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Curricular Reforms For Viksit Bharat 2047: Fostering Critical Thinking Skills

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Abstract

Education is considered the cornerstone of progress and development, vital for both individual and societal growth. One of the first steps towards transforming India into Viksit Bharat is reforming and completely overhauling the Indian education system. Fostering critical thinking should be one of the foremost priorities while designing the new curriculum appropriate for Viksit Bharat. Critical thinking skills require higher order thinking skills wherein an individual is expected to observe, assess and make informed decisions. Development of critical thinking skills are vital for an individual's growth as well as national development. Curricular reforms are pivotal to ushering in an era of educational practices focussed on conceptual clarity which encourages learners to hone their analytical and problem-solving skills and apply the acquired knowledge in real life situations. NEP 2020 is a huge step in this direction, with many more steps to be taken. A paradigm shift from rote learning to active learning, promoting discussion, debate and collaborative problem solving, encouraging case studies, project based learning, experiential learning, brainstorming, anticipatory thinking activities, crosswords and puzzles, riddles, decision making based mental exercises, focussing on self-reflection and implementing new innovative assessment methods are some measures that ought to be incorporated as part of curricular reforms to make the education system more holistic and progressive. This integration of real world-based learning activities into the learner curriculum will definitely help foster critical thinking skills among the learners.

Keywords: Curricular reforms, Viksit Bharat 2047, critical thinking skills Curricular Reforms for Viksit Bharat 2047: Fostering Critical Thinking Skills

“Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.”

- Albert Einstein

Education is considered the cornerstone of progress and development, vital for both individual and societal growth. It helps empower individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, abilities and opportunities to successfully face life's many challenges. One of the first steps towards transforming India into Viksit Bharat is reforming and completely overhauling the Indian education system. Designing and implementing curricular reforms which promote 21st century skills can help build an entire workforce of well trained, productive citizens oriented towards national development. Progressive, holistic education is one of the vital pillars of the overall success of a nation. India is already on the path to realizing the dream of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) @2047. Educational reforms are the need of the hour, critical to promoting a more holistic education for the future generation. The dream of Viksit Bharat 2047 can truly be achieved only by bringing about drastic curricular reforms in the education sector. Embracing the idea of a holistic, multi-faceted education can go a long way in helping India reach its true potential. Critical thinking skills are key to the progress of a nation as it enables the citizens to think logically and take informed decisions while dealing with complex life challenges. Fostering critical thinking should be one of the foremost priorities while designing the new curriculum appropriate for Viksit Bharat.

Critical thinking, over the years, has been defined in myriad different ways but one of the most comprehensive definitions in recent years has been given by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul (2003), “ *Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.*” Critical thinking skills require higher order thinking skills wherein an individual is expected to observe, assess and make informed decisions. Development of critical thinking skills are

vital for an individual's growth as well as national development. Critical thinking involves the ability to interpret, evaluate, and analyse available facts and information to form a judgement or decide if something is right or wrong, make connections between logical ideas to see the bigger picture. Key critical thinking skills include the ability to observe, analyze facts, reason logically, solve problems, take informed decisions, exhibit creativity and communicate effectively.

Critical thinking skills play a vital role in the progress of a nation in numerous ways, some of which have been elucidated below:

- ✓ **Civic Engagement and Democracy**- Critical thinking is crucial citizens to take informed civic decisions like elect the best suited candidates, engage in productive but peaceful dialogue, hold their elected leaders accountable, and contribute to building a more democratic, peaceful and just society.
- ✓ **Effective Governance** – When policymakers and stakeholders are able to think critically, they are able to analyze issues objectively, design and implement more realistic policies and curtail corruption.
- ✓ **Economic Growth** – A productive and efficacious workforce possessing critical thinking skills has greater potential to innovate, solve day to day real life problems, handle pressure while dealing with challenges, communicate expectations and even boost start-ups thereby leading to economic development of the country.
- ✓ **Education and Research** – Critical thinking enriches the quality of education being imparted and scientific research being conducted, leading to creation of new knowledge bases and promoting technological advancements.
- ✓ **Social Progress** – Individuals with critical thinking abilities are more empathetic, resilient, tolerant and have the ability to think and plan ahead for the future thereby helping create a more inclusive and progressive society.
- ✓ **Problem-Solving** – Critical thinking skills help individuals discerning and analyzing the complex issues and come up with innovative sustainable solutions for global problems like poverty, crime, climate change and infrastructure deficits.

- ✓ **Global Competitiveness** – Countries with a population that possesses the vital critical thinking abilities are able to advance in various fields of science, technology and keep up with the global demands.

By fostering critical thinking abilities in individuals through holistic education and constant practice, a nation can create a more prosperous and progressive, developed society.

The ability to discern facts from fiction and take logical, unbiased decisions, innovate in challenging situations is what makes a country's citizens invaluable to its progress. In fact, this forms the crux of a civilized, informed, resilient and progressive society. Empowered citizens possessing critical thinking skills can help their country innovate, adapt and successfully deal with complex challenges while marching forward on its path to a developed society. Critical thinking skills are indispensable in all fields of life and hence need to be fostered among one and all. Developing critical thinking skills are like muscle development, *the more you exercise the stronger they become*. Training one's mind to think critically is something that does not happen overnight but requires dedicated mental activities and can be developed only over time, with time and hard work. Fostering critical thinking skills requires providing suitable situations conducive to development of requisite mental faculties. Critical thinking skills can be developed among the individuals through designing and implementing appropriate educational practices. This in turn calls for curriculum changes which can provide ample learning opportunities to individuals to develop and train their minds to think critically. Traditionally, the Indian education system has relied heavily on rote memorization thereby limiting the student's ability to analyze, evaluate and think logically to create new ideas and build new knowledge bases. Now is the time to shift the focus to a more holistic approach which relies on fostering critical thinking skills and develop more wholesome, productive citizens.

