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REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCTION 2016 WITH REFERENCE TO EQUITY AND QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

"Padhega India tabhi to Badhega India"

It is an established fact that an education system built on the premises of quality and equity is central to sustainable success in the emerging knowledge economy. Education is a powerful tool for preparing our citizens in the knowledge society. The 2016 National Policy on Education, which is being formulated nearly three decades since the last Policy, recognizes the criticality of Education as the most important vehicle for social, economic and political transformation. It reiterates the role of education in inculcating values, and to provide skills and competencies for the citizens, and in enabling him to contribute to the nation's well-being; strengthens democracy by empowering citizens; acts as an integrative force in society, and fosters social cohesion and national identity. One cannot over -emphasize the role of Education as the key catalyst for promoting socio-economic mobility in building an equitable and just society. In this particular paper the writer has tried to review the report of the committee for evolution of new education policy. The main focus is to review the report in terms of promotion of equity and quality in higher education.

Introduction:

"Padhega Indiatabhi to Badhega India"

When this slogan came in front several questions starts posing like what is the present situation of education? Is there need to revise education policy? What does new education policy says about equity and quality in higher education? What are the suggestions and recommendations given in new education policy?

Report named National policy on Education 2016 was submitted to Ministry of Human Resource Development for evolution of the New Education Policy. The structure of the report is as follows: after the preamble chapter 2 outlines the methodology followed by the committee, chapter 3 provides background information on the education sector of India leading up to the need for a new Policy in Education. These are followed by an analysis relating to school education, higher education, some institutional issues as well as some

overarching issues in chapter 5 to 8. The recommendation outlined in the various chapter are summed up in chapter 9 which is the policy recommended by the committee, this can also be seen as executive summary of the report.

The main focus of writing this review is to study the report in terms of equity and qualityin higher educationand finding answers to above posed questions and also to study the objectives, methodology and recommendation of the committee.

Present situation of higher education and need of NEP 2016

There has been an upsurge in the demand for higher education after independence, resulting in a virtual explosion in the number of universities and colleges in the country. Many students join university courses merely to obtain a degree, which has come to be considered as a sine qua non for white (and even blue) collar employment and social status.

The institutions of higher learning in India consist of:

(i) Central Universities established by an Act of Parliament;

(ii) State Universities established by State Legislatures;

(iii) Deemed Universities recognized as such by the Central Government on the recommendation of the UGC;

(iv) Private Universities established by various State Governments through their own legislation; and

(v) Institutes of National Importance declared as such by the Government of India by an Act of Parliament.

All these institutions are empowered to award degrees. A small number of Central and State Universities are stand-alone unitary institutions; however, the vast majority has constituent or affiliated colleges attached to them.

There are at present 46 Central Universities and 128 Deemed to be Universities in the country (UGC Annual Report 2014-15). No institution has been granted Deemed to be University status since June 2009. In January 2010, the Government of India decided to de-recognise 44 Deemed Universities. This decision was challenged and a final decision is still pending in the Supreme Court, which has, in the interim, allowed these institutions to admit new students.

The Indian higher education system, which includes technical education, is one of the largest of the world. The number of Universities has grown from 27 in 1950-51 to 621 in 2010-11 and further to 712 in 2013-14. The number of Institutes has grown from 11,095 in 2010-11 to 11,443 in 2012-13. The number of colleges has shown phenomenal growth, from 578 in 1950-51 to 32,974 in 2010-11; 34,852 in 2011-12; 35,829 in 2012-13. In 2014-15, there were

711 universities, 40,760 colleges (UGC Annual Report 2014-14) and 11922 stand alone institutions in higher education sector in India (AISHE 2014-15).

As against 2 lakh students in 1950-51, the total enrolment in higher education in 2014-15 was 3.33 crore, comprising 1.79 crore boys and 1.54 crore girls. The number of teachers stood at 14 lakh, with 39% female teachers. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education was 23.6% (24.5% for boys, 22.7% for girls; 18.5% for SCs and 13.3% for STs) (AISHE, 2014-15). As is to be expected, the largest number of students (around 80%) is enrolled in Under-Graduate courses, followed by Post-Graduate (11.4%) and Diploma (7.2%) courses. The private sector has played a major role in the growth of colleges and institutions in India. In 2011-12, 63.9% of the total number of colleges and institutes were in the private sector and 58.9% of the total number of students was enrolled in private colleges and institutes. State institutes accounted for 35.6% and Central institutes for 0.5% of the total number of colleges and institutes. Enrolment in these institutions was 38.6% and 2.6% respectively. The *RashtriyaUchchatarShikshaAbhiyan*(RUSA), launched in 2013, aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions on the basis of a critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans. The central 31 funding (in the ratio of 65:35 for general category States and 90:10 for special category states) would be norm based and outcome dependent. The funding would flow from the MHRD through the State Governments / Union Territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.

