

ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

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AT THE INAUGURATION OF VISITORS' CONFERENCE ON 'IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020: HIGHER EDUCATION'

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I am happy to be with the participants in this Conference of special importance. All of you have a great role in the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 which seeks to transform the education ecosystem in the country.

This Policy has been prepared after extensive participation involving two and half lakh gram panchayats, more than twelve and a half thousand local bodies and about 675 districts. More than two lakh suggestions have been taken into consideration. Thus, the Policy reflects a ground-level understanding of the challenges, aspirations and solutions related to education.

I appreciate the efforts of the Union Education Minister, Minister of State for Education and concerned officials at the Ministry and other institutions for completing the process of policy making. Dr. Kasturirangan, and his team, who prepared the Policy, deserve special commendation.

The National Education Policy aims to reorient our education system towards meeting the needs of the 21st century. It sets the vision of developing an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing quality education to all. This calls for achieving the twin objectives of inclusion and excellence.

Being at the top of the education pyramid, the institutions of higher education have the greater responsibility of making India a global knowledge superpower.

As we all know, coordination and determination of standards for Higher Education Institutions, including scientific and technical institutions are covered in the Union List of the Constitution. However,

the role of the Centre should not be limited to setting norms through agencies like the University Grants Commission or the proposed Higher Education Commission of India. There should be clear focus on quality. Higher Education Institutions under the Centre should set quality benchmarks through their outcomes for all other universities and institutions.

The fundamental principles of the Policy include creativity and critical thinking in order to encourage logical decision-making and innovation. The Policy also highlights that teachers and faculty are the heart of the learning process.

Here, let me recall Lord Krishna in the Bhagvad-gita as a great teacher who guides his disciple Arjun through a two-way dialogue between them. Every chapter of the Gita is described as “Krishnarjun Samvaad” which means “the dialogue between Krishna and Arjun”.

Let us think of the Gita as an example in the art of teaching or pedagogy. In the beginning, Arjun tells Krishna “शिष्यस्तेऽहं, शाधि माम्” which means “I am your disciple, help me through your guidance”. Krishna’s response to Arjun is marked by affectionate and patient answers and clarifications. In the end, after guiding Arjun out of the web of doubts, Krishna asks him, “Could you listen with concentration to what I told you? Is your ignorance-born doubt cleared?” Towards the end of the dialogue, after explaining the various paths available to Arjun, Krishna tells him, “यथा इच्छसि तथा कुरु - Do as you like.” Thus, the teacher provides different solutions and also gives the freedom of choice to the disciple. In between, Arjun asks nearly 20 questions. In terms of psychology, the dialogue between the teacher Krishna and the disciple Arjun in the Gita has both intellectual and emotional elements. Every free communication between a teacher and his student will have both the elements. Our teachers need to avoid one-way lectures and encourage the students to engage in free discussions with them.

Dear participants,

The Policy also seeks to discourage rote-learning and over-emphasis on marks or grades. It seeks to encourage critical thinking and a spirit of enquiry. In our tradition Jigyasa or curiosity for learning was

encouraged. It was given greater importance than Jigeesha or the wish to win a debate or argument.

Universities and institutes of higher education should be centres of innovation. They should provide innovative solutions to national and local problems. Community participation and use of local resources should be encouraged for providing solutions to local problems. Higher education institutions should utilise national missions like 'Swachh Bharat', 'Skill India', 'Make in India' and 'Atmnirbhar Bharat' as opportunities to promote solution-oriented learning.

India was a globally respected education hub in ancient times. Universities at Takshashila and Nalanda had iconic status. But today, India's higher education institutions do not get high positions in global rankings. Effective implementation of the NEP 2020 is likely to restore India's glory as a great centre of learning.

For promoting holistic and multi-disciplinary education, flexible and innovative courses need to be developed. Besides imparting knowledge and hard skills, a truly holistic approach also inculcates among students, values and soft skills. The Policy recommends inclusion of courses and projects covering universal values of Satya, Dharma, Shanti, Prem, Ahimsa, Seva, scientific temper, and life-skills.

Dear participants,

On the theme of values, let me mention a case study developed by the Harvard Business School which highlights the strength of the Indian ethos. Some of you may be aware of the study. Others also may like to read it. During the terror attack on Mumbai in 2008, known as 26/11, an extraordinary fact was observed at the Taj Hotel, Mumbai. According to psychologists, in the time of a terror attack, the normal response of likely victims is to run away. At the time of the attack at the hotel, about 1100 guests and 600 employees were present there. The hotel staff knew all possible exit routes. Yet, not a single member of the staff left the hotel. As many as 11 employees laid down their lives while saving the guests. This was one-third of the total casualties in the hotel. The faculty which studied the incident discussed a number of possible reasons behind this extraordinary response by the hotel staff. Among other things, they found that the

Taj Group prefers to recruit employees from the smaller towns of India because that is where traditional Indian values are still strong. I do not intend to say that people in larger cities lack Indian values. What is important is that such examples of courage, sacrifice, alertness and high ethics are to be found in many parts of India. Educational institutions should study such examples with multi-disciplinary approach. Such objective studies will add to the existing body of knowledge about India. They will also enhance pride in our shared values and culture. This will help us realise the vision of the Policy to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian.

