

# **Comments and Suggestions of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS)**

## **Regarding the Discussion Document for framing New Education Policy**

### **Part- 1**

#### **New Education Policy - Critical considerations**

1. Any discussion regarding the policy formulation must be done with a comprehensive outlook. And we have to discuss 'what' 'why' and 'how' of education. The organisers seem to be very particular not to give any chance to discuss the crucial part of the policy discussion the 'what' and 'why' part of education. It will raise the genuine doubt regarding the secular ideal of the country and what will be the position towards equity and social justice and constitutional values in the newly coming NEP. The document consciously disintegrates everything in to themes thus denying the participants right to reflect their concerns and critics toward the governmental policies in a comprehensive and holistic way.
2. Discussion of the education policy to be formulated by the Government of India will have to be in the background of the performance of the education system in India during the past decades. Considerable changes have taken place in the structure and functioning of the education system during the past two decades. There has been stress on Literacy and Universal Elementary Education, which has culminated in the National Literacy Mission, Sakshar Bharat Mission, as well as the promulgation of the Right to Education Act, 2009. A number of NGOs and CSOs have been functioning in the fields of literacy and Elementary Education, including the mass organizations like the PSMs and BGVS. The net output of the work of these organizations has been rewarding, as literacy and UEE has shown signs of improvement in majority of the states. The Government has also been implementing several centrally sponsored schemes, such as SSA, RMSA for secondary education and RUSA for higher education. Besides, the Government has sought to skills education by introducing the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). This has been additional to the conventional fund allotment for a wide variety of schemes, such as Mid-Day Meals Schemes, special schemes for the SCs and STs, differently abled children and so on.
3. However, an examination of the actual performance of these schemes shows that there is much to be desired. Adult literacy rate still is around 73% with the female literacy around 65%, which means that a substantially large number of children are still first generation learners. Enrolment of children in the primary classes has picked up, particularly since the implementation of the RTE, but the drop outs still continue, with the Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios falling sharply after Standard VIII, showing that a number of children drop out after primary education( or when they complete 14 years, so that they can become labourers). The dropout rates are sharper in the case of SCs and STs. There is a clear improvement in the enrolment of girls into primary education, but they also drop out after primary education. This shows that the stress on UEE has not resulted in the awareness that education is a continuing process, so that all the children will have to reach a socially acceptable level of mental and practical skills to play useful productive roles in society. Apart from this is the so-called 'gaps' in the performances of gender, caste, differently abled and even among the minorities, and these gaps only demonstrate the general shortcomings of our education. Despite the stress on 'mission' approach, centrally sponsored schemes and substantial intervention of the NGOs and private agencies, the question of access to education, the bedrock of the programmes for realization of Education for All, still have not been fully answered, and States that have been backward, still remain backward in terms of access.
4. The nature of education process assumes interesting dimensions when we take into account the question of quality. The results of the recent national Achievement Surveys of the NCERT show that the learning achievement of children at the primary level leave a lot to desired. The results of the survey conducted in 2010 show that about 31.5% of children surveyed got less than 40% in language, 35.8% fail in mathematics

and 35.1% fail in EVS. To cite the case of a state with credible educational development, 39.6% of the children from Kerala, scored less than 40% in Mathematics and 29.7% did the same in EVS. Interestingly, only 2.7% scored more than 80% in Mathematics and 2.9% did the same in EVS (which is about one-sixth of the National average at the same score which itself is poor)! It is clear that when the quality at the foundational levels is average or poor, quality at higher levels is likely to be abysmal. No one has checked whether there is any relation between the quality of education and drop-out rates.

