



NEP and Innovations in Indian Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP–2020) is in place after 34 years as an outcome of countrywide discussions of more than four years by leading academics in our universities. It has been hailed as a policy document with infinite transformational potential due to profundity of its recommendations such as creation of research universities, use of technology to enhance access to quality education, single regulator for “light but tight” regulation of Higher Education (HE). To promote entrepreneurship and creativity and creation of large multidisciplinary institutions. It is well recognized now that education is to meet emerging needs and a resource that augments itself. Moreover, one innovates in necessity and adversity. The NEP–2020 puts faith in the capabilities of our researchers and academia to contribute to the global knowledge pool, win international acclaim and put India in the front row of academic powers.

On the other hand, it is also true that NEP– 2020 has not made detailed analysis of the maladies faced by the HE sector. Some of these include ‘under performance syndrome’ non-inculcation of 21st Century skills in learners due emphasis on examination-centric education which promotes rote learning and lack of ‘teachers and researchers by choice’ (Garg and Panda, 2019). Some intellectuals argue that the Policy should have considered why some recommendations made by earlier Commissions (GoI, 1966; GoI, 1986, NKC, 2009) could not be implemented and suggested a way forward.

The NEP 2020 has devoted a lot of space to address challenges of nationalism. It “envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower” (p.6, Introduction). The Policy further recommends that “the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, national bonding and a conscious awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in a changing world..... ” (p.6). It believes in the dictum that pygmies do not build pyramids. Making reference to SDG4, which seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality for all” by 2030 (p.3), balance out the non-equilibrium between wisdom and knowledge and arrest growing dehumanization of soul, NEP–2020 also emphasizes value-based education for development of humanistic, ethical, cultural, Constitutional and universal human values of truth (satya),

In this paper highlights three key issues: NEP–2020, Innovations and quality assurance in Higher Education (HE). On July 29, 2020, the Government of India took landmark decision of accepting National Education Policy, which seeks to provide a new and forward looking vision. In particular, it highlights the need to re-

engineer Indian education from school level to PhD degree to face new realities and challenges for the country to emerge as an academic power. NEP–2020 is based on the premise that only knowledge can transform our society from stagnation and poverty to dynamism and prosperity, from marginalization and deprivation to empowerment and recognition, from ignorance and delusion to enlightenment and liberation and from conflict and intolerance to peaceful co-existence and non-violence. Among others,

The NEP–2020 has made the following profound recommendations:

- Restructuring of 10+2 system of school education in favor of 5+3+3+4 pedagogical and curricular system covering ages 3 -18 years.
- Creation of multidisciplinary universities and colleges by 2030 to offer education to large numbers in local/Indian languages and minimize fragmentation of higher education.
- Revision of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment schemes, and student support services periodically to include latest developments and be at par with the best in the world.
- Creation of 100 new or out of the existing universities for world class research in front ended fields.
- Minimization of external influences and observance of transparency while appointing enlightened individuals with pragmatic vision as institutional leaders.
- Implementation of merit based faculty appointments and nurturing talent by practicing career progression based on teaching, research, and service rather than “connections” (Author’s emphasis).
- “Light but tight” regulation, phasing out the system of ‘affiliation’ over a period of fifteen years and grant of performance based graded autonomy.
- Promote blended learning and technology to be the important intermediary of teaching-learning.

II. NEP AND INNOVATIONS

Innovation is successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization or system. From this perspective, creativity of an individual is the starting point for innovation. Management Guru Peter Drucker referred to innovation as a change that creates a new dimension of performance. Steve Jobs argued that innovation differentiated a leader from the laggard. But conventional understanding about innovation is commercialization of invention, which refers to new concepts or products that derive from individual’s ideas or from scientific research. To be called an innovation, an idea must be replicable, economic and respond to a specific need. Innovation involves deliberate application of information, imagination and initiative in deriving greater or different value from resources, and encompasses all processes by which new ideas are generated and converted into useful products. In short, an action can be identified as innovation if it is new and useful to the system, increases efficiency, is cost-effective and compatible with or adaptable by other similar systems. In education, innovation lies in continuous march toward excellence and devising improvement in pedagogy and teaching-learning processes for improving learner’s progression curve. In short, innovation is successful implementation of creative ideas for affirmative change in the lives of the people. In the context of higher education, innovation implies systemic improvement in processes of teaching-learning, learner support and knowledge management to conserve national heritage and value systems.