During the academic year 2014-15, out of the estimated total enrolment of about 3.33 crore , 37.41% students were enrolled in Arts, 17.59% enrolled in Science, 16.39% enrolled in Commerce and Management, and the remaining 28.61% were pursuing professional courses, including Engineering/Technology (16.27%), followed by Medical courses (4.02%).

Regional disparities have increased with the expansion of higher education in India. Inter-state disparities in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) are large and have increased over time.

The utility of higher education in assuring employment is questionable. Many graduate and post graduate students do not get jobs in their respective fields even after spending several years in acquiring higher education. While the problem of educated unemployed youth remains acute, there is also, paradoxically, a shortage of skilled manpower in the labour market. There a clear gap between the focus and quality of education in academia and the actual skills required by industry.

The global ranking of universities is a useful indicator of their institutional performance, based on a relative assessment in the areas of research and teaching, reputation of faculty members, reputation among employers, resource availability, share of international students

and activities and other factors. Indian universities do not find a place in the top 200 positions in the global ranking of universities. Even the top ranking institutions in India figure only in the lower echelons of global rankings.

As per the Times Higher Education Rankings in 2012-13, the top ranked Indian institutions were IIT Kharagpur (234), IIT Bombay (258) and IIT Roorkee (267).

Similarly, the top ranked institutions as per the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) System in 2012 were IIT Delhi (212), IIT Bombay (227) and IIT Kanpur (278). The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore ranks 99th in the world's top 100 universities for engineering and technology. As per 2015/16 QS rankings IISc Bangalore has a rank of 147, IITD 179, IITB 202, IITM 254, IIT Kanpur 271.

Accreditation agencies were established in India in 1994 as a measure of quality assurance in order to enhance standards of higher education. Accreditation was voluntary and institutions of higher education were supposed to approach the accreditation agencies to get their institution or programme accredited. Of the 164 universities recognized by the UGC, 140 have got themselves accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), with only 32% percent being rated as A grade or above.

Among the 4,870 colleges, 2,780 are accredited by the NAAC, with barely 9% making the A or above grade. Among the accredited institutions, 68%of the 32 universities and 91% of the colleges are rated average or below average in terms of the quality parameters specified by the NAAC. Quality and excellence in colleges clearly leaves much to be desired

- **Need of New Education Policy:**

The earlier policies had laid out clear objectives and goals; however, many of these have not been realized fully or even partially. The Government of India has launched several social and developmental initiatives such as *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, Digital India, Skill India, Make in India and Smart Cities. All these initiatives have significant backward and forward linkages with the education sector which need to be taken into account in the new NPE. For example, the induction of ICT also underlines the imperative necessity of providing electricity and connectivity, and making computer hardware, software and technical support available in every school, especially in rural areas. Similarly, Skill India and Make in India require the mainstreaming of vocational education, practical knowledge, hands-on projects and courses oriented towards meeting the needs of industry and employment.

The rate of change has accelerated. New technologies and disciplines have emerged and new knowledge and insights are being generated at a rapid pace. Social media transmit and disseminate information and opinions almost instantaneously. Individuals, societies,

governments and educational and other systems are often behind the curve in keeping pace with these developments.

Although expenditure on education has languished at well below the 6 per cent of GDP envisaged in the earlier NPE, there have also been pervasive and persistent failures in implementation leading to sub-optimal utilization of the resources provided. The survey of the present situation in the education sector underlines that outside interference, absence of accountability, unregulated commercialization and lack of standards continue to exist and have, indeed, increased substantially during the past two decades. It would not be an exaggeration to say that large segments of the education sector in India face a serious crisis of credibility in terms of the quality of education which they provide, as well as the worth of the degrees which they confer on students.

