

Towards A New Education Policy: Some Reflections

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Mr Vice Chancellor Prof T V Kattimani, distinguished delegates of the international seminar, dear students and friends!

It is my honour to be here in Amarkantak, not just as a member of the Advisory Board but also as a valedictory speaker to share my reflections, concerns and proposals to serve as inputs for a new education policy.

I bring our greetings from the Aligarh Muslim University ranked as the second best university of the country by two international rating agencies. The name gives an incorrect impression about the university. It is a modern secular institution and admissions are not religion-based, but through open competitive examinations. Our career courses like medicine, engineering and management have a proportion only of 50% Muslims.

It is heartening to share that the proposed NEP 2016 is inspired by the Gandhi's Wardha Scheme of Education formulated as the nationalist education scheme in 1938, wherein skill development and moral values were significant components in order to create responsible and self-reliant citizens for a united great India, which we cherish as **Ek Bharat—Shreshtha Bharat**.

Let me add a word of caution that in the context of education and nationalism, any endeavour to develop a course that inculcates 'extreme form of nationalism', carries very dangerous portents. We should take lessons from history where resort to extreme nationalism by Nazi Germany led to the disastrous second world war. We should not forget the ultra nationalism of the KU KLUX KLAN or the most recent claims of the ISIS. We should not equate nationalism with patriotism. Patriotism is essential for citizens of democracy. Extreme nationalism has to be handled with care.

Indeed we have suffered from the arrogance and perceived superiority of the West and the self effacing negative evaluation of our indigenous knowledge system, which have led to 'colonial neurosis', and 'dependency complex'. The avowed aim of the NEP 2016 to develop a counter-discourse and to provide an ideological resistance for thwarting these psycho-neurotic malaises cannot be achieved unless we also make it clear that colonisation is different from those who chose to make India their home. While the former colonialists concentrated on plunder and quit the country, the earlier settlers only enriched India and made their adopted country home in perpetuity.

The National Education Policy, 2016 must be inclusive to cater towards maintaining the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural fabric of India. It should address the local sensitivities by encouraging and promoting legitimate aspirations of every segment for bringing about social cohesion and religious amity. The NEP 2016 must cater to prevent ghettoization of education by ensuring entry of diverse sections of population in all educational institutions.

The proposed NEP 2016 is committed to provide quality education for all. It envisions a lifelong learning opportunities that would equip our students with "knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country's development process, respond to the requirements of the fast-changing, ever-globalising, knowledge-based societies".

The proposed NEP 2016 promises to stand out as being holistic, integrative and accommodative to include and integrate all those constituencies of enterprises based on agriculture, medicine, etc., which would go a long way in capturing the aspirations and economic urges of the Indian population.

LACK OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCE REFLECTED IN EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The proposed NEP 2016 points out the lack of competencies in cognitive and language domains among children who complete post-school education. It considers inappropriate curriculum, lack of trained educators and ineffective pedagogy as factors contributing to this lack of competencies.

However, the incompetence arising out of the lack of command over language has generally been missed out. We therefore need to strengthen our students on their language competence. By the time they leave elementary schools they should be made comfortable in one more language, other than their mother tongue.

For the promotion of multilingualism through education and for the protection and preservation of the multilingual character and diversity of the society, there is a need to uniformly develop a framework for the Multilingual Education (MLE) in India. This will preserve the multilingual fabric of India.

The imperatives to use mother tongue assumes all the more significance in the context of extinction of many local languages and vernaculars.

The ongoing SPPEL (Scheme for the Preservation and Protection of Endangered Languages), a flagship program launched by the Ministry of HRD under the Central Institute of Indian Languages which is aimed towards preserving the linguistic vitality of India, should also be integrated with the NEP 2016.

Cognitive and social advances in analysis and understanding of language have shed light on the role of language in perpetuating inequalities among the underprivileged groups, a legacy of colonial education. There is marked absence of any public awareness of socio-linguistics of language diversity, of language as a tool for exploitation and marginalization, as a source of discrimination in education.

