Concerns for New Education Policy 2015

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Abstract

National Education Policy formulated in 1986 by government of India has become irrelevant. In view of the paradigm shift in national perspective and societal processes, a number of concerns are raising their heads. For evolving a relevant and effective national policy, through national level debate on 33 themes (20 themes relating to higher education), the government's venture in designing a policy which truly represents Indian realities is notable. In the present article, an attempt has been made to critically examine issues in higher education pertaining to 20 themes. Suggested concerns for education policy cover varied aspects of grassroots of India.

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Introduction

For Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, education is backbone of society and is largely responsible for its upliftment. Jawaharlal Nehru has accepted education as the most important means to social change. Political thinkers and educational philosophers admit that it is not possible to establish a democratic society without an adequate and suitable system of education. Nehru said that only through right education can a better order of society be built up. The secret of development of any nation lies not in acquisition of material wealth and rapid rise in economic indicators, but in the development of human resource. A renowned economist, Rensis Nurkse has rightly remarked that a nation is poor because it is poor. Developed manpower has the capacity to generate resources and to develop new methods of making life comfortable and peaceful. True education empowers a person with knowledge, skills and values, which help him to live life with dignity and happiness. According to International Commission on Education, the aim of education is to transform a person into a „complete man‟. It brings out perfect integration of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual capabilities of a person. Such person forms the building block of a prosperous society and peaceful world.

Today, unfortunately, the Indian system of education, elephantine in size and gargantuan in unproductive expenditure, is at the crossroads as a large number of educational institutions are imparting low quality education. A question generally asked is - has our education system met the aspirations of emerging society? The answer is big NO. According to Sri Sathya Sai Baba - "The education system of a country is the bank on which the nation draws a cheque whenever it requires strong, reliable and skilled workers. If it goes bankrupt, as ours has very nearly gone today, it is a national disaster". Many share the view that overall academic standards seem to be deteriorating and prospects are discouraging. The failure of the system is also attributed to perennial shortage of funds; inflexible academic structures with antiquated examination system, resistance to change, activism on campuses, highly politicised and bureaucratised systems of management, the distancing of the universities from society and a sagging work ethos.

Factually speaking, the literate persons are creating more problems than the illiterate ones. Discipline has almost totally declined among students. National character is at discount. Who is responsible for this all? It is wrong to blame the students alone. In homes, the parents are responsible; in schools and colleges, the teachers; and outside, the governments which have failed to provide a proper system of education.

Purpose of Education

Education must result into increased knowledge, skill development and character building. In our education the last two are missing. There are three main components of knowledge required for achieving human excellence: theoretical knowledge for broadening the understanding of a subject, practical knowledge dealing with the experience of a person in executing a task, and self-knowledge for understanding oneself. A person cannot be called educated person if he does not possess adequate skills for earning his livelihood. It is really an incomplete education that a person lacks respect for work and necessary acumen to perform it. The end of education is character. Mahatma Gandhi once said, „Knowledge without character is a powerful evil". For many people character carried different meanings in different situations. It is again due to „mis-education".

The basic purpose of higher education is to provide trained manpower in different areas of societal needs. It is the repository of knowledge and instrument of change through people for the good of the society. According to NPE - 1986, "higher education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialised knowledge and skills. It is, therefore, a crucial factor for survival. Higher education has made a substantial contribution to the development of modern technology leading to high food production, industrial development, and revolution in communication technology and advent of life-saving medical techniques. But, it is said that it has not paid the society the due dividend. Its successes are shrouded in silence and failures spotlighted in notoriety.

The poor quality of education, reflected in low learning levels, in India and other South Asian countries traps many young people in poverty and prevents faster economic growth and shared prosperity, the World Bank (2015). The report recommends a multi-pronged strategy that includes initiatives outside the education sector to address the challenge. Some of these include ensuring young children get enough nutrition or investing in early life nutrition, and raising the quality of

teachers, which is also a key concern in India. It also suggests bringing more private investment to the sector and improved measurement of education outcome.

