Dimension of Inclusive Education in Light of NEP 2020

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Abstract

Accepting Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy "Nai Talim" by policy makers in independent India, emphasis has been laid on developing a sense of self-reliance and self-respect in children from childhood.In the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution, it has been said that compulsory and free education should be arranged for the children of 4-14 years. Then in 1968, based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, while formulating the National Education Policy, it was first passed during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi.In 1985, a document called "Challenge of Education" was prepared and in 1986 a uniform educational structure for the whole country was accepted and the new National Education Policy was released during the rule of Rajiv Gandhi.A committee was formed under the chairmanship of ISRO chief Dr. K. Kasturirangan in June 2017 to formulate a new education policy, the draft of the National Education Policy was presented in May 2019, finally after 34 years, during the rule of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this new Indian National Education System was announced on 29th July 2020 with new changes.

Key-words:Inclusive Education; Identities matter; Historical learning; Subcategories; NEP2020

Introduction

The development of a country depends on the education system of that country and India has been famous for its scholarship since ancient times, our Vedas have taught knowledge, technology, science and research to the world, while also being culturally rich, that is why it is called You have got the status of Vishwa Guru.Our Indian society is a multicultural democratic society, in which various forms of education are visible, in the education system of the present scientific technological digital age, creativity, self-concept, thinking, reasoning aptitude, aptitude ability are important in the students.In the education policy, the policy of education in schools and colleges is prepared, the Government of India has made many changes in the new National Education Policy 2020, through this to make India a "global knowledge superpower".[1]

One of the biggest highlights of this year has been the launch of the much awaited National Education Policy (NEP) which came about an excruciating wait of over three decades. Drafting a centrally designed education policy for such a diverse country is no easy task, especially with the fleetingly changing social and economic environment. Of the many things that have captured public attention, one theme has been around the idea of inclusion and equity. In all the education policies throughout the years, the idea of Inclusive Education has often revolved around making education accessible and available for all, especially for children from marginalized milieus. While the overarching idea remains more or less the same, each policy document offers a different narration of which categories of learners require support and attention in inclusive education. The criteria of such decision making are not very apparent and probe a deeper examination which is outside the ambit of this article. What is within our scope is to see how different ideas and manifestations of Inclusive Education have found their place in NEPs historically.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is not an indigenous concept in India. The concept was borrowed from recognized international settings (mainly through international intergovernmental organizations like UNESCO, World Bank etc.) and started gaining currency in India post the 1990s. The initial underpinning of inclusive education was limited to 'special education' or inclusion of children with disability, which has seen some expansion in the past few years. India, however, still lacks a well recognized 'working definition' and shared understanding of 'Inclusive Education'. This is due to a lack of systematic effort amongst government and other stakeholders in exploring the meanings, relevance and applications of Inclusive Education in India. This is also the reason why expressions of Inclusive Education are often placed under broader social concepts like inclusion, equity, access etc. Some well-accepted international definitions (from a policy perspective) view inclusive education as taking "a holistic approach to education reform and thus changing the way the educational system tackles exclusion". Literature views "inclusion as a process which is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers" of education and ensures the "presence, participation and achievement of all students" and their diversities. It is often said that the students having vulnerable identities are at a greater risk of marginalization and exclusion from education and thus need greater attention than others.[2]

It is well established that identities stand at the core of the question of who we are. Our identities and life realities often define our social, cultural and economic standing in a society and this very much applies to education as well. Identities which are more marginalized, vulnerable and oppressed often find themselves deprived of educational access and experience. In order to change these social realities, instruments like laws and policies (and the way they recognize and treat these identities) act as powerful agents of transformation. The National Education Policy is one such policy which, by its very recognition and inclusion of different marginalized identities, paves a roadmap for positive action. The next section will dive deeper into how different NEPs have historically viewed and addressed different social identities both in words as well as in action.[3]

The life cycle of the National Education Policies can be traced back from 1968, 1986 and finally to the most recent policy of 2020. A journey of over half a century covers a multitude of socio-political and economic upheavals. A comparison between these time frames wouldn't be a fair analysis because context varies, but it is important to track how priorities and identified beneficiaries of education (especially inclusive education) have changed over time.

