NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

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Jointly prepared by Common Cause and its academic partner, CSDS, the report is a study of the trying working conditions of police personnel, their meagre resources and infrastructure, crime investigation, diversity, people-police contact and police violence. We interviewed about 12000 police personnel inside police stations or at their residences in 21 states as well as around another 11000 of their family members.

The SPIR 2019 studies the experiences of the police personnel and their attitudes towards incidents of crime, use of violence and torture, marginalised communities, juvenile delinquency and incidents of mob lynching.

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What is New in the New Education Policy?

We Must Debate Low Quality of Learning and Neglect of the Poor

A new education policy has been long overdue. Since the last policy came out in 1986, India has changed as an aspirational society, an emerging global economy and as a country with half its population under 25 years of age. It was keenly awaited from the BJP-led NDA government whose vision of education has been a subject of heated political debates.

NEP's release in July 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, passed off almost as a non-event. Unfortunately, it did not get the deserving attention even from the Opposition. Parliament had no time to hold rigorous debates due to the truncated monsoon session of just 18 days in which 25 important Bills were rushed amid stormy boycotts. The Question Hour was eliminated in both Houses while the Zero Hour, in which urgent public matters such as this are raised, was curtailed by half.

This issue of your journal covers NEP's aims and targets along with the gaps left uncovered, particularly against India's recurring challenges. We at Common Cause believe that social policies are the most important part of governance and they must be discussed and contested appropriately. All successful societies try to find ways to improve things for citizens but mere improvement cannot be the objective of a social policy: It has to look into the future generations and prepare them with knowledge, foresight and skills to deal with impending challenges. We have to move towards a 'learning society' where all citizens are enabled to get the education or training necessary to work, or to pursue their interests.

How Far Have We Travelled?

India's literacy rate has grown from around 18 per cent in 1951 to over 74 per cent in 2011. By 2010, over 96 per cent of India's children in the 6-14 year age group were enrolled in schools, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) but India's dropout rate remains unacceptably high. (The NEP document recognises that retaining children in schools is one of our biggest challenges.) India's high proportion of enrolments drops sharply for children above 15 years of age and worse for girls. The richest young women in India have already achieved full literacy, but if the present trend continues, the poorest are projected to do so only by 2080, according to the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011.

India's real problem lies in the neglect of the poorer children and its persistent low quality of education. For years, ASER surveys have been warning us of very low teaching-learning outcomes. The progress is more in terms of enrolments, construction of buildings, appointments of teachers, utilisation of grants etc. but not in terms of the quality of education. Sadly, the gap between better and worse performing states is huge, and widening. Niti Aayog's School Education Quality Index shows that the composite scores of the best performing states like Kerala (77.6) and Tamil Nadu (63.16) are more than twice as good as the worst performing states like Jharkhand (28.4), Bihar (30) and UP (32.8).

At this rate, the poorly performing states may take decades before they catch up with the rest. Meanwhile, some better performing states like Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra have slipped on vital outcome-based indicators. It is official that almost five crore children in elementary school do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills. This points to a severe learning crisis right from the foundational stage. The trend is loaded against girls as parents prefer to send boys to the more expensive private

schools, according to ASER 2019. All this, combined with limited capacities, inefficiencies, and very high levels of vacancies, leaves much to be desired.

Transformational or More of the Same?

The new policy aims to curtail dropout rates, redesign curriculum to include early care and education, launch targeted schemes for disadvantaged groups, and increase enrolments in higher education. By all means, a noble mission, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. For instance, it recommends that the public spending on education be raised to six per cent of the country's GDP. But the earlier two NEPs, in 1968 and 1986, also promised exactly the same percentage of national income for investment on education, of course, without fulfilling it. It remains to be seen if the dubious trend will be broken this time.

The most commendable part of NEP is its emphasis on mother tongue which could make early education more engaging, particularly for the disadvantaged children. It is well-known that language of instruction is the key to communication and comprehension in the classroom and it reduces dropout rates. "Instruction through a language that learners do not speak…is analogous to holding learners under water without teaching them how to swim," says a UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2004) titled "The Importance of Mother Tongue-Based Schooling for Education Quality." NEP promotes multilingualism and offers a three-language formula with a rider that no language will be imposed on any state.

The NEP starts with pre-school education at the Anganwadis and goes up to higher education and research while replacing the existing 10+2+3 system with 5+3+3+4. It seeks to hold examinations in grades 3, 5 and 8 and improve test material, scores and teachers' training. It will replace multiple regulators like the UGC, AICTE and NCTE with one Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to govern all institutions of higher education with the same set of norms and standards. It is to be seen if the new structure will actually change or only rejig the old system just as it renames the HRD Ministry back to the Ministry of Education.

The biggest criticism of the new policy is that it promotes private at the cost of the public sector at all levels of education. It singles out 'private philanthropies' along with 'voluntary community' without defining them or fixing norms of transparency and accountability for them. It also leaves ambiguity in the role of the state governments which have a pivotal role in delivering education as a service to the citizens. For instance, there is no clarity on the state government's directorates of education vis a vis the new regulators or on the implementation of the Right to Education Act.

While many critics see ideas like Indian ethos, culture or knowledge systems as euphemism for political agenda, it must be said that NEP talks about virtually everything right from scientific temper to fitness and from arts and sports to creativity, technology and gender sensitivity. If there is one thing missing in a flood of politically correct expressions, it is a roadmap. For instance, technology is a central feature of the policy but it fails to effectively address the country's digital divide which is evident in the times of Corona pandemic. We hope there will be scope for more deliberations, and course correction.

The issue covers all these questions and much more. Like always, your feedback will be vital for us.

Vipul Mudgal
Editor

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Salient Features of the New Policy Framework

The Union Cabinet of India approved the National Education Policy (NEP) on July 28, 2020 and it was unveiled by the Ministry of Education on July 30, 2020. The new policy framework replaces the 34-year-old National Policy on Education, framed in 1986. An aspirational document, NEP 2020, looks at overhauling the entire education structure, including its regulation and governance, keeping in mind a quickly-changing employment landscape and global ecosystem.

Here is a curated list of changes laid out in the policy document:

PHOTO CREDIT: Suresh K Pandey, Outlook

Students attending a class at a government school in Delhi's Rouse Avenue

What is the changed class system?

NEP 2020 suggests a 5+3+3+4 class system, as opposed to the current 10+2. In the 5+3+3+4 design, there will be the Foundational Stage (divided into two parts --- 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school and subsequent 2 years in primary school in Grades 1-2; together covering ages 3-8), Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18).

Flexibility has been made a key theme of the new education policy. Particularly in secondary school students are flexible to choose subjects in physical education, the arts and crafts, and vocational skills.

An interesting takeaway from NEP 2020 is that in secondary school education, boundaries will not be created between 'curricular,' 'extracurricular,' or 'co-curricular.' Hard lines will also not be drawn between 'arts', 'humanities', and 'sciences,' or between 'vocational' or 'academic' streams. In addition, subjects like physical education, the arts and crafts, and vocational skills will be part of the entire school curriculum, in addition to science, humanities, and mathematics.

Students at all levels will be taught contemporary subjects, including Artificial Intelligence, Design Thinking, Environmental Education, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), etc. Activities involving coding will be introduced in Middle Stage.

Why is there a debate around languages?

NEP 2020 says that "the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language." It goes on to add that thereafter, the home or local language shall continue to be taught as a language. This will be followed

Students sitting on the floor at a primary school in West Bengal

by both public and private schools.

