Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University
Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)

Third Special Lecture on

Catelysing transformations in Higher Education and ODL through NEP 2020

By

Dr. (Mrs.) Shakila Shamsu

About Dr. BRAOU

The University, initially known as Andhra Pradesh Open University, was set up on 26th August 1982 through an Act of the A.P.State Legislature (APOU Act 1982). Subsequently the University was renamed as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University on 26th October,1991. The establishment of this University, the first of its kind in India, heralded and era of affirmative action on the part of the Government of Andhra Pradesh to provide opportunities of higher education to all sections of society to meet the changing individual and social needs. The University is providing services to the student community through a wide network of 179 study centres spread across both Telangana & Andhra Pradesh States, including 23 Regional Co-ordination centres and 11centres exclusively meant for women students. Prison inmates under life sentence also enrol themselves as students and pursue education through exclusive study centres at Central Prison - Cherlapally, Warangal, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Kadapa and Nellore and exclusive Study Centre for Army Personal and their family members, which was located at AOC, Secunderabad. The University offers Certificates, UG, PG Diploma and PG Degree and Research Programmes in including various Professional Programmes.

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Catalysing transformations in Higher Education and ODL through NEP 2020

Prologue

Independent India has seen three Education Policies- National Education Policies- NPE 1968, NPE 1986 modified in 1992, and the latest National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020. NEP 2020 comes after a gap of more than three decades and is the first education policy of the 21st century; expected to set in motion a wide range of transformative reforms by 2040. While the policy comprehensively covers the entire education sector, several committees and commissions have examined various aspects or sub-sectors, and their recommendations also form a robust base for the sector.

One must appreciate that every policy, in any sector, is relevant to the extant scenarios of the times it was enacted. Every new policy, in any sector, is a response to changing socio-economic changes that occurs within the society and ensues at the global level. Hence, policies must not be viewed, either as gap-filling of the previous policy or due to its inadequacies; but evolves from the experience of the previous policy. Policies are, intrinsically, vision documents that would be aspirational and forward looking. The National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform India into a knowledge society, with educated skilled manpower of high standards, equipped to meet the 21st century challenges.

The NEP 2020 draws its philosophical moorings from the *Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for The Twenty-First Century* - Jacques Delors (1996) *Learning: The Treasure Within* which highlights four cardinal principles: ***Learning to Know; Learning to Do; Learning to Live Together and With Others; and Learning to Be***. Further, in keeping with the global commitment as a signatory to the UN Development Goals, the NEP is aligned with the SDGs, particularly SDG-4 which seeks to "*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"* by 2030.

NEP 2020 – an overview

The Policy views school and higher education as a single organic continuum, recognising their inter-connectedness and concomitant synergies. It highlights that the teaching -learning processes must evolve in an age-appropriate stage -wise manner from the tender growing years to the advanced ages. The sequential educational development must be recognised, so that the benefits of strong foundational early learning would result in improved learning outcomes in subsequent stages. The Policy's underpinnings are based on a set of 22 principles which guide the recommendations, which *inter alia* include identifying and nurturing the unique potential of every student; encouraging flexibility across curricular choices, removing silo-based disciplinary boundaries to promote holistic multidisciplinary education, exposure to 21st century skills and life skills at all levels; leveraging the power of language for cognitive and critical thinking; pedagogical and assessment reforms; instilling values through respect for diversity and pluralism; emphasis on the criticality of teachers and faculty in ensuring enriched learning and improved student performance; experiential learning for enhanced quality of teaching-learning; extensive use of technology and online models for enriched learning and bridging learning and language gaps; ensuring equity and access to create sustainable societies; focus on research and innovation; governance and regulatory reforms for efficiency; rooted in the Indian ethos and constitutional values; reaffirming education as a public service and calling for substantial investment for a strong public education system.

REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is a critical contributor to sustainable livelihoods, economic development and plays an important role in improving human well-being, and developing the nation as a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane society. As India moves towards becoming a true knowledge society, more and more young Indians are aspiring for higher education. The aim of a quality university or college education must be to develop good, well rounded, and creative

individuals. It must enable an individual to study one or more specialised areas of interest at a deeper level, while at the same time building character, ethical and Constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, spirit of service, and 21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines including the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, as well as professional, technical, and vocational crafts.