The study of language still continues to be in the clutches of traditional prescriptive rote-learned grammar instruction. We need to overcome it through the NEP 2016.

The proposal to introduce ICT as a subject from class sixth needs to be re-considered. I personally think it should be introduced rather earlier. For example, it is easier to teach a three year old a language rather than a ten year old.

HIGHER EDUCATION

In the higher education sector, academic governance remains a big challenge on many counts.

We wish to propose more rigorous and more transparent methods of recruitment particularly at the entry level, at least in few premier universities. We should introduce a two-tier evaluation system at the initial recruitment level. The two tiers should have different compositions of selection committees. In the first tier the candidates should be evaluated on the basis of their performance in live classroom in the presence of other faculty members. This will be evaluated and a detailed evaluation report should be a feedback for the second tier of evaluation which should comprise the VC and usual composition of the selection committee. For the purpose of transparency every evaluation should be video-recorded.

For promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, it is important that research should be made a strong component of evaluation, at least in the better-provisioned universities. There should be a five tier system of promotion, from Assistant Professor to Junior Associate Professor, to Associate Professor, then to Junior Professor before being promoted as Professor.

We should think of linking salary with quality research outputs. The policy of rotating chairman and Dean has its advantages, but it detracts them from being assertive because on completion of tenure they would be on the other side of the desk. It is proposed that the office of chairperson and dean should be held only towards the end of teaching career so that they can retire from there.

Overcoming the problem of vacant positions for inordinately longer period where the proportion of the vacancies, many a time, go up to 40%, remains a challenge in higher education. In the cases of old big residential universities this challenge becomes all the more complex. Here, during the recruitment at the entry level, there should also be a panel of few candidates wait-listed who should be considered for filling the vacant position. This goes without saying that such an arrangement of having panel would be expiring in a year.

Similarly, the recruitment of non-teaching staff needs to be made much more competitive and meritocratic to attract better supporting staff for university governance. This exercise will help overcoming the problem of having disproportionately large number of locally resident non teaching employees. There should be a constant appraisal within the employer university as well as outside. On the pattern of training for central secretariat staff, the university non teaching staff should also be made to undergo the training of secretarial practices, file-noting, movement and maintenance of the file-records. This practice will make the employees much more accountable.

Our environmental concerns suggest us that we should try becoming more and more paper-less.

Experiences of governance of the high functionaries of the universities/Institutes, viz., VCs/Directors, PVC, Registrar, Controller, FO, etc., must be documented towards or after the completion of their tenure. These documentations will help gauge, comprehend and identify the problems, difficulties, unfinished tasks, as also the priorities of the issues to be taken up. These can become a resource and input for future policy formulations for better governance.

The NEP 2016 revisits the earlier recommendations for the creation of an Indian Education Service. The efficacy of this proposal can be achieved by having it implemented only for those new centres/departments of excellence which the NEP 2016 proposes to establish in a decade from now. We also propose that we should go for establishing centrally funded, well-provisioned and well-equipped colleges in major towns across the country. This would be partly in line of setting up AIIMS, IITs, IIMs, National Law Institutes, etc., to overcome the problem of having lack of quality educational institutions owing to resource crunch in the provinces, besides many other factors/constraints. This will make quality education accessible to meritorious and promising students coming from economically challenging backgrounds. A proper liaison in terms of academic exchange should be made between the central universities and the proposed centrally funded colleges.

We have already established language-based central universities in Wardha and Hyderabad. A tribal university is already in place. What is needed now is to have central universities for women.

We appreciate the proposal of moving towards a university system "integrating Undergraduate (UG), Postgraduate (PG) and doctoral studies, with faculty concurrently teaching both at UG and PG levels to help improve synergies between teaching and research. Universities will be multi-disciplinary in nature and cannot be single discipline specific".

We also welcome the proposal of an "Education Commission comprising of academic experts...[to] assist the Ministry of HRD in identifying new knowledge areas/ disciplines/ domains as well as pedagogic, curricular and assessment reforms at the global level, This will help to keep up with the changes in global scenario and national aspirations". This should not however encroach upon the autonomy of the universities. Because, every university is set up to reflect certain vision about Local-National-Global connect, prioritizing the researches in the geography, economy, polity, history of the region and sub-region. These researches can become inputs for the curriculum.