Crucially, the policy offers flexibility in the three-language formula, stating that no language will be imposed on any state. States, regions, and of course the students themselves, will choose the three languages. But at least two of the three should be native Indian languages. Students will also be allowed to change one or more of the three languages they are studying in Grade 6 or 7.

In addition, an activity on 'The Languages of India,' sometime in Grades 6-8, will be held for students. High priority would be given to classical languages in addition to Sanskrit, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit. They will be offered as options for students in schools, possibly as online modules.

Sanskrit occupies a prominent space in the policy, and will be offered at all levels of school and higher education. The language will also be included as an option in the three-language formula.

Also, foreign languages will be offered at the secondary level, while Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardised across the country. The policy also says that national and state curriculum materials will be developed for students with hearing impairment.

What changes does the policy outline for the report card system?

The report card, referred to in the policy, as progress card, is a record of school-based assessment for students, communicated to parents by schools. States/UTs will be responsible for its makeover under guidance from the proposed National Assessment Centre, NCERT, and SCERTs. The

progress card will include self and peer assessment, along with teacher assessment. Artificial Intelligence-based software, based on learning data and interactive questionnaires for parents, students, and teachers could be used by students to help track their growth in school, and will offer them information on their strengths, areas of interest, and on areas needing extra attention.

Will board exams be less taxing for students now?

The policy decries the coaching class system and the emphasis on memorisation encouraged by the present education system. The new policy therefore, while continuing with the board exams for Grades 10 and 12, seeks to reform the existing system of board and entrance examinations. The end goal is to do away with the parallel learning in coaching classes. Therefore, board exams will be overhauled to encourage holistic development, allowing students to choose many of the board exam subjects, based on their interests.

The policy also unequivocally stresses its intention to make the board exams 'easier.' These exams will be used to assess primarily core capacities/ competencies rather than months of coaching and rote-learning.

An interesting feature of NEP 2020 is that all students will get a

second chance to improve their board exam marks during any given school year. There will be one main examination and one for improvement, that students can take if they so desire.

What are the reforms in teacher training?

The policy aims to set up a large number of merit-based scholarships across the country for studying quality 4-year integrated B.Ed. programmes. "In rural areas, special merit-based scholarships will be established that also include preferential employment in their local areas upon successful completion of their B.Ed. programmes."

The policy also mentions that Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) will be strengthened to inculcate better test material. The TETs will also be extended to cover teachers across all stages (Foundational, Preparatory, Middle and Secondary) of school education. For subject teachers, scores of TET or National Testing Agency (NTA) in the corresponding subjects will be taken into account for recruitment.

How will university entrance exams be different?

A common entrance gateway has been proposed. NTA will conduct a common aptitude test, as well as specialised common subject exams in the sciences, humanities, languages, arts, and vocational subjects, at least twice every year.

Students will be allowed to choose their test subjects, and each university will be able to see each student's individual subject portfolio and hence forth make their admission decisions based on individual interests and talents. It will enable "most universities to use these common entrance exams - rather than having hundreds of universities each devising their own entrance exams - thereby drastically reducing the burden on students, universities and colleges, and the entire education system," according to the policy document. However, it is not mandatory. It will be left for individual universities and colleges to use NTA assessments for their admissions.

How will higher education change?

A big change brought about by the NEP 2020 is that the undergraduate degree will be of either three or four-year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications. For instance, a student can get a certificate after completing one year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after two years of study. He/she can get a certificate for a Bachelor 's degree after a three-year programme. However, the policy adds that the four-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme, "shall be the preferred option since it allows the opportunity to experience the full range of holistic and multidisciplinary education in addition to a focus on the chosen major and minors as per the choices of the student." There's also provision for the 4-year programme to lead to a degree 'with Research' if the student completes a rigorous research project in their major area(s) of study as specified by the higher education institutions (HEI).

In continuation of its emphasis on multidisciplinary education, the policy is aiming to implement a new system called the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). It would digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognised HEIs. This will enable degrees from an HEI to be awarded taking into account credits earned.

Will the regulation of higher education be transformed?

The regulatory system is also set to change, with the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), aimed to function as a single regulator for the higher education sector, including teacher education, and excluding medical and legal education.

GRAND TARGETS WITHOUT A ROADMAP
Is Universal Access to Education Possible?

Ambarish Rai and Srijita Majumder*

A group of children attending their online classes in Murad Nagar, U.P.

PHOTO CREDIT: Tribhuvan Tiwari, Outlook

2. *Issues of Teachers*

3. *Girls' Education*

4. *Community Participation*

5. *Quality of Education*

6. *Social Inclusion*

7. *Curbing Privatisation of Education*

In this article RTE Forum presents a critical analysis of the new education policy.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been approved and it came after a period of 34 years. The previous policy was adopted in 1986, with a modification made to it in 1992. Since the last policy, considerable progress has been made in the field of school education, the most significant among them being the promulgation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE Act 2009), which made elementary education a fundamental right in India. It mandated the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. For the first time the school system was defined by an Act of Parliament.

This Act also provided for several child-centric provisions like neighbourhood schools, age-appropriate learning and laid down different infrastructural

About Right to Education Forum

The Right to Education Forum (RTE Forum) is a coalition of around 10,000 organisations working in 20 states across India. The Forum comprises national people's movements, prominent educationists, social workers and social activists. It was formed after the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in 2010, for closely tracking and supporting the implementation of the RTE Act. Its structure is federal and it brings together actors at the national, state and district levels that share a common commitment to the implementation of the right to education. The Forum envisions realising the goal of universal education for all through a strong public system of education, funded by the State.

The broad thematic areas of its work include:

1. *Systemic Readiness and Redressal Mechanism*

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norms which set the benchmark for quality and equity. The RTE Act is the highest stage reached in the evolution of education policy in India. Hence, any education policy must take this into cognisance. Surprisingly, the NEP 2020 mentions RTE Act only a couple of times, that too in passing reference.

The draft NEP 2019 that was released for public comments in 2019 had recommended the extension of the RTE Act 2009 to include children from 3-18 years and this was welcomed across civil societies in India. They felt that it would have been a big step towards the achievement of universalisation of school education. However, much to everyone's dismay, the final policy is silent on this. The final policy does talk about universal access to education, but without a mandatory mechanism it doesn't seem possible.

The policy document recommends an overhaul in the entire structure of school education system. The 10+2 structure of the education system which has been in place since the first Education Policy was announced in 1968 based on Kothari Commission's (1964-66) recommendation will be replaced with the 5+3+3+4 system. The new system will take years to be implemented on ground, in view of the complexity of the current system. In the process, the dislocation and disruption

that will result would take years to be stabilised.[1] Alongside this, the foundational literacy and numeracy programme aims at making children school-ready before they join class 1. Hence, it is important to look at the dangers of making a child school ready from such an early age.[2]

The document sets the goal of 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from pre-school to secondary standards and bringing 2 crore out-of-school children back in schools. While it is a welcome step, the policy lacks a roadmap of how it will be achieved. Similarly, the policy does reiterate that 6% of GDP will be allocated for education, but fails to give a timeline for this. It is important to highlight here that the Ministry of Human Resource Development has deprioritised education to a Category C expenditure (the lowest classification), which will restrict expenditure to within 15% of that budgeted for at least Q1 and Q2 2020-21.[3] This shed considerable light into how much the government is willing to allocate for education.

