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Education, Hindutva and the National Education Policy (NEP 2020)

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The distinct feature of human beings compared to rest of the animal species was its ability to consciously think and translate these ideas not just to react with the nature, but also to transform it. Explaining this Marx wrote in Capital Volume 1: "We are not dealing here with those first instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level... We presuppose labour in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic. A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in those materials."

What is apparent is that consciousness, thinking and formation of ideas are inseparably linked with the process of production – social production. It is also obvious that this sequence links human beings to society and social existence.

Education happens to be the process by which the collective experience of human beings in social production and their engagement with nature over generations is institutionalised. The expression 'wheels need not be reinvented' explains that collective knowledge does gain over generations and adds on to the collective memory of societies and civilisations without having actually lived through it. This is the essence of education. It is not just training for replicating processes, but also the basis for new ideas to transform themselves and society - nature. This basic idea about education, however, assumes a new dimension as the journey traverses into class societies. This is what is captured by the Chilean transformational education theorist Paulo Freire.

Education: major theatre in the battle of ideas

Education understood as mere instruction existed in the most primitive forms of social organisation. With the development of class divided society, education ceases to be merely a process of instruction and transmission of skills. In addition, to transmitting the necessary skills, education becomes the process of transmitting also a consciousness specific to that form of social organisation.

In class societies, the nurturing of a specific consciousness becomes necessary for the continuation of the class rule. The process of education under the class society, therefore, embraces the process of generating and nurturing a consciousness in the interest of the ruling class.

As Marx and Engels observe: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations; dominant material relations grasped as ideas: hence of the relations this made the one class the ruling one, and therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things, consciousness, and therefore, think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas' are the ruling ideas of the epoch". In societies prior to capitalism, the process of education was essentially confined to those sections belonging to the ruling classes, i.e. to those, who consequent to the division of material and mental labour, had leisure at their disposal to conduct the affairs of the society and planned productive activities. The example of Greek institutions and more specifically, the Indian system of "Gurukuls" illustrate this fact. The story of 'Ekalavya' illustrates the fact that not only was education confined to the ruling classes but that the labouring classes were subjected to denial and exclusion.

Duality inherent in the evolution of education in class societies

With the development of productive forces and the division of society into two antagonistic camps—bourgeoisie and the proletariat—and when all relations in society have been subsumed under the dominant capital labour relationship, it becomes necessary for the bourgeoisie to impart technical skills and knowledge to the proletariat whose development is an essential element in the working of the capitalist system. After all, commodities have to be produced for profits.

Thus, it becomes necessary for capitalism to provide a certain degree of education to the working people, which strengthen its class domination. But while ensuring the spread of education, this in itself creates conditions for raising the level of consciousness of the working class. As Marx and Engels noted in the Communist Manifesto, "Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death unto itself: it has also called into existence the men who are to wield these weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians".

Further, they note, "the bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education. In other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie". The bourgeoisie for its own advance, initially in its fight against feudalism and monarchy and later for the consolidation of its rule, gives the proletariat knowledge and skills which in turn can be used by the organised working class as weapons against this very bourgeois class rule. Education, under capitalism, therefore, assumes a contradictory nature: A reflection of its basic contradiction i.e., the social nature of production and private nature of appropriation.

With the emergence of monopoly capitalism, the education system develops in such a manner that science and knowledge are regulated and placed at the disposal and service of capital. Marx's analysis in Capital reveals that in a capitalist society, science becomes "a productive force distinct from labour and pressed into the service of capital". In the era of monopoly capitalism, scientific research is more highly organised than ever before, but always with the overriding aim of private profit. The training of natural scientists is departmentalised so as to make it difficult to acquire a conceptual grasp of natural science as a whole, and such students receive no training at all in the study of human society. (History is taught as though it was not a branch of science at all. In the natural sciences, the student may know nothing of Marxism, yet at least he recognises the dialectical processes in nature.)

This separation of natural sciences from social sciences and the separation of various branches of social sciences from each other serve the purpose of preventing the student from acquiring knowledge of the totality of his or her existence and on the other hand, give him or her distorted world view -- an education system that is deliberately used by capitalism, in its offensive against the working class and socialism. Education under capitalism, therefore, reflects the conflict in bourgeois consciousness between the need to develop science as a productive force and the need to conceal the true relationship between labour and capital. However, the ruling classes, at all times, ensure that the basic class requirement for their continued rule is in place.

