

CRITIQUE OF THE DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2019

INTRODUCTION: The Draft National Education Policy, 2019 was long overdue since the last NEP was in the year 1986/'92. Much has changed from then to now given the advancement in all spheres of life and the great technological leap that has taken place. We, the Gujarat Education Board of Catholic Institutions (G.E.B.C.I.) which is a registered umbrella body having 178 educational institutions all over Gujarat State as its members, whole heartedly welcome the said draft at the same time we have some very serious concerns which we would like to outline.

Some of the positives are as follows:

1. A lot of time and effort have gone into wording this volumous draft document and also taking into consideration various situations in minuteous detail.
2. The vision envisaged for India is commendable in line with the historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted at the UN General Assembly in 1948, declared that “everyone has the right to education” and stress on the 4 pillars of education by Jacques Delors i.e. i) Learning to know; ii) Learning to do; iii) Learning to live together and iv) Learning to be.
3. Drawing from India’s rich heritage, the draft gives importance to holistic education that was prevalent in ancient times with its rich diversity in all walks of life.
4. The goals envisaged in the draft are lofty which seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030
5. Stress is laid in the area of Early Childhood Care and Education and revamping and moderning of the Anganwadis in the country, specially, at the village level.
6. The scheme 5-3-3-4 is well thought out namely Foundational Stage (K.G. to 2 Grades), Preparatory Phase (3 to 5 Grades), Middle School (6-8 Grades) and Secondary (9-12 Grades). It envisages a lot of flexibility, fun in learning, play-and discovery-based learning, age-appropriate learning and burden-free-learning. Given the pressure loaded on to modern day children and on parents too, this chain of stages and concept of learning is like “a breath of fresh air”.
7. Notable too is the interconnectedness of all the phases and importance given to Liberal Arts and Vocational courses in the Secondary Phase.
8. It is spot on in intergrating Sports, Music, Dance, and other activities as part of the curriculum. Giving importance to development of Life-skills is also appreciable.
9. Highly desirous is the idea of setting up Special Education Zones in disadvantaged regions across the country to reduce the illiteracy among certain sections of our people.
10. We endorse the move in Higher Education too. In keeping with world wide practices in Higher Education of Liberal Education through an array of different disciplines that include the Arts, Humanities, Mathematics and Sciences suitably integrated with a deeper study of a special area of interest.

11. Research at the University level is fostered which will remove the existing lacuna in the education system. The National Research Foundation with the right funding will be able to improve the quality of research in the country and provide linkages with other universities world-wide.
12. Laying stress on improving Teacher-Education Institutes and the desire to woo the best towards the teaching fraternity is the need of the hour. The present malaise in the B.Ed. programme and the corrupt practices being adopted by some teacher-training institutes needs to be flushed out. Quality teachers will definitely improve the quality of education in our country.
13. A very positive and a much needed step is the raising of the funding in education to 6% of the nation's GDP which till date is hovering below 3%. An increase in the funding will definitely improve the infra-structure and quality in education.
14. Bringing about transparency and accountability in the education sector is very much applauded.

Some Serious Concerns are as follows:

1. Past National education Policies (NEPs) have remained as 'wonderful documents' without being implemented due to 'Policy Paralysis' as Education is a State subject under the Concurrent List.
2. SAFFRONISATION of Education seems to be the 'Hidden Agenda' of the Draft National Education Policy, 2019 for the following reasons (a) One Nation, One Policy; (b) Centralized Curriculum; (c) Over stress on Hindi, Sanskrit and other Indian languages; (d) 'Catching them YOUNG' from the age group of 3-18 years, thereby influencing the child's 'impressionistic mind' with 'Coloured' historical facts and religious beliefs; (e) Disparaging view of English language as 'Colonial' and 'Elitist'; (f) Linguistic Minorities are special protection; et al.
3. The Draft NEP, 2019 on one hand stresses Indian languages and the doing away with English language and on the other hand writes the whole volumous draft of 484 pages in English language ONLY. It's a contradiction in terms!
4. The Prime Minister of our country goes hobnobbing countries after countries marketing India globally by way of 'Globalisation' and the Draft is 'Nation-centric' instead of being 'Global-centric'.
5. 40% of the educational institutions in India are run by Private Founders, so too a large number educational institutions of high repute over the years are run by Christians though being miniscule by way of population, have not been given their due place/representation while formulating the Draft NEP, 2019.
6. The Constitution of India and the laws of the land by way of Supreme Court pronouncements in various cases have not been taken into account while framing the Draft and after promulgation of the same, it will be saddled with innumerable litigations.

7. Many of the proposals in the Draft are very ‘Utopian’/’Idealistic’ which will be very difficult to implement without taking into consideration the ground realities.
8. There is a huge shortage-crunch of good and qualified teachers in our education system as of now. Where do you get the teachers from, to teach 41 Semester Courses in the Secondary Schools (9-12 Grades)?
9. There are contradictory statements galore in the Draft which makes it very confusing and sets in a feeling of scepticism and reservation with regard to the Policy.
10. Excessive Power is given to the SMCs and the general public to interfere in the day-to-day working of the school making the Principals and Teachers of the educational institutions feeling like having the Damocles’ Sword hanging over their head. They will have no freedom to experiment and innovate. They will have to go STRICLY by the Rule Book.
11. Multiple Agencies monitoring and controlling the education sector is fraught with danger and will stifle diversity of thought and ideas which are essential factors in the development of human mind and thinking.
12. The ground realities in our villages and remotest regions of our country have huge imbalances and lack basic amenities. In no way will they reap the benefits of technology which is strongly mooted in the Draft.
13. The back-log of Drop-outs from schools is unthinkable high which will be an Himalayan Task to rope-them-in the main-stream of educational enhancement.
14. MINORITY RIGHTS GRANTED BY THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA UNDER ARTICLE 30(1) AND THE APEX COURT’S JUDGEMENTS IN MINORITY MATTERS IN VARIOUS CASES WILL BE TINKERED WITH AND TRAMPLED UPON AS IS CLEARLY STATED IN PAGE 194 OF THE DRAFT NEP,2019.

CONCLUSION: We, the Gujarat Education Board of Catholic Institutions, strongly feel that the Government should seriously reconsider and retract certain portions of the Draft NEP, 2019 which are harmful, detrimental, ‘frog-in-the-well’ visioned and devious elements noted above titled ‘Serious Concerns’. Further, we suggest that the Drafting Committee involve more Stakeholders (like Private School Founders, Religious Groups, Parents and Students undertaking Research), Eminent Educationalists and Civil Society from across the board for a Cohesive, Futuristic, Non-Communal and Unbiased Draft NEP, 2019 to build a robust, diverse, strong, and a prosperous India that will lead the world in the 21st Century!