Although, the creation of the Gender Inclusion Fund to promote and strengthen girls' participation and completion of school education is laudable, the issue of girls' education is clubbed within the discourse of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). This undermines the historical and structural barriers that act as

> **The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected girls. Extended school closures have made girls more vulnerable to gender-based violence, early marriages and child trafficking.**

roadblocks to girls' education. As opposed to this, the National Education Policy of 1986, envisioned education as a transformative force which would build women's self-confidence, improve their position in society and enable them to challenge inequalities that are prevalent in Indian society. The new policy does not see education as a transformational tool to change the disparity in the society and move in the direction of empowerment of girls and a more egalitarian society.[4]

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected girls. Extended school closures have made girls more vulnerable to gender-based violence, early marriages and child trafficking. Simultaneously, they are also facing the unequal burden of domestic chores and care work. In such a scenario an education policy with a strong gender focus is needed, which is missing in the present document.

The document emphasises on digital education, which will further deepen the existing segregation in society. Only half of urban households and 14.9% of rural households have internet access.[5] A brief study conducted by RTE Forum in 11 villages of Hamirpur district in Uttar Pradesh revealed that out of a total number of 1525 students from 11 schools (from 11 villages), only 252 had someone in the family with a smartphone (16%). Out of these 252 students, only 87 responded to work/assignments given by their teachers on the WhatsApp groups. Thus, in reality, only 5% students actually could avail the facility of online education. This digital divide deepens further when it comes to girls' access to technology. The news of suicides of school-going children, unable to join online classes due to lack of smart-phones, in the states of Kerala,[6] Madhya Pradesh,[7] Assam,[8] Maharashtra[9] and West Bengal[10] and also the double suicide in Tamil Nadu[11] by children who couldn't face the pressure of online learning, highlight the government's need for devising alternative forms of distance learning, till the time schools remain closed.

The policy, on one hand, mentions that children from class 6 will be taught the nuances of coding. While, on the other, it says that vocational training on pottery, carpentry and gardening will also begin from the same grade. There is a looming fear that while children from urban private schools, with access to digital means, will learn coding, the majority of India's children, without this facility will be pushed towards child labour and their education would be discontinued.

The process of school closure under the pretext of rationalisation was first seen in Rajasthan, where closure of schools with small enrolments were recommended. It was soon followed by other states. In Rajasthan, till 2014, as many as 17,000 schools were closed/merged. Later, 4000 were re-opened owing to public pressure.[12] Evidence shows that increased distance due to school closure has led to a rise in drop-outs, particularly among girls.[13] The NITI Aayog, as part of its Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E) programme, which started in 2018, has closed down nearly 40,000 schools in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha.[14] The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) validates and legitimises these processes by mentioning the consolidation of school complexes. However, the question remains as to how it'll be done without impacting education access. Rationalising the distance from 5 to 10 kms, as mentioned in the NEP, will not only have a negative impact on access but also dilute the norms of the RTE Act 2009.

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The NEP, in the name of philanthropic schools and Public Private Partnerships (PPP), is laying out the roadmap for the entry of private players in education. This will further commercialise education, exacerbating existing inequalities, while girls from marginalised communities will remain alienated.[15]

This policy is also silent on the Common School System, which was first recommended by the Kothari Commission (1964-66) and reaffirmed in the National Education Policies in 1968 and 1986. One way to remove the discrimination in the school education system is to introduce a Common School System (CSS) in the country which ensures a uniform quality of education to all the children.[16]

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> **All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual.**
>
> *Albert Einstein*

CAN EDUCATION BE LEFT TO MARKET FORCES?

Real Improvement Needed in Teaching-learning Quality

Anita Rampal*

Soon after the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was approved in the throes of the pandemic, without a parliamentary debate, an equally sudden promulgation of the Odisha Universities Ordinance 2020 (No. 12, to amend the Odisha Universities Act 1989) has alarmed the academic community. In a federal structure with education as a concurrent subject, states have a role in making their policies. An unprecedented measure in centralised educational governance was first put forward by the draft NEP (2019) for a permanent apex Rashtriya Shiksha Ayog (National Education Commission), chaired by the Prime Minister (later the education minister, in a subsequent draft).

Fortunately, after much opposition from the states as well as legal experts resulted in the measure being dropped just before the final policy was put out. The NEP has recommended central control through resetting the agendas of existing national bodies and the proposed setting up of new ones, such as the National Research Fund, the National Assessment Centre (PARAKH), the National Educational Technology Forum or the Higher Education Commission of India (with

PHOTO CREDIT: Tribhuvan Tiwari, Outlook

Students attending online classes in a rice field in Murad Nagar in U.P.

multiple vertical structures of authority).

Some states have expressed concerns and are still assessing its implications. Instead of resisting greater control on its educational institutions, the Odisha University Ordinance is vying with the centre to wrest more political and bureaucratic power. It removes the role of the Vice Chancellor in the appointment of faculty and non-teaching staff, now to be done through the State Public Service Commission and the State Selection Board respectively. It abolishes the senate which serves as an academic council and rests all decision making on the syndicate, with government nominees. It also mandates

the Chancellor to nominate a retired bureaucrat instead of an academic in the search committee for a Vice Chancellor. Stifling universities under greater state control does not bode well for academic credibility and has been seen to result in mediocrity and irreparable decline. Claims of 'autonomy' made in the NEP need deeper scrutiny within its plan of creating a hierarchy of institutions, with implications for access to resources. Some of the best colleges of Delhi University have resisted the offer of 'autonomous' status, seen as a euphemism for having to fend for their own funds, and also raise fees. Teachers have also seen this as a move that isolates an institution from the larger network of affiliated colleges,

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A still from a film shot at Delhi's Trilokpuri to generate awareness about the enrolment of students from the economically weaker section

which provides a collective resource for academic matters of curriculum and administrative issues that need redress on a larger forum. With already an acute shortage of qualified teachers in the system and almost half of them being ad hoc or contractual appointments, the policy rhetoric of a robust culture of autonomous and motivated teaching faculty fails to convince.

The precarity of teaching will increase owing to a tenure track, a five year or longer probation, multiple levels of a salary scale, performance appraisals through peer, student and even community reviews, and modular on-line courses for professional development. One cannot help but look at what is happening to our best universities with the most eminent and committed teachers constrained by hostile administrations and centralised fiats.

Those who work for social justice and question government policies face unprecedented threats for being 'anti-national' and are even being falsely charged for terrorist and unlawful activities (Mehta, 2020). One needs to be repeatedly reminded of the founding vision, for the need of democracy and autonomy in higher education, as posited by the first University Education Commission (1948-49). Chaired by Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, it warned that state funding was not state control. "Freedom of individual development is the basis of democracy. Exclusive control of education by the State has been an important factor in facilitating the maintenance of totalitarian tyrannies. ....We must resist, in the interests of our own democracy, the trend towards the governmental domination of the educational process.... Professional integrity requires that teachers should be as free to speak on controversial issues as any other citizens of a free country. An atmosphere of freedom is essential for developing this 'morality of the mind.'"[1] The Radhakrishnan Education Commission, as it is popularly known, envisioned universities as 'homes of intellectual adventure.' It also viewed autonomy as a responsibility of the state to protect democracy, and promote knowledge creation for social justice, "which demands the freeing of the individual from poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and ignorance. This is not enough. We must cultivate the art of human relationships, the ability to live and work together overcoming the dividing forces of the time." Acknowledging the role of education in perpetuating status quo, it warned that the aim must not be to produce conformist citizens to adjust to given social norms, but individuals who can bring social change to uphold the Constitution.

