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NEP 2020 on Higher Education

Wishing Away Structural Problems, Wishing a Magical Solution

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The National Education Policy 2020 does not address the structural problems in higher education today. It instead merely rejigs the existing edifice, creates new institutions & reimagines the system, all in the hope that a new, creative one will then emerge.

Of the astonishingly large number of those who have given approving nods to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, one remains unrecorded. That is a beaming nod from the nether world, where the soul of George Nathaniel Curzon, 11th Viceroy of India (1898-1905), would surely be exulting in the realization of his own unfulfilled dreams for higher education in India. At least three of Curzon's aspirations are addressed, directly or indirectly, in this document: entrenching centralized state control in the governance of education; fixing the problem of affiliating colleges; and restraining the political activism of students.

There is of course a lot more in the NEP 2020 that is deserving of comment, but the scope of this essay is restricted to four issues: the process followed in formulating this policy and, in substantive terms, three aspects of its recommendations relating to higher education: the regulatory architecture, university governance, and educational content.

The policy process: Limited consultation and transparency

It has taken the government four years and as many draft reports, ranging from 55 to 484 pages to come up with a new National Education Policy. Even so, this policy, unlike its predecessors of 1968 and 1986, has not been through an extensive consultative process with experts, parliamentarians, and the states.

In 1967, the central government constituted a committee of 30 members of parliament (MPs), representing all political parties, to prepare a draft of the National Policy of Education based on the 1966 Kothari Commission's recommendations. The commission's recommendation of selective admission to universities was rejected by the committee of MPs, with Jagjivan Ram even threatening to launch a satyagraha if it was accepted. Nine members wrote minutes of dissent, running into 23 pages appended to a 26-page report. This report was considered by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) and by the Vice-Chancellors' Conference. Most vice-chancellors opposed Kothari's idea of developing half a dozen universities as major universities comparable to the best in the world. Opposition to what were perceived to be elitist tendencies resulted in the rejection of some and stymying of other aspects of the policy's implementation. This was enabled by the very effort of building consensus around it in an incredibly democratic process (Naik 1982, 34-40).

> Both the 1968 and the 1986 policies … were thus put through extensive consultative processes. By contrast, the consultative process of NEP 2020 appears to have been limited and anodyne.

The 1986 National Policy on Education had a strong policy champion in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who wanted the new policy drafted in one month and, if possible, for implementation to begin even before it had been completely formulated. This impatience derived from his vision of propelling India into the 21st century and the age of information technology. This techno-managerial vision, in no small measure informed by the World Bank's advocacy of education as human resource development, found expression in the renaming of the Ministry of Education as the Ministry of Human Resource Development. (The rollback of this nomenclature in the NEP 2020 would be a welcome step, if only name changes-for which the ruling dispensation has a special fondness-could produce real change.)

Rajiv Gandhi's enthusiasm for speedy education reform was reined in by a secretary who persuaded him that such an exercise required widespread consultation with a range of stakeholders, including and especially the states. The process of consultation was conducted over 18 months, under the leadership of a new minister, PV Narasimha Rao (who had earned his education spurs as an effective minister for education in Andhra Pradesh). Sifted-sometimes postcard by postcard-compiled and analysed by the National Institute of Educational Planning Administration, the consultations yielded 18 reports that became the basis for the formulation in 1985 of *The*

Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective. This document was discussed at a meeting of state education ministers at the CABE, and of chief ministers at the National Development Council. It was after this extended process that the policy was adopted by both houses of Parliament in May 1986. As many as 23 thematic task forces were then constituted which developed a Programme of Action, that was once again considered by the education secretaries of the states (Ayyar 2017, chapter 3).

Both the 1968 and the 1986 policies-the first while education was still a state subject, and the second after it had entered the concurrent list-were thus put through extensive consultative processes. By contrast, the consultative process of NEP 2020 appears to have been limited and anodyne.