Education: The Genesis in India

The origins of the present education system in India and its evolution during the colonial period were directly linked with the efforts of the British to consolidate their rule. Initially, their efforts were directed towards conciliation with the upper class 'natives'. One of the ways in which this understanding expressed itself was the official patronage given to traditional and oriental learning. (Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrassa in 1791 and Jonathan Duncan established the Banaras Sanskrit College in 1792.)

In 1837, the English replaced Persian as the official and court language and in 1844 Hardinge announced preference for English educated Indians in the Civil Service. These two steps effectively sealed any growth of education other than English education. Consequently, in 1853, an enquiry was conducted by the East India Company, which resulted in the famous dispatch of Sir Charles Wood to the Board of Directors in 1854. Described as the 'Magna Carta' of English education in India, this dispatch set forth a comprehensive scheme of education for the country. Following the political, economic, administrative and cultural needs of the British, this dispatch reaffirming the policy laid down in 1835 by Macaulay, recommended the concentration of higher education to the upper classes. Its recommendation led to the establishment of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras Universities in 1857. The Woods Dispatch also suggested the administrative machinery for the education system which included among other things, the university senates, the specific methods of examination, setting up of separate departments of public instruction under an important officer. This entire administrative set-up continues to exist even today.

However, the spread of education under colonial rule also led to the spread of consciousness that was seeking liberty from such foreign rule. (Of the many incidents that confirmed such a trend was the famous murder of the Collector of Pune by the legendary Chapekar brothers in 1897). Curzon noted, "It is impossible to dissociate their ideas and their (who took up arms) hatred of England from the course of education and training through which they have passed". What followed was the restriction of education in order to curb the rise of enlightened Indian nationalism. Curzon, in fact, argued, "It is quality and not quantity that we should have in view".

It is precisely the same expression that the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes of independent India have put forward following the initial years of massive expansion of education in free India. To meet the needs of the ruling classes following independence, there was a rapid expansion of educational facilities to create the necessary scientific and technical manpower required for domestic capitalist development. However, the inherently flawed process of capitalist development as analysed by the CPI (M) Programme led to the emergence of an economic crisis in the mid-sixties where the students thrown up by such expansion could not be absorbed by the economy. The Kothari Commission setup in the mid-sixties came out with a report based on a vision of a modern developed and highly educated society which, amongst others, recommended at least 6 per cent of the GDP be spent on education. This has never seen the light of the day till date. The 1986 New Education Policy of the Rajiv Gandhi government was the contemporary expression of the ruling classes to create (read produce) the manpower required for the consolidation and advance of the class rule while consigning the rest to non-formal education. This, once again, reaffirmed the ruling classes' approach towards education. What followed subsequently, naturally, was the inadequate growth of education

facilities to meet the needs of our entire people. Education continues to become increasingly a privilege than a right. The CPI (M) Programme notes: "The Constitution of Republic of India which was adopted in 1950 had laid down a set of directive principles to be followed by the State. These include ...right to education and provision of free and compulsory education for children. ... None of these principles had been realised in practice. The glaring gap between the constitution's precepts and the practice of the bourgeois rulers is a scathing indictment of the bourgeois-landlord system instituted after independence." (Para 2.37)

Nature of policy making in changing times

The world underwent a tectonic shift with the collapse of Soviet Union and the disappearance of the bipolarity. The process of globalisation and the associated overwhelming domination of international finance capital did not allow nations and national priorities to remain insulated. Globalisation forced hitherto efforts towards decolonisation to actively engage and integrate with this finance capital led processes. Fundamentally, capitalism works for producing commodities for profit and as we have pointed out that has been a determinant in the course of development that has influenced education. However, globalisation and its consequent neo-liberal policies adopted in countries to ensure profit and the undeterred movement of finance capital.

The contemporary challenges arise out of this basic class orientation of the bourgeois-landlord Indian State which has authored the education policy during the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first century. The crisis of the path of capitalist development in India has led to major changes which were influenced both by the internal, as well as, external circumstances. The crisis has now resulted in a new offensive on the rights to education and employment.