It asserted that education is a universal right, not a class privilege. The report cited the example of the legendary mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, from Jawaharlal

Nehru's *The Discovery of India*. It emphasised that when basic conditions of health, education and opportunities of growth were available for all, many among the millions living on the verge of starvation would become eminent scientists, educationists, technicians, industrialists, writers and artists, to help build a new India and a new world.

With affirmative action in terms of reservations, a demographic change has been witnessed in public universities which serve as a democratic site to students from diverse social backgrounds aspiring for higher education.[2] These are also places where students and teachers can challenge the present dystopian market forces (Rampal, 2018) dismembering education from its essential discourse of democracy, social responsibility and civic courage.[3] Student groups have engaged with the disparate realities of their lives, mobilised against growing commercialisation and commodification of education, resisted crippling fee hikes, and protested against gender, caste and religious discrimination. However, the growing aspirations of students for good quality public education are not met while students from disadvantaged and deprived groups are increasingly being channelled into avenues of open and distance learning (ODL). This is in no way comparable to the social processes of regular education. However, the NEP abandons a commitment to

expand good quality public education, stating that ODL and online education will provide the 'natural path' to increase access to quality higher education.

Following market principles of economies of scale, the policy proposes a college to have over 3000 students (though the All India Survey of Higher Education in 2019 showed only 4 percent colleges in this category), and a university with over 25000. It also justifies closure and merger of suboptimal schools and establishing school complexes. In college it legitimises exit at each year of an undergraduate course. In addition, without scrutinising the complexity of equivalence of institutions it proposes a credit bank so that students can return or migrate at will.

Moreover, increasing enrolments is tied with its aim to channelise half of all students at school and college into vocational education, which unfortunately, has very little education, mostly skills designed by the industry. It serves as second rate stream for the so called 'low ability' students to be prepared for low-status employment. In school education, the policy crafts a semantic space for 'public philanthropic partnership.' It assures that there will be no focus on inputs, but instead, a substantial loosening of the 'restrictive' requirements of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Children of age 6-14 years have a right to good quality free and compulsory education

> **Student groups have engaged with the disparate realities of their lives, mobilised against growing commercialisation of education and resisted crippling fee hikes.**

in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education. RTE lays down the nature of education for building up the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent; learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly manner. The aim of that education is to make the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and help him/her to express views freely (clause 29).

NEP contradicts RTE when it regresses to provide 'universal access,' but does not ensure completion as a right. More damagingly, it compromises with quality and calls for 'alternative models', through 'multiple pathways' which include non-formal and open schooling even at grades 3, 5 and 8. Its Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Stage (age 3-8 years), combining three years of Early Childhood Care and Education (age 3-6 years in anganwadis) and grades 1 and 2 of school, offers a minimalist curriculum. Worryingly, along with anganwadi workers, who

> **Contrary to the discourse of 'choice' and 'flexibility,' our system continues to sort and select, based on students' social capital that constructs their 'ability' or 'merit' to perform and pay.**

are not professionally trained teachers, it opens the space to volunteers, community members and also child-tutors from the same school. Not only is the term 'tutoring' out of place in a national policy, making young children 'tutor' others is violative of their rights.

Its focus on state examinations [guided by the National Accreditation Council (NAC)] even in grades 3, 5 and 8, runs contrary to the RTE, which disallows children to be subjected to a board examination, allowing only regular school examinations.

Similarly, its requirement that the essential core curricular content will be decided at a national level, while state textbooks add local context and flavour, problematically impinges upon the states' constitutional role to develop their own curricula.

Contrary to the discourse of 'choice' and 'flexibility,' our system continues to sort and select, based on students' social capital that constructs their 'ability' or 'merit' to perform and pay. The vocationalist instrumental view of education in the NEP, based on metrics of outcomes, denying inputs crucial for the disadvantaged, will further push students, teachers and institutions into an aggressive race for rankings and survival. Negotiating renewed hierarchies of skill and knowledge, or regular and distant modes, through centrally calibrated norms, such systems of education will expunge vestiges of equity and justice from its notion of 'quality.' Significantly, every mention of constitutional values in the NEP is prefaced by ethical or human values, so that in a long list of 30 or more, the more mundane 'respect for public property' or cleanliness can precede equality or justice, which invariably lie at the end, while secularism is conspicuously missing.

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SPIR 2020 UPDATE

The Status of Policing in India Report 2020 will be studying policing in extraordinary circumstances. It will examine the nature of policing in conflict states which have the presence of army/ para military forces, as well as policing during emergencies such as the current Covid-19 health crisis and the consequent lockdown in India. The surveys are being conducted with the common people as well as police personnel on both these issues in 19 states (as shown in images alongside). While there was some delay in data collection due to the national lockdown, it is currently in process and will be completed by November 2020. The official data analysis and literature review for the report have been completed.

The fieldwork process has already begun in Assam, Delhi, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

A field investigator interviews common citizens in Delhi on the role of the police during the pandemic as part of SPIR 2020. The respondents to the survey were selected through a scientific, randomised sampling method using electoral rolls.

A field investigator interviews people in Assam for the survey on the conflict in the state and the role of the police, paramilitary and army in it.

GAPS IN TEACHERS' TRAINING
Much Neglected Area Needs Real Attention

Poonam Batra*

Teachers engaging students in various activities at an EDMC Primary School in Delhi's Trilokpuri

Three overarching frames can help us understand the direction and vision of the National Education Policy[1] (NEP), 2020. First, NEP's disconnect from the structural and process ground realities of school education, teacher education and higher education. The policy neither refers to the concerns and challenges that plague India's education system, nor does it attempt to build on what has been achieved so far. Second, NEP 2020 maintains a continuity with the trajectory of neoliberal measures put in place over the last three decades by offering concrete pathways to take the agenda forward. Third, NEP proposes well-thought out structural openings to take the agenda of privatising education, homogenising and standardising curriculum and pedagogy along ideological positions, and centralising systems of governance and regulation.

Using these frames, this short essay examines some aspects of school teachers and their development in the context of educational reforms and the proposals in NEP 2020.

NEP's Disconnect from Ground Realities

The most recent estimates noted in the draft national education policy,[2] show that "the country faces over 1 million teacher vacancies - a large proportion of them in rural areas - leading to PTRs (pupil-teacher ratios) that are even larger than 60:1 in certain areas." The mandated pupil-student ratio is 30:1 as per Right to Education (RtE) norms. Contractual teachers make up 38 percent of the current teacher work force in India. About 34 percent of the teachers in Delhi government schools alone are contractual teachers.