National Education Policy, 1986

In any policy document, words matter. The usage of the word in a particular document often reflects the priority and mind-sets of those who frame the document, and society at large. The NEP 1986 has meticulously and neatly divided the focus of inclusive education into different categories of marginalized populations and dedicated separate sections on their issues (which was one of the critiques of the 1986 policy). They broadly revolve around the issues of women's equality, caste-based minorities, religious minorities, rural-based learners, and 'handicapped' children. The focus of the time was primarily on ensuring universal access to, and providing quality education to a wide base of learners. The idea of privatization in education was also getting introduced around this time. What was however, strikingly unique about NEP 1986 was its insistence of many nuanced categories of marginalization. It accounted not just for the traditional marginalized categories but also the relatively newer and less discussed categories like working children (focus on them was mainly through non-formal schooling though), children from economically poor urban slum communities; migrant children; children of construction workers and agricultural labourers; children from forest dwelling communities in remote areas and from ecologically deprived areas etc. In fact, it took into consideration needs of rural students and their manual work requirements as well. The policy also made several recommendations to make minority education more robust (for e.g. inculcating a more diverse and representative curriculum, setting up resource centres to train and guide minority schools, schemes for remedial coaching in minority managed educational institutions and many more).

Despite nuances in the document, implementation strategies did not fully account for these variations and missed out on important categories such as 'children in conflict with law' and 'children in need of care and protection'. Another critique of the NEP 1986 was that it walked on a tightrope of mentioning a number of encouraging ideas but never backed it up with corresponding legal framework, policy or implementation programmes. For instance, it mentioned assimilation of children with special needs and girls into education but never had any dedicated financial, programmatic or institutional structure to drive it further.[4]

National Education Policy, 2020

The NEP 2020, on the other hand, has moved away from the traditional categorization of the marginalized and, to some extent, has recognized the interconnectedness and multidimensionality of these sites of exclusion. The policy makers have moved beyond the simplistic understanding of boxing these categories individually and taken crucial intersectionalities into account by putting them into the broader category of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). This exhibits an important departure from the previous trends. However, there is always a risk of subjectivity in interpreting who constitutes SEDGs. This clubbing of categories would inevitably lead to some groups receiving more or less attention than the others and a broader umbrella will also carry the potential risk of not addressing community specific needs and nuances. This dilemma might particularly be faced during implementation with the brunt of such subjectivity being disproportionately borne by the group of learners who did not find recognition in NEP 1986 or NEP 2020. Such examples include categories like students from the LGBTQI communities, refugee children, internally displaced communities, children in conflict with law and many more.

In another important departure from the previous trends, NEP 2020 has not given any explicit recognition to caste based inclusion and reservations (neither for learners nor for the teachers). Lastly, it's vague silence on the scope and deployment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in making all these suggestions implementable has also raised many apprehensions and doubts. On the bright side, the NEP 2020 is willing to deploy a greater focus to issues of gender parity through inclusion of transgender children and the gender inclusion fund. The constitution of Special Education Zones (to be established specifically in disadvantaged regions across the country with the objective of providing targeted attention to students and teachers in these zones and ensure joint monitoring by both Centre and the states); flexibility and recognition given to school models such as madarsas, gurukal etc. and the standardization of Indian Sign Language (ISL) are welcome moves which further the cause of inclusion. NEP's section on school education is also particularly reassuring for many. The insistence on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), flexibility in assessments, more robust and inclusive learning outcomes, well rounded education and prominence given to teacher training are some of the few things worth watching out for during the implementation phase.