While 'equity' and 'access' have been, rightly stressed in the past as the guiding principles in the education field, the issue of quality has hitherto effectively been relegated to the background. It has now become an imperative necessity to lay major emphasis on improvement of quality across the board, without compromising on equity and access.

It is now time to undertake a comprehensive review of the educational scene in India as it is currently being administered and implemented, and articulate a new NPE.

Broad Objectives of the New National Policy on Education, 2016

The starting point for the new National Policy on Education (NPE) must necessarily be a clear articulation of the meaning and goals of education in the Indian context. What are the basic objectives which we seek to achieve through the new NPE? What knowledge, skills and other qualities do we seek to instill through education? What kind of citizen should emerge as an end product of the education system? What attributes should an educated citizen possess in order to be able to function as an informed and enlightened member of society?

Discussions on these objectives of education predate the independence of India. In 1938, a Committee on the Wardha Education Scheme (*NayiTaleem*of Mahatma Gandhi) set up by the Central Advisory Board of Education *(*CABE), worked out the modalities for the implementation of the *NayiTaleem*in great detail and recommended it for adoption by all provincial governments. This was reiterated by the CABE Committee on "Post-War Plan for Educational Development in India" (1944), also known as the Sargent Plan. This was a Plan to 'Indianise' education; universalize primary education; and improve the quality of education so as to make the Indian education system comparable to the best available elsewhere.

Education has all through been considered a key driver of national development; an essential condition for building a humane society. However, the core objectives of education in the coming years should encompass four essential components – i.e. building values, awareness, knowledge and skills. While knowledge and skills are necessarily specific to the objectives of study and largely determined by factors like future employment or the pursuit of a vocation, awareness and values are universal in nature and should be shared by all. Ideally, these should foster development of personal qualities and behavioural attributes, which will help children, develop into good citizens.

Along with the economic objectives (i.e. creating human capital), education should aim to develop pride in India and in being an Indian. It should foster learning about our ancient history, culture and traditions. Indian society is characterized not only by multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious diversity, geographical differences and regional disparities, but also by inequalities of income, wealth, opportunity and access to resources. Education should be seen as a powerful route to reduce regional and social disparities, and enabling choice and freedom to the individual to lead a productive life and participate in the country's development.

Education should foster peace, tolerance, secularism and national integration. Towards promoting greater understanding of diversity in India as well as social cohesion, education should inculcate awareness of India's rich heritage, glorious past, great traditions and heterogeneous culture. Education must enhance and sustain the cultural capital in the country, a powerful input for national development. Education must be seen as development and not a means of development; it should find a prominent place in the national development agenda.

Various issues raised by the committee

- **Issues Affecting Quality of Higher Education**

While the Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world, the quality of universities and colleges and the education they offer is far from satisfactory. The number of institutions of high quality is limited. Even the top-most Indian institutions do not figure in the international rankings of universities in the world. This is an issue of major concern and the subject of frequent public discourse in India.

The quality and standards of Indian higher education institutions need to be upgraded systematically and sustained at a high level through rigorous screening, innovation and research, recognition of excellence and creativity. Currently there is no regular system of regular monitoring of educational outcomes.

Higher education and research institutions in India have evolved in divergent specialised streams, with each stream being monitored by an apex body. The UGC has an omnibus mandate, covering all aspects relating to recognition, accreditation, curriculum approval, permission to start courses, disbursement of grants to institutions, and management of scholarship programmes. The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) are autonomous bodies, which recognise and accredit programmes offered by professional and technical institutions in the disciplines of engineering and technology, management, architecture, pharmacy and hospitality.

In addition, there are a number of other professional councils established by statute as well as autonomous coordinating or regulatory bodies, many of which are authorised to perform the functions of recognition and accreditation of institutions and courses of study under their jurisdiction. These include the Quality Council of India (QCI), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the Bar Council of India (BCI), the Medical, Pharmacy and Dental Councils of India (MCI, PCI and DCI), the Nursing Council of India (INC) the Central Councils of Homoeopathy and Indian Medicine (CCH and CCIM), the Institute of Management and Engineering (IME), the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), the National Councils for Teacher Education (NCTE), the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), among other regulatory bodies.

According to UGC data for 2014-15, there were 329 state universities, 46 central universities, 128 deemed to be universities, 74 institutions of national importance, and 205 state private universities functioning in the country. There were40,760 colleges (UGC Annual Report, 2014-15). The total estimated enrolment in all higher education institutions in year 2014-15 was 3.33 crore.