NEP and Open and Distance Education – the complementarities

It is significant to note that many recommendations and enablers in NEP foster and promote open and distance learning. These include:

1. A quantitative target for Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, including vocational education and enrolment in Open and Distance Learning, is set to increase from the current 27.1% (2020) to 50% by 2035.
2. NEP calls for individualisation and customisation of learning experiences, and hence underscores the scores the need for flexibility in curricular choices, medium of instruction, teaching -learning methods and pedagogies, assessment tools and evaluation methods. This provides for a host of options to the learners in terms of the duration of academic programmes, completion time and staggered phasing with multiple exit and entry options, modularity, blended models of curriculum transaction, and learner centricity in various aspects. The credit mobility across academic programmes and institutions that NEP recommends can easily be implemented in Open Universities with some tweaking. These, as we all know, is inherently what ODL/ODE systems encourage in its academic ecosystem.
3. NEP reflects the goals outlined in SDG4 which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education with lifelong learning opportunities for all. This is inherently what ODE seeks to achieve.
4. NEP seeks to expand and invigorate ODL through online courses and digital repositories developed, credit-based recognition of MOOCs, Open Educational Resources (OERs), etc.,

5. NEP recognises Open and Basic Education in school education, life enrichment and vocational skills, education of CWSN and the strong role of Open schooling for multiple learning needs.
6. Integration of technology and innovative pedagogies for stimulating learning and provide enriched learning is inherent in NEP and resonates with ODL.
7. Teacher education and vocational courses through online mode will be made available.
8. Capacity building of faculty, leadership development and continuous professional development of teaching, technical and administrative are highlights of NEP, which Open & Distance learning systems advocate and undertake on a regular basis.
9. NEP envisages the ICT driven models of dual mode education system, hybrid & blended learning, digital & virtual universities.
10. NEP gives a boost to ODL in its role for enhancing access, providing inclusive and education for marginalised and the SEDGs, ensuring affordability of education without diluting quality.
11. The need for robust student support services for holistic development and addressing student needs are the mainstay of NEP and ODL.

Quality Assurance in ODL

A major concern is that while promoting ODL, the generally perceived notion that ODL is secondary to F2F education needs to be addressed. This calls for total quality transformation, in terms, of best learning resources, programme delivery, student support, outcome-based education, technology integration, offering MOOCs are some measures on the academic side. New and emerging areas of study must come within the ambit of ODL education, including research on ODL pedagogy with scope to explore innovative ways of teaching and assessment. On governance side, transparency and accountability becomes critical to the effectiveness of ODL systems. ODL institutions must prepare Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) with clear strategic goals and actions. Ensuring quality parameters and benchmarks leading to accreditation and ranking is another significant reform. Given that the National Credit Framework

(NCrF) and the NHEQF are in place, Open and Distance education must be aligned appropriately to permit student mobility and credit accumulation.

Holistic, integrated multidisciplinary education

The policy envisages a broad-based multi-disciplinary holistic education at the undergraduate level. The existing discipline-specific and silo-based programmes will give way to diverse set of course offerings, which will be inter-disciplinary, transdisciplinary and allow students to choose with varied and disparate options as per his/her own dispositions, likings and interests. The education system must help to develop well-rounded individuals possessing critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; social engagement; soft skills; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. Such a holistic education is the expected approach for all undergraduate programmes, including professional, technical, and vocational disciplines. The undergraduate degree will be of either 3 or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options, with appropriate certifications- a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor's degree with a specialisation after a 3-year programme or a Bachelor's with Honours or Research. The flexibility is not limited to curricular choices, institutional choices and duration, but also the freedom to do the courses from multiple modes of face to face, online, ODL and even MOOCs. In view of the change of structure at UG levels, the PG level has three options for pursuing Master's programme-two years Masters for those completing three years degree; one-year Masters for those completing 4 years degree; and five years integrated Master's Program. The eligibility for PhD shall be either a Master's degree or a 4-year UG degree with Research.

The transformation to multidisciplinary HE would require existing institutions to enter into academic arrangements through memoranda, cluster arrangements, opening new departments etc.

The instrumentalities

To facilitate this flexible university education at UG, PG and doctoral levels; three enabling instrumentalities have been created or formulated: *Academic Bank of Credit (ABC); National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF), and National Credit Framework (NCrF).*

An **Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)** has already been established to digitally store the academic credits earned by the students from various recognized HEIs, so that the degrees can be awarded based on the total credits earned. Both the students and academic institutions must onboard this site to derive the benefits of credit mobility.

