

**Brief Note towards
NEP Phase-2 Campaign: On NEP Implementation**

*submitted to AIPSN NEP Campaign Steering Committee, AIPSN Education Desk & AIPSN EC
by D.Raghunandan, Delhi Science Forum, 21 July 2021*

1. Introduction Three rounds of discussion have been held on this subject in the AIPSN EC and GC. As called for earlier by the EC, a Note towards a 2nd Phase of the AIPSN Campaign on the NEP, with a focus on the on-going Implementation of the Policy, was tabled by this writer at the EC on 21 January 2021. This Note, outlining the content, strategy and main points of the Campaign was discussed and broadly endorsed. The Note itself had been prepared based on detailed discussions with, and inputs from, EC Members or prominent activists from Kerala, TN, AP, Karnataka, Maharashtra, MP, Jharkhand, Haryana and Tripura on the status of implementation of the NEP in their respective States. This Note was again tabled and discussed in the GC Meeting on 7 February 2021, and was again broadly endorsed, with a decision to finalize plans for an AIPSN NEP Campaign Phase 2 on Implementation of the NEP. A Sub-Committee of the EC was constituted and tasked for the purpose, and met on 18 March 2021. This EC Sub-Committee entrusted the AIPSN Education Desk to take the Campaign forward based on these earlier Notes and decisions. This present Note is prepared and submitted to assist in this process with a view to initiating the Campaign as soon as possible.

2. Concept Phase-1 of the AIPSN Campaign on NEP was based on the AIPSN Position Paper responding to the NEP2020 as finalized by the Government [<https://bit.ly/2MflH0Q>]. Since then, the Union Government has started implementing NEP, selectively pushing certain policies of NEP at different speeds in different States. The EC/GC Note, based on inputs from States, observes that Opposition-ruled States have been resisting NEP implementation to some extent, varying from State to State. Even here, however, the Union Government is working through bureaucrats especially IAS officers to push implementation of NEP at least in select aspects. Unfortunately, resistance to this has not yet developed into a broad-based campaign and platform bringing together different stakeholders. This is the need of the hour. The AIPSN NEP Campaign Phase 2 should therefore urgently respond to this unfolding reality and mobilize the broadest possible coalition of teachers, students, parents, non-teaching staff, Anganwadi workers, Unions of all these, educationists, other experts, NGOs and civil society organizations.

3. Response and Resistance to NEP In general, as reported by activists in the States, response by the general population including students and teachers, mass organizations and other stakeholders, has been lukewarm. Opposition to NEP is generally weak, except among politically conscious activists, civil society organizations and organizations of students, teachers and non-teaching staff. Even among students and teachers, opposition to NEP is somewhat muted. Therefore there is a risk of opposition to NEP being perceived as coming mainly from the political opposition especially from the Left or by those inside the education system supporting the “status quo.”

3.1 Broadly, AIPSN/BGVS would join the campaign against NEP being conducted under the aegis of the Joint Forum of Movements on Education (JFME) involving organizations of students, school and university/college teachers, and non-teaching staff. In fact, AIPSN/BGVS is already playing a leading role in JFME as regards drafting Perspective Papers, Status of NEP Implementation etc.

3.2 However, JFME is weak or has limited presence in many States such as TN, MP, Jharkhand. In several such States, AIPSN/BGVS will therefore have to play a leading role.

3.3 At same time, active joint struggles are going on in Haryana, Maharashtra, Kerala, where a Joint Platform of Left/Progressive teachers and students organizations is active with KSSP as "Resource Group," West Bengal where a students-teachers Forum for Right to Education is active, and Tripura where 13 Left and progressive mass organizations are very active.

3.4 AIPSN/BGVS Member Organizations have been campaigning vigorously everywhere, in some States down to Taluk level, but sometimes fighting a lone struggle. In Kerala over 10 lakh people have attended webinars, a grassroots campaign is underway in Tamil Nadu, in MP a "Save Education, Save Constitution" campaign has been underway and letters have been sent to CM, LoP, MPs etc, HP where a "Save Education Campaign" formed in 2005 has been revived, AP, Jharkhand etc.

