

A Critical Analysis of NEP 2020 Special Context to Inclusive Education

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Abstract

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the integration of social inclusion and the mitigation of social inequalities within the context of social education. It further suggests that there is a gap concerning the socio-economic status of a person, caste, gender, area, and some other issues that need specialized attention as far as education is concerned for there to be equity and Justice in the society. In general, The NEP 2020 seeks to provide a more balanced, equitable, and comprehensive education system to pupils from different socio-economic, language, culture, and geospatial communities. With specific measures, the policy aims to fix systemic discrimination and instead support all children, especially those from marginalized and unrepresented groups. NEP2020 is an unprecedented reform of the education system in India, designed to transform the current system into one which is more holistic, integrated, and learner-

friendly. In the heart of NEP 2020 is ensuring that education is made available to everyone, particularly to socio-economically weaker sections SEDGS such as girls, disabled children, and persons living in marginalized communities. The nature of paper is theoretically established which trying to critically highlight the major aspects of NEP 2020 for inclusive education.

Key Words: NEP 2020, Social Inclusion, Socio-economically disadvantaged groups Inclusive Education

Introduction

The NEP 2020 is the guiding framework which seeks to transform the Indian education system to be more integrated, inclusive, and holistic (Chandramana 2020). It was endorsed by the Union Cabinet of India on July 29, 2020, and replaced the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986. The policy attempts to restructure the entire education system while placing particular focus on inclusiveness and skill development at all levels. It aims to meet India's diverse population challenges and prepare students for the 21st century by changing the educational landscape of the country (Aithal 2019).

The Contextual Backdrop of Education Policies in India the Indian education policies have seen a change as per the social, political and economic transformations during the course of time. From being dictated under the framework of British colonialism to catering the needs of an independent India, the country's educational system has surely progressed. Here is a summary of the the evolution timeline of the educational policies in India, underscoring significant events that formed the education system. Major strides have been made to amend and broaden the education domain since achieving independence in 1947, including some landmark policies. The first articulate Integrated National Education Policy was brought about in 1968 aimed at increasing access, regional language application, and the overall quality of teaching. It is worth noting that the execution was not consistent, especially for rural regions. In an attempt to provide educational equity, especially for disadvantaged groups, the National Policy on Education (NPE) was initiated in 1986. It was later modified in 1992 with the introduction of 'Operation Blackboard' and District Primary Education Program (DPEP) aimed to better the primary education level. Even with these policies, a sizable proportion of people do not have access to proper education due to stubborn reasons like, economical issues, regional location, and issues related to the female population.

The RTE (Right to Education) Act of 2009 still ignored factors of quality, inclusivity, and curriculum relevance in terms of 21st century expectations. NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 is the latest policy concerning the education of India

and it marks a major change in the education system of the country as we know it. This aims to resolve the issues that the educational system is currently facing, bring in new and effective changes, and have a more integrated, all-encompassing, and elastic approach towards education in India (Verma 2021). The focus of the policy rests on the issues of equity, inclusiveness, and quality while ensuring that India's education system is competitive at the global level which at the same time maintaining the country's cultural heritage.

Inequality of Income and Its Other Aspects in India

Just like most countries, India also has some issues that serve as the country's 'Achilles' heel'. These include an exceedingly complex social construct which leads to unhindered economic growth and development along with persistent gender, and wealth inequality. The foremost problem area of concern is Economic inequality. Here, India has wreaked havoc to a greater extent than just few decades back when the liberalisation of foreign goods started. A part of the population made fortune overnight, while others whom couldn't keep pace with the socio economic transformation began submerged into poverty.

The economic gulf has widened due to inequality in various spheres such as education, employment, and political participation, which in turn has led to the neglect of other important civic issues. And so while a small wealthy population continues to grow, others destined to poverty become more and more neglected. Of course, this has resulted in a much lower standard of living for the impoverished individuals across the country. Even now, some people lack basic necessities such as food, clothes, sanitation, education, healthcare and housing. To summarize, the most prominent factors of concern are: 'Income Inequalities' which basically refers to the division of incomes in such a way that the few wealthy people remain wealthier and poorer people remain poor—and the differences are only compounded through time (Sahasranaman 2020). Although present Indian government and policymakers are continuously working on this issue to resolve it at any cost.