We welcome the proposal of having tribunals for adjudicating on higher education. It will ease the burden on already overburdened judiciary, and simultaneously it will dispense expeditious justice on the academic matters.

We should also evolve a methodology for making the Search Committees' accountable for their recommendations pertaining to the empanelment of the VCs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

We wish to propose that immediately after selection and joining of Assistant Professors, they should be sent out of the employer university, for a mandatory inter-disciplinary Orientation Course of not less than three months, and within a year they should undergo a Subject Refresher Course of again not less than three months. These two training programmes should be made much more rigorous with external evaluations before confirming the probation. The training programmes should be joined in selected prestigious universities having the most renowned names in the given field as resource persons. These two training programmes should have mandatory link with probation confirmation.

At least in few selected premier universities, after these training programmes, during their service as Assistant Professor, it should be made mandatory for them to obtain specialized exposure from the benchmark departments of studies (centres of excellence) within India and/or abroad. This exposure must reflect in their research output which should be linked with their salary and promotion. And inbreeding in the faculty recruitments must be avoided. In fact, there should be a cooling off period in other institutions. Most of the better provisioned universities already have a practice of study-leave. This can be utilized for this purpose. Granting autonomy to best-in-class universities to devise their own mechanism for faculty recruitment is a very welcome idea embedded in the NEP 2016.

The proposal of tenure-based system in the universities needs to be tread with great caution. Unscrupulous functionaries can spoil the spirit of the proposal. Over-emphasis on this will have its own undesirable implications. We must not forget that tenure-based system also entails too much of job insecurities. In a country like ours, with specific social and family structure (*parampara and sanskaar*), our employees need more security rather than vulnerability. We therefore on this count should not be inspired as much by the US system which is marked by a strong sense of alienation, and over-emphasised self centred individuation, leading to break up of family ties, articulated by Francis Fukuyama with a phrase of 'Great Disruptions'. Family ties and social bonds become inevitable. Hence the tenure system does not gel with our socio-cultural ethos.

The under-emphasis on doctoral degrees suggested in the NEP 2016, I am afraid, will eventually make the nation deficient at knowledge creation. We will end up reducing ourselves only as disseminator and recycler of knowledge. For knowledge creation our dependence on other countries will increase which will not augur well for our nation. It will also adversely affect our idea of having Research-focussed institutions envisioned elsewhere in the NEP 2016. The policy of Internationalization of the premier universities and nationalization of the central universities in terms of faculty and student-intake, should be integrated with the professional development of teachers. Our young faculty members should be encouraged to obtain training from the benchmark departments of the better known universities within and outside India. The recruitment of the faculty members and the enrolment of the students should be nationally representative, coming from diverse regions.

The NEP 2016 document's emphasis on research and development cannot be seen in isolation from rights and responsibilities that are impinging upon the higher education in India. Too much of teaching crowds out the time left for research and deadens the intellect which requires leisure and solitude to flourish.

ENROLMENT AND EVALUATION OF STUDENTS

Enrolment policy should be sensitive to the socio-regional diversities. It should, as I said earlier, prevent ghettoization of education. Good Ph. D. theses should be incentivized through a rigorous method of short-listing the best Ph. D theses. An institution like the Shodhganga may be assigned with this task with all the required rigours and objectivities.

We have now begun to encounter a problem whereby less competent students are found to have scored very high marks because of our practice of inflated marking. It injects false sense of pride among the students, making them complacent and condescending. This problem needs to be taken care of.

Specific methodologies of inculcating critical thinking and scrutiny needs to be brought into practice, with different pedagogic ways at each stage of UG, PG, and research.

The research productions for obtaining Ph D degrees should be made to undergo more rigorous scrutiny of the work done at the level of evaluation than what it is now. The examiners should submit more comprehensive reports delineating the strength and the weaknesses of the work done with specific suggestions of improvements.