> There are … substantive shortcomings in the policy, which include but are not exhausted by the lack of pathways to implementation.

The origins of the latest policy lie in four previous documents. First, the 2016 report of the Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy (henceforth the TSR Subramanian committee), all of whose members (bar one) were bureaucrats. Second, the draft National Education Policy of 2019, formulated by a 10-member committee headed by K. Kasturirangan, and followed by, third, an abridged 55-page version of it. Finally, after the 29 July press conference announcing the policy, two apparently identical documents came into circulation within a couple of days of each other. Both carry the official logo, both are undated, and both purport to be the NEP 2020. Neither has the usual covering letter, suggesting an in-house production. I refer to them as NEP 2020 v.1 and NEP 2020 v.2. The latter is on the official website and it is six pages longer than the first. The reason both find mention here is because there are notable differences between them.

A single slide projected at the press conference announcing the NEP 2020 offers a cryptic overview of the platforms on which consultation was conducted around the Draft NEP 2019 - on mygov.in; in panchayats at all levels; and with MPs from seven states, apart from CABE and the Parliamentary Standing Committee. But, with characteristic opacity, it offers no account of consultations with the states. Nor is it clear as to how exactly the "unprecedented process of consultation that involved nearly over 2 lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks, 6000 ULBs, 676 Districts" and the "unprecedented collaborative, inclusive, and highly participatory consultation process" was conducted and to what effect.

> Since the states do not appear to have been an integral part of the consultative process, how much control and flexibility will they have in adopting and implementing NEP 2020?

The response of most of those who welcomed the NEP 2020 was qualified by a "but what about the implementation?" clause. There are, however, substantive shortcomings in the policy, which include but are not exhausted by the lack of pathways to implementation. Past practice also indicates multiple steps between union cabinet approval for a policy and its implementation. Here, however, the 29 July press conference announcing cabinet approval was followed on 17 August by presidential approval for the name change of the ministry. On 19 August, the government announced a test run of the students' 'credit bank' by December 2020.

There is no word yet on whether the new policy will be placed before or adopted by Parliament. Since the states do not appear to have been an integral part of the consultative process, how much control and flexibility will they have in adopting and implementing NEP 2020? Will the acts governing central and state universities be modified by Parliament and the state assemblies, respectively? The process followed so far falls considerably short of the standard mechanisms of consultation and transparency.

What ails higher education and what will it take to fix it?

The NEP 2020 offers a diagnosis of the challenges in the field of higher education and a vision for overhauling and re-energising it. The lists of 10 problems and 9 solutions are wide-ranging: the educational ecosystem is fragmented, hence large multidisciplinary universities are called for; there is too much specialisation, hence a multidisciplinary undergraduate education is needed; there is a lack of access to higher education in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, hence a range of measures for increased access and inclusion are required; the lack of emphasis on research in colleges and universities calls for the creation of a National Research Foundation to actively seed research and to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research; and so on.

The responses to some deficiencies are manifestly meaningless: the solution to the problem of limited teacher and institutional autonomy is "moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy"; to "inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and

progression of faculty and institutional leaders" is "reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit-appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service"; and to "an ineffective regulatory system" is "`light but tight' regulation by a single regulator for higher education" (NEP 2020, 33-34).

The core of the plan for the overhaul of higher education is its structural reorganisation into large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges (at least one in or near every district), many of these offering instruction in local languages. In an effort to streamline the plurality of nomenclatures, such as 'deemed to be universities' or 'affiliating technical universities,' it proposes to have only three types of universities: Research-intensive Universities, Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous degree-granting Colleges.

> There is a cheerful anticipation that existing problems will magically vanish by just restructuring and reorganising the edifice, out of which will emerge an altogether new and creative higher education system in a mere 15 years.

Existing colleges (a daunting 40,000) will gradually become Autonomous Colleges or else get phased out. It is not clear whether some of these or altogether different institutions will become Model Education and Research Universities, or MERUs, on which little detail is offered beyond stating that they will set the highest standards for multidisciplinary education and attain the highest global standards in quality education (NEP 2020, 38). Or might these be the grown-up form of the much-vaunted 'Institutes of Eminence'?