4. Suggested Campaign Strategy It is suggested that:

- a. a new, simple Leaflet in different languages directly addressing students, teachers, parents etc be prepared highlighting major issues and dangers, along with a brief Summary of the AIPSN overall critique (Position Paper)
- b. reinvigorate JFME but, given present weaknesses at State level, AIPSN should also form broader "JFME Plus" platforms in each State bringing together all stakeholders
- c. full efforts be made to involve not only committed Unions and Left/progressive organizations and individuals but all sections so as not to appear partisan-political
- d. common people, parents, teachers, students who are very confused about NEP need to be convinced and mobilized; sections of the middle-classes even think high fees, privatization, vocational courses etc etc are good measures

5. Activities Combination of virtual and physical Campaign (as per Covid norms) depending on local conditions:

- a. State level Coalition/Platform Meetings
- b. State level Conventions
- c. State level Activists Camps
- d. District level Conventions
- e. Public protests activities (at different levels depending on State capability)
- f. National-level Policy-level advocacy and lobbying by AIPSN core Group

6. Draft Backgrounder: see overleaf.

Draft Backgrounder for AIPSN NEP Campaign Phase-2

The All India Peoples science Network (AIPSN) is deeply concerned at the on-going implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) and at the manner in which it is being done. AIPSN had itself submitted a detailed critique of and response to the Draft NEP 2020 circulated by the Union Government for public comments expressing serious disagreement with many of its provisions. The Union Government ignored these critiques and alternatives suggested, yet re-drafted the Draft NEP 2020 and finalized a redrafted NEP without explaining either the reasons for rejecting the suggestions offered or the rationale for the changes made without any further public consultations. A detailed critique of the revised NEP was published as a booklet by AIPSN, which also conducted seminars and workshops with organizations of school and college/university teachers, non-teaching staff and students, besides numerous experts, educationists and civil society organizations, which expressed similar criticisms and suggestions.

It is well known that NEP was also not placed before Parliament for its consideration, yet was approved by the Cabinet. The Union Government has also not discussed the NEP with State Governments prior to its finalization, and has not given States an opportunity to consult their Assemblies, even though Education is a Concurrent subject under the Constitution. This completely non-transparent and centralized process of formulation of the NEP, a favoured mode of governance of the present ruling dispensation, is unfortunately now being replicated in the process of implementing NEP. Again, neither the States nor other stakeholders are being consulted, and the NEP is being unilaterally imposed on the country and pushed through by the Union Government.

AIPSN is of the firm opinion that NEP represents a significant withdrawal of the Union Government from its obligation to provide free and universal public education at school level and severely shrinks opportunities of the large masses of students for obtaining quality higher education suitable for the 21st century at reasonable cost. This is inevitable due to the NEP promoting commercialization and privatization of education at all levels and, through other additional means, reducing access to education. NEP over-emphasizes virtual or distance learning, perpetuating the digital divide in an already unequal society, and further marginalizing students from lower-income and under-privileged households from the education system. Government schools are being closed, while new so-called vocational courses are being introduced in colleges/universities with exorbitant fees. NEP centralizes syllabi, numerous entrance and periodic examinations, and even school text books, ignoring the diverse socio-cultural contexts in different parts of the country which all educators agree should shape teaching-learning. NEP also gives primacy to agencies of the Union Government to oversee all crucial aspects of both school and higher education. Rights and service conditions of teachers and non-teaching staff are being curtailed, and corporate managerial systems and culture are being introduced into institutions of higher learning. Concerns have also been expressed throughout the country at efforts to impose Hindi, Sanskrit and supposedly Hindu culture on all the diverse states, regions and communities of the nation through revised syllabi and curricula.

Against this broad background, NEP is now being implemented all over India directly by the Union Government and by-passing State Governments. This implementation has several common features and also some differences in modalities and in emphasis and prioritization of different aspects.

The broad trends in implementation, based on feedback from AIPSN/BGVS activists from different States, are noted below.

1. In **Overall** terms, NEP is being implemented and pushed by the Union Government all over the country, even though at different pace, with differing scope, and using different methods, all varying from State to State. Main trend is that BJP-ruled States are implementing NEP vigorously, but even among these, while there are some common features, different States are placing emphasis on different aspects. Non-BJP ruled States are by and large not pushing NEP, with some States even having written to the Union Government expressing their disagreement with NEP or refusal to implement it. However, the Union Government is making determined efforts to implement NEP in non-BJP ruled States as well by using various central Agencies, working directly through bureaucrats especially IAS officers and through other means.

1.1 BJP-ruled or BJP-allied States are going full-steam ahead with NEP implementation, although at different speeds and with some difference in emphasis. Common features are closure of many “unviable” government schools, initiation of 4-year Vocational Courses with year-wise exit options in Colleges with high-fees, and privatization of schools and colleges in different forms. Karnataka has drawn up a 10-year road-map, with State Education Commission and legislative measures planned, and a State Implementation Task Force with quarterly reviews headed by the Education Secretary. Madhya Pradesh has constituted has formed a State-level Committee for implementation, although its composition is not yet in the public domain. Tripura too is vigorously implementing NEP.