Curricular reforms are pivotal to ushering in an era of educational practices focussed on conceptual clarity which encourages learners to hone their analytical and problem-solving skills and apply the acquired knowledge in real life situations. Such reforms would eventually result in the creation of a highly skilled, efficient, productive workforce which can then contribute towards nation building in a more effective manner. The vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 can truly be fulfilled when we have such a

workforce. Citizens with critical thinking skills are harbingers of a more progressive, prosperous and peaceful society. Becoming a Vishwaguru also necessitates fostering critical thinking abilities among the younger generations. The dream of transforming India into Atma Nirbhar Viksit Bharat (self-reliant and developed nation) can be realized by steering the national educational goals towards adopting a more holistic approach with critical thinking skills at its core. NEP 2020 is a huge step in this direction.

Now that as a nation we are all geared up to bring to fruition the dream of a *Viksit Atma Nirbhar Bharat* by 2047, when India will be proudly celebrating its 100th year of independence, we need to let educational (curricular) reforms take the lead. Education forms the bedrock of any nation's progress and we as a nation collectively, need to prioritize curricular reforms on a war footing if we are to empower all Indians, foster inclusive growth, and equip all citizens to successfully meet the global challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Students with strong problem-solving abilities can efficaciously handle tricky situations and academic challenges. Furthermore, just because we have technology and algorithms, complex problems won't be readily solved in the future. In the age of artificial intelligence in the workplace, managers and employees will need to be more creative and adaptable than ever before. A comprehensive strategy that prioritises moral and ethical education in addition to academic achievement is required for the educational transformation that will lead to Viksit Bharat@2047. Rapid worldwide transformation presents difficulties that call for proactive steps to close knowledge gaps and promote interdisciplinary cooperation. To effectively address modern concerns, it is essential to foster creativity and a sense of responsibility in pupils.

The National Education Policy, NEP 2020, encourages critical thinking and problem-solving abilities while fostering pupils' creative potential. The goal of the National Education Policy is to create Viksit Bharat by preparing people who are not only knowledgeable and talented but also have cognitive abilities, timeless Indian knowledge, and ideals. In accordance with industry demands, the strategy is to disseminate scientific knowledge, cultivate an individual's personality for reskilling and upskilling, and create new opportunities in the future. By reducing curriculum load, integrating arts and vocational education, emphasising holistic development and 21st-century skills, and moving away

from rote learning and towards experiential and inquiry-based learning, NEP 2020 encourages critical thinking through curricular reforms. NEP 2020 is merely the first initiative in the direction of a *shikshit* Viksit Bharat @2047, we have many more milestones to reach, many more challenges to overcome before 2047. Some of the key elements of NEP 2020 which are aimed to foster critical thinking are:

1. Shifting Focus to Experiential and Inquiry-Based Learning

- **Less Content, More Understanding:** The policy advocates for reducing the amount of content in the curriculum to allow for in-depth understanding and critical thinking rather than rote memorization.
- **Experiential Learning:** NEP 2020 emphasizes experiential learning, where students engage in real-world problems and projects, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Inquiry-Based Learning:** The policy encourages teachers to facilitate inquiry-based learning, where students explore concepts and develop their own understanding through questioning and investigation.

2. Integrating Arts, Sports, and Vocational Education

- **Holistic Development:** NEP 2020 aims for holistic development, integrating arts, sports, and vocational education into the curriculum to promote various skills and abilities, including critical thinking.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The policy encourages an interdisciplinary approach to learning, where students can connect knowledge from different subjects and apply it to real-world problems, fostering critical thinking.

3. Emphasizing 21st-Century Skills

- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** NEP 2020 highlights the importance of developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills, which are crucial for success in the 21st century.
- **Creativity and Innovation:** The policy encourages creativity and innovation, promoting students to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions to challenges.

4. Assessment Reforms

- **Competency-Based Assessment:** NEP 2020 emphasizes competency-based assessment, which focuses on assessing students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, rather than just rote memorization.
- **Formative and Summative Assessments:** The policy promotes both formative and summative assessments, allowing for continuous feedback and improvement in learning.
- **Digital Assessments:** NEP 2020 encourages the use of digital assessments to evaluate students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

5. Teacher Development

- **Continuous Professional Development:** NEP 2020 emphasizes the need for continuous professional development for teachers, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to foster critical thinking in their students.
- **Facilitators, Not Just Instructors:** The policy encourages teachers to act as facilitators, guiding students in their learning process and helping them develop their critical thinking skills.

Curricular reforms can go a long way in nurturing critical thinking skills among the students by adopting varied teaching practices into their teaching learning situations. A paradigm shift from rote learning to active learning, promoting discussion, debate and collaborative problem solving, encouraging case studies, project based learning, experiential learning, brainstorming, anticipatory thinking activities, crosswords and puzzles, riddles, decision making based mental exercises, focussing on self-reflection and implementing new innovative assessment methods are some measures that ought to be incorporated as part of curricular reforms to make the education system more holistic and progressive. This integration of real world-based learning activities into the learner curriculum will definitely help foster critical thinking skills among the learners.

The policymakers at the highest level and all other stakeholders must champion the promotion of new innovative curriculum designs aimed at fostering critical thinking skills among the learners. This exercise should not be limited to only school going children but also be extended to the higher education level with special focus on teacher education programmes. Since the onus of ultimately implementing the new curriculum will also lie with teachers, they should also be mentally trained to

think critically and learn and incorporate practices which will enhance critical thinking skills among their learners.

