Draft National Educational Policy - An Analysis

What is the issue?

The draft National Education Policy lacks the very abilities it emphasizes, critical thinking and deeper understanding.

What are the highlights of NEP?

- The draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 recommends a restructuring of school years and the curriculum, in a wide-ranging manner.
- These include –

i. flexibility and wider scope at the secondary level
ii. space for moral reasoning
iii. re-emphasis on the true spirit of the three language formula
iv. a focus on the core concepts and key ideas in subjects
v. vocational courses
vi. focus of assessment on understanding

- The policy envisions an "India centered education system that contributes directly to transforming the nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society".
- The operational vision is that of a "knowledge society", almost entirely contained in UNESCO-preached '21st century skills'.
- "The goal", according to the draft policy, "will be to create holistic and complete individuals equipped with key 21st century skills".

What are contentious areas?

- **Lack of democratic thinking -** The democratic ideal is neither mentioned nor used in articulating the aims of education or curricular recommendation.
- However, democratic values are mentioned in the list of key "skills" that are to be integrated into the subjects.
- The broad goals are to send out "good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings"; not a critical, democratic citizen who may want to change the situation rather than adapting to it.

- **Confused thinking process -** The phrase “evidence-based and scientific thinking” is used together everywhere implying that there can be “scientific thinking” which is not evidence based.
- The policy assumes that evidence-based and scientific thinking will lead naturally to rational, ethical, and compassionate individuals.
- Further, “evidence-based and scientific thinking” is supposed to help create an ethical, rational, and compassionate individual but
- It does not focus on creating “logical and problem solving” individuals,? as they are listed separately as “skills”.
- **Social studies -** Social studies seems to be missing entirely as it has been mentioned once and then left out of the entire discussion on curriculum.
- In the end, the vision of the draft NEP rests on UNESCO declarations and reports.
- It does not pay much attention to the Indian Constitution and development of democracy in this country.
- Thus, in spite of wanting to make education India-centered, in the suggested curriculum changes, socio-political life is almost invisible.
- All this goes to show that the draft NEP 2019 itself lacks the very abilities it emphasizes, namely critical thinking and deeper understanding.
- In short, the policy lacks depth and loses focus of the richness of secular democratic ideals by aiming for 21st century skills.
- **Emphasis on Language teaching -** The draft NEP rightly criticizes private pre-schools for being a downward extension of primary school and of there being formal teaching in them.
- But it goes on to recommend preparing children for primary by prescribing learning the alphabets of and reading in three languages (for 3-6-year olds).
- All this in the name of “enhanced language learning abilities” of young children.
- Further the draft policy mistakes “language acquisition when children are immersed in more than one languages” with a “language teaching” situation where immersion is impossible in three languages.
- It then extends it unjustifiably to a learning of three scripts.
- It prescribes teaching script and reading in three languages to three-year-old children, but writing is supposed to be taught to six-year-old children.
- It also wants to introduce “some textbooks” only at age eight.
- It is unclear why there is a three year gap between teaching, reading and writing.

What is the way forward?

- Identifying key concepts and essential ideas are a matter of rational curricular decision making.
- Social studies needs more space in the upper primary curriculum.
- The subject has to be taught in such a manner that it connects with society and can be a very good way of introducing critical issues and moral thinking.
- Abstract moral reasoning is likely to have the same fate as so-called "moral science" that is taught in many schools.
- Similarly, "Indian classical language" and "Indian languages" can constitute a single rich subject rather than being split into two courses.
- The most important and educationally worthwhile term is "skill" and everything has to fit in within that; even ethics and social responsibility.

Source: The Hindu

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