The present challenges become most obvious in the onslaught on public and mass education. The undermining of public education at the primary and the secondary stage in the overall context of decrease in allocation for education per se substantiates this approach. There is an attack on every aspect of the daily academic life. Education has seen a reduction in outlays over the period of neo-liberal reforms. It is not just the State's withdrawal from its social responsibilities; but more importantly, the State is redefining its priorities under the neoliberal dispensation. The State is preoccupied with increasing the avenues for maximisation of profits to both foreign and domestic capital. Education increasingly is being seen as a profit generating activity. In order to permit private profit, the State must vacate the space it holds. This is happening since the mid-eighties. Self-financing colleges and universities have mushroomed as autonomous institutions. Private technical institutions have grown manifold across the country. Private universities are being considered

while facing strong protests. Deemed university status had been conferred on many private institutions. The government sought to permit foreign universities to operate in India and discussing 'education' as a 'service' in the ongoing WTO negotiations.

The pattern of commercialisation and privatisation is presupposing that private investment in technical education will generate remunerative returns on such investment. This poses that the students coming out of such institutions have brighter prospects of employment. This is triggering off a disproportionate race towards these branches of education. This is undermining social sciences and humanities. This can only be extremely detrimental for the overall balanced objective of our education.

Our research activities and higher education are increasingly subverted by foreign entities undermining our national objectives. MNCs are seeking to dictate our research agenda. The permission sought for entry of FDI in higher education highlights the threat to our intellectual life. This is an issue which conflicts with our patriotic yearning and has the potential of rallying very wide sections of the academic community in defence of intellectual self-reliance.

The role of the judiciary in freeing private institutions from regulatory control has further accentuated the process of privatisation of higher education, particularly technical education. While these tendencies have their own adverse impact on the right and access to education, it particularly affects the question of social justice and further marginalizes the socially underprivileged sections of the students.

Resurgence of the ultra-right

With neo-liberal policies reaching a dead end with the impact of growing inequality and unemployment (resulting in sharp diminution of the purchasing power of the people), corporate driven finance capital had to devise new features to ensure policies which would not be just continuation, but intensification of policies to put profit over people. This process became particularly pronounced after the global financial meltdown of 2008.

The resurgence of the ultra-right was made possible in those parts of the world where the Left was not in a position to challenge this brazen corporate driven ultra-right wing polices and pose an alternative people centric polices.

The distinguishing feature of this ultra-right movement was characterized with complete marginalization of the people and their access to the national and natural resources, the denial of guarantees for livelihood, the denial of basic rights of education, health and housing, the abridgment of democratic rights and a complete disruption of people's unity through engineering of identity

politics to nullify any possibility of united resistance to such anti-people policies.

In short, it implied a major change in the manner of functioning of the neo-liberal state and the manner of functioning of the contemporary capitalism. These threw up individual centric political processes with the most outrageous responses of elected leaders.

The crop of ultra-right politicians that have appeared in the contemporary political landscape like Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Bolsonaro, Erdoğan – the ludicrous strongmen – dominate nations that would once have laughed them off stage. The question is why? Why are the technocrats who held sway almost everywhere a few years ago giving way to extravagant loud mouths? Explaining this global context of the resurgence of the ultra-right, the *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot offers, “The way capitalism function has changed. The dominant force of the 1990s and early 2000s – corporate power – demanded technocratic government. It wanted people who could simultaneously run a competent, secure state and protect profits from democratic change. But, today corporate power is overlain by – and mutating into – oligarchic power”.

The theorist, Steve Bannon, who spearheaded these ultra-right leaders’ thought process, points out that they seek the “deconstruction of the administrative state”. Chaos is the profit multiplier for the disaster capitalism on which the new billionaires thrive. Every rupture is used to seize more of the assets on which our lives depend.

These leaders force distraction. While the kleptocrats fleece the people, they advocate looking elsewhere. They encourage channeling the anger that should be reserved for billionaires towards vulnerable sections with identities who could be excluded in a majoritarian project. Just as it was in the 1930s, ‘the new demagoguery is a con, a revolt against the impacts of capital, financed by capitalists’.

The oligarch’s interests always lie offshore: in tax havens. Paradoxically, these interests are best promoted by hyper nationalists. The politicians who most loudly proclaim their patriotism and defense of sovereignty are always the first to sell off the national assets.

