

RESTRUCTURING OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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1. Introduction:

The present paper aims at probing the challenges in implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020 henceforth). The major challenge is the restructuring of higher education institutes as envisioned in the policy, its pros and cons on education in general and higher education in particular and measures to be undertaken. Higher education plays a significant role in promoting an individual to a responsible citizen of the country and a good human being. It has substantial role in nation-building as enshrined in the Constitution- a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic, republic nation upholding justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. It has been considered as the engine of development of the nation. Hence, there was an urgent need to make drastic changes in the Indian higher education system in general and higher education institutes (henceforth HEIs) in particular. Prof. D. S. Kothari mentions that "Indian education needs a drastic reconstruction, almost revolution" (Education Commission: 1966) in order to transform India into a knowledgeable society.

Sanctioned by the Central cabinet, in its meeting, held on 29th July, 2020, NEP 2020 brings to the fore the basic problems currently faced by the higher education system in India such as fragmented higher education, a rigid separation of disciplines in

silos, limited autonomy to teachers and institutions, large affiliating universities, etc. and suggests recommendations to overcome these challenges. The policy envisions revamping the existing HEIs and building multidisciplinary Universities, Colleges and HEI Clusters/ Knowledge Hubs in which enrollments will be 3000 or more students on the basis of the ancient universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi and Vikramshila. The provision in the NEP 2020 reads as: "To end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming HEIs into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges and HEI clusters/Knowledge Hubs, each of which will aim to have 3,000 or more students" (NEP 2020:10:1, P34).

The policy endorses the need of multidisciplinary undergraduate education and autonomy to faculty and institutions. The policy envisions setting up at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district by 2030 and "model public universities for holistic and multidisciplinary education, at par with IITs, IIMs, etc. called MERU (Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities)" (P38). This provision is really appreciable.

By 2040, the policy aims to transform all colleges into multidisciplinary institutes by phasing out single faculty colleges and colleges of low enrolments and affiliating system over a period of 15 years. The current structure of the Indian university

system has a large number of affiliated colleges with a university which makes overburden on many universities. Resultantly, universities become centres of conducting exams rather than serving academic, research and innovative purpose.

Table I
Universities and Affiliated Colleges

Sr. No.	Number of Affiliated Colleges to University	Number of Universities	Cumulative Number of University
1	0-100	168	168
2	100-200	59	227
3	200-300	36	263
4	300-400	12	275
5	400-500	10	285
6	500-1000	13	298

Source: Report of AISHE 2018-2019

The above table shows the number of colleges affiliated to the universities. There are 298 affiliating Universities in the country and they have 39,931 colleges. There are 13 Universities, which have 500 or more colleges, 10 universities 400-500 colleges and 12 universities 300-400 affiliated colleges. It indicates how universities are burdened due to large number of colleges affiliated to them. However, universities have to waste their energy and time in conducting exams, declaration of results and distributing degrees.

2. Recapitulation on Previous Commissions:

University Education Commission (1948-49) observed that affiliating universities are “more than a machine for conducting examinations” (367). It should

be phased out at the earliest possible moment and make the size of universities small. In many countries, it has been proved that small universities can do good work. The commission recommends that number of colleges should be grouped together in order to form university or one college which has adequate strength should be developed as university.

Kothari Commission (1964-66) also brings out the consequences of affiliating system and suggests decreasing it step by step. National Education Policy 1986 (Revised in 1992) endorses that affiliating system should be replaced by allocating autonomy to colleges (NEP 186/1992: P14).

National Knowledge Commission (2006) recommends establishing around 1500 universities and 50 National universities as multidisciplinary in order to increase Gross enrolment ratio of students in higher education. The commission insists on the dire need of expansion of HEIs in order to provide quality higher education to the last segment of society.

Yashpal Committee (2009) recommends that 1500 good colleges in the country which have rich history, strong infrastructure and academic base and large body of students have to be upgraded to the level of universities. The committee also endorses the need of clubbing some colleges in clusters which may recognize as universities. The Draft National Education Policy 2016 submitted under the chairmanship of T. S. R. Subramaniam recommends that the existing affiliating system will continue but there should have a maximum limit of 100 affiliating colleges (DNEP 2016: 4.14:8 P34).

