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WHAT AILS INDIA'S NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020: BRINGING INTO QUEST ION PRIVATE INTEREST IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, higher education in India has undergone significant transformation. Several factors are to bear responsibility for this, including rising demand for higher education as a result of population growth, improvements in school education, an increase in aspirations, and the changing structure of the Indian economy, which necessitates new and diverse skills. These transformations have an impact on the National Education Policies that shape the structures and processes of the education system. Privatization's impact on higher education in liberalising India has transpired in the presence of a centralised regulatory regime. This phenomenon contradicts explanations that see privatisation as a direct result of the state's withdrawal from higher education; rather, it calls into question the notion that liberalisation has little impact on state funding of higher education. The impact of liberalisation and private interests on the education sector and national education policies is not an exception here. Thus, the current study seeks to comprehend the impact of private interest on India's higher education system in general, and the National Education Policy 2020 in particular.

Keywords: Higher Education, National Education Policy, Privatisation, Economic Reforms, GATS, WTO.

1.1.Introduction

Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon coined the phrase "Knowledge is Power" (García, 2001) as a political strategy in the 16th century. Education and literacy were always used to govern society, and there were always some institutional boundaries around literacy in most religious societies. When King James I of England authorised the translation of the Bible in 1604, it removed the Bible from the sole control of the Church and the priestly class, sparking a debate about whether the Bible should be placed directly in the hands of the common people without the priestly class acting as intermediaries. The Brahmins held the monopoly on knowledge and literacy in the Indian context.

The role of religion in education was gradually taken over by the state in the modern state system. Education came to be regarded as a significant responsibility of the state towards its citizens, and it was regarded as a public good. In the context of India, when the country gained independence in 1947, the independent government of India began addressing a variety

of literacy-related problems and initiated state sponsorship. There was a call for the central government to establish strong central control over the education sector. Maulana Azad, India's first education minister, was also of the opinion that the central government should have control over education. However, it took approximately 20 years after Indian independence to prepare the positional or policy document on India's education system. At the time, the country realised that in order to achieve national development, it needed a strong education system that produced good human resources. The development of the country's education was dependent on the government's formulation of education policies, as well as its reforms from time to time whenever it felt any changes and improvements. The country has seen three consecutive National Education Policies, the first in 1968, the second in 1986, which was later revised in 1992, and the third in 2020.

Education reform is one of the top priorities for governments around the world in terms of economic, political, and social development. Because India's education sector is the world's largest, it required a National Education Policy after independence to regulate and direct it in the right direction. National Education Policies are guidelines and principles established by the government that are used to control the country's education system and to define the rules and regulations for the development of the country's education system. These policies are comprehensive in nature and aim to revitalise the country's educational system. The National Education Policies attempt to cover academic objectives such as school size, curriculum structure, student-teacher ratio, instructional strategies, challenges to different levels of education, and so on. In this context, the current study attempts to juxtapose the role of the state and the growing importance of the private sector in the country's educational policymaking. As a result, the paper will put into question the role of privatisation in the country's higher education as well as the recently adopted National Education Policy, 2020.

1.2. Objectives

1. To investigate the impact of liberalisation on the education sector, specifically National Education Policies.
2. To comprehend the impact of private interest on India's higher education system in general, and the National Education Policy 2020.

1.3. Methodology

Since the study is qualitative in nature, descriptive and analytical methods are used. The study relies solely on secondary data to investigate the proposed area. The paper is being developed using government reports, journals, and other related literature.

1.4. National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 is India's first national education policy in the twenty-first century, with the previous one being implemented in 1986, 34 years ago. Thus, the NEP replaces the 1986 National Policy on Education, which was revised once in 1992. Prior to that, in 1968, the first education policy was enacted.

Efforts to develop a new education policy have been ongoing since 2015, and in May 2016, the Committee for the Evolution of the New Education Policy submitted its report, on which the then-MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource) prepared 'Some Inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016'. Finally, in June 2017, the Committee for the Draft National

Education Policy was formed, chaired by Dr K Kasturirangan, former chief of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), and it submitted the Draft National Education Policy 2019 to Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal on May 31, 2019, after he took over the ministry. According to the reports, the document was also submitted in December 2018.

