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Historical Review of Indian Higher Education for Understanding Contemporary NEP-2020



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The Indian advanced educational framework is transforming with a phenomenal change in the coming decade. On 29th July 2020 National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 was declared by the Government of India. The nine member's committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Kasturirangan was constituted in 2019 for drafting the NEP-2020. Subsequently, based on the recommendations of the committee NEP-2020 was prepared and started its implementation in the academic year 2022-23. This new NEP-2020 recommends significant changes in the educational framework after 34 years in the history of post-independent India. NEP-2020 recommends a new framework of 5+3+3+4 by replacing the previous framework national education policy.¹

Ancient Period :

During the Ancient times education was not only aimed for means of livelihood but focused on the creation of pure character, behavior and observation of religious, and moral values. The '*Gurukul*' pattern was the first phase of the educational system prevalent widely in India. Hence, the consistent interactions with teachers (*Guru*) and pupils (*Shishya*)

was feasible as a result of living together. Vedic literature was an integral part of the syllabus from elementary to higher education. Along with the Vedas, the Puranas, Smriti, logic, philosophy, Nyaya (law), grammar etc. were also taught. There were big libraries in the universities. Except the Sudras, everyone was allowed to receive education.² During the Ancient times little information was available concerned with education policies. The Aryans brought clarity in the education policies and made it mandatory to follow to the local peoples.³ Formal education was available in Brahman Ashramas, hermitages, and in Buddhist and Jaina monasteries. In the former it would have been restricted to the upper castes. The emphasis was on memorizing texts such as parts of the Vedas, and gaining familiarity with the contents of the ‘*Dharmashastras*’ (Theology) and subjects such as grammar, rhetoric, prose and verse composition, logic and metaphysics. But much else was included in Sanskrit learning, such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine and astrology. ‘*Nalanda*’ in South Bihar became the foremost Buddhist monastic and educational centre in the north, attracting students from places as distant as China and south-east Asia. Excavations at Nalanda have revealed an extensive area of well-constructed monastic residences and halls of worship. Technical knowledge remained largely with the guilds, where the sons of craftsmen were trained in hereditary trades. Arab scholars mention that mathematical knowledge from India was more advanced than what they had retrieved from Greek sources.⁴ The *Agrahara* grant applied to a village consisting of a settlement of Brahmans, the land being given to them as a grant and exempt from tax, but the Brahmans

could provide free education locally if they so wished. In about the eighth century, the *Matha*, an institution supported by Brahmanism and Puranic Hinduism, emerged as a parallel institution to the Buddhist and Jaina monasteries.⁵

Medieval Period :

Education was traditional and out of touch with rapid developments in the West during the Medieval Period. The centres of higher education were spread all over the country and were usually financed by *Nawabs*, Kings and rich *Zamindars*. Among the Hindus higher education was based on Sanskrit learning and mostly confined to Brahmins. The Hindu Temples and *Matha's* were working as educational centres mostly through royal patronage by the rulers. The *Madarasa's* were working as educational higher educational centres among the Muslims. Persian education was based on the official language of that time, equally popular among both Hindus and Muslims. Girls were seldom given education, though some of the higher classes were an exception.⁶

British Colonial Period :

Modern education evolved during the British colonial regime. The traditional pattern of learning in India suffered under the impact of colonial expansion. The Calcutta Madrasa established by Warren Hastings in 1781 for the study of the Muslim law. The Sanskrit college was established by Jonathan Duncan at Banaras in 1791 for the study of Hindu law and philosophy. The British Parliament for the first time made a clause in the 1813 Charter Act that the British East India Company should be spent compulsorily on education. However,

the company used this fund for promoting Indian language and literature. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who insisted for the establishment of Calcutta College in 1817 to the British government favoured imparting western education. The Orientalist and Anglicist controversy was one of the most debatable issues in the field of education during the colonial regime. The orientalist advocated the policy of giving encouragement to oriental literature whereas the Anglicist favoured the adoption of English as a medium of instruction. As a member of the Executive Council Lord Macaulay favoured the viewpoint of the Anglicist group. In 1835, Lord Macaulay was appointed as law member of the Governor-general Council. Macaulay put forth a theory in education popularly known as '**Filtration Theory**' in which education could be percolated from elite, higher classes to the lower and downtrodden communities. In 1854, Charles Wood prepared a dispatch on the education system for India which is known as '**Magna Carta of Education in India**'. According to Wood's scheme, the government needed to spread Western education through English medium for higher education, establishment of universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, teachers training institutions and promotion of education for the women. To evaluate the progress achieved under the Dispatch of 1854, a commission under William Hunter was set up in 1882.⁷ Rural and women's education unfortunately lagged behind throughout the 19th century.⁸ Rabindranath Tagore rejected the blind adoption of the British educational system. His father established the '*Shantiniketan*' in 1863.⁹ For improving the working and

prospects of Indian universities, a commission was appointed in 1902 by Lord Curzon. The Universities Act, 1904 which appeared to enhance government control over higher education, was resented and criticized by Gokhale and others of the educated elite.¹⁰ The Sadler Commission (1917-19) was appointed to study the problems of the Calcutta University through its recommendations applicable to other universities as well. Hartog Committee (1929) recommended a selective system of admission to universities and diversified courses leading to industrial and commercial careers. Mahatma Gandhi proposed his Wardha Scheme although for 'Basic Education' intended learning through activity but focused on vocational education. The Sargent Plan (1944) worked out by the Central Advisory Board of Education called for elementary and higher secondary schools.¹¹

Table-1 : Showing the summary of education systems with respect to the objectives, pedagogy, and outcomes :

