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New Education Policy - Myth Or Cultured India

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ABSTRACT: On May 1, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed NEP 2020 and declared that online education would constitute the core of the education policy because it would improve the quality of education and enable India's education to reach global standards. Two related questions arise. First, is there any credible evidence that online education increases the quality of education? On the contrary, there is ample evidence that without human agency of the teacher and student-student interaction learning levels deteriorate. Second, what are these global standards and who has set them? It is taken for granted that India's higher educational institutions (HEIs) should be ranked among the top 100. This ranking is done by marketing agencies that apply parameters rooted in market fundamentalism, which are not related to the social purpose of education or its transformative role or constitutional values.

KEYWORDS: NEP, quality, student interaction, market, fundamentalism, constitutional, social

I.INTRODUCTION

Against this background, the Prime Minister's call for raising the level of India's education to the so-called world class is far from a settled matter. Yet, the NEP does not raise these concerns; instead it promotes the notion of world-class education uncritically.[1] Then why this compulsion to push for online technology? Shortly after the Prime Minister's announcement, Google's chief executive officer (CEO) announced a major investment in Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries. This was followed by a marketing agency report that online education would have a market worth $15 billion in the next four years. Clearly, the push for online education is not motivated by education but by the need to resolve the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. The Prime Minister gave a call on June 11 to build atmanirbhar Bharat. Within a short span of time, on June 24, the Human Resource Development (now Education) Ministry signed an agreement with the World Bank inviting its intervention in school education in six States of India. If India, the self-assumed 'Vishwa Guru', does not know how to organise its school education,[2] then how will it create an "atmanirbhar Bharat"? More significantly, in doing so, the Government of India ignored the history of the World Bank's District Primary Education Programme (1993-2002), or DPEP, in almost half of India's districts, which led to the dismantling of the primary education system and the consequent creation of a vast market for private schools, which was the core objective of the World Bank. In 2001-02, when the World Bank intervention was at its peak[3], its loan constituted merely 1.38 per cent of the total expenditure on education incurred by the Central and State governments together. The second intervention of the World Bank was in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), from 2002 to date, which led to a multilayered school system rooted in discrimination and failure to achieve the SSA's mandated goal of universalising elementary education (Class I to VIII) by 2010, a goal that has since been eroded by the national political agenda.[4]

Why then invite the World Bank for a third intervention? Is it because India lacks resources? Like in the case of the DPEP, the World Bank loan for its STARS (strengthening teaching-learning and results for States) programme would comprise only 1.4 per cent of the total public expenditure incurred on education. Clearly, this decision is motivated by neoliberal capitalist forces to create space for non-state private actors (such as non-governmental organisations and edu-tech companies) and a market in elementary education for almost 20 crore children.[5]

On July 6, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued a notification ordering all State governments and universities to hold final undergraduate and postgraduate examinations online latest by September, least concerned about the impact of

COVID-19 on students. Ironically, a few weeks earlier, the UGC had given the State governments freedom to decide whether to hold university examinations or not on the basis of local conditions. In the process, the UGC overruled the decision of seven State governments against holding examinations, as if the States did not matter. The cynical assault by the Central government on the federal structure, sanctified by the Constitution, is now an integral feature of the NEP. The greed of edu-tech companies for the huge market that online examinations would open fits with the Central government's alignment with neoliberal capital, not the people of India.[6]

The aforesaid three examples foreground the neoliberal coordinates that define the government vision of education. The additional ideological orientation of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime of Hindu Rashtra will be revealed as we further decode the NEP. Brahmanical Hegemony[7]

The NEP's incomplete and misperceived framework of the "rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought" reveals its historical prejudices. While it accords adequate attention to the Brahmanical traditions and sources of knowledge, the non-Brahmanical contribution to knowledge and pedagogy of debate and questioning by the Buddha and Mahavira and their challenge to social stratification and hierarchical social order stand ignored. The materialist philosophical treatises of Charvaka or Lokayata rooted in observation, empiricism and conditional inference as sources of knowledge are not just undervalued but entirely erased from the NEP's historical memory. [8]The Brahmanical view failed to accommodate both the rich Tamil literature and its treatises as part of India's rich heritage until there was a protest from Tamil Nadu in mid 2019. The same prejudice is extended to deny its due space to the contributions of Syrian Christians who settled on the Kerala coast in the first century A.D. and became part of the subcontinental socio-cultural landscape. The NEP further sidelines the entire medieval period when Islamic traditions interacted with Hindu traditions to create syncretic Sufism [9]and infused new dynamism in India's pursuit of knowledge in various scientific fields, governance, commerce, literature, music and arts. Similarly, the epistemic contributions of the tribal people of central and eastern India as well as those of the north-eastern States to agriculture, forestry and management of natural resources[10] are not recognised as part of the so-called "mainstream" Indian heritage. This skewed perception can only mislead educational planning for the youth of the 21st century India.[11]