Trends in Education

UNESCO points out three important world wide trends - enormous quantitative expansion which has nonetheless not led to increased equality of access and has not resulted in a proportionately large production of engineers and scientists; inadequate diversification of institutions and academic programmes that do not comply with minimum standards and have not led to significant educational innovations; and expansion in an increasingly constrained financial environment, where per student spending has not kept pace with the growing number of students.

The Indian Higher Education system has rapidly grown both in size and accessibility after independence. It has emerged as the largest educational system in the world with more than 725 university level institutions and more than 37000 colleges with 300 lac students as against 19 universities and 636 colleges with 2.56 lac students in 1947. It is beset with serious problems like mushroom growth of institutions, anxiety and perplexity, discontent and indiscipline, purposelessness and disobedience, violence and perversion, etc. In terms of efficiency, productivity and utilization of resources, they have completely broken down. A vicious cycle of declining academic standards has eclipsed higher education. As a result of it, the whole system seems to be beyond redemption.

A glance at the contemporary trends in economic development at the national and international levels, reveals the fact that India of 2020 will have huge business potential, varied employment opportunities and a strong pool of talent. A wide range developments in various sectors such as multi-media, information super highways, digital libraries, open learning resources and resource based networks have brought industry, society and educational institutions closer in an urge to achieve their respective objectives. Institutions will have to think globally and act locally. The nation has to prepare itself for providing skilled and trainable manpower, which could efficiently operate, maintain and repair the new systems.

The skills must be substantiated by certain human values such as dignity of labour, integrity, commitment, hard work, patriotism, scientific temper, egalitarianism, equity, ceiling on desires, etc. UNESCO‟s Report Learning: The Treasure Within (1996) has rightly observed the need for education which might make it possible to avoid conflicts or resolve them peacefully by developing a respect for other people, their cultures and their spiritual values. It emphasises on education, which shall have to focus on such aspects as the emerging high-tech organization, adjustment issues requiring new types of behavioural skills than even the intellectual skills.

The evolvement of higher education system relevant to our needs requires strong political will, unfathomable social support and unshakeable individual dedication. A multi-dimensional strategy is required both in „content‟ and „conduct‟ of education. The deliverers of education namely - teachers, parents, government, social reformers, politicians, etc. have to jointly select and agree upon the contents of education and select an approach suited to the requirements of the rising generation and future India. Higher Education system can be made more productive and responsive to societal needs if it is managed on the principles which have led to achieving excellence in many

industrial and non-profit organizations. Different commissions and committees constituted for improving education system in the country have stressed the evolvement of organizational system and management practices based on contemporary societal environment and requirements.

The future belongs to those educational institutions which would establish close link with societal aspirations and requirements, and develop required skills. In the wake of changing technology, institutions have to stress on trainability component which means the initial capability to handle new technology. It involves improvement in reasoning, cognitive abilities, scientific aptitude, appropriate language, communication skills, inter-personal skills and self-discipline.

Today the higher education seems to have gone out of track as it is moving towards certain directions which do not help it to accomplish its goals. Some of the distracting factors are:

1. Widening gap between the demand for specific skills and the skills being produced by the institutions of higher learning. The development in science and technology has necessitated adoption of flexible approach in revising the contents of education but the change is not being incorporated in that spirit.

2. Education is being treated as overhead and not as an investment which has resulted into low quality education for want of necessary infrastructure and expertise.

3. The objectives stipulated for higher education particularly promotion of humane and scientific temper and an egalitarian society, freedom of thought, expression, etc. have assumed back seat while greed, communalism, superstitions, etc. have dominated higher education activities.

4. The higher education institutions have failed to achieve quality, efficiency and effectiveness in their management.

5. Vices like malfunctioning, politicking and indiscipline have become the norm of their functioning.

6. With the increasing stress on privatization of higher education, only privileged section of the society is being benefited at the cost of poor and under privileged ones. This has given rise to elitist type of education.