It took a Supreme Court appointed high powered Commission - the Justice Verma Commission (JVC) on Teacher Education to unveil the reality of teachers and teacher education.[3] It revealed that the bulk of teachers are trained and qualified through the sub-standard private system of 'teaching shops' that fail to address the pedagogic needs of diverse classrooms. It also shed light on the small but significant number of teachers, who are poorly prepared through pre-service public institutions that are severed from centres of higher learning and use largely outdated curricula and pedagogy. The Commission noted that the number of private teacher education institutions (TEIs) increased manifold in the years preceding the RtE; and that the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) failed to control the proliferation

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of sub-standard TEIs, leading to rampant privatisation and commercialisation. By the 2010s, while close to 80 percent of children studied in state schools,[4] their teachers came from a teacher education system with over 90 percent of TEIs in private hands.[5]

The massive increase in the number of private TEIs over the years created an imbalance in favour of urban areas in the spread of teacher preparation facilities. This adversely affected access to teacher education among marginalised groups, especially in rural and relatively remote areas. Many districts that have a "lower intake ratio in teacher education institutes in most of the states are those having SC and ST populations of more than 25 percent. States having surplus teachers also have lower intake ratios in districts with SC and ST populations of over 25 percent."[6]

Despite intervention by the Supreme Court, state investment in teacher education continues to be low and it remains isolated from the higher education system. While the share of funds for school education declined from 1.3 percent in 2009-10 to 1.1 percent in 2018-19, states with large numbers of professionally unqualified teachers (Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and West Bengal) continue to spend less than 1 percent of their school education budgets on teacher training.[7]

Inadequate expansion of the government school teacher pool, especially in the most educationally challenged states, limited state investment in education and lack of professional support to teachers have led to a de facto public policy that undermined the potential role of teachers in achieving equitable quality education. Compounding the problem are divesting teachers of agency, narrowing curriculum to a disconnected set of learning outcomes and reducing teaching to lower order cognitive thinking and skills.

The neoliberal policy narrative undermined knowledge, over-emphasised the development of skills and constructed notions of educational quality as synonymous with learning outcomes. This created the logic of marginalising the teacher, undermining her agency and the need for epistemic engagement. Teachers were trained to implement minimalist agendas built around 'practical knowledge' that is positioned as key to ensure student learning.

NEP 2020 does not address the chronic problem of teacher shortage. It also does not commit itself to discontinuing the practice of hiring contract teachers. In glossing over the acute problem of teacher provisioning, the NEP shows complete lack of state commitment to meet the challenge of equitable quality education. Instead, NEP suggests

> *The massive increase in the number of private teacher education institutions over the years created an imbalance in favour of urban areas in the spread of teacher preparation facilities.*

that teachers be recruited to a school complex and that the sharing of teachers across schools would aim towards "greater resource efficiency… coordination, leadership, governance, and management of schools in the (school) cluster."

NEP's silence on the critical recommendations made around the major gaps in the teacher education sector, by the JVC and hence the Supreme Court, is inexplicable.

NEP's Continuity with Neoliberal Policies

With a change in the political regime, more recent neoliberal policies have widened the disconnect between teaching-learning processes and the educational concerns of equity and social justice. Two critical amendments to the RtE Act over the last couple of years led to the dilution of the provisions that ensured equitable education to all. First, the scrapping of

> **The most recent estimates noted in the draft national education policy show that the country faces over 1 million teacher vacancies - a large proportion of them in rural areas.**

the no-detention provision has effectively put the onus of learning on the child. Second, the focus on learning outcomes as the central objective of RtE induced state schools to create segregated and unequal learning environments such as, separate English medium sections and streaming children into ability sections in early grades, minimising their opportunities to learn at their pace.

The inclusion of learning outcomes in the RtE Act has reduced the 'right to education' to a mere 'right to learning.' By maintaining a deafening silence on the RtE Act, NEP 2020 effectively brings down the curtain on the right to education. NEP shifts the focus from the 'child's right to education' and the 'duty of the state' to provide equitable quality education; to the 'duty of the child to learn'.

While the bulk of pre-service teacher education continues to happen in private 'teaching shops,' seven years after the JVC, most in-service training of teachers across several states is also being outsourced to private 'edupreneurs,' with a push for digitalising teacher development. An example of this is the creation of a Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA). This, and other platforms are projected in NEP 2020 as unique initiatives which leverage existing highly scalable and flexible digital infrastructures, with teachers at the centre.

The capture of the school teacher by private interests has led to the effective subversion of the commitment to the Constitution-led policy frame of equity and social justice. Even as the Supreme Court stepped in to disrupt the subversion of this agenda, an institutionalised nexus between an entrenched private sector in teacher education and a compromised state system continues to shape teacher education policy. This has become evident during the pandemic as sudden school closure was used by governments and private players to lobby for digital learning across state and private schools.[8]

Teachers During the Pandemic and State Response

An ongoing research on the impact of school closures reveals that the teacher has been thrown further into the margins.[9] She has virtually no say in how schools should respond to the educational needs of millions of children during the pandemic.

According to some government teachers, notifications from state officials with all their ambiguities are considered sacrosanct. Neither the teachers nor the school administration can question these or even enquire about them. Any attempt to do so could lead to a show cause notice from the concerned authorities.

State schools are sent YouTube video links and worksheets directly from the state departments of education. Teachers reveal that their role is merely that of a conduit whose duty it is to forward these links and worksheets to their students via WhatsApp groups; and maintain records of students who access the videos and return their duly completed worksheets.

Worksheets are being outsourced to several non-state actors such as, Career Launcher, Teach for India and Tech Mahindra. These organisations have not only taken over the task of preparing worksheets across grades, they are also monitoring schooling processes and practices. Mentor teachers in Delhi government schools shared that during the pandemic even their role has been reduced to being 'record keepers' and 'conduits' for passing information to non-state actors such as STIR who work with full government support. Teachers are being asked to collate information pertaining to student scholarships, student attendance, utilisation of money allocated etc. They are not

being engaged in discussions on curriculum and pedagogic approaches – supposedly their primary task.

In some of the state schools, teachers have been specifically asked to not take classes, so that uniformity in the digital teaching-learning process is maintained. Teachers are not allowed to reach out to their students individually as governments are focused on promoting and projecting the 'efficiency of digital learning.'

During the pandemic, invoking the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 has led the bureaucracy to exercise unlimited authority over teachers. All work allotted to teachers is prefaced with 'As per the Epidemic Diseases Act.' As a result, several teachers have been put on duties of distributing rations, as part of relief work during the lockdown, conducting COVID surveys, and keeping records at dispensaries and isolation wards of COVID patients. The bulk of teachers sent for COVID duties are from primary classes as they are expected to work via WhatsApp while senior teachers are engaged with live sessions. There is no voice or redressal mechanism for teachers.

With extreme centralisation of power teachers feel like 'puppets' in the hands of the government and their administrators. Some Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers have been coerced to travel to their workplaces from their hometowns, despite hometowns being in containment zones, with threats of loss of jobs and salaries. While several teachers and non-teaching school staff have not received salaries over the past four-five months, most contractual teachers across several states have lost their jobs.

Teachers in several private schools are facing new forms of power and control, given the new set of CBSE guidelines issued during the pandemic. Teachers are expected to prepare online teaching plans, collate resources and get them approved by school authorities before taking them to class. Any official from CBSE or school authorities can enter these online classes at any time to monitor the teaching-learning process.

Digital learning platforms, started as an emergency measure to stay connected with school children during the health crisis, are being used to impose uniform curricular and pedagogic approaches. This effectively strips the school teacher of all intellectual agency, reducing her to a mere 'worker'.

Several teachers even fear that their role is being made redundant by the manner in which digital learning is being integrated into the school system. This could be a precursor to the road map NEP 2020 has laid towards this. Laying emphasis on the role of technology in 'improving educational process and outcomes,' NEP proposes a dedicated unit to develop a 'digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building.'

Homogenising Curriculum, Homogenising Identities via Teacher Education

India's pre-service and in-service education of school teachers is almost entirely in the hands of private players. The NEP 2020 offers little to change this reality. Instead, it reconfigures the role of the state in line with the logic of the market - as a 'regulator' rather than 'service provider.'