Caste-based Inequality

Social groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are discriminated against that is social and economic in nature. Even with affirmative action and rigorous efforts of government, some groups still face barriers when it comes to resources, education, and employment opportunities. Some of These groups, including Dalits and certain tribal populations, face even more severe

discrimination and violence including but not limited to being untouchables, social and economic ostracism, and violent acts (Kumar, V. 2019).

Gender Inequality

Workforce Participation: Unfortunately, women are afforded the least opportunities in the working environment and when they do access it, it is in the informal sector where minimal compensation is offered winning them even lower pay. It is not a surprise to see women being paid lower than men for performing the same tasks (Sheth, D. A. 2023). **Educational Inequality:** In spite of an increase in the number of girls enrolling into learning institutions, the gender gap persists especially in the rural and remote marginalized regions. **Violence and Safety:** Women around the world especially those within the underprivileged communities are on the receiving end since they have to deal with violence, harassment, and poor living conditions. This plight is very dangerous for their wellbeing because it puts them in an even more difficult position (Sheth, D. A. 2023). At present Indian government is working hard for women safety across the country. Many policies has been made since couple of years. But still there are lot to achieve in order to make every place a safe place for women.

Education Inequality

In both privatized and government funded learning institutions, there is an alarming difference when it comes to the impact in the rural and urban areas. It comes as no shock for most rich families to enrol their children in private institutions while children from struggling families tend to rely on poorly publicized governmental schools. It should also be mentioned that educational reforms at large scale are going in country to strengthen public education system. Even after the efforts of government Girls and children belonging to lower caste groups face significant barriers to education. They tend to drop out of school more frequently because of economic, security, and sociocultural reasons.

Healthcare Inequality

After investing enormous amount of money and resources by government, Healthcare services are disproportionately available to those living in urban centres while the rural and isolated areas continue to lack basic infrastructure, personnel, and drugs. Such areas bear a huge burden of morbidity and mortality. Even the Private sector healthcare facilities which offer the services at higher standards remain inaccessible to the needy

(Ramachndran 2024). Government funded health programs are working hard to eradicate this healthcare inequality.

Social Exclusion

Certain social tribal ethnic communities and indigenous tribes suffer social and economic exclusion. There is insufficient access to many resources and wealth in these communities. Inequalities persist and a large section of rural India still does not have land, or is suffering from land grabs by the elites resulting in displacement and poverty. Government continuously working on this issue but still there is lot more to achieve social inclusion in India.

Environmental Inequality

The impacts of climate change such as floods, droughts, and extreme weather are felt the hardest by poorer communities. The lack of resources to recover after catastrophic events takes a toll on their overall living standard. The gap in access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is a chronic problem, notably in underdeveloped rural regions, which in addition to poverty leads to health problems (Narain 2016).

Access to Technology and Information

The rising importance of technology in conducting business, education, and everyday life has further extends the divide between the urban and rural areas, as well as among different socio-economic divisions, limiting opportunities for many Indians. All these factors are intertwined and their cumulative effect hurts the country's development and growth. Tackling inequality calls for policies that take on issues from various angles as well as omit resources and social justice provisions to ensure equity.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the strategy of enhancing the capability, opportunity, and dignity of those who are disadvantaged, marginalized, or excluded from social participation. Inclusion enables the former to access social, economic, and cultural activities and the latter to function optimally as members of the society. This guarantees cohesiveness and justice in society. Inclusion is requisite for achieving an equitable society. It encompasses all activities in which a person can engage and contribute to society. Ensuring social inclusion requires action from everyone: individual members of society, communities, institutions, and the government, all of which need to make

genuine efforts to eliminate obstacles, achieve equity, and create inclusive opportunities for every member of society to succeed. Societies can strive for maximum social integration, economic wealth, and positive life quality for everyone by using ethnically diverse policy frameworks and social programs with a commitment to anti-discrimination policies.