The Indian Context: Corporate-Communal Nexus

With the neo-liberal policies creating a conducive atmosphere for the ultra-right upsurge, the ground was ready for the emergence of a corporate-communal nexus. With the RSS in its place and facilitation of identity politics, the real challenge for the ultra-right was the democratic secular Constitution bearing the legacy of the anti-colonial freedom struggle. On the eve of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in 2013 itself almost entire spectrum of top Indian corporates met in Mumbai and virtually adopted a resolution urging BJP to announce Narendra Modi as their Prime Ministerial candidate in the event the party gains majority in the Lok Sabha. Sensing a great opportunity for advancing towards a Hindutva Rashtra, the RSS jumped into the fray. Shedding its earlier commitment to abstain from the political process of the country, the Sangh came out with a public statement urging the BJP leadership to follow suit. Given the overall hold of the RSS over BJP, this was a forgone conclusion. Thus, the corporate-communal nexus was put in place even before the 2014 election and the consequent formation of the Modi government.

Therefore, there should not be any difficulty in understanding that apart from promoting the unabashed corporate interest in all spheres of Indian society and public life, the principal thrust will be to dismantle the Indian Constitution and replace it with the narrow sectarian fascistic Hindutva Rashtra. The subsequent developments have only confirmed this course of development. With the brutal majority for the BJP in the 2019 election has only consolidated the corporate-communal nexus in the policy making. Neo-liberal policies have reached new heights with clear emergence of cronyism and handing over of national and natural assets on a platter. The process has been accompanied by a severe authoritarian onslaught with the undermining of the Constitutional framework and subversion of all statutory and Constitutional organs including the legislature and the Judiciary. With the guise of 'Constitutional rule', majoritarianism has become the guiding principle. Finally, the legacy of freedom and the striving for an independent foreign policy have been jettisoned with a complete proximity to the imperialist camp.

Education is recognized as an important instrument for ideological hegemony over the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the basic thrust of education was awaiting a major overhaul.

Economics and politics of NEP 2020

Any worthwhile policy making has to start with an objective assessment of the existing reality. Outlining the challenges, the policy ought to set out a road map for overcoming them. However, despite the PM's loud claims that NEP 2020 was preceded by intense study and research for last 3-4 years, no data or reference substantiating this appear in the policy document. Therefore, the inescapable conclusion is essentially this is a vision statement.

This is the third version which has been cleared by the cabinet.

From the 68 page NEP, 2020 on the government's website, it is apparent that though education, which figures in the concurrent list of the Constitution, the document does not reflect numerous serious disagreements of state governments, academic bodies and important academics, organisations of the teaching community and student bodies.

Taking advantage of severe restrictions on public protest in the pandemic affected environment, in its familiar aggressive pursuit of anti-democratic and anti-federal agenda, Modi government is aiming to unabashedly promote corporate intrusion through NEP 2020.

With the NEP document itself setting out a timeline which will go beyond 2030, the tearing hurry in finalising it without a public debate and more importantly, a discussion in the Parliament, clearly establishes a unilateral authoritarian drive to preempt possible opposition.

During the consultation over the NEP, RSS emerged as the most influential voice. RSS affiliates were involved through the drafting process with meetings between their functionaries; education minister of some BJP ruled states, representatives of the government and NEP drafting committee chairman, K Kasturirangan. The RSS demand on emphasising 'ancient Indian knowledge' has been incorporated in the final version of the policy document.

Fundamental Departure

Education has been always recognised as a powerful tool for national development and a means for realising the potential of our people. In fact, the battle for ensuring access to education was aimed against exclusive control of the elite through British colonial policy of limiting mass education. Therefore, this battle merged seamlessly with the struggle for achieving Indian freedom.

Post-independence, this basic thrust on universal mass education found its way into the Constitution and its directive principles. Born in the crucible of the freedom struggle, the Constitution also recognised the rich diversity of the Indian society; its multi-lingual multi-cultural nature, the caste stratifications, discriminations and exclusions, the historical lags suffered by Dalits, tribals and the unequal status of girl children.

The post independent education policy had aimed towards overcoming these handicaps through the principle of social justice and affirmative action for reinforcing the secular democratic Republic based on common equal citizenship.

