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NEP – 2020: CHALLENGES AHEAD OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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In our constitution, Education is in the concurrent list which expects equal responsibility of both the Central and State Governments. In the post independent era, the National Governments appointed several Committees and Commissions on Education. On the basis of recommendations made by these Committees and Commissions, perspective plans for Education have been formulated. In that direction, the Policy of 1968 which is the outcome of Kothari Commission Report is a land mark in the history of Indian Education. Subsequently, it was in the year 1986 that a New Education Policy was placed before the Nation, and in the year 1992 a Programme of Action has been worked out. After almost 30 years, recently Government of India came out with a policy on Education namely National Education Policy – 2020 (NEP-2020).

The NEP-2020 is a unique policy which emerged out of the deliberations from grass-root level (Panchayats) to the National Bodies including various organizations, social groups, associations and the representatives of Civil Societies. As such, the policy is free from hidden political agenda, public criticism and inconsistencies etc.

The Drafting Committee constituted by Ministry of Human Resource Development, corroborating the inputs received from different quarters of the society, prepared a draft policy document. This draft policy document is now made available in public domain. Different organizations, academic institutions and NGOs organized seminars, symposia and conferences on different areas of education included in the draft document. Upon receiving the opinions and outcome of discussions that took place across the country, the Committee finalized the policy. The same has since been approved by the Union Cabinet.

The policy has some salient features. It is coherent, consistent and comprehensive which addresses the needs and requirements of the future society besides enabling each individual to emerge themselves as complete human beings. In addition to the above, the policy is based on the cultural and moral fabric of our great Nation. The Policy includes the broad strategies of implementation with a timeline, clearly stating expected outcomes at each stage of Education. This will enable the planners and practitioners of Education to work out the implementation strategies more scientifically.

This is for the first time in the history of independent India that not only the Central Government has involved the society at large in the making of the policy, but also His / Her Excellencies, the President of India and Governors of different states initiated online consultations about the salient features of the policy along with modalities for its implementation. Further, it is no less astonishing to observe the Hon'ble Prime Minister addressing the Nation about the NEP-2020 and also taking part in several online consultative meetings. This proactive initiative from the Central Government is a positive nod for its implementation in the country in its right spirit.

Now, based on the NEP-2020 postulations, it is left to the Central and State Governments to work out the Programme of Action keeping in view the socio-economic and educational scenario of the Nation / given State.

Implementation of the Policy keeping in view the timeline on one hand and ensuring the realization of learning outcomes at each level of education on the other will throw a big challenge to the states. The success of such a well formulated policy depends upon the collaborative efforts of the Central and State Governments, because the implementation of NEP-2020 requires huge investments. No State in the country can afford to meet such a quantum of money from their own budgetary provisions. Further, there is a need to augment the physical and human resources which again is a herculean task for the States.

In order to ensure the effective implementation of NEP-2020 both the Central and State Governments should work in tandem with utmost coordination. This requires political will along with liberal, constructive approach from the bureaucracy, besides professional competency combined with commitment and accountability from among the academicians.

The present National Policy on Education-2020 covers entire gamut of Education beginning from early childhood care education to the advanced level of research. Prior to this policy, the Nation adopted 10+2+3 system for all most five decades. Accordingly, institutional structures were developed. In this policy, the school education is restructured as 5+3+3+4+3 or 4 which means the period of schooling gets extended from the existing 12 years to 15 years. It implies that the State Governments should provide infrastructural and human resources required for adding one class, every year for three years. This measure involves huge investments. For any state budget, adding one more class per year for three years will be a huge burden while meeting the expenditure involved in administering the present school structure.

The new policy suggests restructured ladder for School Education i.e., 5+3+3+4, different from the present structure of 10+2. In view of the change in the structure, from next year onwards schooling will be extended from the present 12 to 15 years. This change requires three years of extended schooling in all our schools which in turn requires huge investments in terms of human resources and infrastructural facilities. But the policy suggests that the services of Anganwadi workers may be utilized. In practice, Anganwadi workers are expected to address the health, nutritional and educational needs of young children, pregnant and lactate mothers. As these workers are not trained, and since ECCE expects certain learning outcomes, as such a new contingent of trained teachers along with supporting staff are to be appointed. In addition to the staff, existing school infrastructure is to be augmented. Also, play and creative activity materials are to be provided. Therefore, Central Government should come in a long way to support the State Governments.

In the policy, expected learning outcomes at the end of the first three years of schooling is clearly spelt out. Unless the system provides the trained teachers along with other material facilities simply extending the schooling by three years and depending on existing Anganwadi workers does not serve the purpose.