NEP 2020 proposes to make the education of teachers uniform at all levels via a single curriculum design model. In promoting the idea of teacher preparation as a homogenous standardised activity, the policy undermines the needs and challenges of social and linguistic diversity across India's states. It also discounts the needs specific to different levels of education and undercuts the role of academia in developing teacher education curricula and design.

NEP's focus on embedding education in the 'Indian ethos' with reference to the heritage of 'ancient India' alone, goes against the secular mandate of India's Constitution. The regulation and governance of education via a common curricular and pedagogic approach for school and teacher education creates a structural

base for homogenising identities and undermining India's diversity.

By recommending the provisioning of "suitably adapted 1-year B.Ed. programmes," "special shorter local teacher education programmes" "at BITEs, DIETs, or at school complexes," "shorter post-B. Ed. certification courses" at multidisciplinary colleges and universities, NEP 2020 contradicts its emphasis on a 4-year integrated degree as the minimum qualification for teaching. It suggests this as a measure to prepare teachers for children of socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs).

Via its proposal of special education zones for SEDGs, and multiple methods of learning – formal and informal, the NEP may well have laid the foundation for a future segregated system of school and teacher education in India - of sub-standard (and low-fee paying) private and government schools for the poor and most vulnerable, largely taught by teachers from sub-standard private TEIs, that the Supreme Court had issued unequivocal orders to regulate.

Even though NEP 2020 proposes to 're-establish teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society,' 'to empower teachers and help them to do their job effectively,' and to foster a 'culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate,' the measures it recommends belies the intent. Teacher narratives gathered during the pandemic indicate how the teacher has been reduced to a mere worker, expected to follow official orders; and who has been made accountable to a range of non-state actors who seem to hold the power of educational decision-making.

The pandemic has enabled states, with support from the growing private sector in education, to take complete control of schools and the teaching-learning process. Over the last six months teachers have been effectively reduced to docile followers of government diktats. By forbidding teachers to reach out to their students, even the minimal sense of agency that they had in their classrooms has been eroded. Digital learning platforms have shown how easy it is for administrators to take control over matters of curriculum design, knowledge selection and the pedagogic process. They have also indicated how effortless it is for teachers to surrender to authority. With NEP 2020 legitimising digital learning and augmenting the role of private interests, the state has effectively abdicated its constitutional duty to provide equitable quality education to all.

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POOR CONNECTIVITY, SHATTERED DREAMS
Is Bridging Digital Divide Easier Said Than Done?

Protiva Kundu*

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on school education. As an immediate response to the pandemic, the Government of India has opted for a nationwide school closure. As per UNESCO estimates, around 32 crore learners are affected in India, of which 15.8 crore are female and 16.2 crore are male students. The bulk of these students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools (86%), followed by tertiary (10%) and pre-primary (4%) level of education (UNESCO, 2020).[1]

Moving learning from classrooms to homes at scale and in a hurry presents enormous challenges, both human and technical. However, as governments are obligated to respect the right to education of children, from April first week onwards, many schools have shifted their base from traditional classrooms to virtual platforms to conduct classes online.

A girl attending her online class at home using a smartphone in a village in U.P.

PHOTO CREDIT: Tribhuvan Tiwari, Outlook

Digital Divide and Learning Inequality

The pandemic has affected children irrespective of class, caste, gender, or place of residence. But the same has not been true for its consequences, as it has hit the vulnerable hardest. Widespread closures of educational facilities present an unprecedented risk to these children's education and well-being. Remote learning as an alternative to conventional classroom appears challenging for many students, given the vast differences in access to basic digital infrastructure.

Access to electricity is one of the basic components of digital infrastructure, whether for charging devices or connecting to any broadband service. While almost all households (99.9%) across the country have electricity connection, the quality of electricity (based on total hours of electricity available during a 24-hour period) is a serious challenge. In rural India only 16 per cent households received 1-8 hours of electricity, 33 per cent between 9-12 hours and only 47 per cent received more than 12 hours.[2]

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The other important component of the digital infrastructure is access to a device, preferably a computer --- desktop or laptop. While a mobile phone can also serve the purpose, it might not be convenient for carrying out lengthy assignments or doing research. Unfortunately, while 24 per cent Indians own a smartphone,[3] only 11 per cent of households possess any form of computer. This includes desktop, laptop, notebook, netbook, palmtop, tablet, or similar handheld devices (MOSPI, 2020).

The "digital divide" is evident across class, gender, region, or place of residence. The recently released National Sample Survey (NSS) report shows that only 4.4 per cent of rural households possess any computer, and the figure is 23 per cent for urban India.

Note: Since, income data is not available for household, the expenditure by households has been used as proxy of income. Source: NSS Report No.585: Household Social Consumption on Education in India

The rural-urban divide is starker across income class. Among the poorest 20 per cent households in rural India, only 1.6 per cent have access to a computer, and among the top 20 per cent rural households, the proportion is 9.9 per cent. While in urban India, 7.5 per cent households in the lowest income class and 45.5 per cent of the richest households

Figure 1: Percentage of households with computer by income class
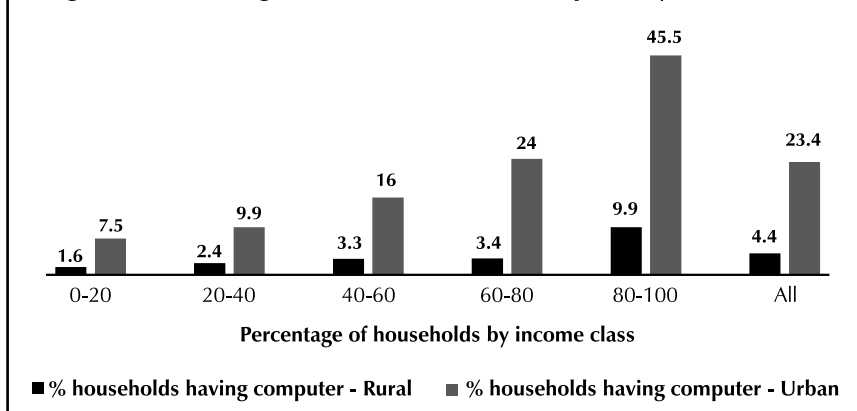
have access to a computer (MOSPI, 2020) (Figure 1).

The difference is apparent across states too. For example, the proportion of households with access to a computer varies from 4.6 per cent in Bihar to 23.5 per cent in Kerala and 35 per cent in Delhi. When it comes to the usage, among children of age 5-14 years, only 9 per cent could operate a computer and this proportion is 33.6 per cent for 15-29 age group population (MOSPI, 2020).

With increase in digital coverage, the number of internet users in India has grown significantly. Between 2014 and 2019, number of internet subscribers per 100 people has increased from 20 to 48 (MOC, 2019).[4] However, the penetration of digital technologies in India has been haphazard and exclusionary. There is still a large population with no access to the internet – particularly in rural areas, poorer states and in poorer households.