5. The problem of quality can be checked in another way also. The Central Government has initiated vocational secondary education from 1988, but it has not shown appreciable results. Skills education has been introduced from 2009, and it is yet to show the desired results. The educational experts have been emphasizing employability as a criterion along with equity and excellence in education, where our experience for the past quarter century has been negative. It is easy to put the blame on the present day practice of vocational education, but the more crucial problem appears to be that of integrating vocational stream with the academic stream, that is, to ensure equity and excellence in the education process that would enhance both the academic and vocational skills of children.
6. The available evidence also shows great diversity among different regions in India, and different states, both in terms of access and quality. In general, both the southern states and North Eastern States have performed better, whereas Northern India has lagged behind. This form of diversity is nothing new, but the state policies during the past quarter century have done nothing to change the pattern, which shows that the malady lies deeper in the economic conditions and socio-cultural forms rather than the education process itself. In fact, the achievement of Uttar Pradesh (those children who got less than 40% came only to about 15% of the sample) in the national achievement survey helps to emphasize this point. Unfortunately, this element never finds itself seriously considered either in the educational literature or in the documents of policy makers. Diversity of our national economic and cultural forms finds expression in the use of language, environmental knowledge and even in computation, and the other element of social knowledge acquired by children has been ignored even by NCERT. It appears that the policy makers do not care whether children know the history of their own land, understand their living conditions or know their Government. This means that the great diversity of Indian population can be safely ignored by the policy makers, educational institutions and even teachers and students. This kind of policy making can only be on the basis of a false objectivity, which does not bother to understand the living conditions of Indian population.
7. The edifice of higher education built on such brittle foundations cannot hope to be stable either. Among the numerous reports on higher education submitted to the Government in recent times, only the report submitted by the Yashpal committee takes cognizance of the varied conditions of educational development and suggests a degree of autonomy in the functioning of Universities and decentralization of power. Others, like the Birla-Ambani Report, NKC Report and the recommendations by N.R.Narayanamurthy have treated higher education as a money-spinning enterprise which places knowledge and expertise in the marketplace, and treats students and the feeder community as stakeholders. This form of academic mercantilism, with the slogan of 'user pays' (something that we see in public toilets, also called by the nobler term of self-financing) has become the central motivating factor of the current expansion of educational institutions, aided and abetted by central apex bodies such as the AICTE, IMC, NCTE, NCVT and so on. Such expansion has not paved the way for the diversification of higher education with an emphasis on quality, which should have been the concern of all entrepreneurs, but the emergence of a kind of academic cloning, where the same variety of courses, such as engineering, medicine and management were being cloned everywhere as courses capture the 'student market', and even major Universities being forced to run or recognize such courses. Studies on the academic performance in such courses have demonstrated an absolute decline in quality, indicated by a sharp fall in the examination results, in spite of such screening processes such as the entrance examinations. In fact, the admissions processes in the numerous self-financing institutions that have sprung up everywhere have become so complicated that

entrance examinations do not serve as the screening instrument anymore. This is further complicated by the emergence of numerous 'coaching malls' that resort to open malpractice. Strategies of 'quality assurance' such as accreditation and rating devices have not helped in improving the conditions of higher education. Many colleges and Universities have got the rating, but rating has been used as a method to attract more funds, not to improve the teaching-learning process or to ensure academic excellence. In the process, forms of knowledge that are called conventional, such as basic sciences, Mathematics, Social sciences and languages have lagged behind, being not attractive commercially, not being part of 'New Generation Courses'.