According to the government, the NEP 2020 was developed after nearly 2 lakh suggestions were received from 2.5 lakh village panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 ULBs, and 676 districts. According to the policy document, it aims to produce engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for the purpose of building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which was launched on July 29, 2020, outlines India's new education system's vision. To ensure continuous learning, NEP 2020 focuses on five pillars: affordability, accessibility, quality, equity, and accountability. It has been designed to meet the needs of citizens, as the demand for knowledge in society and the economy has necessitated the acquisition of new skills on a regular basis. Thus, the thrust of NEP 2020 is to provide quality education and create lifelong learning opportunities for all, leading to full and productive employment and decent work as enlisted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986, and establishes a comprehensive framework for transforming both primary and secondary education in India by 2040.

The NEP 2020 calls for significant reforms in both secondary and higher education to better prepare the next generation to thrive and compete in the new digital age. As a result, the document places a strong emphasis on multidisciplinary skills, digital literacy, written communication, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and vocational exposure.

The NEP 2020 was designed to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education from 26 percent to 50 percent by 2030. It aims to develop students' overall personalities by improving infrastructure for open and distance learning, online education, and increasing the use of technology in education.

Furthermore, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be established to boost research in the country. A National Accreditation Council (NAC) will be established as a single regulator for all higher education institutions in the country. The Higher Education Council of India (HECI) will also have multiple verticals to fulfil. Efforts will be made to establish a National Recruitment Agency for all government recruitment exams, as well as a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for various recruitment exams at the same level. To achieve this goal of global quality standards, courses and programmes in subjects such as Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH systems of medicine, yoga, arts, music, history, culture, and modern India, internationally relevant curricula in the sciences, social sciences, and beyond, meaningful opportunities for social engagement, quality residential facilities and on-campus support, and so on will be fostered.

1.5. GATS, Privatization and Indian Higher Education

The new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) represents a significant step toward the neo-colonisation of Indian education through privatisation and corporatisation. This aspect of the NEP must be investigated. Foreign universities and foreign direct investment (FDI) have been permitted to enter the higher education sector under the NEP. Thus, it is necessary to delve into the beginning of private interest in the Indian higher education system.

The corporate sector discovered a massive and rapidly expanding service industry in education. Students, teachers, and non-teaching employees are profit-making resources in this industry with a massive global market. Despite being primarily a government-supported service, most governments are withdrawing from it as a result of neoliberal economic reforms. The Indian government has encouraged this process through extensive privatisation, commercialization, and deregulation.

The first decade of the twenty-first century had seen huge and bitter demonstrations from students, teachers, and the general public around the world against their governments' privatisation and commercialization of higher education, as well as their inclusion of the sector in the General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS) and World Trade Organization (WTO). GATS was designed to create an open, global marketplace where services, such as education, could be traded to the highest bidder.

Mukesh Ambani and Kumarmangalam Birla considered education to be a very profitable market in their Report on "A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education" submitted to the Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry in April 2000. These two businessmen argued for full cost recovery from students as well as the immediate privatisation of several aspects of higher education. The Ambani-Birla Report sought to transform the country's entire higher education system into a market where profit was the only consideration. If this Report had been implemented, only those who could afford to pay exorbitant fees could have enrolled in higher education. For Ambani and Birla, education was a lucrative market that the corporate sector needed to control. In light of this, they sought legislation "forbidding any form of political activity on university and educational institution campuses." Even normal trade union activities were prohibited. Students, teachers, parents, and the general public all criticised the Report.

1.6.Legitimization of Privatization under NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 is the third after independence and the first National Policy of Education in the twenty-first century. It was followed by one in 1968 (heavily influenced by the progressive Kothari commission of 1964-66) and one in 1986. (Whose revised version came in 1992). This 65-page document recommends steps for various educational sectors to "overhaul" and "revamp" education in our country. While adequate scrutiny is required, the current paper highlights two significant policy moves that will have irreversible consequences not only in the education sector but also in the larger socio-political reality of our subcontinent. The first is its open embrace of private interests in education, and the second is its move toward increased regulation.