Education System	Objectives of Education	Pedagogy	Outcomes
Vedic Education	1. Inhibition of those activities of the mind by which it gets connected with the world of matter. 2. Individual's supreme duty is thus to achieve his expansion into the Absolute, his self-fulfillment. 3. The individual is the chief concern and centre of the Education	1. Oral Tradition 2. Four reliable devices gaining knowledge Perception, Inference, Comparison and Testimony of experts. 3. Three steps of education process Listen, Comprehend and Reflect. 4. Elementary arithmetic and grammar, phonology and metrics also formed part of the primary curriculum.	Composition of <i>Sutras</i> and <i>Bashyas</i> . Skill Based education Sanskrit as Medium of Instruction

Buddhist Education	<p>1. To achieve moral perfection and to develop a morally perfect personality.</p> <p>2. The desire can only be removed, and moral development can be possible through Eight-Fold Noble path</p>	<p>1. A child is first introduced to a —<i>Sidham</i> and then great <i>Sastras</i> of the five Sciences</p> <p>2. <i>Aksharasvīkaraṇa</i> (5 or 6 age) - Formal Introduction</p>	<p>Establishment of Monasteries and Universities</p> <p>Translation of Vedas, <i>Vedāṅgas</i> and Upanishads in Tibet language</p>
Islamic Education	<p>1. Emancipation from Dogmatic and ideological understanding of Islam.</p> <p>2. Islamic education should develop the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects of a Muslim</p>	<p>1. Authoritative acceptance of knowledge is stressed, with learning based on listening, memorization, and regurgitation.</p> <p>2. Listening to a teacher, who is active as a transmitter of knowledge, while the student is passive.</p> <p>3. Pedagogical knowledge into two divisions revealed and acquired knowledge</p>	<p>Advanced studies in various branches of sciences. Music, Painting and Philosophy</p>
British Colonial Education	<p>Providing education to the marginalized, deprived economically weaker sections of India.</p> <p>1. Anglican missionary schools as centers of spiritual and religious dialogue</p> <p>2. Promote Technical and Women education</p>	<p>1. Reading and writing of vernacular language and arithmetic.</p> <p>2. Introduction of Rural education - half time school tailored for children of agriculturists</p> <p>3. Excessive prominence is given to examination</p> <p>4. Training college for teachers</p> <p>5. Medium of Language for Higher primary and Missionaries run school was English</p> <p>6. Introduction of Kindergarten methods and Physical in the primary schools</p>	<p>Establishment Industrial, Technical and Commercial Schools, National Education</p> <p>Movement - promote technical education in local languages.</p> <p>Medium of Language - English</p>

Post-Independent India :

After Independence, the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) was set up to review university education. The commission recommended that higher education be set up to impart general, liberal and professional education, increased focus on the subjects such as agriculture, law and medicine and improvement of engineering and technical institutions, establishment of UGC (University Grants Commission). Dr. Moodliyar Commission (1952) focuses on the diversification of courses, technology enabled multipurpose schools. The Indian Government adopted a resolution in 1968 which was mostly based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964-66). This commission suggested the pattern of education viz. 10+2+3 exists in India. National Education Policy (NEP) in 1968 was drafted in the context of the commission's recommendations.¹² The union government also has exclusive responsibility for institutions for scientific and technical education financed by the Government of India wholly or partially. These institutions are declared by the law of Parliament. Under this provision the Government of India took responsibility in the establishment of five Indian Institution of Technology (IIT) namely Kharagpur, Kanpur, Madras, Delhi and Bombay in 1956.¹³ Later on the policy for science was passed during the reign of Pandit Nehru in 1958.¹⁴ The

National Education Policy Draft (1979) was stressed on skill enhancement along with knowledge. Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi's government introduced a new National Education Policy in 1986 by replacing previous educational policies. It recommended equity in educational opportunities concerned with admission and employment. The committee was constituted by the then Prime Minister P. V. Narsinh Rao led by Janardhan Reddy in 1992 for reviewing educational policies. National Education Policy (NEP) (1992) published in 1996 by this committee recommended enhancing the autonomy of the educational bodies. In 2005 Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh formulated a new educational policy based on minimum activity oriented programmes in the realm of education where in a common entrance test was introduced for admission to the professional and technical educations.¹⁵

National Education Policy (NEP-2020) :

The UGC Draft Guidelines for transforming Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Multidisciplinary Institutions (March, 2022), emphasizing holistic and multidisciplinary education. All HEIs are expected to be transformed into multidisciplinary institutions.¹⁶ The ancient Indian universities *Takshashila*, *Nalanda*, *Vallabhi*, and *Vikramshila*, which had thousands of students from India and the world studying in vibrant multidisciplinary environments, amply demonstrated

the type of great success that large multidisciplinary research and teaching in the universities.¹⁷ The objective of enhancing up to 50 % Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in education has been set in NEP- 2020 by 2050.¹⁸

Conclusion :

Indian education framework and policies have a very long history of its developments. The different phases of its developments have taken place since ancient to the contemporary NEP-2020. Although several phenomenal changes were recommended by different committees and commissions in the sphere of education, most of the times failed to implement suggestions by governmental agencies, stakeholders of HEIs in India. Although great Indian tradition, values mentioned but secular principles of the Indian constitution have been either neglected or ignored in NEP-2020. Modern education evolved during the British colonial regime but was adversely impacted on the Indian peoples, especially the attitudes of Eurocentric ideologies. The imitation of the European and American educational policies seems to be irrelevant to the contemporary Indian educational system. The corporatization of higher education would lead to the marginalization of the downtrodden communities. It could further assign educational privileged rights in the hands of higher and elite classes. The balance of blending of knowledge, education, skills, and moral values

seems to be one of the major challenges in the context of vibrant global educational circumstances before implementation of NEP-2020 in India.

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