VEDIC STUDIES

A four-tier architecture of proposed NEP 2016 is conjured to “master the software and skills”, which the learners need for building a “thriving creative career”. It is premised on the belief that along with knowledge, the education should also aim at making a complete human by imparting and inculcating the spirit of knowledge, values, and commitment. The foundational tier of the proposed architecture is premised on VEDIC view, where VEDIC as an acronym that stands for: Versatile/Visionary, Efficient/Enthusiastic, Dynamic/Dedicated, Inventing/Inspiring, and Committed/Curious. This inculcation would however remain incomplete if our teachers are not made familiar with the outcomes of civilizational exchanges which have come about over a long period of history. These exchanges have made our nation versatile and polychromatic. No civilization exists and makes progress in isolation. Amir Khusrau’s invocation of India as heaven on earth (*firdaus bar roo-e-zamin*) suggests that we must also have a comparative study of other cultures, traditions, languages, religions, and literatures.

The stress on VEDIC studies is appreciable but the proposed NEP 2016 must be inclusive to cater for multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural prosaic of India.

TRIBAL EDUCATION: It is a matter of satisfaction that the NEP 2016 draft gives special focus on tribal education. However while taking them from ‘Comfort Zone to Expert Zone’ the parameters of assessment of their literacy, and evaluation of their academic performance need to be, sensitive towards and in sync with the tribal ethos and worldview.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

The proposed NEP 2016 has broadened the notion of inclusive education by incorporating the various schemes of the central and the state government in the course curriculums of the various educational institutions as well. Hence, there is a clear integration of several sub-schemes such as ‘Make in India’, ‘Start ups’, ‘Skill India’, ‘Clean India’, ‘Yoga and Meditation’ have been recommended under the inclusive education.

The uniqueness of this proposed NEP 2016 is its forging of inter-sectoral linkages with policy formulation. Education is not just a concern of one specific ministry of HRD. It has its cascading impact and rippling effects on other ministries as well. Hence inter-, multi-, trans-ministerial education policy will help achieve many longstanding goals and unfinished agendas. This will also contribute towards realizing the desired goals of not less than 6% of the GDP to be earmarked for education. It is not that only the MHRD will be left with the task of funding. There will be sharing from the ministries of health, family welfare, agriculture, technology, etc., and would therefore augment the total share for the education up to 10% of the annual budget.

From my own experiences and inputs from other old universities, I feel that the funding for infrastructural developments in such universities requires separate treatment by the funding agencies. Unlike the new universities/institutions, the older ones suffer from a problem of fund crunch. A large proportion of the total grant is invariably spent on pensions and salaries and also on maintaining the already existing old infrastructures, thus, adversely affecting the infrastructural developments. Hence these universities need special grants and packages in addition to their regular grants.

Unfortunately, even after decades of our independence we continue to be a society with marked inequalities. Therefore special focus of the proposed NEP 2016 on **education for the underprivileged sections**, including the nomadic tribes, is commendable.

SKILLS, EMPLOYABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ISSUES

While NEP 2016 proposal rightly places emphasis on **Career-Focussed Institutions** offering courses, curricula that are relevant for skills and employability. It should however also be concerned about how markets and industry can play an important role in determining relevance of courses and curriculum. For any skill development to succeed, the employers need to be put in the driving seat and the govt. should act as a regulator and not the implementer.

Further, for highest return to technical skills, a combination of soft skills and technical skills is important. Soft skills come from liberal education. Liberal arts equip students with communication and interpersonal skills. It also sharpens questioning spirit, interpretative and critical faculty besides making them sensitive to social, cultural, and economic concerns of the nation.

The humanities and social sciences can be critical in helping us understand what the science will become in the future. A productive dialogue between the natural sciences and the social sciences is essential to explore critical themes such as global sustainability and global development.

According to Lawrence Katz, a labour economist at Harvard, not only is a broad liberal arts education a key pathway to success in the 21st century, humanities also help people reach wise public policy decisions, for science also depends upon the humanities and social sciences to shape judgments about ethics, limits and values.

Just as every Don Quixote needs a Sancho Panga, every Shylock needs a Portia, every science and technology needs humanities and social sciences.