There is a large network of research institutions providing courses of advanced learning and research leading up to a Ph.D. in branches of science, technology, agriculture, social sciences, languages and other disciplines. Many of these institutions come under the umbrella of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Even though a very few of these national research institutions are referred to as islands of excellence, the overall impression about the quality of research, and the output and performance of most of these agencies over the decades has been not seen to be satisfactory.

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), the National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and the Indian

Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), are among the most prestigious institutions in the field of science, technology, and management.

Technical education has grown rapidly in recent years, with the annual enrolment of scientists, engineers and technicians exceeding 20 lakhs. The break-up includes around 9.5 lakh engineers, who have undergone a 4-year undergraduate degree; 7 lakh diploma holders; over a lakh computer scientists with post-graduate degrees and 2.4 lakh Management Professionals, apart from about 30,000 architects and 50,000 B Pharma graduates.

- **Variations in Quality**

At present, there are wide variations in the quality of higher education institutions in India. Some institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs) and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), have been globally acclaimed for their high quality of education. Alumni from these institutions have made impressive contributions in science, technology, research, management, business and commerce both in India and abroad. However, barring a few, India still lacks universities and institutions that could be considered to be at par with the best universities in the world.

At the other end of the spectrum are large numbers of privately run 'teaching shops' and so-called non-profit institutions, which are generally ill-equipped, and operating with unqualified staff. Such institutions seek to take advantage of the widespread demand for acquiring degrees. Many of these private universities, colleges and institutes operate under political patronage and take advantage of a lax or corrupt regulatory environment to run courses and offer 'degrees' which are of little use in the employment market. Students mainly coming from rural and semi-urban backgrounds often fall prey to these institutes and colleges.

The majority of higher education institutions fall in between these two extremes. These institutions vary widely in terms of infrastructure, library and laboratory facilities, quality of teachers and teaching-learning processes. Many

universities and colleges have poor infrastructure facilities and face shortage of qualified teachers. In general, around 40 percent of the teaching positions remain vacant in many institutions.

A fundamental weakness is the lack of transparency and accountability in the system, which is exacerbated by the strength of teacher unions, threat of strikes and the affiliations of student bodies with different political parties.

❖ **Ensuring Quality in Higher Education**

Policy interventions have generally tended to focus on the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, which is currently around 23% and sought to be increased, through the *RashtriyaUchchatarShikshaAbhiyan*(RUSA) to 30%. However, the GER does not track the wide variations and uneven quality of the education being imparted to students. According to one industry association study, less than 20% of those graduating from higher educational institutions are rated as immediately employable by industry. The quality of higher education needs to be urgently upgraded, particularly at the lower end of the spectrum dominated by the private sector. It is perhaps time to pay attention to a different type of GER – the Gross Employability Ratio of graduates.

An effective system for assessing the quality of higher education institutions would need to distinguish between recognition, accreditation and evaluation of the institution under review. Recognition is a minimal, legal threshold which essentially ensures that the institution offers courses and degrees which fall within the purview of the recognised higher education system. Accreditation is a higher threshold of minimal quality assurance; it validates and provides assurance that the quality of education provided by the institution meets a common standard.

Accreditation is important for the institution, the student and for prospective employers. For assurance of quality and adherence to academic standards, accreditation enhances the reputation and acceptability of the institution and the degree conferred by it. It increases the employability and worth of the student in the job market by enabling prospective employers to filter and grade individuals on the basis of a common standard of accreditation. It reassures recruiters that the student has received quality education and will add value to the establishment when he joins it.

Until recently, accreditation was voluntary and institutions of higher education had to approach the accreditation agencies to get their institution or programme accredited. However, in 2013, stemming from the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission (2007-08) and the Yashpal Committee (2009) the UGC notified new regulations (the Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions Regulations, 2012) making accreditation mandatory for all institutions of higher education other than those in the technical and medical streams. Without accreditation, no general-stream university or college was to be eligible for grants from the UGC.

Thus, the current position is that accreditation is mandatory only for general stream higher education institutions receiving grants-in-aid from the UGC. Technical and medical institutions are not required to go through the accreditation process. This is an anomaly and

lacuna which needs to be corrected. A detailed recommendation to this effect has been made elsewhere in this Report.