The policy is similarly short on specifics for the Higher Education Institution (HEI) clusters or the Knowledge Hubs that it envisages as buzzing with artistic and creative energies in "vibrant multidisciplinary environments," and as harbingers of a fundamental change in the "conceptual perception/understanding of what constitutes a higher education institution" (NEP 2020,34). Some of these clichés recur with a grating regularity that is suspiciously evocative of empty vessels.

On the whole, the recommendations are less about fixing the problems in existing institutions and repurposing them; they are more in the nature of reimagining the entire system. There is a cheerful anticipation that existing problems will magically vanish by just restructuring and reorganising the edifice, out of which will emerge an altogether new and creative higher education system in a mere 15 years. This is a bit like putting an unhappy joint family in a glitzy new building and expecting its tensions, accumulated over generations, to dissolve and disappear.

Many of the structural problems that plague higher education are altogether ignored. For instance, the policy ignores the large number of faculty vacancies: 77,912 in the central and state universities. In the central universities alone, there are 6,688 vacancies, approximately one-third of a total of 18,243 sanctioned teaching posts. In the Indian Institutes of Management and Indian Institutes of Technology, vacancies stand at 22% and 41%, respectively. The University of Delhi presently has reportedly 5,000 teachers without tenure-the labels of `ad hoc teacher' or 'guest lecturer' are clear pointers to casualization. Across India, the exploitative conditions in private colleges, where teachers are present on multiple payrolls and actually paid by none, are well known.

It does not take a lot of imagination to estimate the impact of these working conditions on the quality of education imparted or on sustaining a full-time academic programme, but they are evidently unworthy of the attention of the NEP 2020. Unless the plan is for all teaching to be robotically delivered, where will the appropriately trained teachers be conjured up from for these vibrant multidisciplinary clusters and Knowledge Hubs?

The regulatory architecture

The statement on the intent to transform the regulatory system of higher education begins with disarming candour: "too much has been attempted to be regulated with too little effect. The mechanistic and disempowering nature of the regulatory system has been rife with […] heavy concentrations of power within a few bodies, conflicts of interest among these bodies, and a resulting lack of accountability" (NEP 2020, 46). Nobody could disagree with this diagnosis of the disease, except that the cure proposed is about as convincing as hydroxychloroquine administered to a Covid-19 patient.

The architecture of governance for the entire higher education system envisages an umbrella institution, the Higher Education Council of India (HECI), which will have four 'independent verticals' under it: one each for regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting, of which all but funding are currently performed by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

The four institutions will be the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), the single point regulator for the entire sector (excluding legal and medical education); the National Accreditation Council (NAC), a much more autonomous and powerful

version of what exists; the Higher Education Grants Council, responsible for financing (though no mention is made here of the fate of the recently established Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA), a non-banking financial institution that gives public universities loans that are projected as grants); and the General Education Council that will frame 'graduate attributes,' or the expected learning outcomes. The GEC will frame a National Higher Education Qualification Framework in sync with the National Skills Qualification Framework to integrate vocational education with higher education. In addition to these, all the existing professional and research councils, in fields ranging from agricultural research to architecture, will now be called Professional Standard Setting Bodies setting standards in particular fields of learning.

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Together, these culminate in the certainty that "such a transformation will require existing structures and institutions to reinvent themselves and undergo an evolution of sorts." (NEP 2020: 48). Grand, sweeping, and invariably optimistic statements of this kind are, in their frustrating vagueness, pervasive. Which structures and institutions will need to reinvent themselves and to precisely what effect? What will be the substance of the "evolution of sorts"? Given that education is a concurrent subject, how will this regulatory structure affect the states?