Caste and Patriarchy

The NEP fails to recognise the hegemonic role caste and patriarchy continue to play in circumscribing access to and participation in education, acquisition and production of knowledge and opportunities for socio-economic mobility through higher education. The NEP also ignores the rich legacy of the anti-caste discourse from Savitribai-Jyotirao Phule, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj [12]and Dr B.R. Ambedkar (Maharashtra); C. Iyothee Thass, Singaravelar and 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy (Tamil Nadu); Narayana Guru and Ayyankali (Kerala); Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu and Gurajada Apparao (undivided Andhra Pradesh); Kudmul Ranga Rao and Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV (Karnataka); and, finally, the historic debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of caste in the 1930s. This lack of recognition is reflected in the NEP's flawed understanding of these twin historically embedded issues, when it tries to see caste and patriarchy through the lens of the so-called "merit" and gender sensitisation respectively[13]. Reservation has no space in the NEP, in violation of Article 16 and as denial of all gains made through the struggles for social justice since Independence.[14]

The twin anti-caste and anti-imperialist legacies of the freedom struggle that inspired the defining framework of the Constitution stand cynically replaced by the World Bank-sponsored United Nations Sustainable Development Goals-4 (STD-4). [15]Even a cursory comparison between the two documents will reveal that the constitutional imperatives constitute a far more empowering framework for educational and other related social rights than the SDG-4. This is why the NEP prefers to rely on STD-4 and undervalues the Constitution. Ambiguity, internally contradictory positions, conceptual blurring of ideas and duplicity mark the NEP. It would refer to fundamental duties but maintains silence on fundamental rights, a practice adopted during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-I rule (1999-2004). [16]The concept of 'free' education stands replaced by 'affordability', thereby allowing private institutions to increase the fees as they wish; the distinction between education and literacy-numeracy and similarly between 'informal' and 'formal' education is

blurred. The constitutionally legitimised terms of Scheduled Castes (S.C.), Scheduled Tribes (S.T.), [17]Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and religious and linguistic minorities are substituted by "socio-ec onomically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs)" or "under-represented groups", thereby trivialising the historic oppression and exploitation of the Bahujans over centuries.[18]

II.DISCUSSION

Article 1(1) of the Constitution states, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States". While presenting the Constitution to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, Ambedkar, as the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, declared, "The basic principle of Federalism is that the Legislative and Executive authority is partitioned between – the Centre and the States. . . . The States under our Constitution are in no way dependent upon the Centre for their legislative or executive authority[19]. . . Centre cannot, by its own will alter the boundary of that partition." The 13-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court in the Kesavananda Bharathi case (1973) held that the "federal character of the Constitution is the basic structure". Yet, the NEP proposes to over-centralise all key decision-making "from ECCE [early childhood care and education] to higher education" through a spectrum of new central agencies and mechanisms to be constituted/instituted;[20] for example, the Higher Education Commission of India, the National Research Foundation, the National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE, the General Education Council, the National Testing Agency, National Professional Standards for Teachers, and so on.[21] In the process, all the powers and responsibilities of the State/Union Territory governments relating to education as well as those devolved to the Tribal Councils under the Fifth & Sixth Schedules and to village panchayats/zilla parishads and municipalities/municipal corporations by various Acts are destined to be either substantially compromised or withdrawn altogether. This paradigm shift in the constitutional framework calls for a nation-wide democratic debate and for placing NEP 2020 for a thorough scrutiny by Parliament.[22]

The NEP provision that has won acclaim from the media and academia alike is the ECCE provision for the 3-8 year age group. ECCE for the 3-6 age group had been included in all previous policy documents and, since 1974, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), popularly known as the Anganwadi programme, has been implemented all over the country. However, it basically remained a nutrition-health care programme, without making provisions for pre-primary education. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, did not include children in the 3-6 age group. Hence, the NEP's addition of pre-primary education and combining it with the first two years of primary schools (Class I-II) to create a foundational literacy and numeracy programme has attracted public attention. Let us decode the intent and content of the proposal.[23]

Starting from ECCE to senior secondary schools, the NEP proposes an informal role for "trained volunteers from both the local community and beyond, social workers, counsellors and community involvement" in the school system. Who are these people and what is their eligibility for being invited to undertake informal tasks in anganwadis or schools?[24]