Of the 164 universities recognized by the UGC, 140 have got themselves accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), with only 32% percent being rated as A grade or above. Among the 4,870 colleges, 2,780 are accredited by the NAAC, with barely 9% making the A or above grade. Among the accredited institutions, 68% of the universities and 91% of the colleges are rated average or below average in terms of the quality parameters specified by the NAAC. Quality and excellence in colleges clearly leaves much to be desired.

Apart from accreditation, ranking of higher educational institutions is another useful indicator of institutional performance. There is no official ranking system for higher education institutions in India. The MHRD has recently announced an official ranking system for higher education institutions in India. However, several publications (India Today, Outlook, Business Standard, etc) bring out lists of rankings from time to time, which generally do not have any rational acceptance or basis for the rating methods; these are more like surveys or opinion polls.

Recently, a joint initiative has been launched by directors of IITs, IIMs, NITs and representatives of CII and FICCI to work out a ranking system suitable for India. It has been reported that six groups of outcomes, including academic performance, teaching-learning, learning resources, graduation outcome, global MoUs and impact/innovation will be used as bench-marks by which institutions will be ranked. Ranking for science, engineering, liberal arts, social sciences, medicine, law and business administration will be done differently.

The Committee is of the view that a credible ranking system covering all institutions of higher education without exception needs to be instituted, building on the recent initiative of the MHRD.

- **Important recommendations for equity and quality in higher education**

The proliferation of privately run ‘teaching shops’ and so-called non-profit institutions, ill-equipped and operating with unqualified staff, is a disturbing development and needs to be urgently addressed through appropriate measures.

The first step is to confront the reality that many private universities and colleges, professional and otherwise, flourish under the patronage of influential people backed by money power with little interest in education, taking advantage of a lax or corrupt regulatory environment.

It has to be recognized that the higher education institutions are proliferating but there is neither a structured system nor adequate commitment to provide quality teachers commensurate with the increasing demand for higher education. A manpower-needs study must be undertaken every five years at the central and state levels to determine the need for faculty positions in institutions of higher education. The recruitment needs have to be forecast well in advance to ensure that the recruitment action is taken in time. The scope for making appointments based upon subjectivity has to give way to rigorous merit based selection, preferably through the Public Service Commission or an independent body set up for the purpose.

There is a need to ensure that competent and motivated teachers enter the profession. Innovative options have to be offered to talented students at the class 12 stage from amongst, say the top performers (depending upon projected manpower requirements of specific subjects at college and university level). They could be offered admission in a 5-year integrated course in those disciplines, which would include an emphasis on nurturing teaching skills, research methodology along with subject specialization. This total period should be fully sponsored from public funds so that the best people are motivated to join the teaching profession in higher education.

It was brought to the notice of the Committee that the reasons for faculty posts remaining vacant were several. First, there is reluctance on the part of some states to fill posts on a regular basis with the aim of saving the outgo on salaries of full-time faculty. Second, the recruitment process, through the Public Service Commission is often time-consuming. A large number of teaching positions are lying vacant, especially in state universities and affiliated colleges. The process of recruitment also gets delayed due to litigation. However the alternative of recruiting ad-hoc and part-time faculty impacts adversely on the quality of teaching and research. It has been found that wherever the states have invested in permanent, qualified faculty, the outcomes are far superior and a lesson has to be taken from the benefits of proper recruitment of faculty.

Overdependence on ad-hoc and guest teachers militates against the quality of teaching. Learning from the experience of states that have invested in the recruitment of permanent faculty, which has reflected in better performance at the college and university level, it is recommended that all state higher education departments devote utmost attention to ensuring that permanent faculty is in position in all their institutions. For this, recruitment action has to start well in time and the absence of regular faculty should become a negative indicator at the time of accreditation.

For most undergraduate programmes, it should not be necessary to insist upon for teachers to possess a doctoral degree. Instead, it should be mandatory for such teachers to attend appropriate training programmes in teaching and communication skills, and the use of ICT.

Budgetary allocations should be increased and facilities for carrying out research should be improved in order to support good researchers. Policy-makers needs access to good research.

To the extent possible, teachers should be recruited and attached to particular institutions, rather than be part of an organized service where they are subject to frequent transfers. This will help in developing institutional attachment, identification and commitment.

Accreditation should be made mandatory for all institutions of higher education, including technical education, medicine and agriculture, both in public and private sectors.

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