It is also necessary to emphasize that even the engineering, medical, technical institutions must teach some quantum of humanities and social sciences. As said earlier, it also sharpens questioning spirit, interpretative and critical faculty besides making scholars sensitive to social, cultural, and economic concerns of the nation.

The NEP 2016 proposes to have three sorts of institutions, viz., Research-focussed Institutions, Career-focussed institutions, and Foundation institutions. In our humble view, these institutions should not be taken in isolation but all the three need to be integrated. The Foundation-institutions should have interaction with Research-focussed institutions for developing analytical minds and updating pedagogy with research advances and the Career-focussed institutions should not disregard humanities and social sciences, which contribute to developing critical faculty and articulation among the skilled professionals.

CASE STUDY CONCEPT:

This is a much needed component in our higher education, keeping in mind the mix of the students coming in the institutions from both rural and urban backgrounds. The institutions should undertake to conduct case-study exploring the geography, economy, histories and cultures of the respective localities. This should be taken as a mandatory project at the levels of undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees. The findings of such explorations can go as useful pedagogical inputs.

The proposed Multidisciplinary approach with flexibility to the students in opting courses is welcome.

The tie-ups/partnerships with industry players should not remain confined merely to internship programmes. It should also take a lead role in guiding towards skill development and the government should be a regulator rather than an implementer.

VALUE AND SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

As mentioned in the beginning of this presentation, with emphasis on cultural diversities, the objective of inculcating value education will also be fulfilled in a big way. As part of value and spiritual education, the NEP 2016, should endeavour towards developing integrity and character of individuals not only by teaching epics pertaining to Hinduism and Sikhism, but also by including epics of other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and quite importantly the folk traditions of the tribal populations. However, uncritical acceptance of long standing practices would hamper the inculcation of critical thinking. Comparative study of different cultures and their histories added with the core commonalities and syncretic elements impinging upon the well being and coherence of the harmonious social fabric of the pluri-cultural country like ours should be a necessary component of our curriculum across the disciplines.

As part of Value Education, the proposed NEP 2016 should also emphasize that failure is equally important in the journey to success. Positive outlook to failure means finding 100 alternative ways that did not work. Success could not have been as sweet to Thomas Edison, credited to have 1903 patents to his name in the US, if he had not failed several times. As Guy Claxton, a cognitive scientist from King's college, UK has proclaimed that the erasers are an "instrument of the devil" and should therefore be banished from our classrooms. One should be encouraged to learn from mistakes rather than feel ashamed of them. Erasers might be bad for learning but they can be ingredients for creativity and innovation.

OUTREACH SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

As discussed earlier, there is dis-connect between school and Higher Education curricula and lack of skills needed for work and entrepreneurship. To overcome this dis-connect, the universities and colleges and other technical institutions of Higher Education should adopt schools as part of their outreach activities. This is besides the NSS and NCC programmes.

CONCLUSION

Having been in the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University for four days, our team has been very impressed with the way this international seminar has been conducted and the MHRD in its wisdom has selected a very enlightened VC to head the Draft Vision Document which will be the basis for the NEP 2016. This policy is the need of the hour. It must reflect the salad-bowl concept of our nation. That means we are a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual people residing in our great country which can be termed as a salad-bowl. We are integrated just like ingredients of the salad, but retain our respective identities which we are very proud of. Sensitivities of all segments of population must be kept in mind in the NEP 2016. Let me bid you all my good bye with this Urdu couplet by Ghalib, articulating our proud civilizational characteristic of 'living together separately', that is, Indian-ness or *Bhartiyata*,

Hai rang-e-laalaa-o-gul-o-nasreeN, judaa judaa

Har rang meiN bahaar kaa isbaat chaahiye

Tulip or primrose, although they speak in their distinct colours.

Each one of them answers the spring in its own dialect Just as each blossom answers the call of spring which is curiously unique in itself, being born out of a distinct hue and fragrance and texture, so is the mixing of each one of us without losing the colours of our distinct cultural and linguistic identities.

Jai Hind