A Concise Overview of the National Education Policy 2020

The NEP (National education policy) 2020 aims to improve the educational framework in India by making the system more inclusive, integrated, and adaptable. It received the nod from the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020 and dislodged the National Education Policy (NPE) 1986. The policy pays attention to the transformation of the education system starting from the preschool to tertiary level, along with the value of skills, inclusiveness, and quality (Aithal 2019).

The following are notable features and scopes of NEP 2020:

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

NEP 2020 makes it clear that achieving foundational literacy and numeracy is a prerequisite for all children, which is set to be achieved by Grade 3. This is necessary to gap ill learning which has been part of the Education system. The proposed policy seeks to systematically raise literacy and numeracy levels for reading, writing, including mathematics, as well as advocating multilingual teaching by permitting the use of mother tongue or regional languages up to the end of grade five.

Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education

Students should not be restricted to one chosen stream of study in the multi-disciplinary approach, therefore, they can study Science, Commerce, or Arts. The policy calls for teaching subjects using combined approaches by ensuring that students acquire critical, creative and problem solving abilities. Students will be offered new four-year undergraduate programs, with the option to earn certificates, diplomas, or degrees at various stages, depending on the number of years completed (Malik 2021).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

NEP 2020 specifically notes the importance of early childhood education as one of the most important periods in a person's life, calling this age bracket the most responsive

stage of learning. It proposes quality ECCE for all children aged between 3 and 6 years, hence provision for this age group under the formal education system is made for the first time. It advocates for quality pre-primary education and acknowledges ECCE as a crucial step in cognitive and social development with a provision to meet it by the year 2030 (Aithal 2020). This policy propose the establishment of pre-scolar or kindergaten as a component of basic formal education which will, from the outset be integrated with lower primary school education. It further lays emphasis on the reduction of the passive and extensive rote learning approach to teaching, allocating more time and resources towards critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving through a devised system of instruction and assessment.

Universal Access to Education

From pre-school through secondary education, the program seeks to universalize education such that no child falls behind—especially in rural and remote areas. It emphasizes on raising enrollment rates at all educational levels and guaranteeing that students from underprivileged areas with less socioeconomic background have access to high-quality education (New Education Policy 2020).

Curriculum and Pedagogical flexibility

The NEP suggests flexible courses so that students may select disciplines in several spheres. This adaptability seeks to support complete education. The course of instruction will be set to develop critical thinking, originality, and ability to solve problems. It will lessen rote memorizing, advance experience learning, and support multidisciplinary studies (New Education Policy 2020).

Mother Tongue for Instruction's Medium

Up to at least Grade 5, and ideally until Grade 8 or beyond, the policy advises mother tongue or regional language as the medium of teaching. Especially in rural areas, this strategy seeks to make learning more efficient and easily available for youngsters (New Education Policy 2020). It also underlines the significance of keeping and advancing the linguistic variety of India.

Application of Technology in Education

Particularly in remote and underdeveloped places, NEP 2020 emphasizes the need of technology improving the teaching-learning process. The policy supports instructors and students by means of online platforms, e-learning, and digital tools. Furthermore reinforced will be digital infrastructure to offer improved access to premium learning resources (New Education Policy 2020).

Teacher Training and Development

A strong focus is placed on improving the quality of teacher education and professional development. The policy suggests creating National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and revamping teacher training institutions. Teachers are expected to be trained in pedagogical methods, including integrating technology into teaching (Farswan 2024).

Reforming Assessment and Examination

The policy calls for a shift from rote-based testing to a more holistic approach to assessment, focusing on assessing students' overall learning, creativity, and application of knowledge. Board exams will be redesigned to assess higher-order skills, such as analytical thinking and problem-solving, rather than simple memorization. There will be a greater emphasis on formative assessment (ongoing assessments) rather than summative (final exams) (New Education Policy 2020).

Vocational Education and Skills Development

The NEP promotes vocational education starting from the school level itself. The aim is to integrate vocational training into mainstream education so that students can choose skill-based education and align it with their interests. Internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on experience will be encouraged to prepare students for the job market and enhance their employability (New Education Policy 2020).