Therefore, the Central Government should liberally extend financial support to the states to ensure the effective implementation of this particular recommendation of the policy i.e., three years pre-school education.

Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi propounded new education "Nai Talim" for our country to replace the then existing alien system which we inherited from the British rulers. Gandhiji's education centered around a 'craft' which is expected to enable the child to earn their bread and butter. Keeping in view, his ideas on education, in post independent India Educational Planners proposed Vocational Education as part of secondary and senior secondary education. But, unfortunately due to various reasons including 'social taboo', that manual work is considered to be inferior and parents prefer that their wards be away from manual / vocational education. As such though a number of initiatives were made, vocational education at secondary level could not take off. In view of the disturbing past experience the present policy delineated in detail the need for vocationalization of secondary education. For effective implementation the present policy advocates vocational education as an integral part of secondary education. The description in the policy about vocationalization indicates the necessity of

vocationalization of secondary education. In order to realize the policy expectations on vocationalization the entire school should undergo transformation. Also in order to make vocationalization as an integral part of school education required infrastructure is to be created. Well qualified and trained vocational education teachers are to be appointed. In addition to the above, vocationalization of education requires huge amounts as recurring cost.

NEP-2020 suggests radical transformation in the existing Higher Education sector. The policy proposes giving absolute autonomy to the well established under graduate colleges, where in they can choose what is to be taught and also can award the degrees. Thereby the existing practice of 'affiliation' system will be abolished. Further, the policy proposes freedom to the student who can choose the subjects of study. It means the undergraduate colleges continue to exist, should offer the subjects across different disciplines. The major challenge before the states is to upgrade all its degree colleges to the level where these institutions can fulfil the expectations of the policy. Another issue is shutting down thousands of ill-equipped colleges under private sector, which entails overcoming legal complications involved in it.

On the whole, to move in the direction of realizing the expected reforms at this level of education prescribed in the policy among 2,000 odd Government and Government aided degree colleges in Telangana is a challenge for the Government.

NEP-2020 strongly advocates the conversion of all the existing universities into multi-disciplinary universities. It means all programmes across different disciplines of knowledge except Medicine and Law should be made available on one campus. Historically, the Nation followed the same principle throughout. But, since 80's a new trend emerged in Higher Education, establishing exclusive faculty-based universities, such as exclusive University for Engineering, Languages, Agriculture etc. Now, in view of the recommendation of the new policy, if all such faculty-based universities are to be made as multi-disciplinary universities, it will be a gigantic task for the states, that too in the stipulated time period.

The new policy has set well defined goals for research and other allied areas of education. To realize the expected outcomes of this policy requires restructuring the existing institutional structures, clearly defining the role of both State and Central Governments. Merely assigning the ends in the policy, does not make much difference unless the partnership between Central and State Governments is well-articulated along with a policy for smooth flow of funds, etc.

Finally, the implementation of NEP-2020 ultimately depends upon the following salient aspects

- There should be a well-defined partnership between Central and State Governments.
- There should be a well-defined and mutually acceptable procedure for the flow of funds.
- There is an immediate need to increase the budgetary provision for education by both the State and Central Governments.
- Very often Central Government launches several initiatives in education under centrally sponsored schemes, usually for a plan period. Subsequently, the states should take over it. By the time the programme is launched, the plan period comes to an end. Therefore, no benefit will accrue out of such initiatives. Any programme that the Central Government wants to launch should be done by taking the States into confidence and continue to take the responsibility of supporting them continuously thereafter.
- Both the State and Central Governments should evolve mutually acceptable policy of preparing and empowering teachers at all levels of education. Otherwise, with the present substandard teacher preparation programmes and the gaps existing among different stages of education, persist to continue, nothing different can be expected in the system.
- There is an urgent need to come out with a well-defined policy for the Nation to prescribe and ensure its adherence by all the teachers at all levels of education. Such a policy should include
 - i. Professional code of conduct
 - ii. Accountability

- iii. Continuous upgradation of professional competencies
- iv. Professional upward mobility linked with their performance
- b. Autonomy vis-à-vis commitment and performance
 - Initiating required modifications in the State / Central acts pertaining to education to overcome litigation that may arise out of implementing the existing policy.
 - Creating an independent body with autonomy, outside bureaucratic structure to oversee the educational scenario and its functioning to identify the best practices, innovations etc. along with the gaps at different stages and to suggest measures to address and overcome them. If any good practices are identified, such practices are to be replicated in other states and facilitate them to adopt and practice.
 - Necessary care needs to be taken particularly while appointing the persons to manage the system at different levels and should be based on the candidates professional competencies and commitment to the system, overcoming all other considerations with which the present system is crippled with.