I am glad to know about the new ABC of higher education which stands for Academic Bank of Credits. This is a major shift in Policy which will be of great help to the students. The ABC will digitally store the academic credits earned from various Higher Education Institutions so that degrees can be awarded, taking into account the credits earned by students. It will allow students to take courses as per their vocational, professional or intellectual requirements. It will also allow them suitable exit and re-entry points. This flexibility will be very useful for the students.

One of the earliest examples of multi-disciplinary approach highlighted by the National Education Policy can be found in the work of Acharya Pingala. Much before the Common Era, Pingala used the word 'shunya' to refer to zero. He is also said to have used the concept of binaries which is at the root of computer science. He contributed in the areas of mathematics, grammar and prosody or chhand-shastra. His work is an example of the natural closeness between mathematics and music.

The NEP 2020 document mentions nearly 20 great scientists, saint-scholars and thinkers from ancient India. I request you all to develop study material on them and other such great ancient scholars. Their work should be re-written in modern terminology. Verifiable and relevant learning from our rich past should be put to new applications by our education system.

One of the targets of the NEP 2020 is to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio or GER in higher education to 50 percent by 2035. Technology can help in achieving this target. In fact, the online system of education can also be utilised to reach out to international students. Technology will be particularly helpful for female students and other students from the weaker sections who find it difficult to physically access education facilities.

Greater use of online facilities will also help overcome problems of shortage of faculty and other resources. Educational institutions should develop very good portals and apps to provide e-learning, e-library and other digital facilities.

Education facilities based on Information and Communication Technology are to be expanded to meet the challenges in providing quality education for all. It is important that concerns of equity are addressed and digital divide is eliminated through joint efforts by the concerned stakeholders.

Providing good infrastructure, hostel facilities and other inputs is necessary for a good learning environment. For promoting overall transparency and implementing student-friendly measures, we should increase the use of Information Technology in all aspects of education-governance. As Chancellor of State universities when I was Governor of Bihar, I had pushed for starting digital locker or digi-locker for creating and preserving certificates of students. Printing, distributing and safe-keeping of paper certificates becomes difficult. Students and parents face serious problems in getting the certificates. Digital certificates and digi-locker will remove such difficulties.

As a Chancellor, I had also felt the need for strict monitoring of B.Ed., vocational and distance-learning courses. I also thought that such courses should be conducted only after the approval of Statutory Bodies and as per norms. I am glad to see that the NEP has taken care of these concerns.

Dear participants,

One of the most important features of the National Education Policy is its focus on equity and inclusion. In this context, I am glad to note that

according to All India Survey of Higher Education for 2018-19, GER for females is slightly higher than that for males. However, the share of female students is extremely low in Institutions of National Importance. Their share is particularly low in technical education. This needs to be corrected. The higher education ecosystem should reflect concern for gender-justice in terms of enrolment and contribution, specially in technical institutions.

The Education Policy seeks to provide pathways for future in an era of rapid changes. Our ancient knowledge traditions also suggest that change is the law of nature. For example, the Buddhist tradition gave us the philosophy of kshanikvada which means everything is momentary. In the current context of change, it is difficult to predict what the world of 2050 will look like. It is equally difficult to predict the skill-sets that will be needed after a few decades. 'How to learn' is more important than 'What to learn' because the contents of learning keep changing. The fundamental skills of learning remain useful even when the contents keep changing. In other words, the new generations need to learn 'the art of learning' and re-learning. They will have to keep reinventing themselves. In the fast-changing world of knowledge economy, it will be necessary to learn new skills continuously in order to earn livelihood continuously. The teachers and students will be FUTURE-READY only if they are CHANGE-READY.

In schools and higher education institutions, principals, vice chancellors and heads of institutions have a very high impact on the performance of teachers and students. You all have to play the role of change-agents. This raises an important question. Being used to the existing methods internalised by you from the earlier systems, how enthusiastic are you all to implement the recommendations of this Policy which has many new beginnings and departures? I think, we have no choice but to change the mindset, if needed, and whole heartedly implement the recommendations of National Education Policy.

I am glad to note that the Policy has taken into account the serious problems of epidemics and pandemics. It recommends that Higher

Education Institutions take the lead to undertake research in areas of infectious diseases, epidemiology, virology, vaccinology and other relevant areas. The proposed National Research Foundation will enable and support a vibrant research and innovation culture.

The Policy recognises the importance of technology and also its risks and dangers. As we observe the happenings around us, cyber-security is emerging as a life-skill. It is important for the safety of individuals and organisations. It is also important for national security.

I am sure that the National Education Policy will be implemented in letter and spirit. It will be a milestone in the history of our country. It will not only strengthen the future of our youth but also set our country on course to becoming 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

The sincerity of purpose shown by all of you makes me confident about effective implementation of the Policy. I am glad that teams have been formed to deliberate upon five important themes related to the Policy. And the next two sessions in today's Conference are devoted to the presentations on those themes.

I am sure that by the end of the Conference, we will have more clarity about the implementation roadmap. I wish success to all the participants in this collective effort of great importance.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!