



MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of minds to think." (Albert Einstein)

ABSTRACT

On July 29th, 2020, the Indian Education System noticed a landmark decision made by the Union Cabinet, Government of India. On this day, the Ministry of Education announced a paradigm shift in the educational system under the National Education Policy 2020. Education policies are usually revised and modified every few decades. The first came in 1968, the second in 1986 and the third reformation of the Indian education system was seen after three decades in 2020. This research paper will try to focus on NEP-2020 as the inclusive, participatory, multidisciplinary and holistic approach that aims to transform the existing educational policies. This paper also takes into consideration the challenges and huge amount of resources required to implement the NEP-2020 on ground level.

Keywords: *Indianness, NEP- 2020, paradigm shift, multidisciplinary, holistic, glocal, mother tongue, digital learning etc.*

INTRODUCTION

To many of us, 'Education' simply refers to a process of acquisition of bookish knowledge or cognitive learning. Often, we forget to lay enough emphasis on 'multidisciplinary and holistic approaches' which are fundamentals and blueprint to a constructive education in today's scenario and futuristic developments as well. At the outset, we have to distinguish the main and secondary/tertiary purpose of education. Knowingly or unknowingly our education system before NEP-2020 focused on rote learning, teacher-centric and getting jobs only

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strategy instead of creating good and humanitarian scholars, scientist, intellectuals, historians etc. That is why we have created untrained, unskilled and unprofessional teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, researchers, to name but a few, in large numbers. They have been destroying the real ethos of education and national integration as well.

The real aim of education transcends from such type of trivial matters. The main purpose of education is to make us an enlightened, holistic and gentle person first and to see the unseen phenomena across the globe. To fulfill these challenges and criteria, the Government of India has launched National Education Policy in 2020 and emphasized its multidisciplinary and holistic approaches in Indian education system. More importantly, the previous national education policy was adopted by the Government of India in 1986. So, it has taken almost 34 long years to change and adapt the system as per the current and futuristic needs and challenges. NEP-2020 seeks and envisions the following key changes to the current education system. To name but a few:

- i. Multidisciplinary universities and HEIs that focus medium of instructions in mother tongue/Indian languages.
- ii. Faculty and institutional autonomy.
- iii. Drastic change in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and student support system.
- iv. Establishment of a National Research Foundation.
- v. "Light but tight" regulation.
- vi. Access, equity and inclusion in HEIs.
- vii. Teacher's training.
- viii. Reimagining vocational and skill based education.
- ix. Focusing on quality academic research in all fields.
- x. Online and digital education etc.

These are some of the very promising challenges of this vision document. But this essay especially throws the light on its one of the basic features i.e. multidisciplinary and holistic approaches in education. NEP 2020 or we can say 'The Vision Document of 2020' insist its multidisciplinary and holistic approaches in education in this manner:

India has a long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning, from universities such as Taxila and Nalanda, to the extensive literatures of India combining subjects across fields. Ancient Indian literary works such as Banabhatta's Kadambari described a good education as knowledge of the 64 Kalaas or arts; and among these 64 'arts' were not only subjects, such as singing and painting, but also 'scientific' fields, such as chemistry and mathematics, 'vocational' fields such as carpentry and clothes-making, 'professional' fields, such as medicine and engineering, as well as 'soft skills' such as communication, discussion, and debate.

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Thus, it can be said that we have a very long and ancient tradition of multidisciplinary and holistic approaches in education. There have been Gurukuls, Ashrams, Pathshalas and Maktabas which focused on cognitive, physical, moral and spiritual aspects of life supplemented with dozens of skills and abilities such as horse riding and archery. Since time immemorial, our ancient education system evolved and insisted on the holistic development of the individual by taking care of both the inner and outer self. It emphasized on values such as humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance and respect for all creations. Students were taught to appreciate the balance between human beings and ecology. Teaching and learning followed the tenets of the scriptures fulfilling duties towards self, family and society, thus encompassing all aspects of life. Education system focused both on learning and physical development. In other words, the emphasis was on healthy mind and healthy body. You can see that education in India has a heritage of being pragmatic, achievable and complementary to life. Aryabhata, Panini, Katyayana and Patanjali are the best examples of it.

Taking care of our ancient and rich culture, the Government of India has also reimagined and reintroduced National Education Policy in 2020 after 34 long years. Its curriculum, pedagogy, assessment etc. have been designed as per current and futuristic needs focusing on 'Indianness' and 'glocal' phenomena in every aspect. 'Multidisciplinary' and 'holistic' are the two key words interrelated with each other and need to be discussed here in this essay. 'Multidisciplinary' or, in a broader term, we can say 'transdisciplinary' simply refers to more than one discipline or field of study such as students can choose science, commerce and humanities for their studies at the same time along with their vocational training, skill based trainings and other extracurricular activities as well. The second key word 'holistic' implies towards an education system having comprehensive approach to teaching-learning process where educators seek to address the social, moral, psychological and academic needs of learners in an integrated learning format.

As per the vision and mission of NEP 2020, a holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings i.e. intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. Such a holistic education shall be, in the long term, the approach of all undergraduate programmes, including those in professional, technical, and vocational disciplines.

While reading the draft and imagining a society full of knowledge, capabilities, skills, and ethics, to name but a few, we remember a very famous line of William Shakespeare, "All that

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glitters is not gold.” Undoubtedly the draft of NEP 2020 is very fascinating, visionary and ideal yet it needs huge machinery, money, infrastructure and systematic and continuous monitoring to fulfill these criteria. We have been using just 3.1% of total GDP on our education system; our infrastructure is not upto the mark; teachers are not well trained; lack of awareness of digital education in rural areas; colleges don't have smart class rooms and labs; lack of universities and colleges; one University manages hundreds and in some cases thousands of colleges and covering several districts etc. In this sense, the proverb seems very relevant and meaningful, “A hungry man can't focus on any work until hunger is satisfied.” The intent of the policy and purpose of Demonetization might not be bad but it was an utter failure as the black money increased in manifolds. We also remember the horror of the sudden Corona Lockdown and lack of oxygen. In a nutshell, a good policy is that which achieves at least half of the target goal and sustain it for a long period of time. Even very good policies fails because of incompetence, corruption, lack of resources and bad governance. We, as a citizen of India, are hoping against the hope that this policy will achieve all that necessary for a developed/enlightened nation and it will bring positive and constructive changes in our education system and society as well.

Lastly, if we summarize the real intent and purpose of the draft of NEP 2020 in just one paragraph, it would be that the real aim of education does not mean to memorize facts and figures or getting certificates with good marks only for whatever post or job you will have in the future but also to open your heart and mind critically to some of the novel ways of thinking, specialization in various fields and holistic development. Education is not about how many facts you can learn, but how you use your knowledge to solve the real world problems. The education reformer John Dewey encapsulated education rather nicely, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” John Milton, a well known poet and scholar, very beautifully puts forward his ideas regarding the real ethos of education which also resonates with the main idea and intent of NEP 2020 as well, “Education always carries a holy purpose to fit a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.”

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