



## Transitions to Indian Education Policy in Higher Education

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### Abstract

*Indian higher education has always been a centre of education policies for a long back. India was known as the centre for learning from ancient times and it has had many universities such as Nalanda, Vikramsheel and others that contributed significantly. Scholars from all over the world visited to study here. However, with the passing of time and the rulers from outside, these institutions were destroyed as a learning centre of higher education. Different educational policies were established to revive higher education from the British period to independent India. In this series of policy making, the recent one was the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The article has covered the analysis of major policies on higher education from the Radhakrishnan Commission to NEP 2020.*

**Keywords:** Education Policy, Higher Education, Kothari Commission, NPE, NEP

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### Introduction

Higher education is considered one of the most important pillars of future innovation, progress and development of society upon which the whole system is based. Independent India, however, inherited its system of higher education from the colonialists. It was felt from time to time in the post-independence era to reconstruct higher education based on the country's needs and requirements due to which various educational policies were constituted and implemented starting from the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) to the recently implemented National Education Policy 2020.

### The Historicity of Educational Policy in India

India has witnessed a long history of experimentation with educational policies. In this regard, Nehru very rightly remarks at the Educational Conference of 1948 (Ghosh, 2000: 178) as “Whenever conferences were called to form a plan for education in India, the tendency, as a rule, was to maintain the existing system with slight modification. This must not happen now. Great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionized.”

Naik (1965) explained that Nehru believed that post-independence education in India should align with the new national goals outlined in the Indian Constitution, including democracy, secularism, poverty

reduction, the creation of a socialist society, and national integration (78-80). The leaders of the independence movement recognized that education had a transformative role to play in achieving these goals, given their understanding of the situation on the ground in India. The Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948 visualised as follows:

*The academic problem has assumed a new shape; we have now a wider conception of the duties and responsibilities of universities. They have to provide leadership in politics and administration, the professions, industry and commerce. They have to meet the increasing demand for every type of higher education, literacy and scientific, technical and professional (knowledge). They must enable the country to attain, in as short a time as possible, freedom from want of disease and ignorance, through the application and development of scientific and technical knowledge* (Report of University Education Commission, 1948-49).

In his role as the Chairman of the Commission, Dr S. Radhakrishnan proposed the reform of the university education system. The primary aims were to offer education in fields such as science, technology, and other areas of human resources to facilitate the overall socio-economic development of the country and to promote the betterment of the people. The Commission has given significant recommendations for university education as follows:

Covering all aspects of university education in India, they emphasized the 10+2 structure at the pre-university stage, correction of the “extreme specialization” in the courses, development of research to

advance the frontiers of knowledge and professional education in agriculture, commerce, law, medicine, education, science and technology including certain new areas such as business and public administration and industrial relations and suggested reform of the examination system by assessment of the student’s work throughout the years and introduction of courses on the central problems of the philosophy of religion. They also emphasized the importance of student welfare through scholarships and stipends, hostel, library and medical facilities and suggested that they should be familiar with three languages—regional, federal and English at the university stage and that English be replaced as early as possible by an Indian language. The Commission was also in favour of the idea of setting up rural universities to meet the need for rural reconstruction in industry, agriculture and various walks of life. The universities should be constituted as autonomous bodies to meet the new responsibilities, University Grants Commission to be established for allocating grants, and finally, university education to be placed in the concurrent list (Ghosh, 2000: 178-179).

The majority of the suggestions made by the Radhakrishnan Report in 1950 were accepted and taken into consideration by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE). However, CABE did not approve the recommendations related to including Education in the concurrent list. The University Grants Commission subsequently played a vital role in coordinating and advancing the development of universities in India (Ghosh, 1983:35). Many of the Radhakrishnan Commission's proposals

have since been put into practice, including the expansion of women's education at all levels. The enrolment of women in higher education, which was less than 10% of the total enrolment before Independence (1947), has now increased to 48.6% as of 2018-19 (Hindustan Times, March 6, 2020).

Significant transformations in the university system were initiated starting with the first five-year plan. The third five-year plan observed, "Education is the most important single factor in achieving rapid development and technological progress and in creating a new social order based on values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities" (Planning Commission, 1961: 573).

