

Leadership of National Education Policy 2020: An odyssey from a self-reliant child to a self-reliant nation

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Abstract

In the backdrop of Government's clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat amidst the COVID-19 pandemic period, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been unveiled as a bold education sector reform. The NEP aims at fuelling the growth of 'Bharat' through a democratic construct of self-reliant citizens. This paper is based on a close reading of the NEP 2020 from the perspective of factors which will instill self-reliance in the students and bring autonomy in the education system in the long run. The key finding of the study is that NEP 2020 primarily focusses on the foundational development of the child in such a way that self-reliance as an important skill in various aspects is inculcated in the child.

Keywords: NEP, self-reliant, higher education, early childhood

1. Introduction

Being 'Atmanirbhar' or 'Self-Reliant' for an individual can have many dimensions such as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and financial. Developing a child on all these fronts enables to unleash his/her full potential for the development of the family, society and nation. In a democratic country like India understanding these intricacies in human development is all the more important. The spirit of self-reliance inculcated in its future citizens through the New Education Policy 2020 will unleash the full potential for development of the 'Bharat'. Application of this understanding of 'Atmanirbharta' at the national level means that India is preparing herself for a leadership role at the international level. In the words of Honourable Prime Minister (PM) Shri Narendra Modi "When India speaks of becoming self-reliant, it doesn't advocate a self-centred system. In India's self-reliance, there is a concern for the whole world's happiness, cooperation and peace". In education sector, 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' implies making India 'brain and tech hub' of the world. In this backdrop, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020. In his address

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to the students of VishvaBharati University on February 19, 2021 Hon'ble PM stated, "This education policy is a major milestone in the making of an Atmanirbhar Bharat. The new National Education Policy also breaks old restrictions and allows students to realize their full potential."

To spur growth and to build a self-reliant India, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (ANBA) rests on five important pillars viz. Economy, Infrastructure, Systems driven by technology, Democracy and Demand. Education is important for one of these pillars i.e. Democracy (as can be seen in the Figure:1). A democratic construct of self-reliant citizens (who act as assets rather than liabilities) can be the most desirable source of energy for building a self-reliant India. In line with this thought and after recognizing the need for bold reforms amidst pandemic, Government of India announced the New National Education Policy 2020. To cope up with the issue of continuation of education amidst lockdown of schools, colleges and universities, technology driven format for delivery of education was immediately adopted across the institutions. A number of portals to facilitate the same were decided and launched.

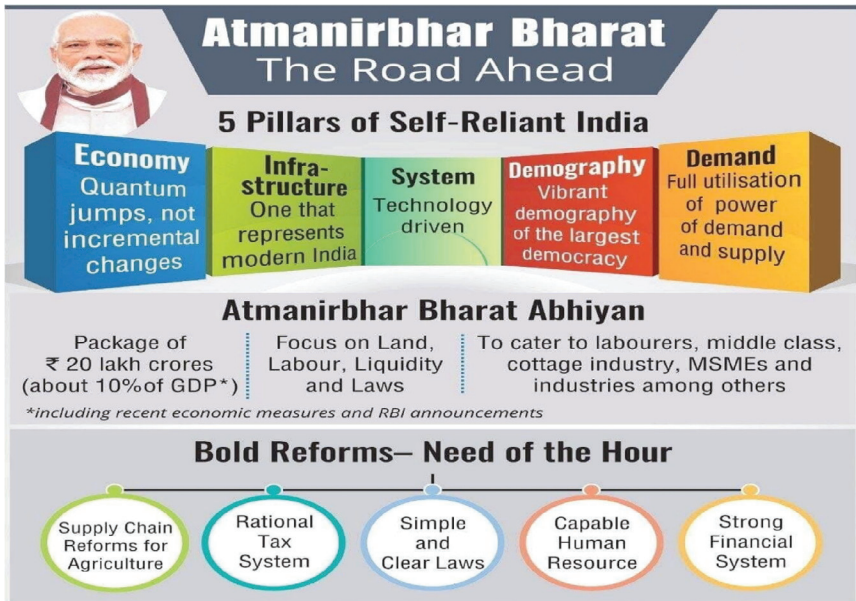


Figure 1: Education of the largest democracy an important pillar of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

(Source: Government website on Atmanirbhar Bharat - <https://atmanirbharbharat.in/abhiyan/>)

The purpose of education is to pass on the society's collective wisdom and knowledge from one generation to the next, as well as to prepare young people for future membership in the community and active engagement in its maintenance and development. Although the content of education differs across countries, the goal remains the same. Wherever education fails in any of these areas, society stagnates or social upheaval ensues as people discover that their education has prepared them for a future which is not open to them.