The current policy was preceded by the Policy Framework for Reforms in Education (PFRE), which was convened by Mukesh Ambani and included Kumar Mangalam Birla as a member. It promoted foreign direct investment in higher education and proposed a bill for

private universities. It heralds a new era, which eventually saw the rise and dominance of capitalism in education. It shifted from the 'human resource' approach of NPE 1986 to 'human capital,' exploring the need to act as drivers of technological innovation. The current national policy clearly reflects the influence of these recommendations. NEP 2020 has successfully widened the gap for private actors to participate in policy debates. It managed to bring them from the margins to the centre, making them an important stakeholder. They are not only treated on par with the public sector, but are also given special treatment and importance when necessary. It is fascinating to investigate how, in our context, it attempts to change the disdain and suspicion that private evokes, particularly in a sector like education, which is a public good.

NEP 2020 begins with an ambiguous introduction to private, and that benevolent tone continues throughout the document. It is captured by the deliberate use of words such as 'public-spirited private' and 'philanthropic private.' Wherever the word "private" appears in the document, it is paired with either "philanthropic" or "public-spirited," as if removing these qualifiers would reveal something hideous about "private." While the policy distinguishes between private for profit and philanthropic private, it never explains how to tell the difference. It is unclear how to navigate the zone of intentions to determine whether the private exists for profit or for the public good. On the contrary, it gives the impression of a well-meaning private lobby concerned with issues of social justice and welfare. A similar benign sound can be captured by its use of the term Public Philanthropic Partnership (PPP) instead of the previously much criticised Public Private Partnership. It hopes that by using these pleasant-sounding phrases and terms, it can dispel the contempt that arises when the state forms a partnership with the private sector or, worse, when it leaves social sectors in the hands of the private sector.

In providing complete acceptance to the presence of private, NEP 2020 stands out and differs from the other two policies. Because education is critical for improving people's life chances and functioning, educators have opposed private participation in this realm. They were supposed to be separated from policies and programmes that must be welfare-focused. This can be seen in the NEP 1968, which was committed to educational equality. It was influenced by the Kothari commission of 1964-66 and was committed to the constitutional values of equality, freedom, justice, and dignity. The possibility of having private stakeholders on par with public institutions was introduced in the 1986 policy, which was heavily criticised, and by 2020, that prospect had become a reality. By calling for "the revitalization, active promotion, and support for private philanthropic activity in the education sector," it finally gives private that legitimacy in education policy that it previously lacked.

This would result in a complete revamp of higher education. It is important to note that both the public and private sectors of higher education exist in India. If public universities are funded by the federal and state governments, respectively, private universities are funded by their own bodies and societies. The UGC has been tasked with regularly monitoring these private universities, which rely on the former for recognition. NEP 2020 has successfully completely revamped this system by establishing a single common regulatory body, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). It not only puts both on an equal footing, but it also provides special relief to private players where necessary. For example, welcoming foreign universities implies some relief for their smooth entry and operation. "A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special

dispensation in terms of regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India," (:39).

Conclusion

The growing presence of private and corporate players is commonly associated with the state's shrinking role. That explains why words like absent state, shrinking state, and failed state are frequently used. They reflect the mutation that has occurred in its fabric, which is loaded with the sentiment of betrayal. They are marked with the assumption that a democratic nation-state would avoid forming alliances with lobbies that only have their own self-interest at heart. Even though this sounds ideal and should be a constant demand of civil society from the state, it is critical to recognise that it is not a necessary condition for the emergence and maintenance of either the state or democracy. Historical and sociological examinations of the state and democracy would reveal contradictions. Even if a democratic state appears to represent the masses and its people, it has always maintained close ties with powerful groups who only have their own interests at heart. This small group requires constant support and protection from the state in order to grow.

As a result, it is incorrect to believe that the state is fundamentally opposed to capitalism. While capturing world systems, Wallerstein observed how capitalism is always dependent on state power for its emergence and expansion. The belief that the economy can exist independently of the state is nothing more than a capitalist society's ideology (Karatani, Structure of World History). Thus, we must be cautious of the nuances that exist in the connotations of failure or absence. Its failure and absence are not general characteristics; rather, they are activated in relation to its people, civil society, or public space. These are the areas where the state has withdrawn. For the other purposes of capitalism, it is a successful state that is both present and active.

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