The one thing on which there is no ambiguity is that accreditation will be the powerful central pillar of this regulatory system, adjudicating the evolution of a college into an Autonomous College or into a Research- or Teaching-intensive University; deciding the movement of institutions from one category to another; and even determining the basis of public funding. The new NAC is envisaged as a 'meta-accrediting body' specifying benchmarks and setting levels of quality. It will therefore perform not just the role of the current National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), but also the current standard-setting role of the UGC. It will also determine the basis of funding, even if the actual funding is assigned to a separate body.

This profusion of institutions qualifies significantly the idea of a single regulator facilitating 'light but tight' regulation, whatever that means. The policy maintains an intriguing silence on the composition of the umbrella HECI and its four verticals, and the relationships (not to mention potential conflicts) between them. There is nothing to suggest that these agencies will not be packed with government appointees, bureaucratic or political.

> The assumption that new agencies will inherit a clean slate on which to mark their 'light but tight' regulatory presence is … delusional.

Nor is any rationale provided for how the reconfiguration of 'verticals' and the creation of new agencies would fix the tough and longstanding problems that bedevil the higher education system. It is not hard to imagine our poorly funded and thinly staffed universities being consumed by the task of negotiating this thicket of bureaucratic acronyms and trying to render accountability to multiple institutions with conflicting requirements.

The assumption that new agencies will inherit a clean slate on which to mark their 'light but tight' regulatory presence is also delusional. For instance, there is no mention of a whole gamut of issues relating to academic corruption-in, for instance, licensing, accreditation, recruitment, and ghost written theses.

The TSR Subramanian report at least openly acknowledged political patronage and corruption in the appointments of teachers, the conduct of examinations, educational management, and the grant of approvals and recognitions. That libraries and laboratories are rented and shipped post haste from one college to another when the inspectorate is on its way is common knowledge. In announcing a voluntary process of faceless self-disclosure for accreditation, the NEP 2020 seems committed to the pretence that such problems do not exist. Is then the platitudinous reassurance of a new regulatory structure as the panacea anything more than a sedative?

The most notable aspect of the regulatory architecture in the latest iteration of the education policy is the mysterious disappearance of the controversial Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA), which merited a full chapter in each of the three previous drafts. Even NEP 2020 v.1 provides a detailed account of the RSA, an apex advisory body for every level of education in India replacing the CABE. In these proposals, it was variously headed by the prime minister or the union education minister, and overloaded with ministers and secretaries from the centre and the states, apart from eminent educationists and leading professionals from the arts, science, and business. But NEP 2020 v. 2 suggests strengthening, remodelling and rejuvenating the CABE. Only time will tell if the disappearance of this section from the present version of the policy is a considered change or a last-minute response to the adverse feedback it received or whether it lies

waiting to be re-introduced at an opportune moment when the NEP is no longer in the spotlight.

Another happy omission from the NEP 2020 is the idea of reintroducing the short-lived colonial experiment of the Indian Education Service. This was first mooted in the TSR Subramanian report (for both teaching and managerial positions), went missing in both versions of 2019, reappeared in the NEP 2020 v. 1 (as a managerial cadre only), but is mercifully missing in NEP 2020 v.2.

Architecture of university governance

Two aspects of university governance in the NEP 2020 call for special consideration. These are, first, the issue of autonomy and, second, the proposed restructuring of internal university governance.

In the Indian educational context, autonomy is a Janus word: alluring for members of the university community but one that, emanating from the state, generally means its own opposite. Both faculty autonomy and institutional autonomy have been imperilled in recent times, unlike how the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), invoking the spirit of free inquiry as necessary for intellectual progress, made a strong case for state aid "not to be confused with State control over academic policies and practices" (p 42).

> In the NEP 2020, autonomy is something to be desired but circumscribed and controlled, for it is ultimately in the gift of the state.