The objective of this paper is to throw light on the relevant provisions in the NEP 2020 which ensures leadership for creation of a second generation leadership for Atmanirbhar Bharat. NEP 2020 was developed via an unprecedented consultation process that included approximately 2 lakh recommendations from 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks, 6000 Urban Local Bodies, and 676 Districts. From January 2015, the MHRD began an unprecedented collaborative, inclusive, and highly interactive consultation process. The report was submitted in May 2016 by the 'Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy' which was chaired by Late Shri T.S.R. Subramanian, Former Cabinet Secretary. The Ministry created 'Some Inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016' based on this. In June 2017, a distinguished scientist Dr. K. Kasturirangan chaired a 'Committee for the Draft National Education Policy' which submitted the Draft National Education Policy, 2019 to the Hon'ble Human Resource Development Minister on May 31, 2019. The Draft National Education Policy, 2019 was posted on the MHRD's website and the 'MyGov Innovate' platform to solicit feedback from stakeholders, including the general public.

The paper is divided in five sections. Section one, focuses on methodology and research tools; section two, entails review of literature on linkage between education and self reliance; section three, focuses on current issues and challenges in education sector of India; section four, focuses on provisions in the NEP as supporting measures for inculcating self-reliance in students and section five concludes the paper.

2. Methodology

The data has been cancelled from a variety of secondary sources, the majority of which are online data sources including Elsevier, Google and Google Scholar, as well as reputed newspapers. Articles from online media and journals, research papers, and government agency releases are among the sources cited. A close reading of the NEP 2020 has been attempted from the perspective of factors which will instill self-reliance in the students and autonomy in the education system in the long run. Accordingly, the paper endeavours to study the following aspects of NEP 2020:

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- (i) What components of NEP would create a self-reliant child ?
- (ii) What is there in the NEP to make India 'brain and tech hub of the world'?

3. Review of literature on linkage between education and self reliance

According to Myrda, "To start on a national development programme, while leaving the population largely illiterate seems to be futile. The educational facilities provided in under-developed countries increase their geographic and occupational mobility, raising their productivity and facilitating innovations."

Moreover, education increases the human capital inherent in the labour force, which increases labour productivity. Education may increase the innovation capacity of the economy. Further, it may facilitate the diffusion and transmission of knowledge needed to understand and process new information and to implement successfully new technologies. According to Nyerere, education for self-reliance is a practical focused education that aims to deliver genuine solutions to society's issues. This type of education emphasises everyone's labour and no one's exploitation as well as sharing of resources generated by other humans. Education for Self-Reliance, must set people free to inspire citizens to rely on their own growth and reach their maximum potential.

Studies conducted in Ohio State in US, has established that the majority of high-wage states have a well-educated workforce. There is a clear and significant link between a state's workforce educational attainment and the state's median wage. Investing in education can help states lay a solid basis for economic success and shared prosperity. Expanding access to high-quality education would not only increase residents' economic opportunities, but would also boost the state's overall economy than anything else the state government can accomplish.

The goal of the colonial education system was to prepare people to work for the colonial powers. Colonial masters oppressed and dehumanized the colonized people. As a result, they acquired information which was meaningless to their existence. This research highlights the importance of education for self-reliance, which leads to lifelong learning, to help bridge the gap created by ineffective colonial education.

Education is regarded as a necessary component of society as well as a liberating tool that equips man with the skills and knowledge necessary to control and regulate nature. Four main concerns relating to such "self-reliance education" are:

- i. the need to develop a curriculum which aims at meeting the concerns of the majority of the people, particularly those in the rural areas;

- ii. the need to integrate education with life and the community;
- iii. the need to integrate education with manual work and with production so that the educational institutions become self-reliant communities;
- iv. the need to instill in the students attitudes of self-confidence, creativity, problem-solving and scientific outlook. The policy of self-reliance makes the analysis of the relationship between education and employment particularly useful as a tool for educational decision-making.