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In addition to the recommendations of various Commissions and committees, several Indian educationists stressed the need of decreasing the number of affiliating colleges in order to give more space to the universities for academic and research work. V. C. Kulandisamy, in his book, entitled, *Reconstruction of Higher Education in India* (2006) rightly mentions:

“Indian higher education must move totally from the college compounds to university campuses and India certainly needs more universities- many more universities; may be about 2500 by 2020 (Kulandisamy: 2006).

However, the government has not paid any attention towards these recommendations up to date. Conversely, the NEP 2020 proposes de-affiliation of all existing HEIs and transforming them into multidisciplinary HEIs. The policy makers should see whether it is practical and feasible or not.

The developed nations established large number of universities in the ratio of young population in their respective countries. The table given below shows the population and number of universities in the developed nations.

Table 2

Sr.	Country	Population (In crores)	Universities
1	America	33	5300
2	China	143	2663
3	India	135	993

Source: Report of UNESCO 2017

The above table shows that India has less number of universities in comparison with the developed countries. So, it is necessary to minimize the burden of

affiliated colleges from the university by establishing more central/ state universities, IITs, IIMs and Institutes of National importance in the ratios of the students eligible for seeking higher education between the age group of 18-23. The NEP 2020 insists the need of establishing Multidisciplinary HEIs and MERUs.

3. Merger of HEIs into Three Types:

The main focus of the policy is phasing out single faculty HEIs and colleges which have low enrollments. As per All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) 2018-2019, there are 993 Universities, 39,931 affiliated colleges and 10,725 Stand Alone Institutions in India. 34.8% colleges run single programme and 60.53% colleges are located in rural areas. Majority of colleges are smaller in terms of enrolment. 16. 3% of the colleges have enrolment less than 100 and 48.1% of the colleges have student strength 100 to 500. It means 64.4% of the colleges have enrolment of students less than 500. Only 4% Colleges have enrolment more than 3000 (AISHE 2018-2019: P24). **Table 3**

Cumulative Number of colleges in Different range of Enrollments

College enrolment	Number of Colleges	Cumulative%
0-50	2565	6.7
50-100	3642	16.3
100-200	7579	36.1
200-500	10798	64.4
500-1000	6315	80.7
1000-2000	4335	92.0
2000-3000	1509	96.0
3000 and above	1536	100.0

Source: Report of AISHE 2018-2019

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It is crystal clear from the above table that only 4% colleges will remain in the process of restructuring as per the policy document, whereas, the rest of institutes will be phased out on the basis of less enrolments and single stream. The merger of single faculty colleges and colleges with low enrolments will make adverse effects. What is the rationale behind it? How far is it viable to phase out all single faculty colleges in remote rural and tribal areas? What will be the future of students and employees of the HEIs that are to be phased out? How far the poor and weaker sections of society will seek education after phasing out HEIs in their regions? Can they seek education by coming to the cities and bear its heavy expenditure? The policy has no explanations on these serious issues. It seems that the policy has framed a target of establishing multidisciplinary HEIs.

Actually, the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (population in the age-group 18-23 years) is average 28 which is very low in comparison to the developed countries. On this basis, India needs more colleges in order to provide access to quality higher education. However, the policy proposes restructuring HEIs by dismantling existing colleges started in rural, tribal and hilly areas in order to reach the opportunity of education to the last segment of society.

The policy proposes three types of HEIs:

(A) Research-intensive Universities (RU); which will equally focus on teaching at undergraduate and post-graduate programmes and research,

(B) Teaching Universities (TU); dealing with teaching at undergraduate and

post-graduate programmes and conduct research as well and

(C) Autonomous Degree-granting College (AC); which will be multidisciplinary institute of higher learning that grants undergraduate degrees and will focus on undergraduate teaching.