The RSS has publicly claimed that most of its "demands" have been incorporated in the policy. It is obvious that the RSS cadre would be assigned the aforementioned informal roles which would be supported by public funds. RSS-allied education-related organisations have been for long advocating that the most effective way of preparing Hindu Rashtra cadre is to instill Hindutva ideas and "ethical" values (read myths, prejudices and superstitions) in the subconscious mind of the 3-6 year age group during which more than 80 per cent of the mind develops, thereby making them integral elements of the future generation's thinking and social behaviour. And this explains why the NEP is insisting on merging the three years of ECCE with the first two years of primary education since it builds a plausible basis for absorbing the new RSS entrants into the permanent primary school cadre itself.[25]

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Languages and Medium of Education

The question of making "mother tongue/home language" the medium of instruction at the primary level or even beyond has been debated ever since Mahatma Jyotirao Phule extolled the significance of the mother tongue being the medium of education before the Hunter Commission (1882) – an idea that has been endorsed by educationists and linguists globally and practised in all economically advanced countries. Both Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were ardent advocates of the mother tongue as the most potent cognitive medium for acquiring knowledge as well as for laying the foundation for learning any other language proficiently, including English. This rational and internationally accepted principle is rejected in India by the narrow interests of the upper castes and classes. It is nobody's case that children should not learn fluent English. What is being debated is whether English or any other alien language is best learnt by using it as a medium of education or learning it as a subject on the strong foundation of the child's mother tongue. According to a 2017 British Council study, "There is little or no evidence to support the widely held view that EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) is a better or surer way to attain fluency in English than via quality EaS (English as Subject) . . . A move to EMI in or just after lower primary, commonly found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, yields too shallow a foundation of English to sustain learning across the curriculum from the upper primary years onwards. Early introduction of EMI is thus viewed as impairing learning in the formative years and limiting educational attainment."[26]

The NEP's proposal on the mother tongue/home language issue is not just deliberately ambiguous and confusing; it also overburdens the child with the language curriculum, which includes the emphasis on learning a classical language (read Sanskrit) at all stages of education, including higher education, even as classical and rich languages such as Tamil, Pali and Persian are accorded step-child status. Nor does the NEP take any stand against Brahmanical Sanskritisation of Indian languages – a phenomenon that is partly responsible for the massive exclusion of the Bahujan children constituting 85 per cent of the child population.[27]

Higher Education

The NEP's higher education proposals imply:

(a) Starving government degree colleges and State universities of funds, forcing them to become indebted to the market, eventually leading to their closure;

(b) Incrementally handing over higher education institutions (HEIs) to private capital under the pretext of promoting philanthropy, which is yet another neoliberal excuse to pass on public funds to India Inc. under the modified PPP, that is, Public Philanthropic Partnership;

(c) Exacerbation of the present rate of exclusion of Bahujans and the disabled (even higher rate for girls in each of these sections) from higher education by not just giving freedom to the HEI to hike up their fees but also by essentially withdrawing the social justice agenda, especially reservation, and distortion of the concept of scholarships/fellowships by linking it to the so-called

"merit" which sociologically implies "privileges, rooted in class, caste and patriarchy, on the one hand and linguistic and metropolitan hegemony" on the other;[28]

(d) Reducing knowledge to mere skills under the pretext of vocational education from "ECCE to higher education", despite the repeated claims of "no hard separation between . . . academics and vocational education", thereby diverting Bahujan students from academics to parental caste-based occupations and other low-wage skills; viewing critical thinking, creativity and scientific temper as mere skills; distorting knowledge-related parameters to those of Skill India's notions (Section 18.6);

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(e) Demolishing the research-based knowledge production in HEIs by over-centralisation of the research agenda through the National Research Foundation, that is, taking away the excitement of research; and

(f) Establishing the hegemony of online education to homogenise knowledge as per market requirements; reducing knowledge to mere skills – both low-wage earning (as in the unorganised sector) and high-wage earning (as in Silicon Valley/National Aeronautics and Space Administration), the latter category being entirely enslaved to the global market framework; and dehumanising education by eliminating human interaction both between teacher and students and among students themselves, thereby also depoliticising the education system.[29]

III.RESULTS

The obsession of the ruling elite with "foreign universities" does not permit them to see the "satya". The joint document of the World Bank and UNSECO (The Task Force, 2000) reported "There are prestigious universities from developed nations offering shabby courses in poor and developing countries, using their renowned names, without assuring equivalent quality." The great universities of North America and Europe have earned their reputation by building upon their rich intellectual legacy over 100 to 150 years. It would be naive to assume that this inherent epistemic legacy can be just mechanically transposed to their Indian campuses. The only option for us, denied by the NEP, is to build our own intellectual legacy, just like several of our post-Independence universities have been able to do and win laurels globally, despite being discredited by the present regime.[25]