In contrast, the TSR Subramanian committee, the direct ancestor of the NEP 2020, adopted a cautious and even disciplinarian approach to free speech and freedom of association, to be balanced against the "primary purpose" of universities. While Curzon would have been overjoyed by this, even he might have balked at the directive by the Gujarat government to universities to ensure that doctoral students write their PhD theses on topics chosen from a list of 82 subjects prescribed by the state secretariat.

In the NEP 2020, autonomy is something to be desired but circumscribed and controlled, for it is ultimately in the gift of the state. In terms of faculty autonomy, it promises autonomy to design curricula and pedagogical approaches "within the approved framework" (NEP 2020, 40). It is not hard to imagine the fun that educational bureaucrats could have with those four innocuous words empowering them to curtail and restrict the very freedom that is promised. In institutional terms, autonomy here applies primarily to affiliated colleges who could use it in unspecified ways to move gradually to become 'Research-intensive' or 'Teaching-intensive Universities' (ibid: 35).

The most sinister change contemplated is to the institutions of university governance. What the new policy puts in its place is an egregious violation of the fundamental principles of self-governance that are integral to the functioning of a university.

As at least formally self-governing institutions, universities typically have Boards of Studies and Academic Councils to regulate academic matters and maintain standards of instruction, education and examination; Executive Councils or Syndicates to decide on matters pertaining to the general management and administration, revenues and properties of the university; and University Courts or Senates, supreme authorities and oversight institutions that hold the university accountable to society. Faculty members occupy both *ex officio* (deans and chairs) as well as elected offices in the statutory bodies of the university.

> [The] new architecture seems to dispense with faculty participation in the governance of the university altogether. The days of the university as a community of self-governing scholars are clearly numbered.

It is nobody's case that these institutions have been exemplary in their functioning. But they have served as fora where university faculty can debate and disagree (sometimes violently) before arriving at a consensus on a wide variety of academic issues that lie at the heart of what the university sees as its purpose.

None of these bodies finds even a passing mention in the NEP 2020.

Instead, we are informed that HEIs will be headed by an Independent Board of Governors, consisting of "a group of highly qualified, competent, and dedicated individuals having proven capabilities and a strong sense of commitment to the institution" (NEP 2020, 49). The brief description of its role-"empowered to govern the institution free of any external interference, *make all appointments including that of head of the institution*, and take all decisions regarding governance" (ibid) (emphasis added)-suggests that it would, apart from becoming the appointing authority for the vice-chancellor, essentially perform the role of an Executive Council.

What the name-change signals is the elimination of the elective principle and of the established system of representation of faculties and departments of the university. The policy does not indicate how and by whom these highly competent and dedicated individuals will be chosen. It says only that they will be accountable to "the stakeholders" (an undefined category) and upwards to the HECI through the NHERC.

In other words, the board of governors will be an unrepresentative body, independent of and unaccountable to the university community. There are no safeguards provided against its potential use of unaccountable power to, for instance, impose restrictions on academic freedom or on freedom of association or indeed on legitimate protest.

This new architecture seems to dispense with faculty participation in the governance of the university altogether. The days of the university as a community of self-governing scholars are clearly numbered.

Teachers and students: Exclusion from participation in university governance

The NEP 2020 heralds the likelihood of faculty exclusion and the certainty of student exclusion from participation in university governance. It has all of seven lines on *Student Activity and Participation* that effectively infantilise university students, promising them opportunities for participation in "sports, culture/arts clubs, eco-clubs, activity clubs, community service projects" (NEP 2020, 40). Apart from the studied silence about student societies that deliberate on issues of society, politics and social justice, the singular absence of any mention of students' unions or indeed any form of student governance or student participation in the statutory bodies of the university, is ominous.

The abhorrence of student politics straddles a wide spectrum from Curzon to TSR Subramanian. Curzon's perspective was comprehensible because student politics offered resistance to imperial rule. But given the stellar role played by students in India's freedom movement, and the fact that the legal age of voting is 18 years, it is less easy to understand the aversion of the Subramanian committee and its successor, the NEP 2020.