7. Quantitative expansion in the enrolment as well as institutions without clear cut vision and planning is further hampering the quality of education due to increase in the students, teachers ratio as well as decline in the per head availability of educational facilities to the students.

8. The rigidity in the institutional structure as well as policy has further deepened the crisis as higher education is unable to incorporate the changing knowledge and experiences in their structure and curriculum.

9. There is over stress on quantitative accomplishments rather than qualitative change affected by the institutions.

10. Educational institutions lack the basic working ethos and values which form the life blood of any institution. There is a wide spread crisis of certain values like commitment, discipline, sincerity, social concern, etc.

11. Intellectual capital produced by higher education has less potential to be converted into economic capital. As a result most of the research is not producing any tangible impact.

12. Despite the fact that general higher education is producing more unemployment there is clamour for opening more and more such institutions. Which creates illusion that higher education is fulfilling its purposes.

13. Vocationalisation is the need of the hour but this concept has not been concretised in its true spirit.

14. The higher education which expected to solve the problems of society and improve its quality of life to establish interactive relationship through extension and research activities have lacked behind.

15. The present system is becoming more delivery centred rather than learner centre which makes it irrelevant in terms of availing employment opportunities and facing the challenges of modern age.

The Solution

The National Educational Policy was formulated in 1986 and further modified in 1992 has become ineffective so as to cope with the emerging requirements. Realising the urgency for its revamping, the government of India has initiated the process of formulating a new policy which meets the changing dynamics of the population's requirement with regards to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry. It has initiated the consultation process involving all stakeholders starting from the Gram Panchayats. New Education Policy is expected to be finalised by December 2015. Suggestions are being invited on 33 themes - 13 relating to School Education and 20 to Higher Education. This is the first time that the Government is embarking on a time-bound grassroots consultative process to this extent.

While talking about the higher education sector, there is need for paradigm shift in various aspects. In the following pages, an attempt has been made to highlight various concerns under the 20 themes earmarked for higher education:

1.   Governance Reforms for Quality

Most of the higher educational institutions are functioning without well-defined, shared and accepted vision and goals. Stakeholders are hardly involved in developing vision of the institution. The situation becomes precarious when it is observed that the institutional goals do not match with the aspirations of stakeholders. There has to be a perfect congruence between aims and goals of institutions and objectives of stakeholders. There is a widely known crisis of appointment of

educational leaders like vice chancellors, chairmen of various councils, members of national level committees, etc. Appointments are made not on merit but on the basis of considerations other than merit. As is the leader so is the effectiveness of the institutions. For improving quality of governance, it is suggested that a mechanism may be developed wherein the stakeholders" views are also given weightage. Besides, all the educational administrators must be imparted relevant training. There is also a need for standardisation of rules and regulations for the effective working of the administrators.

2. Ranking of Institutions and Accreditation

After reviewing the Indian conditions and requirements, we should identify quality parameters which are comparable with International standards. Some parameters may not be realised in Indian situation, hence, we may have to evolve our own region-specific ranking parameters. At present we have only two assessment and accreditation agencies, namely National Assessment & Accreditation Council and National Board of Accreditation which are not able to meet the demand for accreditation. Hence, there is a need for setting up of more agencies. And also that all the accreditation agencies should also be accredited. Further, the parameters for assessment should be made more transparent and objective.

3. Improving the Quality of Regulation

The tragedy in the regulation of higher education is that in certain areas it is over administered and in other areas it is laissez-faire. There is tendency on the part of Ministry of Human Resource Development and also of UGC to centralise the regulation of higher educational institutions. The recent example is that of developing uniform curriculum for various courses for all colleges and universities. Where is the autonomy of the universities and also the freedom to design courses for catering to the needs of specific region and realise their specific visions. Many institutions overlook the defined regulations. There seems to be a need for effective regulation of education in the country for which a regularity body like SEBI may be set up. This regulatory body would be required to conduct regular audit of educational institutions regarding their compliance with the regulations.

