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Evolution of National Policy on Education in India

Kishor Chandra Satpathy

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VISTAS OF EDUCATION



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EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION IN INDIA

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1.1 Introduction:

Imparting Education in India has always been considered a noble endeavour both for the learner and the preceptor since ancient times. We had had the tradition of Gurukulas, Ashrams, Monasteries, Maktabas and Madrassahs where students came from far off places to study. Despite this glorious tradition, we lacked a uniform and established pattern of education for the whole country for a considerably long period of time.

The origin of modern education in India can be traced back to the establishment of Calcutta Madrassah in 1781 and that of Benaras Sanskrit College in 1791. In 1793, Wilberforce's plea in the House of Commons for supporting missionaries' efforts in education of Indians was turned down. Similarly, effort of Charles Grant who became an elected Member of the East India Company in the British Parliament (1802-1818) for introduction of English language as the medium of instruction could not pass the Parliamentary

hurdle. Despite this, his views influenced considerably the contemporary British opinions. When the Charter of the East India Company came up for renewal, a token provision of one lakh rupees was made for education of Indian people in the Charter Act, 1813 (clause.43), and the Company was asked to oversee the educational responsibility of Indians. The clause indicated three propositions for consideration (i) encouragement of learning of the natives; (ii) revival and improvement of literature; and (iii) the promotion of knowledge of science among the inhabitants of the country. Since there was no Central Government in the real sense, nothing moved in education front.

1.2 Macaulay's Minute, 1835:

In 1823, a General Committee of Public Instruction was set up to draw up an education policy and Lord Macaulay became its president in 1834. In his lengthy minute on education policy in 1835, he suggested closing down the institutions of oriental learning and to codify Hindu and Muslim laws in English.. He further argued that "it was the duty of England to teach Indians what was good for their health, not what was palatable to their taste". Based on this minute, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India, passed a **Resolution on Education Policy** on **7th March 1835** which could be said to be the first declaration of the British Government on Indian Education – rather English Education in India. In fact, in 1837, English was made the language of Administration while resolution of 1844 opened the subordinate positions under colonial rule to the English speaking Indians.

1.3 Wood's Despatch, 1854:

The major basis of education policy in pre-independent India was provided by various Acts and recommendations of several Commissions and Committees appointed by the

Government from time to time, the most notables being the Charter Acts of 1813, 1833 & 1853, Wood's Despatch of 1854, Hunter Commission of 1917, Hartog Committee of 1929 and Sargent Report of 1944. However, the Wood's Despatch of 19th July 1854 was the landmark in the history of education in British-India as it laid down the broad principles and programmes for educational development in India giving a definite direction of a policy framework. It imposed upon the Government the task of creating a properly articulated Scheme of Education from Primary School to the university. Main provisions of the Despatch include establishment of universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; creation of Education Departments in Provinces; provision of grant-in-aid to private schools and women's education etc.

1.4 Education Commission, 1882:

To review the progress of education after the Wood's Despatch, the Indian Education Commission was set up in 1882 and on the basis of the report of the Commission, the Government issued a sketchy order laying down the guidelines for a national policy on education with regard to the "spread of primary education and its management by creation of local bodies at the district and tehsil levels; education of girls, SCs/STs and encouragement to Indian private enterprise in Secondary and Higher Education etc.

1.5 Impact of Freedom Movement :

The nationalists' concern for education was on its ascendancy since the beginning of nineteenth century which resulted in complete condemnation of all the 150 resolutions of the Shimla Conference of 1901 secretly called by Lord Curzon to bring out some educational

reforms. As a result, the Government was forced to take into account the sentiments of nationalists while issuing the **Policy Resolution on Education on 11th March 1904**. This resolution which covered a very wide area subtly reaffirmed overall British policy on education. Further, as early as 1906, the Indian National Congress adopted a Resolution on national education which said that the time had arrived *“for people all over the country earnestly to take up the question of national education for both boys and girls, and organise a system of education, literary and scientific and technical, suited to the requirements of the country, on national lines under national control and directed towards the realization of national destiny.”*