Divorced from that anti-colonial legacy, the framers of NEP 2020 have completely broken away from this legacy. In stressing the preeminence of Indian past without any specific detailing of the possible course of such assimilation, the 'vision of NEP 2020' is "to instill among the learners a deep rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought but also in spirit, intellect and deeds" and "curriculum and pedagogy from the foundational stage onwards will be redesigned in the Indian ethos". (Para 4.29)

However, the document does not define the 'Indian'. Bulldozing the rich diversity, reinforcing social stratification and exclusion, it does not elaborate on how it will relate to the changing landscape and the global knowledge commons. It also does not underline the need for nurturing scientific temper; with an unabashed advocacy of the glory of the past and not to mention a complete silence about the rich history of assimilation towards composite syncretic development. With eloquent silence, the policy has stopped short of spelling out the Hindutva straightjacket.

Centralisation: Death Knell for Federalism, Autonomy and Democratic Participation

Even before the new policy has begun its formal journey, the central thrust is in naked display through the audacious insistence of the UGC to implement its inflexible prescription for holding the final semester examination for the graduate and the post graduate degrees across the country; denying leeway to states and respective universities for a credible evaluation while avoiding discrimination on existing digital divide. It is ironical that the very Pandemic Act which the union government is using to pursue its unilateral agenda empowers the states to exercise a flexible approach. But, NEP 2020 will signal the end of such resistance. The policy empowers extra ordinary centralisation to decide on every aspect of education from early childhood care to research.

The Constitution makers had placed education under the state list in the Schedule. The emergency and the 42nd amendment to the Constitution transferred this from the 'state' to the 'Concurrent List'. But, even with this change, school education was managed by the

states through the respective state school boards; NEP virtually abandons this. The precise school syllabus will now substitute curriculum framework.

In the case of higher education, the role of central government will be absolutely overarching. Now the apex of higher education governance will be assumed by Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) superseding the role of UGC, AICTE and other such bodies. Headed by the prime minister, it will have 12 government appointees and just two academics. Four parallel streams of structures dealing with funding, accreditation, standard setting and examinations will function under the HECI. For research, the policy proposes a national research foundation which will take over all decisions on advanced research funding from a range of overlapping institutions thus concentrating all conceivable powers for guiding research activities.

The federal arrangements following 1976 Amendment will be altogether eliminated as the NEP 2020 does not lay out any comprehensive framework for redeeming democratic obligations under the Concurrent list of the Constitution related to power sharing between the centre and the states.

The federal character of India, as 'Union of States' under the Constitution is already greatly stressed due to centralisation of taxation powers of GST, abrogation of special protection to states and dismantling of the planning commission. NEP 2020 proposes to further centralise this anti-federal trend. The language policy and the disproportionate priority for Sanskrit ,not as a subject, but in competing different Indian languages is aimed to institutionalise this arrangement while further loading against the non-Hindi Indian languages. For NEP 2020, bulldozing the states and the underlined denial of recognition of our rich diversity is the approach for ensuring 'national integration'.

Apart from centre-state issues, NEP also takes away the role of democratic participation and engagement of the academic community, the students and the society at large to address the unevenness in our development process. The university-laboratory linkage with the community which has been hitherto recognised as a basis for our education and research activities will be replaced by a highly centralised bureaucracy driven process. The elected senates, syndicates and academic councils will be substituted by the model of HECI. Over the years demand for granting more 'academic autonomy' is now being finally and decisively abandoned. NITI Ayog's 'three year action agenda' (2017) and UGC's Graded Autonomy Regulations

(2018) formally spoke of autonomy for HEIs. NEP 2020 continues with same refrain. But the 'spirit of autonomy' will be primarily predicated by 'financial autonomy', a euphemism for fast-track privatisation.

Refashioning Education

Prime minister's unusual interest in NEP 2020 is unsurprising with gross failures in handling the pandemic and the catastrophic downturn of the Indian economy even before the pandemic arrived. Naturally his sale pitch hinges on the rhetorical argument that NEP 2020 will ensure 'job creators' instead of 'job seekers'.

Perhaps his speech is prompted by the proposed fragmentation of both the school and the higher education process with several exit points and variable degrees and certificates. These proposals of NEP 2020 are being flaunted as 'flexibility' and 'choice'. The absurdity of such an argument advanced by NEP can be understood from the fact that the first exit point is after class VI in the school where it is proposed that a child at the age of 12 will learn through 'fun and work' as an intern without pay. If this is not legitimising child labour with the existing act laying down prohibition of any labour below the age of 14, what is it?