The policy accepted two important recommendations of Yashpal Committee (2006) 1) all universities should be teaching and research universities and 2) all universities should have undergraduate programmes so that undergraduate students get opportunities to interact with university faculty. It helps improve synergies between teaching and research. These provisions are really helpful for students. The policy proposes that Type 'A' and 'B' universities will run undergraduate programmes along with post-graduate and doctoral studies. The policy allocates freedom to HEIs to move from one category to another based on their plans, actions and its effective implementation.

4. Graded Autonomy- Academic, Administrative and Financial:

The policy proposes a mechanism for granting graded autonomy to all colleges stage-wise. It is mandatory on the part of all colleges to opt for autonomy. The provision in the policy reads as: "All HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy-academic and administrative- in order to enable this vibrant culture" (10.11: P35).

It is beyond imagination that the policy compels all colleges to go for autonomy without taking into consideration the grass root reality. There are innumerable problems in HEIs like unavailability of basic infrastructure, human resources and education amenities, vacant positions of

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faculty in colleges and universities, imbalance teacher-pupil ratio, no financial assistance from government, etc. In such grim situation, any institute will not go for autonomy. Autonomy is a model of complete privatization of higher education. The hidden agenda of the policy document is to insist financial autonomy on all HEIs in guise of academic and administrative autonomy. The policy seems to tantalize public HEIs to opt for autonomy by not assuring adequate public financial support and stability.

India can adept to academic and administrative autonomy to some extent but not financial one. Autonomy should be given to capable institutes. Already 77.8% Colleges are privately managed; 64.3% Private-unaided and 13.5% Private-aided which the policy envisions to make them completely private.

5. Target of Increasing GER:

The big drop out ratio in higher education is a serious concern. Only 10 to 12% students between the age group of 18-23 seek higher education in India. Only 37.4 million students are in higher education of the total eligible population of students. At the time of India's freedom, there were 20 universities and 500 colleges. Today, we have 993 universities and 39,931 colleges. The figures show the expansion of HEIs after independence. However, we have lagging behind achieving the targeted Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER).

The policy envisions increasing the GER in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% to 50% by 2035 which is really appreciable move. However, it should not remain an illusion. It needs large efforts to transform this aim into

reality. It is impertinent to note that there is a dire need of expansion of HEIs in order to offer access of all sections of society keeping in mind the population of eligible students for higher education of the age group of 18-23. However, the policy decreases the number of existing HEIs by merging them into multidisciplinary institutes. How is it possible to attain the goal of 50% GER by 2035 as envisaged by the policy? If we have to achieve a GER of 50% up to 2035, there is an urgent need to increase the number of HEIs in our country.

The National Knowledge Commission itself in his report reiterates the need of expansion, excellence and inclusion for quality higher education (NKC 2006). There is an urgent need to reframe the structure of HEIs. It should be in the ratio of population of students who are eligible for seeking higher education (Age group 18-23). The next table shows that the GER of the developed nations and even the small country's like Canada is very high as they have strengthened public funded education. However, India has 26.3% (AISHE 2018-19) which is the need of the hour to increase it and hence, quality HEIs have to establish to provide equal, free, compulsory and quality education.

Table 4

Country	GER in Percentage	Country	GER in Percentage
America	88	South Korea	96
Russia	76	Canada	100
Britain	59	Germany	100
Brazil	36	India	26.3

Source: UNESCO Report, 2017

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6. Replication of Glorious Indigenous Indian Model:

The policy proposes the need of revamping and restructuring existing HEIs and building multidisciplinary institutes for providing liberal arts education under one roof which was practiced in ancient India and has a tradition of 2000 years with evidence as reflected in the curricula of erstwhile Nalanda and Takshashila universities. What is pertinent to note here is that there was a dire need to expose students especially at the undergraduate level to various disciplines like humanities, social sciences, sciences, etc. The policy insists holistic and multidisciplinary learning in which various programmes like scientific subjects, vocational subjects, professional subjects and soft skills shall be integrated. The prime objective to integrate the humanities and arts with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is to “increase creativity and innovation, critical thinking and higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities” (11.2: P36).

The policy proposes a hypothesis that multidisciplinary education develops all capacities of human beings including “intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional and moral” (11.3: P36). Hence, the policy insists the need of education of ‘knowledge of many arts’ which integrates the humanities and arts with Science, Technology, engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and engineering institutes like IITs, will move towards more holistic and multidisciplinary education with more subjects in arts and humanities. The policy envisions that such education will lead the

country towards the fourth industrial revolution.