1.6 Education Policy Resolution, 1913:

Again, in 1910, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League passed a Resolutions in favour of free and compulsory primary education at their sessions in Allahabad and Nagpur respectively. In fact, Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale had introduced a bill in the Imperial Legislative Council on March 10, 1910 to provide what he called *“the gradual introduction of the principle of compulsion into the elementary education system in the country.”* Though this bill was defeated, it aroused wide spread support all over the country. Consequently, the Government came out with another Resolution on Education Policy in 1913. This policy had twenty four recommendations for different sectors of education, the most notable being separation of school education from that of higher education and spending bulk of state resources for spread of primary education although it refused to accept the principle of compulsory primary education. Creation of a separate Central Department of Education in 1910, a Bureau of Education in 1915,

establishment of Calcutta University Commission in 1917 and ultimate transfer of education to the control of Indian Ministers in 1921 are the result of our struggle during the freedom movement which helped build up the foundation of a major policy framework to follow.

1.7 Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE):

The CABE consisting of all the Education Ministers of Indian Provinces and eminent educationists was first constituted in 1921 to aid and advice the Government on various educational issues. But it was wound up in 1924 in the pretext of economy. However, it was again revived in 1935 and one of its greatest achievements was to prepare the Post-War Plan Educational Development. This is popularly known as Sargent Plan in the name of CABE's chairman John Sargent. It proposed to create an outstanding Indian Education Set-up in a span of forty years. But the plan had an inherent flaw as it did not take into account the factor relating to increase in population which would accrue during these years. Though the plan was not ultimately accepted by the Indian public opinion, it influenced the further course of educational development. Despite varied British interest in Indian education taken from time to time by the liberal elements in the Imperial Administration, no comprehensive policy on a national system of education was enunciated for lack of a genuine political commitment.

a) Post-Independence Era:

Education, however, acquired a new significance after independence as both planner and administrator felt the need for a national system of education suited to the needs and aspiration of free and modern India. Besides, the legacy of colonial rule was not only quantitatively deficient but also culturally alien which needed determined and major efforts for rapid expansion along with fundamental transformation

in its ethos, attitudes and purpose. Faced with this challenge of transforming India, our Constitution makers laid the basic pillars on which the edifice of Indian education would be built.

b) Constitutional Provisions:

Education in our Constitution as originally enacted was the basic responsibility of the State Governments except areas like co-ordination, determination of standards in technical and higher education etc. This position continued till 1976 when by 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, education was brought under Concurrent jurisdiction of both State Governments and the Central Government. Further, the entry 25 of the Concurrent List of the Constitution was amplified. It now reads:

“25. Education, including technical education, medical education and universities, subject to the provision of the entries 63,64,65 & 66 of List-I; vocational and technical training of labour”

However, if we look at the educational responsibilities from a historical perspective, we find that education has been in the exclusive Central List between 1833 and 1870 (by the Charter Act of 1833) in the Concurrent List between 1870 and 1921 (decentralisation of Lord Mayo) in the exclusive State List between 1921 and 1947 (Govt. of India Act, 1919) and mostly in State List between 1947 and 1976 with some specified powers for the Central Government.

Despite the fact that the subject education became equally a responsibility of the Central Government after nearly three decades of Independence, the Government of India has always tried to play a crucial role for evolving a national system of education. The inspiration for evolving a national policy on education has come from our Constitution which in its Preamble spells out the framework of the policy while its chapters on ‘Fundamental

Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy' gives us the major contours of educational plan of action. Several articles in the Constitution of India bring into focus the general principles governing educational development in the country. These articles are rooted in India's struggle for independence. Basic education was one of the important goals of the freedom struggle and Mahatma Gandhi, even while leading the epic struggle against colonial power, evolved an alternative education system in which liquidation of mass illiteracy and seven years of basic education for all children were the essential components.