Bringing it all Together

It is crucial to clarify that inclusion and equity could be much more than just social identities and categories of marginalization. A holistic framework towards inclusive education not only focuses on these categories but also takes equal cognizance of tools, processes, learning environment, skills etc. Traces of all these components have been remarkably interwoven in different sections of the National Educational Policy, 2020. Some of these aspects have been covered in this article but many more remain. Due to the limitations of the scope, it was a conscious (but a reluctant) choice to omit other important themes such as vocational and non-formal schooling; digital education and its implication; the role of philanthropists and private players towards inclusive education; the issues around resources and funding; the constant debate between the Centre and the State sharing responsibilities and lastly the implementation. These themes are as crucial as the other discussed components. All of them collectively have a very crucial role to play in making education truly inclusive in India.[5]

National Education Policy 2020 Analysis

1. Multidisciplinary Education - With the promotion of multi discipline and research and opportunities for learning in different areas through elective courses of vocational education, promotion of practical education is an essential step.

2. Autonomy - Defining degrees, diplomas, certificates and promoting independent research are essential for making higher education effective.

3. Academic Bank of Credit - This can be an important strategy in promoting higher education that the undergraduate courses will be of 4 years duration and the barriers to post-graduation and PhD have been reduced.

4. Promotion of research work - With the establishment of National Research Foundation, there is an important contribution in this direction to encourage research and innovation.

5. Improvement in quality - In the new education policy, the top 100 foreign universities to establish their campuses in India will increase the competition and quality.

6. Intellectual Development - In this education policy, emphasis has been laid on encouraging the creative thinking, logical decision and the spirit of innovation of the students, which is in line with the need of today.

7. Linguistic Diversity and Preservation - Students will not have any compulsion to choose language and for the development and preservation of Indian languages, Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (II) and National Institute for Persian Pali and Prakrit will be established as well as promotion of local language. Giving is also commendable.

8. Curriculum and Assessment - Establishment of a National Assessment Center named "Parakh" as a standard setting body for assessment of student progress; Priority is given.

9. Change in grant item - The government will no longer give grants to universities and higher educational institutions, but will give loans through HEFA (BMT) which will have to be returned in installments. paves the way for privatization of the university.

Challenge of National Education Policy 2020

The suggestions of lakhs of people have been taken in preparing the New Education Policy 2020, which will prove to be effective for the future of the children, yet some problems will come as a challenge.

1. Research and innovation in India was 0.84 percent of GDP in 2008, which has come down to 0.6 percent in 2018. Today, there are 15 researchers per one lakh population in India, whereas in China there are 111, so the actual for research Goal setting is required.

2. In this policy, education for all, affordable education, education with skill development is included, but the biggest challenge is about the implementation, the government has kept the period for the complete implementation of the entire policy till 2040.

There is a lack of clarity in which how the curriculum will change, what will be the base, how will the higher enrollment target be met.

3. This policy expresses commitment to the quality of education, but how it will be implemented on the ground, the role of people associated with the education world is very important, many things are still unclear on these.

4. In this policy, learning in regional languages has been allowed in schools, which can prove to be a big gap between English and non-English learners and employment opportunities, for this there is an important need to take concrete steps.

5. In 1964, the total expenditure on education was 6 percent of the GDP, which has not been achieved till date, to achieve this goal, comprehensive planning is needed.

Conclusion

While this year's National Education Policy has again opened the Pandora's box of discussion around the issue of inclusion, it has presented us once again with an opportunity to systematize our understanding of Inclusive Education for the Indian context. The need of the time is to bring in place a common framework for inclusive education which could act as a yardstick of participation, access and inclusion in Indian education and acts as an important tool for policymakers to plan, collaborate and implement. This shared understanding has to be developed in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders and the objective once again will be just like any other year: To leave no child behind.

The new National Education Policy 2020 aims to inculcate multidimensional talent in children, make them self-reliant, and develop analytical reasoning education. Multi entry and exit system in higher

education is beneficial for the future of students by not harming their study year, this education system has given it a global vision.In this era of knowledge, education, research and innovation are important; respecting the spirit of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat", the system of promotion of other Indian languages including Sanskrit has been included in the new education policy.Continuing after 34 years, the Indian education structure has to be made more dynamic, flexible and relevant, if implemented successfully with its core spirit in time, and then this new education policy in India is based on the pillars of uniform education, fairness, quality inclusive and accountability. India will prove to be a milestone in construction.

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