Education is more than just reading books and earning a university diploma and involves complete development of a person’s physical, mental, financial, and economic well-being. The National Education Policy of 1986 was centered on a unified curriculum framework that included a common core as well as other optional components. Elementary education emphasizes a child-centered approach, followed by secondary education, with inclusion of girl child, SC, ST, and OBC students. The NEP-2020 places a greater emphasis on a holistic approach with multi-disciplinary courses, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches. Students are given a bucket system to choose disciplines that interest them. It addresses the need to create professionals in fields ranging from agriculture to artificial intelligence.

4. Current issues and challenges in education sector in India

Low Gross Enrolment ratio raises a challenge for inclusive education. Table 1 depicts the Gross Enrolment Ratio across different levels of education and corresponding age groups.

S.No	Education levels and age group	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in %	Transition rate
1.	Primary(Grade 1-V) Age group-6-10 years)	103.7 ²	92.80
2.	Upper Primary(Grade VI-VIII) Age group-11-13 years	89.7	91.4
3.	Secondary(Grade IX-X) Age group-14-16 years	78	71.60
4.	Higher Secondary (Grade XI-XII) Age group 17-18 years	51.4	Not available

Source: UDISE 2019-20

². Indicating enrolment from students from other age groups also.

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From the above table, it is evident that only half of the population is enrolled in higher secondary studies. As per All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 27.1, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male and female population are 26.9 and 27.3 respectively. Likewise for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes the respective GERs are 23.4 and 18.0.

According to the statistics shared by Population Foundation of India, India has considerable Demographic dividend³ as the median age of India's population is between 28 to 29 years, and over 62 per cent of the population is between 15 and 59 years of age. India has adopted the Global Education Development Agenda⁴ (GED) in 2015 and is committed to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

Many educational institutions in the country currently place a premium on textbook education and theoretical learning, which fails to provide students with the skills they need to be job-ready. As a result, there is a significant gap between industry requirements and academic understanding. According to the current India Skills Report 2021, only 46% of students graduating from Indian educational institutions are employable. Domain wise employability can be seen in Table 2.

S.No	Domain	Employability in percentage
1.	BE/B.Tech	46.82
2.	MBA	46.59
3.	B.Arts	42.72
4.	B.Com	40.3
5.	B.Sc	30.34
6.	MCA	22.42
7.	Polytechnic	25.02
8.	M.Pharma	37.24
9.	ITI	29.46

Source: India Skills Report 2021, * for year 2018

^{3.} Demographic Dividend is the potential economic growth for a country derived from its population structure.

^{4.} This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This clearly demonstrates the need for increased access to both formal, basic, and higher education systems, as well as more investment in the reskilling and upskilling of students and current employees so that they do not consider leaving the nation.

For a long time, overseas university study has been a popular choice among Indian students. Nearly 7,53,000 Indian students were studying abroad as of 2018. According to several news reports, more than half of the top scorers in Class 10 and Class 12 exams between 1996 and 2015 relocated and were studying or working abroad, largely in the United States. The top students are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to student migration. Students are increasingly dissatisfied with the existing Indian educational system, which they believe is failing to prepare them for the challenges of a more globalised world. Many young Indian students are leaving the country for higher education abroad due to shortage of new courses.

Many unskilled jobs may be taken over by machines because of various dramatic scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, while the need for a skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics, computer science, and data science, as well as multidisciplinary abilities across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, will be increasingly in demand.

The new challenges of climate change, rising pollution, dwindling natural resources, epidemics and pandemics call for novel approach to education with focus on new skilled labour, particularly in the field of biology, chemistry, physics, agriculture, climate science, social science, infectious disease management and vaccine development.

The National Education Policy 2020 is the country's first education policy of the twenty-first century, with the goal of addressing the country's many expanding developmental imperatives. This Policy proposes that all aspects of the educational structure, including regulation and governance, be revised, and revamped in order to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG), while preserving India's traditions and value systems. The NEP 2020 is designed to address the challenges of access, equity, inclusion, employability and brain drain with the focus on making the best of demographic dividend.