The following important educational provisions find their roots in various articles of the Constitution:

Free and Compulsory education: Article 45 under Directive Principles of State Policy states that "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." The expression "the State" which occurs in this article is defined in Article 112 to include the Government and Parliament of India, the government and the legislature of each of the States and all local or other authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.

Education of Minorities: Article 29 & 30.

Instruction in Mother Tongue at primary stage: Article 350-A & B (Part XVII) under Special Directive.

Education for weaker sections (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth): Article 15, 17(Part III)-Fundamental Rights and Article 46.

Secular Education (freedom of conscience, free profession practice and propagation of religion): Article 25(Part III).

Women's Education: Article 15 & 16.

Development of Hindi as a link language of India:
Article 351(Part XVII).

c) Planning in Education:

Another provision in the Constitution which has an indirect but significant bearing upon the role of Government of India in education is entry 20 of List III which is concerned with "*economic and social planning*". Here, besides the constitutional provisions, the Five-Year Plans of the Planning Commission which came into being in March 1950 has played a very significant role in shaping the educational policies and programmes of the Government. The thrust of the first Five Year Plan (1951-56) was on re-organisation of educational system and integration of its different stages and branches while the second Plan (1956-61) stressed the expansion of primary education and multi-faceting the secondary education. Girl's education, Teachers' training, vocational education, technical education received special attention during the third Plan (1961-66).

1.8 Kothari Commission & After:

The task before independent India was to remove the infirmities of the inherited structure of educational system and transform it into a social force geared to the socio-economic transformation of the Indian Society from the colonial under-development to self-reliant development. Consequently the post-independence period was marked by the examination of our education system by several commissions and committees. The most notable among them were: (i) the University Education Commission (1948-49) appointed to report on Indian University Education and suggest improvements and changes-to suit present and future requirements of the country, (ii) the Secondary

Education Commission(1952) was set up to examine the prevailing system of secondary education in the country and suggest measures for its reorganisation and improvement, and (iii) the Education Commission of 1964-66, popularly known as the Kothari Commission.

Amongst the above three Commissions, the Kothari Commission occupies a prime place of importance for the task before it was to advise the Government on the national pattern of education and on the general policies for the development of education at all stages-ranging from the primary to post-graduate stage and in all its aspects besides examining a host of educational problems in their social and economic context.

The Commission submitted its report to the Government on 29th June 1966, which was laid on the table of the Parliament on August 29, 1966. Kothari Commission was of the view that one of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory progress of education between 1947-65 was due to lack of a comprehensive and rational education policy. Therefore, it recommended that a national system of education should be created in the country in a period of twenty years (1966-86) and for this “the Government of India should issue a Statement on the National Policy on Education which should provide guidance to the State governments and local authorities in preparing and implementing educational plan in their areas. The possibility of passing a National Education Act may also be examined. (para 18.58)

1.9 Committee of the MPs on Education:

A Committee of Members of Parliament under the chairmanship of Triguna Sen and Ganga Sharan Sinha on education was constituted by the Government on 5th April, 1967 to consider the report of the Kothari Commission, prepare the draft of a statement on the National Policy on

Education and to identify the programmes for immediate action. The Committee scrutinized only the major recommendations of the Commission along with the comments of the State Governments thereon. While agreeing to accept several of the major recommendations of the Commission with and without modifications, it also gave some new recommendations.