The Government of India and the University Grants Commission established a Commission, under the chairmanship of the distinguished educator Dr D. S. Kothari, which came to be known as the Kothari Commission.

### **Kothari Commission (1964-66)**

The Kothari Commission was formed to provide advice to the Government of India. "[O]n the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects" (Government of India, 1966).

The Kothari Commission presented an extensive report containing recommendations that addressed all aspects of the future development of national education. The report highlighted the importance of incorporating flexibility into the education system and ensuring that education is grounded in science while

also being consistent with Indian culture and values (Power, 1995: 39). It advocated far-reaching reforms:

Indian education needs a drastic reconstruction, almost a revolution. We need to introduce work experience as an integral element of general education to improve the quality of teachers at all levels to strengthen centres of advanced studies and strive to attain in some of our universities, at least, higher international standards; to lay special emphasis on the combination of teaching and research; and to pay particular attention to education and research in agriculture and allied sciences (Report of The Education Commission (1964-66): Education and National Development).

According to the report, it was imperative to:

- Bring about significant enhancements in the quality and calibre of higher education and research.
- Extend higher education to fulfil the nation's manpower needs and the growing social aspirations and expectations of its citizens.
- Enhance university organization and administration (Choudhary, 2008:62).

The Commission advised implementing specific measures in major universities across the country to guarantee the quality of research and development. Additionally, the Commission suggested that other universities and affiliated colleges should focus on enhancing teaching and evaluation by reorganizing courses and examinations, allowing for part-time

education, and giving particular attention to women's education. The recommendations of the Kothari Commission were discussed in both Houses of Parliament and then emerged a need to constitute again a new policy in the name of 'the first national education policy' of independent India in the form of a resolution in July 1968 (Ghosh, 2000:183-184). Although the recommendations of the Kothari Commission were gradually weakened during subsequent discussions, the resulting policy still served as the fundamental framework for all governmental action.

Even though the Kothari Commission was pragmatic in nature, another National Policy on Education was established in 1968 to address this issue. The policy emphasised that university education should be taken care of full-time admitted students in college or university by establishing a library, laboratory and other facilities and the recruitment of staff and teachers in the proper proportion. The other major points of this policy (Government of India, 1968) were as follows:

1. Considerable care is needed in establishing a new university. Adequate provisions of funds should be allocated before establishing a university.
2. Special attention should be given to institutions of postgraduate courses and training and research to be provided at this level.
3. The Centre for Advanced Study should be strengthened.
4. There is a need to increase support for research universities.

Many policies have been established in due course of time but the real action was missing due to which an education policy again appeared in May 1986 (Choudhary, 2008:62-63).

### **The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986**

The objective of the education policy is not only to develop human resources to serve the economy but also to foster important values (Power, 1995: 40). The policy envisions education for equality that acknowledges the diverse socio-cultural systems of the people and inspires the younger generation towards international cooperation and peaceful coexistence (Ghosh, 2000: 184). Regarding higher education, the policy expresses significant concerns regarding the state of colleges and universities and emphasizes the need for consolidation and expansion of facilities. The NPE (Government of India, 1986) proposes that higher education should be more dynamic than ever before. The key components of the programmes and strategies to infuse the required dynamism into the higher education system include:

- (i) Consolidation and Expansion of Institutions
- (ii) Development of Autonomous Colleges and Departments
- (iii) Redesigning of Courses
- (iv) Training of Teachers
- (v) Strengthening Research
- (vi) Improvements in Efficiency

- (vii) Creation of structures for coordination at the State and National levels
- (viii) Mobility
- (ix) Finances
- (x) Review and Monitoring

The NPE (1986) followed by the Programme of Action (Government of India, 1992) states that the spread and development of higher educational institutions in India vary in the quality of teaching and research due to infrastructural variations. The programme of Action, based on NPE, emphasised the following points:

1. The policy suggests revising the pay scales of university and college teachers and providing financial assistance from the Central Government for career advancement linked to performance appraisal and training. It also recommends developing a Code of Professional Ethics for teachers.
2. The National Eligibility Test (NET) should be introduced for the recruitment of university and college lecturers and the selection of Junior Research Fellows.
3. The University Grants Commission (UGC) should establish 48 Academic Staff Colleges in different universities in the Seventh Five Year Plan for organising orientation programmes for newly appointed teachers. Additionally, 200 University Departments should be

identified for conducting refresher programmes for in-service teachers.