5. Provisions in the NEP as supporting measures for inculcating self-reliance in students

The policy draws its foundational basis from the past when India was a Atmanirbhar nation and was known for its academicians and Universities⁵ world over. Great scholars such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, Chanakya, Chakrapani Datta, Madhava, Panini, Patanjali, Nagarjuna, Gautama, Pingala, Sankardev, Maitreyi, Gargi, and Thiruvalluvar, among many others, made seminal contributions to world knowledge in diverse fields (Mathematics, Astronomy, Metallurgy, Medicine and Surgery, Civil Engineering, Architecture, Shipbuilding and Navigation, Yoga, Fine Arts, Chess, and other subjects are among them). The goal of education in ancient India was not merely to acquire information as a means of preparing for life in this world or life after schooling, but to realize and liberate the self completely⁶. Development of each child's creative potential is the vision of this policy. This is also about the identity of the child with his country/home and the associated pride and self-esteem.

NEP 2020 aims at mitigating the following sectors of education;

(i) Universal School Education

According to the NSSO's 75th round household survey in 2017-18, there are 3.22 crore out-of-school children in the age group of 6 to 17 years. The NEP aims at not only bringing these children into the national fold but also to avoid subsequent dropouts, with a goal of achieving a 100 percent Gross Enrolment Ratio from preschool to secondary school by 2030. Education is the most effective means of attaining economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality. In the NEP 2020, adequate provisions have been made to cover Ashramshalas in tribal-dominated areas and all formats of alternative schooling, in a phased manner.

(ii) Early Childhood Care and Education

As per NEP 2020, the current 10+2 framework in school education will be replaced with a new pedagogical and curricular restructure of 5+3+3+4 covering children aged 3-18. Children aged 3-6 are currently not covered by the 10+2 system because Class 1 begins at the age of 6. A strong foundation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from the age of three is also included in the new 5+3+3+4 structure. ECCE should ideally include

⁵. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Vallabhi were world-class institutions in ancient India that set the highest standards for transdisciplinary teaching and research and welcomed academics and students from all walks of life and from all over the world.

⁶. "sā vidyā yā vimuktaye"- Knowledge is one that liberates.

alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles, drawing, painting, other visual art, craft, theatre, puppetry, music, and development of social skills, such as sensitivity, good behaviour, civility, ethics, personal and public hygiene, teamwork, and cooperation. The overarching goal of ECCE will be to achieve optimal results in the areas of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and communication, early language, literacy, and numeracy development. Over 85% of a child's total brain development happens before the age of six, emphasising the crucial need of proper brain care and stimulation in the early years for healthy brain development and growth. Currently, millions of young children, particularly those from low-income families, do not have access to high-quality ECCE. Strong ECCE funding has the potential to provide all young children with such opportunities. To ensure that all students entering Grade 1 are school ready, universal provision of high-quality early childhood development, care, and education must be realized as soon as practicable, and no later than 2030.

(iii) Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

Attaining FLN for all children is stated as an urgent national mission under NEP 2020. In pursuance of achievement of this objective, Diksha⁷ and NIPUN Bharat Mission⁸ has already been launched.

(iv) Integration

Education will not only focus on cognitive growth, but also on character development and the development of holistic and well-rounded persons with critical 21st-century abilities. This will include Art-integration and Sports-integration in the core curriculum. The former would involve incorporating Indian ethos in the process of teaching and learning while the latter would include physical activities, including indigenous sports, into pedagogical practises to aid in the development of skills such as collaboration, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, citizenship, and so on. Students will engage in sports-integrated learning in the classroom to enable them adopt fitness as a lifelong attitude and acquire the relevant life skills as well as the fitness levels envisioned in the Fit India Movement.

⁷ Para 2.6 of NEP 2020: A national repository of high-quality resources on foundational literacy and numeracy will be made available on the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA). Diksha contains Digital TV classroom for class 1 to 12 with E-content along with podcast and Radio channels.

⁸ National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), for ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27.

(v) National Integration

Developed countries throughout the world have proved that being well educated in one's own language, culture, and customs is not a hindrance to educational, social, or technical growth, but rather a tremendous asset. Thus, sometime in Grades 6-8, every student in the country will take part in a fun project/activity on 'The Languages of India,' such as the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' campaign.

(vi) Inculcating Ethical Values

Students will be taught the value of "doing what's right" from an early age, as well as a rational framework for making ethical decisions. Later on, this would be expanded to include themes such as cheating, violence, plagiarism, littering, tolerance, equality, empathy, and so on, with the goal of enabling children to embrace moral/ethical values in their daily lives, formulate an ethical position/argument from multiple perspectives, and use ethical practises in work.