4. Pace setting Roles of Central Institutions

Central educational institutions should emerge as model institutions in teaching, research and extension. They should focus hitherto on the study of neglected areas such as endangered cultures, languages , tribes, women, children, differently- abled persons, human rights, fine arts, literature and many more areas of study which are generally neglected in the market economy of education, etc. The central educational institutions should be required to develop certain distinct areas of research and innovation depending upon their competitive and location advantage.

5. Improving State Public Universities

There is a great challenge for policy-makers to develop a mechanism for improving the plight of state universities. Due to political interference and bureaucratic dominance, the state universities have become the victims of external forces making them truly handicapped. The quality of

recruitments of vice chancellors, teachers and non-teaching staff is diluted by the political power, money power and other corrupt practices. There is need to protect these institutions from the clutches of external forces and provide them adequate autonomy to stand shoulder to shoulder with the national level institutions. The first step in this direction should be providing statutory funding to the public Universities so that they do not beg for funds from the state governments. Free these institutions from political party based elections. For providing participation in the academic and administrative processes of the institution, the recommendations of Lingdoh Committee may be followed.

6. Integrating Skill Development in Higher Education

For empowering the students to seek jobs or establish own enterprise, it is important that the skills of the students are also developed simultaneously. With the new initiatives of establishing Kaushal Kendras, B.Voc Centres and Community Colleges, the government of India has set a direction to higher education in the country. The New Education Policy should make it compulsory for all students to spend predetermined time in the society i.e. rural areas, slums, urban areas, etc. and study life of people and contribute in solving their problems. Important issues related with skill-development are training of teachers so that they use the pedagogy which develops skills in true spirit. The universities have to shoulder the responsibility of developing region specific skill-based courses also.

7. Promoting Open and Distance learning and Online Courses

With digital india initiative, there is much hope that the potential learners will have huge scope for learning. A good number of quality institutions in the country have taken initiative of developing MOOCs/ OERs. With minimum possible cost, the learner has started getting learning resources at their ease. The online /MOOCs have to cover learners from all sections of the society including artisans, carpenters, masons, farmers, craftsmen, service providers of different types and so on

8. Opportunities for Technology enabled Learning

Education policy has to be such that it provides opportunities to the learner to have access to simple, easy and cheap technology for learning resources. Educational institutions should develop relevant e-contents which are easily available to common man enabling them to enhance their knowledge and skills.

9. Addressing Regional Disparity

Establishment of national level institutions in various parts of the country should be based on objective criteria. In any case, the concentration of higher education institutions in few regions should be discouraged. There should be a provision for setting up of quality institutions in different regions so that they act as light house for other educational institutions in the region

10.   Bridging Gender and Social Gaps

The Socially disadvantaged groups should be made aware of various concessions available for enhancing their knowledge and skills. The focus has to be on inclusive education.

11.   Linking Higher Education to Society

Every institution of higher education should have a community development cell to work in close collaboration with community. Research problems should focus at societal requirements. Community work should be integral part of curriculum. The students should be required to work in society. Traditional vocational trades and indigenous knowledge must be scientifically studied and used for supporting the theoretical knowledge in relevant disciplines. Family based vocational skills needs encouragement, refinements and recognition in the form of certification, rewards, etc.

12.   Developing the Best Teachers

Regarding API score for promotion at College and University levels, drastic improvement is required. There is a need for developing proper, objective and quantifiable parameters for assessing the teaching and learning performance. While assessing the performance of a teacher, three-fourth weightage should be to teaching. Research, publications and participation on seminars, conferences, workshop etc. should not be given more than ten percent weightage. This will check rat race of attending seminars and producing low quality publications. The UGC should develop a pool of good teachers who could be invited for teaching in various institutions. Further, an objective and elaborate mechanism needs to be put in place for rewards and punishment.