The **National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF)** has been formulated which will guide the exercise of credit transfers and equivalence. It is an instrument for the development, classification, and recognition of qualifications along a continuum of levels from 4.5 to 8, with levels 1 to 4 in school education. It is an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved along a continuum of agreed levels. NHEQF is based on the fundamental premise that higher education qualifications, such as, a certificate, diploma, and degree are awarded based on the demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes and academic standards expected of graduates of a programme of study. It will assist in the identification of potential progression pathways from one level of education to the higher level of education, equivalence of courses across institutions, including through multiple entry, exit, and re-entry points/ options.

The **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** jointly developed by UGC, AICTE, NCVET, NIOS, CBSE, NCERT, Ministry of Education, DGT, and Ministry of Skill Development is a comprehensive framework encompassing

elementary, school, higher, and vocational education & training, integrating learning on all dimensions- academics, vocational skills and experiential learning, including relevant experience and professional levels acquired. The NCrF is an inclusive umbrella Framework to seamlessly integrate the credits earned through school education, higher education, and vocational & skill education. The NCrF encompasses the qualification frameworks for higher education, vocational & skill education, and school education, namely National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF), National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) and National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCFSE) respectively. The implementation of NCrF would be a game changer by removing distinction, ensuring flexibility & mobility, and establishing academic equivalence between general and vocational education. The NCrF provides for Assignment, Accumulation, Storage, Transfer & Redemption of Credits. Thus, NCrF paves way for multidisciplinary education and empowers students through flexibility in choice of courses for choosing their own learning trajectories and programmes. The Framework fully enables the students - to catch up and re-enter education if they have fallen behind or dropped out at any stage; supports educational acceleration for students with gifted learning abilities; does Recognition of Prior Learning for acquired knowledge and skills informally through the family traditions, work experience, thereby allowing them progression and mobility into formal education.

Empowering and Supporting Students

In keeping with the learner-centric approach and holistic development, several initiatives are being taken to create optimal learning environments that are engaging and supportive, and enable all students to succeed. High-quality support centres are being set up in universities and colleges with adequate funding and academic resources to encourage and support students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Academic, career counselling, including psychological counselling to address socio-emotional issues, as well as counsellors to ensure physical, psychological and emotional well-being will be available to all students. Students in HEIs will have plenty of opportunities for

participation in sports, culture/arts clubs, eco-clubs, activity clubs, community service projects, etc.

Institutional restructuring and changes in the affiliation system

India is home to one of the largest higher education systems in the world, with nearly over 1000 universities, around 40000 colleges and about 15000 standalone educational institutions. They are of varied types ranging from Central universities, State universities, Deemed-to-be-universities (public and private), State Private Universities, National and State Open Universities and aided and non-aided affiliated and autonomous colleges. Each of these types is characterized by its ownership/source of funding and/or geographical location/jurisdiction. The Policy recommends mapping of HEIs into a rationalised institutional architecture, largely by the functions of teaching and research -Research-intensive Universities, Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous degree-granting Colleges (ACs). Model public universities for holistic and multidisciplinary education, named MERUs (Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities) aimed to attain the highest global standards in quality education are also to be set up. This does not necessarily mean new greenfield institutions but converting existing ones.

Affiliation system in higher education has immensely contributed in early stages for ensuring access and equity. Nevertheless, over the years, affiliating universities do not have any proactive role in ensuring academic standards and providing quality inputs; and the host university is mainly involved in conducting examinations, which has disastrously affected the quality. Thus, a long-standing need to reform the affiliating system is being addressed through a major shift from affiliation to autonomy. The affiliated colleges will, in a phased manner, over a period of 15 years, through by a suitable system of graded accreditation and graded autonomy, strive to become independent colleges. Each existing affiliating university will mentor its affiliated colleges so that they can develop their capabilities and achieve minimum benchmarks in academic and curricular matters; teaching and assessment; governance reforms;

financial robustness; and administrative efficiency. A concerted effort by the governments and suitable institutional mentoring will help colleges currently affiliated to a university to attain the required benchmarks and the prescribed accreditation to eventually become autonomous degree-granting colleges. Over a period, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an autonomous degree-granting college, or a constituent college of a university. While such a rationalisation is recommended, care to ensure access and ensure equity in higher education by catering to the rural, unserved, and underserved areas and aspirational districts will be ensured.