According to the NSS report on Education (2017-18), only 24 per cent of Indian households have an internet facility.[5] While 66 per cent of India's population lives in villages, only a little over 15 per cent of rural households have access to internet services; for urban households the proportion is 42 per cent. Among the poorest 20 per cent households, only 8.9 per cent have access to internet facilities and in case of the top 20 per cent households, the proportion is 50.5 per cent (MOSPI, 2019). In fact, only eight per cent of households with children in the 5-24 year age group have both a computer and an internet connection.[6]

The gender divide in access and ability to use digital infrastructure is also stark. Among the internet users, 65 per cent are men and 35 per cent women. The disparity is more prominent in rural India, where the figures are 69 per cent and 31 per cent for men and women respectively (IAMAI, 2019).[7] Access to smartphone as well as intra-

> **Remote learning as an alternative to conventional classroom appears challenging for many students, given the vast differences in access to basic digital infrastructure.**

household allocation of resources like device and internet are likely to be gender-biased, and limit girls' ability to engage with home-schooling. There is apprehension that girls are more likely to miss out on online education and this will lead to an increase in learning gaps.

It is not only about access, but online education also requires a predictable quality internet connectivity. Poor connectivity and signal drop are some of the common challenges as neither states nor the private players have yet accomplished assured connectivity to all subscribers.

Other than the technical glitches, having online classes on a regular basis also has a cost implication as students have to bear the cost of internet services. Majority of the state governments or the Union government are not providing any free or subsidised data pack. In the current situation, many students, especially those whose families have lost income because of a lockdown-related job loss, are not able to afford this additional burden.

To expand access to technology and reduce the digital divide for students, UNESCO has recommended that countries adopt a variety of hi-tech, low-tech and no tech solutions to assure the continuity of learning during this period. Therefore, over time governments, private organisations, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and community --- all stakeholders are taking various initiatives to reach the maximum number of children and children at the remotest (MHRD, 2020).[8] However, the initiatives to impart virtual lessons through television, direct to home (DTH) cable, radio etc to students, without access of device or internet connection, seem to face challenges. According to a situational study, as on July 2020, only 37.5 million children in the major 16 states are continuing education through various education initiatives such as online classrooms and radio programmes etc.[9]

Teachers' Preparedness to Support Digital Learning

Distance learning and lack of digital infrastructure has affected teachers too. Not only are many of them digitally inept, but a large number of teachers have also never used an online environment to teach. Therefore, taking an online course at short notice, which ideally requires early preparation (like designing a lesson plan, teaching materials such as audio and video contents), has posed new challenges for them. A survey by ASSOCHAM and Primus Partners shows that only 17 per cent of teachers in government schools reported that they were trained to conduct online classes; in private schools, this figure stood at 43.8 per cent.[10]

With online teaching becoming the norm due to the lockdown, Union Ministry of Education and many of the state governments are conducting online teachers' training programme and building capacities of teachers and school heads across the country. However, online teachers' training programmes won't equip the teachers with every aspect of quality teaching.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on Digital Education

In Part-III of the NEP, 2020, under other key focus areas, integration of technology with the education system and online and digital education have been discussed to a larger extent.[11] In the whole policy document, this is the only area of discussion where the pandemic has been brought as a reference point. The policy reads:

"The recent rise in epidemics and pandemics necessitates that we are ready with alternative modes of quality education whenever and wherever

traditional and in-person modes of education are not possible."

The policy has envisaged technology as an integral part of education planning, management, administration, teaching, learning, assessment, teachers' training, and professional development. Some policy measures like development of teaching-learning e-content in all regional languages and developing software 'accessible to a wide range of users including students in remote areas and *Divyang* students' are laudable. At the same time, proposals for new age digital transformation like exposures to the knowledge of coding, computational thinking, digital literacy in school; use of virtual lab etc., seem to be favourable for a certain section of students 'aligned with global world of technology, choice, and flexibility'.[12]

India has already 3.2 crore out of school children prior to COVID-19 and many children are at a risk of not returning to school post the pandemic period. Would the digital age be different for these children? NEP 2020 acknowledges the need to bridge the digital divide and improve digital infrastructure. However, without strengthening the existing public education system, extra effort put in reaching out to children through technology shows how poorly majority of the children's needs are understood in the policy.

Conclusion

For the last six months, digital education is the new buzzword in the domain of school education. However, in the renewed academic set-up of online education, learners in the most marginalised groups, who don't have access to digital learning resources or lack the resilience and engagement to learn on their own, are at risk of falling behind. The pandemic has showed the need for a blended education system. However, given the deep-rooted structural imbalances in the digital world across class, caste and gender, too much emphasis on digital and online education could only aggravate the existing educational challenges and perpetuate inequality. To remain relevant, schools will need to reinvent learning environments so that digitalisation expands and complements, but does not replace, the face to face interaction between students, teachers and peers. A coherent plan of action with timelines needs to be developed to ensure inclusive education.

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BETTER RESULTS NEED HIGHER SPENDING
A Look at Worldwide Education Investments

One of most painful stories to emerge during the pandemic was the demise of a 14-year-old Dalit girl from Valanchery, Kerala who reportedly died by suicide because she didn't have the facilities to attend online classes.[1]

Even as the pandemic rages on, so does the distress of financially-stretched students across the country. The shift to online classes and education brought on by the coronavirus crisis has left behind the poor and the marginalised, raising serious questions on the strength of our education system.

Across the globe several nations with low levels of expenditure per student may still be investing relatively large amounts as a share of per capita GDP. Most expenditure in primary, secondary and post-secondary (non-tertiary) education is spent on core education services (teaching costs and other expenditure related to education), with the largest share going towards staff compensation.

Here we take a look at how several countries worldwide are scoring on education investments.

- According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s latest report, Luxembourg, United States, Norway, Austria and Sweden spend the highest (a combination of public expenditure on all educational institutions, private expenditure on all educational institutions and public expenditure on public institutions) on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student.

- Total public spending on primary to tertiary education as a percentage of total government expenditure averages 11% across OECD countries, ranging from around 7% to around 17%.

- Public funding dominates non-tertiary education (primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary) in all countries while the upper secondary education, vocational and general programmes rely more on private funding (about 13% across OECD countries).

- In 2017, on average across OECD countries, 83% of the funding for primary to tertiary educational institutions came directly from public sources and 16% from private sources, and the remaining 1% from international sources.

- In Norway and Sweden, educational funding of primary institutions is fully public, while one-third of the expenditure in Australia, Chile, Colombia, Japan, Korea and the United Kingdom, come from private sources.

- In the Slovak Republic, tuition fees for Bachelor's or equivalent programmes are around USD 2100 in independent private institutions, while public institutions do not charge any tuition fees.

- In Norway, the annual average tuition fees for Bachelor's and Master's degrees combined are around USD 5800 in independent private institutions, while there are no tuition fees in public institutions.

- In Australia, the annual average tuition fees in public institutions for doctoral programmes (less than USD 300) are about 15 times lower than for bachelor's programmes (about USD 5000). In fact, very few national doctoral students are charged any fees in Australia (less than 5% of doctoral students are in public institutions).

- Tuition fees are about four times higher in independent private institutions than in public institutions in Spain, about three times higher in Italy, and about twice as high in Israel and Switzerland.

- In Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, at least 80% of national students receive public financial support in the form of student loans, scholarships or grants, as opposed to less than 20% in Austria, the French Community of Belgium, Portugal and Switzerland.

References

1. Based on trends identified from OECD's The Education at a Glance 2020, https://doi.org/10.1787/19991487

2. The report features data on education collected by the OECD Indicators of Education Systems Programme (INES) or the UNESCO Institute of Statistics from: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia , Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States.