Problematic Areas and Issues

i) The NEP fails to commit itself to a common school system based on neighbourhood schools for all children, irrespective of their socio-economic status;

ii) It has no plan to do away with the discrimination-based multi-layered school system;

iii) It does not commit to replace contract and ad hoc teachers with dignified service conditions; nor does it take a stand against their deployment in census, election (from village panchayat to parliament},, and disaster-relief duties;

iv) It does not call for amending the RTE Act, 2009, to include children in the 3-6 and 14-18 age groups, thereby denying statutory status to both ECCE and secondary-senior secondary;

v) It refuses to ban commoditisation of knowledge and trade in education; and

vi) It takes no stand against the intervention of the World Bank in school education and the World Trade Organisation's regime in higher education.[27]

In this background, it would be justified to surmise that "neoliberal capital is riding piggyback on the Hindu Rashtra forces in order to loot India's natural and human resources!" India needs Ambedkar, Gandhi and Shaheed Bhagat Singh today more than ever before.

Education plays a very important role in knowing the world around you and becoming who you want to be. It opens many horizons that shape your tomorrow. Though the giving and taking of knowledge is often undermined, there are various

myths in the Indian education system that we need to highlight for the betterment of the children. Let's bust some of the myths about the Indian Education System![25]

Myth #1: Memorizing is Equal to Learning

Since forever, the schools have given a special spotlight towards memorizing rather than a practical learning experience for the students. In this education system, it is considered that memorizing is what learning is about. This is a huge loss as the students would be able to memorize, but without getting to know about a concept, which can even be a problem to their cognitive skills and academic performance.

Myth #2: Importance of Grades/Marks

The education system gives a lot of importance to the marks and grades scored by the student. It is considered very important, and the results matter more than the process of learning. Marks are considered to be the only criteria to evaluate a student's performance, and it is wrong to consider that. There are a lot of factors that contribute to the mental growth of a child, and marks should not be the only criteria.

Myth #3: No Career in Arts & Humanities

The never-ending debate that happens about science being the most needed subject and that the focus should only be on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects has left the education system with no creativity. There is a need that people start knowing about the different career paths that can be taken without the science subjects, and that interests and passion matters a lot. [21]

Myth #4: No Questions Asked!

Many times, it is considered to be rude if a child asks questions to the teachers or the parents. The education system does not encourage the habit of questioning and fails to understand that pursuing one's interests is also equally important for one's happiness and health.

Myth 5: Theoretical Knowledge over Practical Knowledge

It is considered that the classes that happen between the four walls are better than students gaining practical knowledge in the real world. It is important to realize the fact that the students eventually have to face the real world, and should know how to live in this world. Thus practical knowledge is of utmost importance and there should be a good balance between the two.

Myth #6: Education can Only Happen in a School

People consider that education is what you get in a school or a college. They do not relate it to knowledge. A person can get educated despite not going to school/college. The thing that is needed is the knowledge, and that can be gained through the web and various other sources as well. It is important that the Indian education system follows and realizes the importance of knowledge rather than a degree.[23]

Myth #7: A Single Assignment Judges Everyone Fairly

A famous saying goes, "Do not judge the fish's capabilities by its ability to climb a tree." But this is not how it goes in the Indian Education system. Students are judged on the same tasks, which makes it unfair for everyone. The one who scores

well is a bright student and the student who does not get good marks is a dull student. It is important that they realize they need to stop judging the marks of the students.

IV.CONCLUSIONS

With the 20 th century marked as the computer era, the digital age is spreading its wings and is also posing challenges of management perspectives to deal with its growing needs. Education System is the one most neglected part because of it being a major challenge for developing countries like India. Many intellectual minds are on work to amend the prevalent and adapted education system having roots in 1980s. In a layman language NEP, 2020 is updating of education system from traditional concept of 1980s to 21 st century to adapt and accept changes with advancing technology. Although we have been upgraded in almost all sectors, whether telecommunication or transportation but the most needed and basic of any advancement is through education which still lags behind. With the advent in technology the importance of education was clearly emphasized along with the pros and cons of NEP policy. The results reveal the loopholes and positive aspects of education system prevalent till now and crux of NEP, 2020. The basic infrastructure in India being a developing country needs to be furnished by government before implementing any policy on mass scale to avoid any hustle as education is milestone in deciding future of youth and any country's economic growth.[29]

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