Internationalisation of higher education

The Policy is contextualized in a globalized era and every country is seeking to get a competitive edge in world rankings and make itself an education destination and hence logically, the policy promotes the internationalization of higher education. It stipulates various measures, which *inter alia* includes facilitating research / teaching collaborations and faculty /student exchange with high-quality foreign HEI and signing of mutually beneficial MOUs with foreign countries; encouraging high performing Indian universities to set up campuses abroad; selected universities from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India; setting up of International Student Office at each HEI for welcoming and supporting students arriving from abroad; counting credits acquired in foreign universities etc. UGC guidelines for internationalisation of HE encourages setting up of an Office of International Affairs and an Alumni Connect Cell in universities Internationalization will be facilitated through institutional collaborations and enabling mechanisms for student, faculty and institutional mobility. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has released the draft Regulations (Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India) Regulations, 2023, which would allow foreign universities to establish campuses in India.

Equity and inclusion in education

NEP 2020 aims to ensure that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background. It identifies the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups(SEDGs) which include: gender (female and transgenders), socio-cultural (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor). Special emphasis is given to increase and enhance the educational participation of the SEDGs through specific interventions. Creation of Gender Inclusion fund and Social Inclusion fund for earmarked funding is recommended. Special Education Zones in areas with concentration of SEDGs and for disadvantaged regions are to be identified for a targeted approach. More HEIs to be established and developed in underserved regions to ensure full access, equity, and inclusion. A game changer to broad base access and equity is the recommendation to offer academic programmes in regional languages. More scholarships for SEDGs are envisaged. Private HEIs also to offer larger numbers of free ships and scholarships to their students.

Teachers and Faculty at the heart of education

The NEP 2020 places the teacher as the pivot of the education system to catalyse the proposed academic reforms. The 4-year integrated Bachelor of Education offered at multidisciplinary institutions would be eligible qualification for all stages of school education. In higher education too, NEP 2020 recognizes that its success is significantly determined by the quality of its faculty and seeks to have motivated, energized, and capable faculty. HEIs will have clearly defined, independent, and transparent processes and criteria for faculty recruitment and recommends tenure-track engagements. Faculty will be given the freedom to design their own curricular and pedagogical

approaches within the approved framework. Career growth and progression avenues with provision for continuous professional development through capacity building programmes are explicitly articulated. Excellence will be further incentivized through appropriate rewards, promotions, recognitions, and movement into institutional leadership. Accountability of faculty is also sought to be ensured with a system of fair and transparent review. A National Mission for Mentoring for engaging a large pool of outstanding senior/retired faculty – including those with the ability to teach in Indian languages – who would be willing to provide short and long-term mentoring/professional support to school/university/college teachers is in place.

Global Citizenship Education and Indian Knowledge Systems NEP 2020 promotes a balancing of global with local. It makes a strong case for promoting Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and aligned with the SDG -4 goal to make learners aware of global issues of sustainable development and become active promoters of peaceful, tolerant, and sustainable societies. Alongside, the curricula with include Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) to cover subjects, like Indian Knowledge, Indian Linguistics, Indian metallurgy, Indian Architecture etc.

Institutional Reforms for effective governance, regulation and enhanced standards- All HEIs will aim to become independent self-governing institutions pursuing innovation and excellence. Institutions and faculty must enjoy greater autonomy to innovate in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Equally important is the need to ensure leadership of the highest quality and promote an institutional culture of excellence. Institutional governance based on autonomy - academic, administrative and

IDPs will assess and make future projections for:

- human resources requirements, - faculty, administrative and ancillary staff;
- physical & infrastructural facilities;
- ICT related facilities;
- Teaching-Learning infrastructure, - labs, libraries, etc.;
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD) requirements;
- Student Support.
- specific plans for increasing participation from SEDGs.

financial -is envisioned with each HEI having a Board of Governors. All leadership positions will be offered to people with high academic qualifications and demonstrated administrative and leadership capabilities.

The regulatory system is set be overhauled, based on the principle of separation of powers and to prevent concentration of powers in a single body,- for funding, regulation, accreditation and academic standard setting. There will be a single overarching umbrella body for promotion of higher education, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI); with independent bodies for standard setting- the General Education Council; funding- Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC); accreditation- National Accreditation Council (NAC); and regulation- National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). A legislation in this regard is expected to be brought out. Regulation will be 'light but tight' to ensure financial probity and public-spiritedness to eliminate conflicts of interest with transparent self-disclosure as the norm not an inspectorial regime. The regulatory body will have powers to penalize HEIs not conforming to norms and standards. Public and private higher education institutions will be governed by the same set of norms for regulation, accreditation, and academic standards.