1.2 In Opposition/non-BJP ruled States, for example in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra, NEP is by and large not being implemented fully, although there is considerable difference in the extent of resistance or compliance. Status of implementation of NEP in Rajasthan and Odisha is not fully known. Some States such as West Bengal and Kerala have even submitted written and categorical NO to the Centre regarding implementation of NEP (WB, Ker). However, full efforts are being made by Centre even in these States to push implementation of NEP through various means. A key method is that the Union Government, especially through the Ministry of Education (MoEd), works with and through select senior bureaucrats particularly IAS Officers in States, even though these officials are supposed to work under instructions of the State Government. In some cases, these interactions between MoEd and select officials in States are conducted confidentially.

1.3 All States are being told to form Committees, mostly of bureaucrats, which work non-transparently directly with the MoEd. States have also been told to appoint a Nodal Officer who is then given confidential instructions by MoEd, this single-point contact being used to prevent leak of these instructions. Several States have reported that spreadsheets of tasks and responsibilities have also been issued to States so as to monitor progress of NEP implementation. Andhra Pradesh is pursuing its own unique policy frame in education. AP is implementing NEP in some ways, but departs from NEP in many other ways, contradicting several its major recommendations. For instance, AP uses English, rather than the mother-tongue, as compulsory medium of education from primary school onwards. Far from closing

schools, AP is incurring substantial expenditure on infrastructure in government schools, focusing on 10 priority issues, and is also giving Rs.15,000 to each BPL (below poverty level) student towards school uniform, school bag, text books etc. As a result, enrolment in Government schools has increased substantially.

1.4 At the present stage of NEP implementation, several common features are notable.

2. In **School Education**, closure of “unviable” government schools on a large scale is being witnessed in many States as per the NEP’s vision, along with creation of “cluster schools.” Tens of thousands of schools have been closed across Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura etc. This can only reduce educational access, particularly among lower-income rural households and those in remote areas, whereas these sections are precisely those who require increased access. In Karnataka, for example, where it is estimated that 40% rural students have poor access, schools being closed will clearly worsen this situation. Evidence is already accumulating of increase in school drop-out rates, made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic. Closure of numerous Government Schools is also resulting in a fall in teachers’ employment, emoluments and working conditions. However, there is also evidence that this is being resisted by several States such as Jharkhand which is even re-opening previously closed schools.

2.1 Privatization of the school system is being pushed in a big way. Many schools being closed supposedly due to non-viability are being handed over to private entities, for example in Haryana and Tripura, exposing the real motivation for the closures. Obviously, these and other new private schools are charging high fees, further widening the inequity in access to education. In Haryana, even Government Sanskriti Schools are now charging huge fees in the name of ‘model schools’ visualized in the NEP.

2.2 Centralization of school education, another key idea of NEP, is being promoted in many new and subversive ways, especially through select officials in States. State Education Boards are being weakened in many ways in favour of CBSE, for instance in Haryana. The Samagra Shiksha Scheme is another vehicle being used to promote centralization and uniformity in school education across the country, negating the autonomy of States and their desire for an education system more reflective of the social and cultural context, which would also be a recognition and celebration of diversity in India.

2.3 Another serious aspect of centralization is that the concept of “one India, one syllabus” is being pushed, for example in Tripura. This runs contrary to the recommendation of most expert educationists who emphasize the importance of school education rooted in local contexts and culture. It also reflects an intention to suppress the remarkable and valuable diversity of India in favour of an imagined homogenous culture. The emphasis given to ancient Hindu culture, to Sanskrit and to Hindi in the NEP documents drew heavy criticism. Now educationists in Kolkata have recently complained of “too much Hindi-Sanskrit” in textbooks.

2.4 As per reports from States, all the above are resulting in increased school drop-outs, accelerating privatization, and a fall in quality of education, possibly except for the elite.

3. In **Higher Education**, the Union Government is similarly pushing key elements of the NEP in States. Centralization is a running thread in this sphere as well. Here the Union MoEd has been using the mechanism of a series of circulars issued by UGC, MoEd itself and other such Central agencies, all of which have dubious legitimacy but are nevertheless being pushed using the weight of the Union Government. Questionnaires are being sent to College Teachers, School Principals etc asking their opinions on how to implement NEP, thus seemingly making them “stakeholders” of NEP directly linked with MHRD, even though many provisions of NEP go against their interests.

3.1 The Union Government is vigorously pushing for adoption of Common Entrance Tests for HEI through a central Testing Agency. These efforts are on-going and advancing, despite resistance from some States such as Tamil Nadu which continues to oppose NEET. Some States are adopting similar models at the State level through common entrance mechanisms for Colleges and State Universities such as in Haryana and Tripura.

3.2 NEP requires that Universities should not be affiliating institutions, but should be stand-alone, preferably campus, Universities and former affiliated Colleges should either become autonomous degree-awarding Colleges as per standards set by central agencies and as recognized by them, or should wind-up. This process has been set in motion using funding various other levers of pressure. While the model, following US or European models, appears to be reasonable, it is totally unrealistic in India in practical terms, where Colleges in rural and semi-urban areas affiliated to major Universities provide a large proportion of access to higher education especially to lower-income rural and semi-urban youth, and to SC/ST communities in such areas.

