intermediate and university standards by the Sadler Commission of 1917-19. The idea was to leave behind a large number of students below university standards at the intermediate level. Indian education witnessed a quantitative increase but eventually, it led to a deterioration in the quality of education. To address this issue in 1929 The Hartog committee was summoned. After the Congress party won in seven provinces in the elections of 1937, the Zakir Husain committee was appointed to work on the scheme of learning through activity but with the outbreak of the second world war in 1939 and the congress ministers' resignation, this scheme could not be executed. In Table-5, it can be seen that in comparison with the 1920s, there was an overall increase in the number of primary schools in

India in 1947. While during the 1920s enrolment per school in India was around 40 students, it reached almost 76 students in 1947.

Table- 5 Primary Schools and Enrolment number during 1921-1947

No	1921-1922	1926-1927	1931-1932	1936-1937	1941-1942	1946-1947
Schools	160,072	189,348	201,470	197,527	181,968	172,663
Enrolments	6,310,541	8,256,760	9,454,360	10,541,79	12,018,726	13,036,665

* Mukerji, 1974. pg. 230

During the British period, Indian higher education also took shape. As can be observed in Table-6, in comparison with the 1880s the number of universities in India in 1947 got increased almost five times while starting with 67 colleges in 1882, and the number of colleges in 1947 increased almost seven times.

Table-6 Number of Colleges and Universities in British India

No	1882	1901	1922	1947
Colleges	67	145	167	496
Universities	4	5	14	21

*Ranganath G, 'An Analysis Abstract of Higher Education in India: Before and After Independence', 2021 JETIR August 2021, Volume 8, Issue 8

While discussing the objectives of NEP, 2020 in fixing the issues developed during the modern era in the Indian education system we may cite one of its prime aims which is to ensure all learners across the country irrespective of economic and social background have equal access to quality education by 2040. The highest priority has been given to achieving 'foundational numeracy' and 'literacy' by all the students by grade three. 'Multilingualism' has been prioritised both in teaching and learning to eradicate the language barriers in education.

NEP, 2020 in addressing the issues in Post Independent India's Education System:

After India got its independence according to the recommendations given by the *Radha Krishnan commission* a twelve-year pre-university course was brought up and a *University Grants Commission* was set up in 1953 to look after the universities. Since then, the Government of India's policies focused mainly on increasing the literacy rate in the country while promoting universal access to education until the *1990s*. No such great reform in the Indian education system has not introduced after that. Thus, a pedagogic static education system got developed and continued which eventually lost its rationality in the rapidly transforming employment landscape.

NEP, 2020 has first brought forward an all-new curriculum i.e., 5+3+3+4 in the place of the previously running 10+2 model. Secondly, education according to the policy, emphasizes *experience-driven education* where a student must be enabled in broad thinking. There will not be any kind hand and soul stream division between Arts, Science and commerce. A student will be given the *flexibility* to choose any subject. Along with imparting *useful skills* for getting employed in this contemporary world, education will also focus on the *character-building* of a learner. '*Enquiry-driven studies*', '*multilingualism*', '*use of technology*' and '*institutional autonomy*' are to be at the centre of the policy for transforming India into a '*vibrant*' and '*equitable knowledge society*'.

Conclusion:

There has been an observed quantitative increase in the Indian education system after independence. At present India has a total of 14,89,115 schools among which more than half are primary schools and the rest are upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools. There are a total number of 1,113 registered Universities and 43,796 Colleges in India. The total amount of expenditure spent on education as a percentage of GDP has increased from 3.84% in 2013-14 to 4.64% in 2020-21.

It can be rightly stated that the issues developed over time in the Indian education system in different historical contexts have been well addressed by *NEP, 2020* and it has ample potential for reforming Indian education in the 21st century but successful implementation of the policy at first necessitates the Government of India to create awareness among all stakeholders of our educational biosphere- students, their parents, teaching fraternity and managements of educational institutes regarding the basic principles of NEP, 2020 and keep its promise to spend 6% of GDP as an item of public expenditure in the education sector. Moreover, education being a subject in the concurrent list, the main challenge lies in building consensus between the centre and state surrounding the policies. The Government of India spent only 0.7% of its GDP on research in 2017-18 which is very less by global standards. So, finally, for building a *research-centric education system*, the government of India should be ready to spend at least 3% of its GDP on research and should produce a more significant number of quality PhDs from Indian universities. For addressing the macro level changes in the present job market, there needs a strong commitment from the industrialists to associate with academia for *'industry-led skilling, upskilling and re-skilling*. The issue of scarce resources sometimes restricts the possibility of successful policy implementation. It is why the Government may opt for a PPP model in the Indian education system to overcome this challenge.

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