In all these post-independence years, dropout rate in schools and higher education has been a major concern for education policy makers. This concern has prompted attempts to overcome socioeconomic inequality by inclusive affirmative action. For example, only about 6 per cent of STs, eight per cent of SC, 9 per cent of Muslims and 10 per cent of OBCs are able to complete schooling till class 12 among children who are admitted in class '1'. This massive exclusion from school, as well as, higher education is now being glossed over through frequent use of terms like 'exit/entry option' and 'lifelong learning' and 'flexibility'. Therefore, it is not surprising that 'reservation' does not find single mention in the entire text of NEP 2020.

Frontal Assault on Public Funded Inclusive Education

Notwithstanding the PM's rhetoric, which conveniently overlooks the horrific conditions of employment where thousands of PhDs and post graduates jostled for recruitment to Group D posts in the government sector, the claim by offering exit points is pure delusion. Employability and employment are completely different propositions, as much as 'job seeking' and 'job creation'! The fact of the matter is NEP 2020 constitutes a frontal assault on public funded education.

Notwithstanding the pious commitment to increased public expenditure on education to 6 per cent of the GDP, NEP 2020 does not clarify how much of this expenditure burden will be shouldered by the union government which collects 4 per cent education cess on income and how the cost of expansion of pre-primary education for ages 3-6 years will be managed by the severely resource constrained 'anganwadis' under the charge of state governments. With current record of central government's budgetary expenditure and categorization of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) gives away the game. Research universities, teaching universities and autonomous colleges aim to actually open floodgates of privatisation. For example, the autonomous colleges will be encouraged to 'consolidate' potentially unviable institutions.

That the NEP is not based on any concrete study becomes further clear from the fact that the policy has pegged such autonomous colleges at minimum student strength of 3,000. All India higher education survey shows of all the 39,000 colleges in the country, at present only 4.3 per cent, have this prescribed strength. Promise of 'light but tight' regulation will facilitate private promoters to go berserk on collecting fees. For ensuring access to higher education, the challenge of education policy making is to guarantee affordability. Indian education shows that access is abysmally low at all levels with respect to even comparable developing economies.

Similar exclusionary approach is evident in the proposal for cluster development in school education. NEP 2020 proposes several schools which are spread over in remote habitations are complex to manage and must be clubbed to form a cluster. Apart from running contrary to the ideas of Right to Education Act which stipulates that every habitation must have a school within a radius of one km, the proposal merely repeats ideas of MN(multi-national) consulting agencies which under the stewardship of BJP led state governments forced closure of thousands of schools. Legitimising drop out, closing down institutions to slash cost on infrastructure and pushing large scale online education while opening up for major privatisation/commercialisation is the preferred route proposed in the new policy.

Contrast this to Kerala where students of private schools are opting to join appropriately publicly funded institutions.

The experience of implementation

In the last two years since the passage of the NEP 2020, the priorities of the NEP are therefore, for all to see. The process of implementation has become

further adverse with the new drive for pursuing online education. The unabashed attack on public funded education with more aggressive pursuit for commercialization and privatization has taken place. The introduction of online platform has been a bigger factor towards privatization as the online dissemination has involved only the corporate sector. The corporate online activity now recognized by the formal system has led to further exclusion of those sections of students who suffer from economic and social inequality. During the last two years we are also witness to sharp increase in fees and curtailment of scholarships particularly that of socially disadvantaged sections like the tribals, Dalits and minorities. The burden of the crisis is also further undermining girls' students' access to education.

The new policy of consolidation of education both at the school and the college/university levels has led to unprecedented levels of closure of schools and a sharp increase in the dropout figures at all levels.

Implementation of the NEP 2020 has also seen complete undermining of the federal arrangement with initiatives being pursued through the bureaucracy even at the state level and concerns of state governments particularly, those of non-BJP state governments have been largely ignored. This is accompanied with a proactive role of the governors, particularly through their attempt to misinterpret the function of Chancellors through their role as Chancellors of even state universities. The activism of Kerala Governor Arif Muhammad Khan is a stark example.

The pursuit of the Hindutva agenda has become crystal clear. The communalisation of education is not limited to injecting communal content in the syllabus and offensive on our history and scientific temperament; there is a conscious attempt to redefine Indian identity along Hindutva lines. The UGC circular pushed by its Chairman is aiming to advance this agenda.

He is anchoring the effort to legitimise narratives of Hindutva proponents Savarkar and Golwalkar in the official academic space of Indian universities. It only betrays scheme of things that RSS and Hindutva forces plan to unleash in the sphere of higher education.