Promoting research

In keeping with the recommendations of NEP 2020, the Government of India has enacted an Act to establish the National Research Foundation (NRF) in India and has allocated Rs 50,000 crore for research until 2027-28. NRF will help reduce the gap in R&D spending between India and other countries. The NRF will promote research and development (R&D) and foster innovation in Indian universities, colleges, institutions, and R&D laboratories. The overarching goal of the NRF is to enable a culture of research to permeate through our universities, helping to develop a culture of research in the country. The NRF aims to promote, fund, and mentor scientific research in higher education institutions. By bridging the gap between research and higher education, the NRF will combine teaching and research. The Foundation will address important

issues in India, including natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, arts, and humanities. Suitable incentives for and recognition of outstanding research, and undertaking major initiatives to seed and grow research at State Universities and other public institutions where research capability is currently limited is expected. It would help in developing linkages between universities/colleges, research laboratories and industry that will give an impetus to research and undergraduate levels.

Technology in education, digital and online education

An autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), has been created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration etc. for School Education, Higher Education and Skilling Initiatives. This ecosystem will be implemented in accordance with the National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR), a unified digital education architecture for School Education **(NDEAR-S)** and Higher Education (NDEAR-H); wherein **NETF** as its custodian, shall play the role of the central advisory and regulatory agency for facilitating educational institutions, central and state governments to effectively deploy technology interventions by providing a single source of proven best practices, emerging research in digital education and recommendations on interoperable, open solutions for the betterment of education delivery in the country.

Appropriate integration of technology into all levels of education to improve classroom processes, support teacher professional development, enhance educational access for disadvantaged groups and streamline educational planning, administration and management is being implemented. Technology-based education platforms, such as SWAYAM, will be better integrated across school and higher education. HEIs will play an active role in conducting research on disruptive technologies and in creating instructional materials and courses including online courses in cutting-edge domains.

Promotion of Indian languages

The policy underscores the importance of multilingualism and the strength of our nation's linguistic pluralism. Accordingly, several initiatives to protect, preserve and develop all Indian languages are outlined. HEIs, are encouraged to teach in regional languages, and/or offer programmes bilingually, in order to increase access and GER and also to promote the strength, usage, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. An Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) would be established. Universities are encouraged to set up new language departments. Sanskrit and all Indian language institutes and departments across the country will be significantly strengthened. National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit would be set up. Efforts to preserve and promote all Indian languages including classical, tribal and endangered languages is recommended.

Conclusion

Education is the most powerful tool for the advancement of the nation and the most potent weapon to fight poverty. It will prepare our youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future. The National Education Policy 2020 will pave the way for revitalising and reorganising our education to ensure 'equality of opportunity in access and success' to all learners; provide opportunities for lifelong learning; creating a harmonious, and cohesive egalitarian society. NEP will succeed to the extent it reflects the unfragmented and total commitment of the entire nation to accord priority to the development of our human resources and leverage the demographic dividend that our nation is blessed with in the coming years.

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Dr. SHAKILA SHAMSU

Brief Bio-Data



Dr. Shakila Shamsu, former OSD (New Education Policy), Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education (MoE), has been a part of the entire exercise in the formulation of this current policy. She has been the Secretary to the Committee to Draft National Education Policy. She was the Nodal Officer of the flagship Govt. of India Scheme of National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (NMTT).

She held senior positions in the Govt. of India:
Joint Adviser (Education), Planning Commission; OSD (XII Plan), Ministry of Education. Her career spans four decades in teaching /academics in the Universities of Mumbai, IGNOU including 14 years in the Government of India.

She holds a Ph.D in Distance Education, Gold Medalist for Masters, PG Diploma in Distance Education, and a Degree in Law. She has to her credit a number of articles in international journals, book contributions and in the preparation of XI, XII Plan and Government reports. She has been privileged to be a member of various Committees of the GOI, State Govts., UGC, USIEF Fulbright National Selection Committees, Academic Council in Universities etc. She has addressed several national and international conferences within the country and abroad. She has received awards for her contribution to the field of education from different bodies.

She has addressed several national & international seminars on the NEP recommendations and implementation. Currently, she is Honorary Adviser, (Education), Centre for Public Policy & Research (CPPR); Member, Governing Council, India MUN, a Pan India UN group for Youth in Climate Action. She has recently been honoured among 100 honorees of Muslim Women in Kerala by the initiative of Rising Beyond the Ceiling (RBTC) for her outstanding contribution to education.

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