Higher Education Reforms

The NEP 2020 envisions the creation of multi-disciplinary institutions, offering programs in diverse fields of study, with an emphasis on research and innovation. The policy envisions the setting up of a National Research Foundation to promote and fund research activities in higher education. Autonomy for higher education institutions will be

increased to encourage excellence and improve institutional governance (New Education Policy 2020).

Promoting Indian Arts, Languages, and Culture

The NEP underlines the need of including Indian languages, arts, and culture right into the syllabus. It seeks to respect local variety by bridging the divide between several linguistic and cultural groups, therefore strengthening national identity.

Reducing Inequality and Promoting Social Inclusion

The NEP gives marginalised groups—including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and economically disadvantaged parts of society top importance. Supporting the education of girls, transgender people, and other underprivileged gender identities, it promotes gender equality. The policy also emphasizes inclusive education for kids with disabilities and making sure that appropriate facilities and resources satisfy specific educational needs (New Education Policy 2020).

More Emphasized Research and Innovation

The policy emphasizes the value of research and innovation in higher education, therefore motivating colleges to establish a research culture and strengthen links between industry-academia. Established to support research across sectors and encourage cooperation, a new National Research Foundation (NRF) will

Governance and Decentralization

The NEP supports local communities, panchayats, and school management committees' participation in decision-making processes, therefore fostering decentralization in educational governance. It also advances the autonomy of educational institutions, therefore enabling them to decide on courses of study, admissions policies, and faculty hiring (New Education Policy 2020).

Key Goals of NEP 2020:

- **Universalization of Education:** Achieving universal access to quality education for all students, particularly from underserved regions and marginalized communities.

- **Quality of Education:** Enhancing the overall quality of education, with a focus on practical skills, creative thinking, and problem-solving.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring that every child has equal access to educational opportunities, irrespective of their socio-economic background, gender, or geographic location.
- **Research and Innovation:** Fostering a culture of innovation and research in higher education institutions.
- **Skill Development:** Aligning education with real-world job requirements by focusing on vocational training and skills development.

The NEP 2020 seeks to change Indian education to fit the demands of the modern world, which include inclusion, quality and equitable enhancement, skill development and serving of different populations. Still, the key priorities are offering developmentally appropriate services and facing the difficulties of the twenty-first century. The National Education Policy notes that both help in social inclusion since inclusiveness and integration go hand in hand. The policy has established many rules to ensure that every child, from whatever his or her background, ability or geography, gets access to education. NEP 2020 stresses the need of helping underprivileged SCs, STs, economically weaker groups, and differently-abled children. This policy also aims to eradicate regional inequalities so that every pupil may gain from the high caliber educational system. The policy promotes the participation of children with impairments in regular courses provided proper accommodations including special teachers, appropriate equipment, and buildings supporting various styles of learning exist. It is meant to inspire social involvement and equitable opportunities. NEP 2020 also emphasizes the requirement of sensitivity and suitable skill development for teachers for several sets of students. Emphasized as a main contributor to social inclusiveness are in-service training courses on social inclusive teaching.

The policy offers an integrated flexible multidisciplinary curriculum which is sensitive to the diverse needs of the students. This includes making the local context relevant for the students, as well as providing learning materials in different languages, formats and levels of difficulty. The NEP appreciates the role of technology in delivering customized learning opportunities, especially for learners with disabilities. The use of social and traditional digital platforms can mitigate access barriers and enhance academic achievement for underprivileged learners. The policy refocuses the educational institutions in question on all possible stakeholders including marginalized people in policy making. This ensures that policies are inclusive of and responsive to all social groups. Constructing a feeling of community and social sabbatical by integrating

approaches wherein students enjoy quality education regardless of their background, the NEP aims to achieve neutral social disintegration and harmony.

All in all, NEP 2020 articulates policy objectives for and aids structural funding to ensure that the education system embraces inclusivity and provides social opportunities for all learners whether they are socio-economically challenged, disabled or any other form of identified marginalization. The focus on making education accessible, as well as the innovations in pedagogy, curriculum, and teacher training, is designed to meet the needs of every learner, and thus, eliminate discrimination within the educational system.

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