

Towards an Atma Nirbhar India - Laying The Foundation of a Globalized India Through The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020

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Abstract

AtmaNirbhar Bharat” is the clarion call given by our Honorable prime minister Mr. Narendra Modi in the backdrop of increasing Geo-Political tensions across the world & in our neighbourhood and the heavy social, human and economic toll of COVID 19 on our country. India has a huge demographic dividend compared to western nations as well as its immediate neighbour with hegemonic intentions – China. However, reaping these demographic dividends is incumbent on inclusive growth, by enabling equal access to means to the acquisition of skills, know-how & technology across the strata of the society and across the vast length & breadth of our country. Equitable access to quality education has adurable cross-generational impact on the growth and development of the country and its population. To this end, this paper examines the steps taken in New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in this direction.

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Introduction

NEP 2020, is the 3rd iteration of India's education policy, coming 34 years after the previous version in 1986. There are several changes planned for international Education Policy 2020 to bring quality in education, spur innovation, promote skills education at school and higher education, via increased autonomy for the learners and educational institutes, development of digital infrastructure, a new layered accreditation system and increased role for private and internationalization players in the Indian education system (Pawan., 2020).

The essence of NEP 2020 is access, equity, fairness, affordability, quality for the learners and responsibility autonomy and liability for the educational institutes (Aithal, 2020). For the key stakeholders in the education sector, NEP 2020 presents an opportunity and a toolkit to build a flexible, interactive, facilitative and democratic eco-system to replace the present outdated, restrictive, prescriptive & disengaging eco-system. The targeted outcome of the NEP 2020 policy is to develop manpower, encourage entrepreneurship and generate employment. NEP 2020 also outlines a robust framework for effective implementation.

Atma Nirbhar Bharat

NEP 2020 is synchronized with different programs and initiatives of the Government of India. Earlier education policies had focused on vocational instructions in tertiary education as an alternative career path. In that sense, the previous education policy was not too different from the best practices for the skills & employment-focused education system in Germany (Kathrin Hoeckel, 2010), Finland and Netherlands and South Korea (Jung, 2020). However, the previous policy failed to provide an on-the-ramp at primary and secondary levels to funnel students towards such skills-focused tertiary institutes of learning (Farías, 2015). In the minds of the learner and society at large, this caused a lack of awareness & fear of the unknown at best and at worst a stigma of "not having made it" to the more predominant academic HEIs choices of their peers. In synch with the aforementioned successful European models, NEP 2020 aims to empower each student in one vocational skill from pre-school to class 12th.

Degrees generating employment opportunities would be most likely to be opted in the future. All HEIs will have to focus on skill education. They also need to have provision for counseling centers with counselors to take care of the mental well-being of students. Conventional education is going for massive transformation as it will be market-driven henceforth. (K., Prakash, & Singh, 2020) A National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE) will be constituted to set a framework. NEP 2020 also envisages the Setting up Governance model

down to the district level where schools interact with vocation training institutions and industry. The NEP intends to focus on developing industry linkages and demand-driven vocational courses by engaging industry at various levels, including co-developed courses and the development of incubation centers at HEIs. The focus areas for vocational education are intended to be chosen based on skill gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities. It also stipulates special entry qualifications for vocational trainers/ teachers at school as well as HEI and lays emphasis on training of such trainers & teachers, including RPL like modules.

Atma Nirbhar Learners

In the NEP 2020, there are no hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extracurricular activities, between vocational and academic streams. There will be multidisciplinary studies; so that the students are able to gain knowledge from different areas.

This put the freedom as well as onus on the learners to choose their learning trajectories and programs, based on their interests, passion, and learning objectives. At the HEI level, NEP 2020 envisages the successful implementation of a credit-based framework allowing full mobility and multiple entry-exit points. The duration of an undergraduate program is modified to four years, wherein students get a diploma degree or an advanced diploma after the first and second year of study respectively and they can continue to get a pass degree and a project-based degree after the third and fourth year of the undergraduate study. The new policy NEP 2020 also encourages opportunities for lifelong learning so that learners can upgrade their skills and knowledge in a at any stage of the life. This is the “Atma - Nirbharta” at the grassroots level where all the learners will explore their interests and realize their full potential to become a positive contributors to the society, according to their aptitude, ability and not be held back due to any unfortunate adverse life circumstances in early adulthood.

Apart from the freedom to choose what to learn, when to learn and flexibility of multiple entry & exit points, NEP 2020 stresses on the development of cognitive abilities of the students. Students not only learn, but they also learn how to learn. Instead of rote-learning, the new policy gives emphasis on conceptual understanding with the help of activity-based & experiential learning. With emphasis on 21st-century skills such as ICT literacy, civic literacy, creative and critical thinking, innovation, communication, and igniting curiosity the new mode of education aims high to move in tandem with the rising global aspirations and create a level playing field for the Indian students.

Moreover, there is emphasis on enabling learners to develop key life skills like – Teamwork, Communication, Cooperation and Resilience. This is supported by reforms in evaluation, with a shift in focus from the end of term or end-of-year summative evaluation to formative evaluation in a regular manner. Adoption of digital technologies will also allow the education system to shift to a more personalized, student-centric model at scale. NEP attempts to ensure that all students can thrive. It envisages building a pool of knowledgeable talented populations which will be the starting point towards the country’s leap towards self-reliance.