(Endnote)

1. Express News Service (2020, June 2) Lacking Smartphone to attend online classes, Class 9 girls sets herself ablaze in Kerala. *The New Indian Express*. Retrieved November 10, 2020 from https://bit.ly/3lje6uN

> Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.
>
> *Malala Yousafzai*

Representations

Reforms in Criminal Laws Consultation

Common Cause has been sending its submissions to the questionnaire-based consultation started by the five-member Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws, set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The questionnaire has been divided into six tranches and it concluded on October 9, 2020. The Committee has also been tasked with looking into the possibility of newer legislation on varied subjects, right from sedition to marital rape. In addition, it will weigh in on myriad issues, including whether mob lynching should be penalised as a separate offence.

So far, we have submitted our detailed comments on two instalments of the questionnaire related to the reforms process. The responses to the First Consultation on Substantive Criminal Law, submitted on July 17, 2020, dealt with Strict Liability Offences, Offences Against the State, Offences Affecting Human Body, Sexual Offences, and many other issues.

We offered our responses to the Second Consultation on Substantive Criminal Law on August 11, 2020, which focussed on Offences By or Relating to Public Servants, Offences Relating to Public Tranquillity, Offences Affecting the Public Health, Safety, Convenience, Decency and Morals, among other things.

In the second leg of the consultation process Common Cause offered detailed commentary on the question of Hate Speech, and whether it should be criminalised as a separate offence under the IPC. We suggested an amendment to the existing hate speech provisions within the IPC. We recommended that they should include the six factors introduced under the Rabat Plan of Action by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules 2020

On August 20, 2020, Common Cause sent a representation to the Deputy Director, Union Ministry of Labour and Employment, on the Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules 2020, which is aimed at providing the base and procedures to implement the Code on Wages, 2019. Our specific suggestions included:

- There should be eight hours of work in a day and 48 hours in a week, as well as one or more intervals of rest which in total shall not exceed one hour daily.
- The number of work hours in a normal working day, including rest intervals, should not spread over more than 10 and ½ hours.
- Rest day should be treated as leave with wages.
- To clarify whether there will be a national level floor wage or state level variations.
- Clarity on methodology used to determine the floor wage.
- Representation of Trade Unions in the floor wage fixation committees.
- Revisiting the criteria for determining wages as developed in the Raptakos Brett Case and the 15th International Labour Conference, as these norms were evolved decades ago.

UNEP Mineral Resource Governance Resolution

In response to UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)'s Regional Consultative Meetings on the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution on Mineral Resource Governance, Common Cause submitted its comments and recommendations on September 3, 2020.

Some of our suggestions were:

- Minerals represent great wealth and a global wealth asset management system is in order to ensure that mineral

wealth is not depleted with the present generation.

- IMF and related standard setters must amend their standard to treat extraction as the sale of great inherited wealth and the State has to be held not only responsible, but also liable for preservation of the mineral resources (not just limited to prohibition of illegal/unsustainable mining). This includes a high security mineral supply chain system, best practices from outsourcing contracts, system auditors, a whistle-blower reward and protection scheme, etc.

- The State shall also be responsible for conducting proper due diligence to ensure that individuals and bodies dealing with mineral wealth follow the highest standards of integrity.

- Transparency charters must be established, with complete public access and empowerment to verify all or any data concerning outsourced service providers converting mineral wealth to financial wealth.

- Implementation of fair mining and creation of a global legal framework to deal with mineral wealth.

In addition, we strongly advocated that UNEP (a) adopt the intergenerational equity principle as the foundation principle for examining mineral resource governance, (b) adopt the "shared inheritance" paradigm for mineral resources

and eschew "revenue", "tax," "earnings" or "income" when referring to royalty and other mineral sale proceeds, (c) recommend that IMF and related standards setters amend their standard to treat extraction as the sale of great inherited wealth, (d) recommend that states and other trustees / managers of mineral wealth treat it as wealth held in trust for the people and future generations separate from proprietary property, (e) recommend the implementation of the full framework, especially the five principles of fair mining, (f) recommend that UNCLOS (United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea) be updated to reflect our improved understanding of issues of biodiversity, corruption, transparency, etc from extraction of minerals, (g) similar legal treaties be negotiated for the other global mineral commons.

Draft Health Data Management Policy

Common Cause sent a representation to the Chief Executive Officer, National Health Authority, in response to the draft Health Data Management Policy on September 21, 2020. The draft policy claims to protect citizens' health data by regulating its collection and storage.

Our specific concerns included:

- Unless there is an overarching data protection law, sectoral laws and specific rules governing the health data management policy in place,

citizens cannot objectively reach a decision to disclose their health data. In the absence of these safeguards, there is a void concerning the treatment and security of data. This blindsides potential card holders into divulging information against their interests.

- It is uncertain whether access to healthcare will actually increase with the implantation of this policy. Online health services will clearly not be helpful for rural populations cut off from electricity and the internet.

- The policy can exercise the theory of Contextual Integrity by Dr. Helen Nissenbaum to explain the data flows to potential data principals.

- There should be a timely resolution of concerns raised by data principals. A specific time frame for problem resolution is not mentioned in the policy document. Also, the Draft Policy states that the intimation of any requests by the data principal can only be made through an electronic medium. Given the deep digital divide in our country, the NHA should re-examine this provision.

- News reports have indicated that since the launch of the national data health mission, over 1 lakh health IDs have been generated. In the absence of a Data Protection legislation, the implementation of this scheme is contrary to the directions laid down by

the Supreme Court in the case of *Justice K.S. Puttuswamy v. Union of India*.

Information Asymmetry in the Delivery of Challans

In response to the growing distress of common citizens regarding the new e-challan system and the e-payment gateway launched by Delhi Traffic Police recently, Common Cause sent representations to the Delhi Police Commissioner and the Union Minister, Ministry of Roadways, Transport & Highways on October 29, 2020 and November 3, 2020 respectively. Aimed at making the challan process easy and cashless for vehicle drivers and owners, the new system replaces the earlier practice of manual issuance of challan.

We requested that clarifications be issued on:

- The exact procedure/mode for the issuance and delivery of challans

- The procedure followed for communication of challans issued online.

In addition, we also suggested that the traffic police must carry out a campaign with the help and participation of the citizens to ensure that drivers across all sections of the society are well aware of the automated systems in place. This will improve compliance of traffic rules and foster respect for the rule of law in the country.

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> The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.
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> *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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Common Cause is a non-profit organisation which makes democratic interventions for a better India. Established in 1980 by the legendary Mr H D Shourie, Common Cause also works on judicial, police, electoral and administrative reforms, environment, human development and good governance.

Its very first Public Interest Litigation benefitted millions of pensioners. Subsequent PILs transformed the way natural resources are allocated in India. Its landmark cases include those regarding criminalisation of politics; cancellation (and re-auction) of the arbitrary 2G telecom licences and captive coal block allocations; quashing of Section 66A of the IT Act; prohibiting misuse of public money through self-congratulatory advertisements by politicians in power, to name only a few. Our other prominent petitions pertain to imposing penalties on rampant illegal mining in Odisha, the appointment of Lokpal and seeking human beings' right to die with dignity through a 'Living Will.'

The impact: Re-auctions leading to earning of several thousand crores, and counting. Even though that is a lot of money for a poor country, the earnings are a smaller gain when compared to the institutional integrity built in the process. From spectrum to coal to mines, today no government can 'gift' precious resources to cronies thanks to these two PILs.
(For more details about cases, please visit www.commoncause.in)

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