1.10 Resolution on National Policy on Education (NPE), 1968:

On the basis of the above mentioned reports, a Resolution on National Policy on Education was issued by the Government on July 24, 1968 which came to be regarded as the first National Policy on Education in free India. It called for a 'transformation of the system of education to relate it more closely to the life of the people; a continuous effort to expand educational opportunities; a sustained and intensive effort to raise the quality of education at all stages; an emphasis on the development of science and technology; and the cultivation of moral and social values. This Resolution dealt with the following seventeen principal points to guide the development of education in the years ahead. These are (i) Provision of Free & Compulsory Education, (ii) Raising Status, Emoluments and Education of Teachers, (iii) Development of Language, (iv) Equalisation of Educational Opportunity, (v) Identification of Talents, (vi) Work-experience and National Service, (vii) Science Education and Research, (viii) Education for Agriculture and Industry, (ix) Production of Books, (x) Examination Reform, (xi) Facilities for Secondary Education, (xii) Strengthening of University Education, (xiii) Provision of Part-time Education and Correspondence Courses, (xiv) Spread of Literacy & Adult Education, (xv) Importance of Sports & Games,

(xvi) Special Effort for Education of Minorities and (xvii) Creation of a Broad Uniform Education Structure.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the policy was only partial. While, one may say, achievements were substantial with regard to overall growth of the system specially in the field of technical and higher education, the universalization of elementary education still remained a dream. Vocationalization had also been only partially implemented, disparities continued and quality remained a distant goal.

A major reason for this was that the adoption of the policy was not followed by detailing out the strategies for implementation, concretising the financial and organizational implications and assignment of tasks to identified bodies, institutions, individuals and making them accountable for fulfilling the given tasks.

1.11 42nd Amendment of the Constitution:

The objective of incorporating education in the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act was to facilitate evolution of all-India policies in the field of education. Though the Parliament was thereby empowered with the authority to legislate on education, the Centre has been relying on a consensual process to promote development of education. In fact, there already exists an all India level consultative body called the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) since pre-independence days in 1935. The representative character of the CABE has undergone some changes which presently consists of, among others, eminent educationists, education ministers of all States/UTs, select Central Ministers of Social Sector Ministries, a few elected members of Parliament and Union Minister of Education. It has played a very pivotal role in the preparation and implementation of the Central as well

as State plan of education and still continues its lead role in the evolution and monitoring of educational policies and programmes.

1.12 Draft National Policy on Education, 1979:

Another serious attempt was made to formulate a comprehensive policy on education based on a national consensus when the Central Government brought out the draft of a new National Policy on Education in 1979 which envisaged to recast education at all levels so as to make the education process functional in relation to the felt needs and potentialities of the people. Highlights of the draft policy include Neighbourhood School Plan, diversification and reduction of academic load, Community participation, Agriculture & Medical Education, control of fee structure of Public Schools etc. It was intended to have a nationwide debate on the document before its eventual finalisation as a critical Policy Statement to charter the development of education for the next two decades i.e. upto the end of twentieth century. However, due to some political uncertainty during the period, the proposed policy could not take off.

1.13 National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986:

In a broadcast to the Nation on 5th January 1985, our late Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi touched upon this subject and said:

“Education must promote national cohesion and the work ethic. The grandeur of our freedom struggle and its significance for national integration have to be brought home to every student. Our schools and colleges should acquaint the younger generations with India’s heritage and culture. The curricula and text books should curb parochial and communal interpretations of our composite culture. I

have looked at some of the policies and programmes in this field. I have asked that a new national education policy be drafted.....”

Following this the Central Government reviewed the whole gamut of educational situation in a document “the challenge of education” which was aimed at initiating a national debate on issues in education. It invited suggestions from the people for a new policy on education. After a nation wide debate and wide ranging consultation with State Governments, NGOs, educationists, editors, parents, teachers and other interest groups, the National Policy on Education was evolved through a consensual process and finally adopted by the Parliament in May, 1986. Similarly, its Programme of Action (POA), 1986 was approved by the Parliament in August, 1986.