AtmaNirbhar Higher Education Institutes

The vision of a ‘self-sustaining’ and ‘self-generating higher education system needs Indian universities to be “AtmaNirbhar” ie to be freed from the existing shackles of regulation, in a progressive and articulate manner and to be able to fund their ambitions according to the value add they bring to their stakeholders, independent of the public-private divide. The “AtmaNirbhar” university has to be autonomous and should be able to experiment, evolve and promote new initiatives without undue regulatory constraints while keeping controls on the quality of education & research. To that end, NEP 2020 introduces reforms in how the higher education institutes are accredited, affiliated, structured, financed, managed and how their outcome & orientation is measured and guided. (Panditrao, 2020)

At the first-order thinking, proposal to merge various controlling institutes like AICTE, UGC, MCI under a single umbrella of HECI, and replacement of NAAC & NAB by a single accreditation body NAC can be seen as merely structural reforms, which enable a uniform and coherent implementation & monitoring of the policy with minimum regulatory overheads, in other words merely a resource optimization exercise.

However, the impact of these reforms is far-reaching and enabling in nature, for example, it’s difficult to imagine the creation of an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), (Deka, 2021) which is a unified digital repository of the academic credits of all registered students across the country, without the simplification of the governance structure of HEIs into a single accreditation agency and single controlling body. The third-order effect of this example is that ABC by itself is also an enabling platform for the geographical and temporal seamless mobility of the student body. With the help of ABC, students will be able to shop around for the best credit provider for a specific interest rather than being tethered to the limited resources and orientation of a single HEI. The creation of ABC is also a catalyst to promote policy initiatives in the direction of curriculum flexibility and also provides impetus to the formation of specialist Edtech enterprises.

Another major thrust of NEP 2020 towards the creation of “AtmaNirbhar” HEIs is to give graded autonomy to all non-public universities based on their accreditation, participation in research innovation and quality education delivery and transparent financial dealing (Gupta, 2021). he will be given freedom for student admission norms, fee structure fixation, teacher’s & staff appointments, retrenchment and layover and concession from reservation quota as well as support for research.

A new layered accreditation system will differentiate between a degree-granting stand-alone college and a wholesome University. The affiliation system is to be stopped, Accreditation should be able to set standards in quality of infrastructure, faculty, technology, research facilities. Further, the colleges have been given the option to become autonomous and award their own degrees or they can also become a part of existing universities. Autonomy will be given to lecturers to devise their own class delivery, evaluation and research. In general, the emphasis has been to create a liberal environment of academic delivery, research & innovation. An autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), is proposed to provide a platform to facilitate decision-making on the induction, deployment, and use of technology, as well as the opportunity to consult and share best practices. At the same time, control on the quality of education is maintained through accreditation and a national ranking system.

The lack of a culture of research, scholarship and publications in Indian HEIs has limited our performance in global rankings. To that end, National Research Foundation (NRF) will be formulated to support and facilitate the research and innovation funding in higher education. Unlike before, NRF will ensure that private institutes can receive research grant funds solely based on the merits of the proposals and there would be no discrimination between government and private institutes for the same. With nearly 70% of HEIs in the private sector and over 70% of students studying in private HEIs, this will unlock a vast potential to promote intensive research at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

Atma Nirbhar Beyond Borders

The concept of an AtmaNirbharnation or self-reliant nation is not new. It is deeply rooted in the Swaraj and Swadeshi legacy of our freedom movement. This colonial past informed our economic policies, best manifest in the focus on import substitution and self-reliance in successive five-year plans from 1947 to 2014. However, until the economic liberalization of the 1990s, the notion of self-reliance has been somewhat protectionist and isolationist. In our politics, our economic policies as well as our social ethos there has been a long-standing sense of inability to compete at a global level.

Since the turn of the century, that has been changing slowly as we as a society we have progressively cherished our successes at the global stage in fields as vast as space technology, IT & Telecoms, biotechnology & pharmacy, Textiles, Cricket and Bollywood to name a few. We have slowly but surely shed our diffidence at the global stage in science, commerce as well as arts. Yet our education sector has lagged behind in vision, leadership, ambition and achievement. For example, despite the exemplar temples of learnings like IITs, IIMs, IISc, IISERs, AIIMs, hardly any Indian university features in any global ranking of top 200 universities. (Chakrabarty, 2020)

Previous education policy had neither promoted nor supported the establishment of Indian campuses by foreign universities. Conversely, there has hardly been any instance of Indian universities establishing a campus on foreign land. The international student exchange has been sporadic, the Indian curriculum has often not been in synch with top universities of the world and the pedagogical exchange of ideas has also not been systematic or widespread.

Internationalization of HEI is added first time to the Education policy of India. NEP 2020 introduces mechanisms for the exchange of credits for degree awards between foreign universities and home institutes. crucial for any knowledge economy to thrive is a two-way exchange of thought across borders. Internationalization reforms proposed in the NEP 2020 would lead to not only a larger participation of international academia in the Indian education system. But also enhance India's voice in the global landscape. Such collaboration and flexibility will aid in the integration of global skills in Indian curricula, for Indian students as well as faculty. These reforms can catalyze foreign investments in Indian education, and also help the growth of the Indian EdTech endeavors by providing them a larger canvas to paint upon. India offers a diverse and vibrant democracy, an intellectually engaging society, and an affordable education. NEP 2020 paves the way for the Indian education sector to become a channel for exporting Indian ethos and worldview across the globe.

This is a significant reform that signals a shedding of the past protectionist stance of the Indian education policy. It signals a new definition of AtmaNirbharta, which is a willingness & confidence to engage with the world on our terms, as who we are, without an apologetic need to blend in and tune in to the Western world, and as someone who has equally to give as to take. The NEP 2020 policy strives to instill confidence among the citizens that they are no less compared to others in the globe, and that our history and culture, has long been top contributor to the world knowledge.

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