National Education Policy seeks to:

- Use innovative teaching-learning strategies to universalize access to education and achieve 50% GER in HEI by 2030;
- Integrate all streams, including professional and vocational education, leading to emergence of one coherent HEI eco-system and accord them parity of esteem;
- Technology to be the major intermediary for transaction of education to enhance access equity and inclusion of all sections of society living in isolation for centuries due to gender, location and religion;
- Promote online and digital education to reach the last mile in a stratified society and innovatively use OERs and MOOCs courses and materials to save resources (financial, human and physical);
- Parity of all educational systems, practice credit exemption and promote learner mobility; and
- Design credit based flexible and innovative curricula in conventional as well as contemporary subjects of study. For instance, environment education could include study of climate change, pollution control, waste management, biological diversity, and sustainable development and living, among other topics.

III. NEP AND QUALITY

Quality in common parlance refers to “degree of excellence” of a product. It is one of the most important issues in present-day higher education ecosystem in the country; in the past it was masked by our overdrive for enhancing access and providing equitable opportunities to HEI to all. The perceptions of leading educators about quality vary considerably; some consider it as fitness of purpose and conformance to standards while others look at it as value for money, relevance to world of work and perfection, and consistency in performance (Ahmed and Garg, 2015). We believe that quality is continuing march toward excellence transparently for social cause. Assessment of quality deficit and devising ways to improve quality at various stages necessary for improving the outcomes defines quality control. Quality assurance aims to identify and address gaps which affect learner performance adversely and hinder realization of institutional vision and mission as also self-actualization of learners. Quality assurance comprises evaluation of policies and procedures for their efficiency, applicability, suitability and efficacy so as to guide the institution and each stakeholder. Through quality assurance, we intend to ensure that prescribed quality specifications and standards are maintained in each activity chain and try to raise the bar gradually. In the context of HE, NEP views quality assurance as an instrument for:

- review of offerings to reflect on pedagogy, improve procedures for continuous (formative) and term-end (summative) evaluation for satisfactory learner progression and reposition these to include skills needed to be globally competitive.
- Cultivation of culture of ownership of the institution by every stakeholder in the system.
- Development of well-rounded individuals through paradigm shift towards value based education. • Incremental improvement in institutional performance standards through continuous professional development of all category of employees and academics at all levels. The policy’s vision for quality assurance also includes:
- Grant of graded autonomy, with accountability, to an institution, its leader as well as teachers and office staff since creativity blooms with fragrance of academic freedom.
- Improvement in institutional leadership by minimizing external influences and appointing enlightened deserving individuals with pragmatic vision and impeccable integrity.

- Creation of self-reliant (Atamnirbhar) institutions by making (interactive) learning materials accessible and available to all learners.

As such some of the recommendations of NEP–2020 are highly cost-intensive. Moreover, all stakeholders of university fraternity would be required to be dedicated, unlearn past practices and relearn new ones through Continuous Professional Development programmes conducted by experts. Therefore, it would be advisable that the efforts on finding ways for addressing quality concerns are driven by the wisdom of practitioners and based on solid research evidence. The private institutions, which have been largely responsible for expansion of professional higher education in India since 1991, which marked the beginning of liberalization era, cater to about 80 per cent learners in professional programmes. Unlike leading foreign universities like Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford, and Stanford, Indian private universities, but for a few, tend to be small in size and scope, with little emphasis on R&D.