4. Autonomous status should be conferred on 86 colleges in 7 States.
5. A comprehensive report should be prepared and examined by the Gnanam Committee appointed by UGC to review the management structure of universities.
6. Inter-University Centres should be set up for providing common facilities for research in Nuclear Science, Astronomy and Astro Physics, Atomic Energy, and Crystal Growth.
7. UGC's Curriculum Development Centres should develop model curricula for 27 subjects in Science, Social Sciences, and Humanities, and these should be circulated.
8. UGC guidelines should be formulated for setting up State Councils of Higher Education (SCHE), and an SCHE should be established in Andhra Pradesh.
9. The distance learning and Open University systems should be expanded.

These policies have given much thought to identify the problems faced by higher education in India and have less emphasis on the programmes of action for their mitigation (Choudhary, 2008:63). The implementation of these reforms has not been very successful in the country. Valiathan (1993) expresses regret that knowing what is needed but not committing to achieving it. Altbach

(1993:3-20) also concludes that "the complexity of the social context in which higher education exists (in India) very likely makes systematic reforms impossible." By looking at these hurdles and the complexity of the educational policies and systems of India, the NDA government led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi implemented the new education policy in 2020.

### **New Education Policy (Government of India, 2020)**

The New education policy comes at a time when there are many challenges, in the context of epidemic Corona, that have been faced by the whole world in general and India in particular. This policy has a broader vision at every level of education to make the education system more indigenous as per our needs and requirements rather than look into and follow the educational system of the West. Why this education policy is important because it envisions the following key changes to the current system of education:

1. moving towards multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with more HEIs across India that offer a medium of instruction in local/Indian languages;
2. moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education;
3. moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy;
4. revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support
5. reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions
6. establishment of a National Research Foundation

7. governance of HEIs by independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;
8. "Light but tight" regulation by a single regulator for higher education;
9. increased access, equity, and inclusion (Government of India, 2020)

### **Growth Trends**

During ancient times, Indian universities were globally renowned centres of higher education, attracting students from various parts of the world. However, during the colonial period, education was not utilized for sustainable development. The first three universities were founded in 1857, but it took another 30 years before the fourth one was established, and almost three more decades passed before the fifth and sixth universities were formed in 1916. These universities were modelled after the University of London, serving mainly as affiliating, examining, and regulatory bodies. Colleges that were already established provided teaching and learning and were affiliated with these universities. For many years, colleges were the only institutions that offered degree courses. It was only around 1920 that postgraduate teaching and research departments began to be established (Choudhary, 2008).

Since independence, the number of colleges and universities has increased manifold. From 1950-51 to 2020, the number of universities has increased from 28 to 958 which are given below:

**Table 1: Status of Universities in India  
(As of 01.10.2020)**

| Sl. No. | Universities              | Total No. |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 1.      | Central Universities      | 54        |
| 2.      | State Universities        | 416       |
| 3.      | Deemed to be Universities | 124       |
| 4.      | Private Universities      | 364       |
|         | Total                     | 958       |

Source: UGC Report, 2020

The number of colleges has grown from 578 (1950-51) to 38,498 (2014-15). During 1950-51 to 1914-15, enrolment in higher education registered a steep increase from around 0.174 million to 34.2 million (UGC Report, 2020). The number of teachers has also gone up from around 24,000 in 1950-51 to 4, 880,000 in 2006-07 (Choudhary, 2008).

### Conclusion

Higher education has always been a critical aspect of national development in India, and as a result, the government has continuously focused on improving its quality and quantity. Despite several educational policies being implemented, the rapidly growing population has hindered the ability of educational institutions to provide equal opportunities to all students. To address this issue, the government has recently introduced a new education policy in 2020, aimed at making education more inclusive and accessible to everyone.

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