The concept note prepared by ICHR is pompously titled '*Bharat: Loktantra ki Janani*'. At the level of intellectual inquiry into our historical past, the document does not have the pretensions of being a product of any rigorous historical research. The development of Indian historiography as a serious discipline based on scientific evidence drawn from archaeological finds and the application of genomics. In a sense, it serves the purpose of brazenly displaying the RSS capture of ICHR. That this distortion in the study of our past is being sought to be perpetrated across our higher education space should not only

cause concern but underline the need for building a platform of resistance to safeguard objective reading of our history and the foundations of our constitution.

The concept note prefaces with an ahistorical claim that Indians have been present all over the globe since 'time immemorial' and consequently the notion of 'Bharat' needs to be celebrated. That this claim is far from truth has now been irrefutably established through the genomic studies and DNA footprints to establish that India has been more of a site for inward migration and not the other way round. In its subjective desire to find the roots of modern democracy in ancient India, the concept note only manages a muddled and distorted history mechanically drawing on European and British colonial writings on Indian village systems. This narrative has been the staple of European colonial historiography on India in the 19th century.

The major theoretical grounding of the note reads, "In India, from the Vedic times itself two kinds of states, Janapda and Rajya have been in existence. The Indian experience evolved its own form of governance at the levels of village and the central polity: (i) The federal/central political structures were delinked from the lives of the community (village communities), and consequently, (ii) village communities became self-governing and autonomous and (iii) developed a hierarchy of self-governing institutions, such as Panchayats and Khaps that enabled them to remain unaffected by and large changing kingdoms/empires particularly, those of invaders hostile to Indian Hindu culture."

Nothing could be more ironic than that, the Indian village which was one of the foundational premise of the colonial construct of the Indian past has become the main prop for celebrating Indian democracy as a part of the diamond jubilee of Indian independence. No wonder that such a construct is the total denial of our anti-colonial legacy of the freedom struggle. That the RSS had carefully avoided to be part of the freedom struggle does not stop this doublespeak on *Amritkaal* and locating our democratic lineages of the ancient past.

Placating Brahminism and Varnashram

The UGC chairperson reiterated the RSS vision- "There are many indications that the ancient form of governance in India was democratic, contrary to the general belief that it was monarchical. There is more evidence in the form of archeological, literary, numismatic, epigraphical, Bhakti and so on to emphasize the Loktantrik tradition of Bharat. The recent archeological excavation at

Rakhighari and Sanauli reveals that the roots of people's self-governance date back to at least 5000 BCE". Based on this assertion and without any concrete evidence goes on to propound that India in the past had "Loktantra" as opposed to "Prajatantra" or "Jantantra". Elaborating on this, the note goes on to explain that these categories stand for "community system oriented towards the welfare of the community" whereas "Prajatantra" is a mere translation of democracy and "Jantantra" implying the "ruler versus people-oriented system".

Armed with such esoteric explanation, the note goes on to assert that ancient India was unique because there was no autocracy or aristocratism and there was no concentration of the prestige of birth, influence of wealth and political office, and "Bharatiya governance was different from ancient Rome and Greece." Instead, the notion of sovereignty in India rested on "Dharma" and interpreted by the note as "Law".

Apart from the essential colonial roots of underlying historiography, the note ends up in attributing Hindu religious and cultural identity rooted in the Brahminical tradition to explain our past. Apart from overlooking concrete evidence of traditions that challenge the authority of the Vedas and Brahminical scheme, the Hindutva ideologues in the ICHR are hell bent to whitewash these dissenting alternative traditions. It is also clear that the note fails to recognise that the Vedic and the Harappan cultures are distinct and separate streams, but pose them to be part of a singular whole - which is the trademark for Savarkar's Hindutva driven historical narrative.

Oblivious of the distinction between history and mythology, the note proceeds to attribute a timeless perception - "the Hindu mind from the beginning addressed the central question of how to weld the vast multiplicity that is India into a single larger community and from ancient times a geo-cultural definition has been given to this entity, *Rashtra*, *Bharata* - the country which lies to the South of the Himalayas and the north of the ocean is called Bharat and the Bharatiyas of this country". This is typical repetition of Savarkar and Golwalkar assertion. The notions of 'border', 'frontier' or 'foreigner' were absent in the "connotation of Bharatavarsha in early sources."