The National Education Policy accords parity of esteem to all types of HE providers by recommending acceptability and credibility for the qualifications conferred or certifications made by them. It is now well documented that Indian Higher Education is producing unemployable graduates who pass their examinations without being deep learners. They are not trained to develop intellectual creativity needed for problem solving, independent thinking, asking probing questions and digital skills suited to 21st Century (Das et al, 2019). Moreover, conventional teachers have traditionally refrained from using technology in curricular transactions either due to their ignorance about its capabilities for value addition or they view it as an agent that would marginalize their role and adversely affect their importance (Panda and Garg, 2019). However, such impressions are misplaced; technology enhances the reach of the word of mouth as also the effectiveness of a teacher in spatial as well as temporal dimensions (Garg, 2015.)

In so far as availability of technology for education is concerned, India has kept pace with developments and applications of ICTs for education and training. But the major problem has been that all these ICTs and related pedagogies/andragogies of teaching-learning have remained at the periphery, sporadically used as supplementary, and operate in a context where there is lack of a holistic and innovative use for teaching-learning. The government initiated reformative schemes such as choice-based credit system (CBCS), B. Voc degrees, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Skill Centers and UGC Regulation 2016 for SWAYAM are bound to improve quality of education for learners living in isolated and far flung areas. In parallel, there have also been developments in technologies and networks to support quality teaching-learning in information highway (Ahmed and Garg, 2015)

IV. ASSESSMENT, ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY

Experience shows that quality enhancement is facilitated by unbiased assessment and accreditation of an institution without preconceived ideas. Assessment and accreditation are viewed as complementary to quality, innovation, and autonomy by some practioners, while these are considered voluntary and self-regulatory by many educationists (Garg and Kaushik, 2020). Assessment is essentially evaluation of institutional vision, mission, core values, objectives, plans, input processes, infrastructure, and outcomes by an external agency based on certain pre-decided performance indicators with the sole purpose of improving it further. It gives an idea of the quality of the outcomes. But evaluation of quality of these aspects to qualify an institution for some status or recognition is known as accreditation (Ahmed and Garg, 2015). It serves mainly three purposes: (i) Formulation of educational norms and institutional recognition. (ii) Quality assurance and improvement in

standards.(iii) Creation of awareness among stakeholders about the quality of education imparted by an institution.

The accreditation process can lead to a win-win situation for all stakeholders: learners get confidence that the programme being pursued by them and offered by their institution enjoys acceptability in the system; the public, including the employer groups, get satisfaction that the institution is conforming to certain standard of expectation; and the institution concerned gets a boost in its reputation and legitimacy. Moreover, by reengineering its offerings strategically with appropriate inbuilt checks and balances, an institution can boast of being trending. Also, accreditation process generates healthy competition with other institutions (Das et al., 2019).

The purpose of quality in India would be served better only if knowledgeable and reputed professors are associated in assessment and accreditation exercise because only they would be equipped with appropriate skills to guide and suggest ways for improvement. (Experience shows that those with natural tendency to bend forward find access to corridors of power and do little to justify their presence.) This highlights the need to take holistic view while framing guidelines for regulation of infrastructure, human capital, fee to be charged, and admissions, etc. so that society can get access to quality higher education at affordable cost. It is a well-accepted fact that certain institutions of higher education enjoy definite preferences of students, parents, and employers. In India, the IITs and IIMs are institutions of choice in higher education. Of late, the process of accreditation by NAAC has undergone gradual change, so as to comply with the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) – institutional ranking by government (besides assessment and accreditation by UGC) – a decision which was an outcome of disenchantment with India's showing in the world ranking of higher education institutions.

V. CONCLUSION

In knowledge era, higher education provides tools to drive economy and quality assurance is the catalyst that powers it. In order to help develop a critical mass of intellectuals and researchers who can contribute to global knowledge pool, NEP–2020 has made several path breaking recommendations to take cost-effective HE till the last mile. It highlights need for complete overhaul and re-configuring the education system by creating (i) multidisciplinary autonomous universities/colleges headed by dedicated academic leaders with impeccable integrity, (ii) about 100 world class research universities with greater focus on quality research, (iii) modularity with multiple entry and exit points, (iv) use of technology as major intermediary for transaction of education to enhance access equity and inclusion of all, (v) promotion of online and digital education and (vi) light but tight regulation through single regulator—Higher Education Commission of India.

VI. REFERENCES

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