8. The remaining part of this note is based on the two annexure, including questionnaires circulated by the MHRD ministry for discussion. Although the formulation of issues and questions for school education and higher education are different, some of the general issues that are discussed in the documents and pertain to both the sectors are taken up. Detailed examination of the documents and the appended questionnaire and a general framework for a PSM response is given as part II .
9. The general approach of the documents and questionnaires is managerial and not academic. The changes proposed to be discussed do not involve the form and content of the teaching-learning process as such and it is treated as an issue of managing education. For example, problems of syllabus and curriculum in higher education are simply a matter concerning whether to implement CBCSS or not, teaching process is related to the question whether to remove non-performing teachers. The entire question of quality is a matter related to the efficiency of system management.
10. The primary concern of the document is regarding the quality of education. What is meant by quality of education taking into account the all –India scenario of education is not spelt out anywhere. Apparently, quality has something to do with parity with 'global' or international curricula, accreditation, and rating by various international rating agencies and so on. Again, at school and higher levels, quality is related to proficiency in science and mathematics. The question why students perform less in science and mathematics is never asked. It is possible that students fail in science and mathematics not because they are not aware of scientific and mathematical issues in real life experience, but they do not understand the way in which the same problems are posed to them in the classroom, and way in which problems are expected to be solved in an examination hall. The diversity of social and cultural environments in which children grow up and acquire knowledge is never appreciated. The standard indicator of quality for the policy makers has been the urban middle class or upper class child, whom they have been familiar with, which just ignores the diversity of social and cultural life across the country. This perspective has vitiated most of our experiments in the formulation of national curriculum, evaluation and formulation of national testing and monitoring devices.
11. This jaundiced vision has resulted in evoking uniformitarian quality standards throughout the country supported by pet phrases such as 'global', 'international' etc. While it is true and necessary that proficiency at international standards will have to be acquired by the pedagogic processes as a whole, the strategies for their attainment can hardly be centralized. Centralization of teaching learning and evaluation processes, and multiplicity of central agencies for monitoring, assessment and rating can hardly initiate a process of quality enhancement across the country, particularly in the rural areas, tribal regions and areas where educationally and economically backward and exploited sections predominate. Uniformitarian quality criteria, whether 'global' or otherwise, cannot enhance quality of common schools and colleges. We need decentralized and diversified strategies that take into account the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-nationality character of our society.
12. The problems of the forms of quality assurance adopted by the policymakers are also indicated by the stress on CBCSS, testing and assessment patterns advocated in the documents. They should be analysed together with the criteria for the performance of teachers in colleges and Universities introduced by the

UGC. CBCSS may be one of the effective mechanisms for organizing education process, but that does not imply any assurance of quality per se. Switching to CBCSS implies a radical re-orientation of our understanding of education process itself, and uniform CBCSS across the country is simply not feasible, as the nature and duration of semesters, courses offered, teaching process and evaluation and credits to be acquired by the students vary substantially, taking into account regional specificities and diverse requirements of the students. Provision for a 20% variation in the common curriculum also will not suffice, as regional requirements cannot be mechanically quantified. Suggestions for a national CAT, evaluation and grading procedure would mean that substantial sections of population, particularly from the needy and exploited, will be simply left out of the education process. Instead of enhancing quality, such procedures will result in a quality divide, privileging the wealthy and upper classes against vast majority of the population.

13. The divide is further compounded by the obvious privileging of science and mathematics against the rest of the subjects. In one place the document talks about the enhancement of quality in the entire education that includes social sciences, and then, social science is completely ignored. This should be seen in the background of a large number of students, whether in the regular or distance mode, acquiring education in social sciences and other disciplines, 'normally called humanities, and also that social problems of various kinds are envisaged as priority concerns among all the development planners and policy makers. Science and mathematics are privileged not because they are advanced systems of knowledge, but because of the links with Industry, in terms of commerce, consultancies and patents, a feature that appears prominently in the schedules to be filled up by colleges and University Departments as a part of NAAC accreditation procedure. The same bias is repeated by the UGC criteria for the assessment of the performance of teachers. For example, in their emphasis on international journals for obtaining scores for publications, they ignore the fact that numerous scholars write in their mother tongue or regional language for better dissemination of their ideas. Such publications are simply ignored, more so because such methods are used by social science and language teachers rather than scientists. For the policy makers it is self-evident that no material of 'international standard' can ever be published in a regional language magazine or journal, particularly from a social scientist!
14. Such distorted priorities have in particular affected the teaching of languages. Ever since the RTE act made the unfortunate recommendation of teaching in the mother tongue 'to the extent possible', the CBSE, other school forms, the Central and State governments have been busy reducing 'the extent' to which education in the mother tongue is to be permitted. This bias is evident in the case of a central agency like the CBSE, which has not bothered to adopt education in the mother tongue as a criterion for their sanctioning of schools. Although the documents under consideration do recognize the merits of teaching in the mother tongue, they apparently limit the merits to tribal areas and areas where deprived sections attend schools, rather than as a general principle. Similarly multi-lingual learning is also recommended for such regions. Is it not a fact that majority of our children in fact grow up in a multi-lingual environment where they not only hear and see multiple languages but also several dialects of the same language? Was not this multi-lingual reality appreciated even by colonialism, and hence they allowed teaching in vernacular in primary schools? Perhaps the sensibility of the liberal, utilitarian foreign master of the 19<sup>th</sup> century does not percolate down to the neo-liberal and 'bharateeya' Indian master of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While study in extant languages (Sanskrit? Not necessarily Pali) is apparently to be considered, education in mother tongue in a multi-lingual environment is even now not a serious proposition for the policy makers. While there is the proposal for eliminating English as the medium of Instruction, the alternatives are Hindi or Sanskrit. Hindi is not the mother tongue for vast numbers of Indian population and Sanskrit is not the mother tongue of any. All this shows the relevance of multilingual learning with English having its place. In any case, multi-lingual learning process will have to start from the Mother tongue and not in any other way.