13.   Sustaining Student Support Systems

Before the students are allowed to pursue higher studies, they must undergo some testing determining their deservedness for pursuing higher studies. Higher education should be open to only those who have required interest and knowledge base. Other students based on their aptitudes, may be given vocational education. This will lead to an empowered economy. Besides, in every course, there should be essential provision for personality development and skill development so that they become more confident and competent to handle challenges of future life.

14.   Promote Cultural Integration through Language

For strengthening national integration, teaching of Indian regional languages must be made compulsory in educational institutions and also for reaching masses more effectively, courses should be taught in the regional languages. However, the teaching of international language, i.e. English should simultaneously be encouraged. This would provide the Indian students an edge over Chinese and Japanese students in international market.

15.   Meaningful Partnership with the Private Sector

In India, businesses are attracted to establish educational institutions for profit purpose rather any philanthropic act. It has led to mushroom growth of low quality educational institutions. Contrary to the belief that educational institution established by industry would deliver better education has disillusioned. There remains a fact that only 20 % graduates coming out of technical institutions are directly usable. The participation of industry in education needs to be closely monitored for improving quality of education. This requires Involvement of Industry in the academic and administrative bodies of the Institutions of higher learning at different levels so that the input of industry could be effectively interwoven in the curriculum. An effective model of active Public-Private Partnership needs to be evolved.

16.   Financing Higher Education

It is interesting to watch that some institutions are flooded with funds and others are starving of bare minimum funds and facilities. This has brought the quality of education to very low level. As suggested by various Commissions and Committees on education, the Central Government should spend at least 6% of GDP on education and at least 2% percent on higher education. Similarly, the state governments should also be required to allocate some earmarked percent of budget on education. Subsidisation of education should be done only in those cases where the families cannot afford to spend on education. Those who can afford must pay full fee.

17.   Internationalization of Higher Education

While keeping the contents of courses relevant to the Indian realities, the education should be imparted in such a manner that students may compete at the international level. The quality of education should be such that the students have more mobility. The job opportunities are more at the international level because of the fact that the economies in developed world are developing fast but at the same time the population growth has slowed down or become stagnant. Some national level institutions like IIMs and IITs should be empowered to participate in international ranking and ensure good ranking.

18.   Engagement with Industry to link Education to Employability

It is important that the industry participates in the administrative and academic decision making in the institutions of higher learning. This will improve the quality of education. The question is how to do that. Some of the measures which may be included are (1) undertaking joint research projects in active collaboration with industry, (2) involvement of Industry in designing and execution of professional courses, (3) promoting co-supervision of research involving experts from the Industry, (4) exchange of faculty and experts between Industry and institutions of higher learning, (5) establishment of incubation centres with the active participation of industry, (6) sponsoring educational events, research and village adoption programmes, etc..

19.   Promoting Research and Innovation

For quality research, creation of research culture and providing liberal funding are the fundamental requirements. The policy must make it mandatory for national level and quality institutions to develop exclusive centres for research which may be developed as models of excellence for other institutions to emulate. Useful networks for collaborative research among various national and international institutions should be developed. An in-built mechanism may be developed wherein the good researches are promoted and suitably rewarded.

20.   New Knowledge

The educational institutions must be made proactive to the emerging streams of knowledge. This is possible if more autonomy is given to the educational institutions and the teachers. The teachers need autonomy to revise and upgrade course contents and to introduce the courses of their specialisation or expertise. Unfortunately much of the research knowledge remains non- teachable and becomes part of bounded theses and unopened CDs. The model curriculum provided by the UGC should be indicative only. Universities should have freedom to design their curriculum, of course, ensuring minimum level of compliance of UGC guidelines. Interactive workshops and conferences may be organised to identify new knowledge in different disciplines to promote appropriate means for providing new knowledge in teaching and learning.