The National Policy on Education (1986) envisages a national system for education which would take determined steps for the universalisation of primary education and the spread of adult literacy, thereby becoming an instrument for the reduction of disparities. It is based on a national curricular framework which contains a common core along with other, flexible, region-specific components. The common core cut across subject areas and is designed to promote values such as India’s common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy and secularism, equality of the sexes, protection of the environment, removal of social barriers, observance of the small family norm, and inculcation of the scientific way of thinking. While the Policy lays stress on widening of opportunities for the masses, it calls for consolidation of the existing system of higher and technical education. It also emphasizes the need for a much higher investment in education of at least six percent of the national income. For the first time, a detailed strategy was laid down in the form of Programme of Action

(POA) for implementation of various policy parametres.

1.14 Modifications of NPE, 1986:

To keep pace with changing times, the NPE,1986 was reviewed by a Committee called National Policy on Education Review Committee (NPERC) in 1990 under the Chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti with the following principal concerns in view:

- (i) equality and social justice; (ii) decentralization of educational management at all levels; (iii) establishment of a participative educational order; (iv) inculcation of values indispensable for creation of an enlightened and human society; and (v) empowerment for work.

The report of the Committee which was submitted to the Government on 26th December, 1990 was tabled in both the Houses of Parliament on 9th January, 1991.

As per a decision of CAGE in its meeting held in 8-9 March, 1991, a CAGE committee on Policy was set up on 31st July, 1991 under the Chairmanship of Shri N. Janardhana Reddy, Chief Minister, Andhra Pradesh to consider modification in NPE taking into account the Ramamurti Committee report and other relevant developments having a bearing on the policy and to make recommendations regarding modifications to be made in the NPE, 1986. The report of the committee which was submitted on the 22nd January, 1992 was considered by the CAGE in its meeting held on May 5-6, 1992. CAGE, while broadly endorsing the NPE, recommended a few changes in the policy and these changes were incorporated in a document called NPE, 1986-Revised Policy Formulations and was laid in the Parliament on 7th May, 1992. Like modifications in NPE, 1986, the POA, 1992 was also evolved through the same consensual process. POA 1992 was tabled in the Parliament on 19th August, 1992.

The modified policy envisages a National System of Education to bring about uniformity in education, making adult education programmes a mass movement, providing universal access, retention and quality in elementary education, special emphasis on education of girls, establishment of pace-setting schools like Navoday Vidyalayas in each district, vocationalisation of secondary education, synthesis of knowledge and inter-disciplinary research in higher education, opening of more Open Universities in States, effective steps for delinking of degrees from jobs, strengthening of the All India Council for Technical Education, encouragement of sports, physical education and Yoga and adoption of an effective evaluation method etc. To cap it all, a decentralized management structure has been suggested to ensure popular participation in education.

The concept of concurrency was given an operational meaning by the NPE, 1986. This policy envisages concurrency as a “meaningful partnership between the Centre and the States” and placed on the Union government a larger responsibility in regard to the national and integrative character of education, quality and standards, manpower planning, research and advanced study, and international aspect of education, culture and human resource development.

Education, as the centerpiece of human resources development in the overall paradigm of development, has now secured national priority. The Constitutional mandate for free and compulsory education bore fruit with the enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 from April 1, 2010. Thereafter, Government took various steps to implement it including (i) notification of the Right of the Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules 2010 and framing of the Model Rules for circulation

to the states to enable them to formulate the State Rules under the Act. Few countries in the world have such a national provision to ensure child-centered, child-friendly education to help all children develop to their fullest potential. There were an estimated eight million out-of-school children in the age group of 6 to 14 in India out-of-school in 2009. The world cannot reach its goal to have every child complete primary school by 2015 without India. A good quality human resource base is extremely important in today's highly competitive environment. The very concept of development in the past two decades has evolved in this direction which has moved from income and income distribution to human resource development. This is the very reason for the marked shift from the welfare approach of education to the right based approach — providing the foundation for the right to dignified living through its transformative potential to development. There is national commitment at the highest levels among policy makers, educationists, community and all concerned persons that education is the key to balanced socio-economic development of this vast sub-continent called **INDIA**.