Predictably the note has laid the blame of splitting the 'self' from the others, on the alien invaders. This is a plain denial of the hierarchical social order perpetrated by Varnashram. The note's specific emphasis on placating the caste inequality is eloquent. "Indian people infused with the spirit of equality, have had since the very Vedic times *loktantrika Parampara*", makes a mockery of history when such

caste ridden history of persecution and atrocities against Dalits and other backward castes are advertised as 'alternative roots of democracy and governance' simply to reinforce that 'India is a mother of democracy.

The ICHR note also echoes the Hindutva narrative of the Indian past and attempts to project the so-called Bharatiya roots of Constitutional democracy in contemporary India by completely distorting and whitewashing the legacy of anti-colonial freedom struggle. The most gruesome crimes were committed against humanity, Dalits and women by the very same tradition – the Brahminical order. Many of the Dharmarashtras and the other Sutras underlining the ideologically loaded nature of the note. Obviously, the UGC chairperson's advisory is legitimising Hindutva myth in official academic space.

And now, the Government has decided to further aggressively pursue the communal rewriting and teaching of Indian history. the efforts by the government to change the syllabus of history through the NCERT text books.

The NCERT chief's specious argument that this has been done to rationalize the syllabus and reduce the burden on the students is totally misleading and is part of a project to rewrite history along communal lines. The government is obviously overlooking that different periods of our past cannot be just deleted based on communal prejudice. This underlines the majoritarian mindset which is distorting history itself by dropping entire chapters about the Mughal empire.

That the current efforts to revise the text books are actually intended to whitewash the divisive and violent role of the RSS is evident in the manner in which the crucial sentences regarding the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi which led to the ban of the organization is sought to be struck off.

We urge the government to immediately take the necessary steps to reverse these obnoxious steps and restore the old text books. We also urge upon all Indian patriots interested in defending the objective study of our past to raise their voice of protest.

An Assault on Constitutional Federalism

The UGC Act as enshrined in the constitution outlines the powers of the UGC – "Determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in universities- Framing regulations on minimum standards of education- Monitoring developments in the field of collegiate and university education; disbursing grants to the universities and colleges".

Notwithstanding the many changes that the law has undergone so far as the governance of higher education is concerned, this sector is not in the central list and the state governments have constitution ordained role in this area. The brazen endorsement of ICHR's note on history without any substantive academic/scientific basis clearly brings out the political/ideological nature of this initiative.

In the constitution, state governments are state governments; in no way the governors can subsume the powers of the elected state governments. The UGC chairperson by having written directly to the governors for organising seminars on the subjects enunciated by the ICHR note is a blatant attack on the powers of the state. We have been, off late, witness to the shenanigans of BJP/RSS sponsored governors. That such cynical acts are not stand-alone episodes but part of the larger scheme of to centralise powers at the cost of the constitutional arrangement becomes all the clearer from this latest UGC missive.

Agenda for Resistance

Notwithstanding the initial constraints to build a resistance to NEP 2020 and the simultaneous push for online education, different sectors involved in education has been able to regroup themselves to change this situation. They are now been able to affectively expose the real nature of this pernicious policy.

This is largely due to the vicious attack of its implementation so far. That this will largely undermining publicly funded education at all levels is becoming amply clear. There has been a large number of closure of schools. Its intensity varies from state to state. This is happening due to the process of consolidation which runs contrary to the provisions of Right to Education Act. These closures are affecting communities and neighborhoods, particularly, those which are poor and inhabited by Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and minority community. Within these groups the girl students are further marginalized. The same process of being pushed out of access to education is equally visible at the Under Graduate and Post Graduate levels. The attempt to limit the scope of research through the reduction in the number of fellowships and scholarships. The fresh offensive on introduction of the four year Under Graduate programme despite no legislation or consultation with the state governments will further open up the process of legitimizing dropout which is already on the rise.

The other aspect which has also come to the fore is the blatant attempt to rewrite history and science education. Forging a new overarching Hindutva identity is quite brazen. This is also enhancing the possibility for building resistance.

It is, therefore, needs immediate affects which has to be the mainstay of opposition and resistance which can help firm up the overall opposition to the NEP 2020.

This is an essential prerequisite for building up an ideological counterpoint to the corporate-communal nexus for evolving an alternative and salvaging the democratic secular basis of the Indian Constitution.