3.3 Corporatization and commercialization of higher education is also being driven by the Union Government, using the kinds of pressure tactics discussed earlier, along with the incentive of policies enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to become money-spinners. In terms of HEI governance structures, University Senates or Academic Councils are being replaced by corporate-style Governing Bodies consisting of government nominees. This removes the academic community from HEI governance, works against democratic and participatory HEI governance with involvement of the University community, and introduces a style of management that is interested in commercial more than academic aspects.

3.4 The NEP push for 4-year “vocational” degree courses with yearly exit options with certificates, diplomas etc (and yearly lateral entry options as systems evolve for credits for different types/levels of education and work experience) has been a major attraction, with the incentive clearly being the high fees Colleges and Universities can charge without any regulation governing the same. Already many educational institutions, including schools and colleges, had been using their premises and facilities for conducting coaching classes and similar short-term courses, often skirting municipal and other regulations. NEP now gives HEIs an opportunity to make money openly, exploiting the unregulated market. 4-year BA/BSc Courses in private, government or aided Colleges/Universities are being started even without AICTE approval and with high fees. For instance in Tripura, many private Vocational Colleges now being affiliated with Tripura (Central) University, and many other Colleges and Universities, have all started such Courses with fees of Rs.4.5 lakhs, even without AICTE

accreditation. Again in Tripura, even State Univ MBB has started various paid courses. Even in Tamil Nadu, which after the change of government, is resisting NEP implementation, many aided Colleges and Universities have started 4-year Vocational Education courses, tempted by the unregulated environment and the higher fees they can charge. It needs to be emphasized that employer acceptability, market demand for such VocEd qualifications, or what remuneration graduating students may expect, are all currently unknown. This exposes students to uncertain futures despite the high investments they are required to make. And the concept of lateral entry at different levels of the 4-year course is completely untested too.

3.5 Commercialization in other ways too, and privatization of HEI, are proceeding rapidly under NEP. Huge fees in professional colleges and for courses in medicine, engineering etc of Rs.15-20 lakhs are spreading wide. In Haryana, for instance, Government Medical Colleges have witnessed fees ranging from Rs.25 to Rs.50 lakhs, and even ITIs have witnessed jumps in fees. Quality of education and facilities in many of these HEI are below par. Fees are so high that Indian students are going abroad for higher studies in China, Russia and other places where they say quality of education is also better. Apart from new private Colleges opening up for high-fee vocational or professional courses, privatization even of existing colleges is also picking up speed. For example, government colleges in Tripura are being handed over to private entities or being placed in PPP mode with private partners. The practice of student loans from banks and other financial institutions is also becoming widespread due to high fees, following the US model over the past few decades where students find themselves trapped in debt traps for a decade or more.

3.6 With all these changes, higher education in India is poised for big changes, mostly for the worse. Students from lower-income families will find it increasingly difficult to obtain higher education due to high fee structure. Even Vocational courses which were supposedly aimed at those sections that needed to enter the employment market early will increasingly cater to the better-off due to commercialization and the inevitable rise in fees. Even if the changes envisaged in NEP, including privatization, result in better quality of education as promised, their benefits will be available only for the privileged few.

3.7 Virtual learning also continues to be pushed by the Union Government in various ways despite the known pedagogical problems associated with it, and regardless of the digital divide involved which can only further increase inequity of access in higher education.

4. Pre-School Education is suffering from considerable confusion since introduction of NEP, which had envisaged starting or shifting Pre-School Education to Anganwadis. In some States, Pre-school education continues to be conducted in school premises, and in some like Haryana it has been shifted to Anganwadis, while the situation is swinging between the two models even within some States. With regard to Anganwadi Workers, there is lack of clarity about qualifications required, training through remote means such as Apps etc. Anganwadi Workers are also legitimately concerned about appropriately increased remuneration, more stable or permanent employment conditions, a new job title appropriately conveying the new responsibilities and social status etc that should go along

with these this new position and tasks. Additional and appropriate infrastructure and facilities in Anganwadis that would be needed for pre-school activities are further unanswered question.

5. In **Non-Formal Education**, despite the proven success of earlier community-based educational models involving community mobilization as witnessed in the Total Literacy Programme and linked post-literacy activities including State Education Resource Centres (SERCs), the Union Government is pushing for each-one-teach-one or distance learning models. Himachal Pradesh for example is conducting adult education in schools through student volunteers. The former has been shown to be ineffective and leaves much to chance. Effectiveness of the latter is again highly uncertain as it de-personalizes and de-contextualizes teaching-learning which is known to be very useful if not essential.