The seven lines devoted to student activity are followed by as many paragraphs devoted to *Motivated, Energized, and Capable Faculty*. The critical role of faculty in achieving the goals of higher education is acknowledged, and faculty motivation is recognized as being lower than it should be. There is a vague mention of "various factors" that underlie this low motivation. But these remain unspecified, though a range of solutions is offered to address them: from infrastructural improvements to some curricular freedom to rewards and recognition to ensure that every faculty member is "happy, enthusiastic, engaged and motivated towards advancing her/his students, institution, and profession." (NEP, 2020, 40).

Infrastructure improvement is an encompassing category that in the same breath covers everything from clean working toilets to libraries. That this is only one of two mentions of libraries in the context of higher education is indicative of the devastating remoteness of the new policy from the real world of higher education: of the extent to which teaching and research depend on decent library resources; of the abysmal state of university libraries and the funding cuts on journal subscriptions; and of the fact that India has the dubious distinction of hosting the largest number of predatory journals in the world. This last is a salutary lesson for the policy, as it was devised to game a well-meaning UGC initiative for Academic Performance Indicator scores to make recruitment and promotions merit-based.

> There is absolutely nothing in the policy about raising the standards of … appointments [of vice-chancellors] or doing away with the clientelism, corruption and politicization that variously afflict this process.

The existing recruitment process is endorsed with a caveat: "a 'tenure-track' i.e., suitable probation period shall be put in place to further ensure excellence" (ibid: 40). This effectively makes the 'permanent post' impermanent. In other countries, this has been identified as a core feature of the neoliberal university, reinventing fee-paying students as consumers and rendering the labour of teachers precarious. In India, the high-sounding notes of "multiple parameters for proper performance assessment, for the purposes of 'tenure'" (ibid) will, on the one hand, introduce further arbitrariness and politicisation and, on the other, worsen the large-scale casualisation that has already come to characterise our universities. This demeaning conception of what teachers do and how they should be treated is unlikely to result in a realisation of the grand vision of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities.

Finally, there is the question of what are coyly referred to as "leadership positions," which would arguably include principals and vice-chancellors. The NEP 2020 promises that such positions will not be kept vacant for long periods (as is indeed often the case) and that

outgoing and incoming vice-chancellors will overlap for some time. There is absolutely nothing in the policy about raising the standards of such appointments or doing away with the clientelism, corruption and politicization that variously afflict this process, none of which can be addressed merely through timely appointments.

The system of election by faculty that is a feature of many western universities would admittedly be vulnerable to gaming in the Indian context. But there could have been an honest attempt to design robust methods to make heads of institutions more accountable to the university community and to prevent the exercise of arbitrary power in the day-to-day functioning of the university. Even a quick survey of the substantial body of case-law on universities would have acquainted the authors of the policy with how frequent and intensely contested such abuse of executive power has been.

Reclaiming the Liberal Arts: IIT weds Vishwa Bharati?

Mentioned 70 times in 66 pages, often in conjunction with the word 'holistic', the word multidisciplinary is like a ritual incantation in the NEP 2020. It is also apparently seen as coterminous with a liberal arts curriculum. Without going into the questionable prescription that *all* HEIs should be multidisciplinary, let us examine the policy's understanding of what constitutes multidisciplinarity and the liberal arts:

> India has a long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning, from universities such as Takshashila and Nalanda, to the extensive literatures of India combining subjects across fields…The very idea that all branches of creative human endeavour, including mathematics, science, vocational subjects, professional subjects, and soft skills should be considered 'arts', *has distinctly Indian origins*. This notion of a 'knowledge of many arts' or what in modern times is often called *the 'liberal arts' (i.e., a liberal notion of the arts) must be brought back to Indian education*, as it is exactly the kind of education that will be required for the 21st century. (emphasis added) (NEP 2020, 36)

The teaching of multiple disciplines in India's ancient universities could be described as multidisciplinary but to apply to them the label of the liberal arts appears anachronistic. In the mediaeval European university, the liberal arts were defined as the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic; and the quadrivium of geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy. More recently, the conceptualisation of the liberal arts curriculum in the American academy straddles the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical and biological sciences and mathematics. There may well be superficial similarities with the subjects-philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, literature and so forth-that we know to have been taught in our ancient universities, but the outstanding intellectual achievements of these traditions of learning are diminished, rather than dignified, by mechanistically applying to them a borrowed label like the liberal arts.