(vii) Experiential/Vocational/Internship

During Grades 6-8, every student will participate in a fun course that will provide an overview and hands-on experience on a variety of important vocational crafts, such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, and so on, as determined by states and local communities and mapped by local skilling needs. These internship opportunities would be available throughout from grade 6 to 12.

(viii) Flexibility and Empowerment of Students at Higher Education Level

NEP has several elements like multidisciplinary universities opening up the horizons for students, exit and re-entry for those who do not fit in the format or who had some compulsions to quit, flexibility in choice of courses and National Research Foundation for supporting research and research culture. The students have options to choose from wide variety of departments such as Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Art, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Economics, Sports, Translation and Interpretation, community engagement and service, Environmental education, and value-based education, Environment education in climate change, pollution, waste management, sanitation, conservation of biological diversity, management of biological resources and biodiversity, forest and wildlife conservation, and sustainable development and living, as well as Value-based education in development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (satya), righteous conduct (dharma), peace (shanti), love (prem), nonviolence (ahimsa), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in seva/ service and participation in community service programmes, Global Citizenship

Education (GCED). Credits will be given in all Bachelors Degree programmes for these subjects if they are done from such departments or through ODL mode when they are not offered in-class at the higher education institutions.

In addition, providing support for innovation in curriculum and examination, support for holistic development of students etc. will enhance employability potential of graduates, and their ability to create innovative startups in emerging areas which will support self-reliance by development of indigenous products and applications.

(ix) Permission for Foreign Institutions to Open Campuses in India

The access will be granted to only the best universities in the world. This will save a significant amount of foreign cash while also ensuring that students in India receive high-quality higher education. These prestigious universities, as well as their faculties and best practices, would be available to Indian students and other Indian universities. Competition and partnership with foreign universities will undoubtedly benefit Indian universities. Our universities will enhance their rankings over time, attracting foreign students to India as well.

(x) Atmanirbhar University

NEP combines John Henry Newman's 'Idea of a University' vision with Humboldt's modern research university imagination to create a new Global University that is multidisciplinary, democratic, inclusive, aspirational and, international.

(xi) Provision for Teacher

Para 5.2 of NEP 2020 also clarifies that in order to enable teachers to spend maximum time in teaching-learning activities, provisions will be made such that minimum administrative tasks are assigned to them.

6. Conclusion

What is most appealing in the New Education Policy is the scientific base expounded for the development of the child at the age of 3 years. The idea is to facilitate the full development of the brain of the child. Atmanirbharta is not a one-day affair. It is a great skill and requires to be cultivated in the child. With the introduction of ECCE to cover kids of ages 3-6 years and making the ECCE system part of the overall assessment system, the New Education policy is aiming at inculcating the skill of self-reliance in the child. The thought to make the child school ready for education at this young age is commendable. Herein lies the roots of self-reliance. Even in ancient times in India, a child initiated learning through hearing, for instance, studying of Vedas through shruti or listening. This basic requirement of a human mind for readiness to learn is being proposed to be

addressed at the age of 3-6 years through playful and experiential learning under the regime of New Education Policy.

Emphasis is also laid on building Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). It is important to make learning interesting for the child in the long run. It has been observed that in Board Exams most of the times students either fail to clear the Mathematics paper or the Language paper particularly English. The NEP 2020, not only emphasizes learning in one's own language but also in one's own cultural settings. This can boost the self esteem of the child which is one of the important factor behind the spirit of self-reliance. Self reliance grows best when one feels pride in one's learning capabilities, one's culture and language. In a nutshell, NEP in itself has the spirit of Atmanirbharta in-built with the objective of developing a self-reliant child who will become the important building block of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Having first developed the foundation of the child, the NEP then provides the myriad of opportunities in the form of choice from credit supported multidisciplinary studies/subjects, vocational studies, developing relevant Skill sets in emerging technologies to the child and the opportunity to exit, change and rejoin whenever the student finds himself/herself in a state of mind to learn. This involves an important element of empowerment of the future citizen of the country. Last but not the least, the emphasis on use of skill driven technologies and development of online education platforms(ex. PM e-Vidya, Diksha, Manodarpan, NIPUN Bharat Mission) of learning for the students across the country would empowers students to learn on their own from the best learning sources in the subject. The idea is not to force education but to recognize the innate qualities of the child and facilitate the inner flowering of the child so as to make him school and world ready.

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