The policy envisions revamping curricula in which flexibility and various course options will offer to students. There will be complete autonomy to faculty and institutes for designing curricula on the basis of the present needs of society. The traditional mugging and one way teaching method of pedagogy will be changed and more emphasis will be given on student-centric teaching-learning and evaluation in which communication, discussion, debate and research will be given more priority which offers them space to engage actively in teaching-learning process. Yashpal committee deliberately insists the need of compulsory internships for all students, irrespective of discipline in order to make them capable for manual and other kinds of work.

The policy document decides to implement this recommendation and proposes to provide opportunities to students for internships with local industry, business, artists, crafts persons, etc. as well as research internships with faculty and researchers at their own or other HEIs/research institutes. Such model was adopted in the education system of developed countries like America, Japan, China, etc. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a renowned African-American educationist, established the Tuskegee Institute (which is recognized a world famous educational institute in America today) to educate the coloured people in the southern part of America in which space will be given to students to learn practical knowledge by serving in various industries, businesses, farm, etc. America has adopted

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such model of education centuries ago. The policy envisions adopting this model to provide practical learning with theoretical knowledge to the students. It may provide opportunities to improve their employability skills which is absent in the existing model of education.

7. Restructuring Degree Programmes:

The policy envisions restructuring of existing model of degree programmes. It proposes revamping existing undergraduate degree programme of 3 years into 3 or 4 year duration with multiple exit options and appropriate certifications. A certificate after completing 1 year, diploma after 2 years of study, a Bachelor's degree after completion of 3 year course and Degree 'with Research' after completion of a rigorous project in major area (s) of study after 4 years. So far as Master's programmes is concerned the policy proposes flexibility to HEIs to offer different designs: a) There may be a two year programme with focus on research for those who have completed the 3-year Bachelor's programme b) 1- year for those who have completed 4 year Bachelor's degree programme 'with Research' and c) Integrated five year Bachelor's / Masters programme. Those who completed Masters Degree or 4 year Bachelors degree 'with Research' may register for Ph.D, whereas, M. Phil programme is discontinued in a new structure.

This is a model of developed countries. The policy makers should think about the exit options. Higher education is already facing the huge drop out ratio where only 10 to 12% students are seeking education. This multiple exit option will increase drop out ratios. The policy expels the students who are unable to seek

education due to their financial crisis; they must take certificate and work as carpenter, painter, clerk so on and so forth. This is contradictory to the clause of compulsory education incorporated in the Constitution of India. It is the prime responsibility of the government to provide quality education to all and sundry as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

8. Conclusions:

Indian higher education in 21st century should be restructured in view of the prime objectives framed by UNESCO such as- learning to be, learning to do, learning how to learn and learning how to live together. HEIs have to be restructured and revamped to fulfill these four objectives. Moreover, it is expected that quality education should be accessible and equitable to all sections of society. Restructuring should not deprive the fundamental rights of education of a common man.

The present institutional restructuring and consolidation is a model of dismantling public funded education and opening new vistas for privatization and commercialization through graded autonomy. Hence, the policy makers should rethink upon the suggested restructuring and reframe it. Expansion phase of higher education in India is yet incomplete and we could not reach even today to all the eligible youths- demographic dividend- with access to quality education.

In a nutshell, affiliation system should be replaced with by establishing universities at least one per district. It will automatically decrease the burden of affiliated colleges on the universities. In view of this, the policy envisions establishing one model multidisciplinary

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HEIs in each district and MERUs. Autonomy is not the ultimate solution and hence, should not be mandatory to all HEIs. It should be given to those institutes desirable for it on the basis of basic infrastructure, student enrolment, academic and administrative development etc. Phasing out all single faculty colleges and colleges which have enrollment less than 3000 is not an ultimate solution. On the contrary, there is a dire need to open new HEIs in the areas required. Needless to say, multidisciplinary undergraduate education should be promoted and such universities have to be established.

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