> Are the values of critical thinking and intellectual doubt genuinely acceptable to those who advertise the NEP 2020 as teaching the young *how* to think and not *what* to think?

In any event, the endorsement of the idea of liberal arts in an environment of conspicuous animosity to the word liberal and the philosophy of liberalism is puzzling. It is also evidently innocent of the simple fact that liberal arts teaching and research require a liberal social and political environment. They cannot thrive in an environment where basic liberal values like freedom of speech and expression are stifled; or within a governance structure that demolishes the principles of liberal democracy in mission mode. Are the values of critical thinking and intellectual doubt genuinely acceptable to those who advertise the NEP 2020 as teaching the young *how* to think and not *what* to think? The censorship of extra-mural activities on campus, the deteriorating condition of academic freedom in India (Spannagel et. al., 2020), as well as the intimidation of teachers who do indeed teach young people how to think: none of these are testaments to the freedom to think, teach, or learn.

Conclusions

Two of the many issues that this essay has not dwelt on, neither of which is confined to higher education, are the controversial questions of language and funding. On the first, it is worth remembering that instruction in the mother tongue was first mooted in the Tenth Quinquennial Review of the Progress of Education in 1934. Any discussion of it in 2020 must acknowledge that it has the potential of entrenching class and caste-based exclusions from employment and opportunities for social mobility.

These would no doubt also be reflected in the composition of the foreign universities that are being invited in, presumably for students who have the social and cultural capital of which the language of privilege is a core component. The NEP's recommendations as to

language might have been more sensitive to our socio-economic context if only the authors of the policy had pondered on the findings of the 2017-18 National Sample Survey on education, which show how social inequalities are reflected in the choice of medium of instruction as well as the choice of courses across different caste and class groups.

> The new policy claims to resolve the tension between state and market in funding universities through a new category of Public-Philanthropic Partnership, without indicating how this might be realised.

Secondly, the Kothari Commission had also envisaged an increased investment in education with a projected growth of national income at 6% every year. The fact remains that public investment in education as a share of central government expenditure has been steadily declining. IndiaSpend estimates that "between 2014-15 (actuals) and 2019-20 (budget estimates), the share of education expenditure in the total Union budget fell from 4.1% to 3.4%." The new policy claims to resolve the tension between state and market in funding universities through a new category of Public-Philanthropic Partnership, without indicating how this might be realised.

Finally, while the word 'quality' figures nowhere on the list of the deficiencies of higher education, it is mentioned 156 times in 66 pages and appears to be the animating desideratum of the NEP. In the 20 pages devoted to higher education, the word quality is mentioned 32 times, with exactly half of these prefixed by the word high. The path to quality however is through a Legoland model of rearranging the blocks to give the impression of a transformative vision. What we actually get is a superstructure of a clutch of excessively empowered regulatory institutions, both within and without the university, that will incessantly intone the mantras of high quality, the liberal arts and multidisciplinarity without a deeper comprehension of their meanings.

Compare this with the Radhakrishnan Commission's account of universities as organs of civilisation, sites of intellectual adventure, enabling an integrated way of life in which wisdom and knowledge complement each other. For Radhakrishnan, democracy, justice, liberty, equality and fraternity had to inform our philosophy of education, encompassing everything from the art of human relationships to social harmony, from training wise administrators and judges to providing equality of opportunity in education. The ink may have dried on that injunction aeons ago, but it could scarcely be more urgent.

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