15. The hype about the merits of ICT and the stock phrases of new knowledge and knowledge society continue in these documents also. ICT continues to be treated as technology that imparts 'knowledge', forgetting that technology does not create any new knowledge, but only facilitates the storage, decoding, transmission and dissemination of information produced by human beings. The problem is to use ICT as enabling device or process so as to facilitate the acquisition of information that can be transformed into knowledge. Hence strategies like 20% online evaluation etc. are redundant, as valuation can only be for the entire knowledge acquired in a given theme, whether online or otherwise. ICT can have a pernicious influence also, such as conversion of all forms of testing into MCQ, because of the ease with which the scores can be tabulated in an OMR sheet and results announced. MCQ is only one among the numerous evaluation processes, with limited utility in assessment of diverse capabilities of the child. Nor has it been demonstrated that IT-enabled teaching (tele-teaching, tele-texts etc) can successfully replace old style 'human' personal contact as effective medium for dissemination of knowledge. One has to think seriously whether the gadget can replace a person, and that will produce new knowledge.
16. This also brings into focus the credibility of the so-called quality assurance processes. Various forms of evaluation procedures have been in vogue, but gradually opinion, at least among the policy makers has veered around to so-called testing of 'outcomes'. Outcomes are strictly quantifiable (with the quality component being introduced through adequate weightages), and as one of the questions in the document implies, should be based on a clearly identifiable text taught in the classroom. The feasibility of introducing MCQ as the standard testing form is also discussed. Surprisingly our policy makers do not happen to be aware of the criticisms raised against MCQ, or even IQ testing procedures in general, for about half a century, or regarding the fact that evaluation on the basis of learning outcomes, as a mode of pedagogy has been rejected after being tried out during the 90s. Universalisation of testing in the form of eligibility tests, entrance tests and multi-purpose forms have in fact jeopardized the process of learning itself as a mechanical process of acquiring the legitimate mental skills and locating the legitimate information has replaced the process of acquisition and production of knowledge. Such testing procedures do not even have the provision of NOTA permitted in our elections! Knowledge that is subject to testing is clearly circumscribed by the priorities of the policy makers and no deviation from it is permissible.
17. It is clear that just as the quality divide mentioned earlier, there is another divide that is emerging , between knowledge workers( management executive cadre, IT professionals, scientists etc) and skilled workers ( technicians), with the unskilled workers becoming part of the reserve army that is outside the pale of the education system ( and industrial workforce). After the elementary education, which is supposed to be universal (although it is yet to attain the status of genuine UEE) and therefore open to the Reserve Army also. We are into a process of segregating men and (presumably) women of quality who are to be made part of the class of entrepreneurs, managerial class, executives and the so-called 'think tanks'(who sell their thought also to the corporate giants apart from 'ideas' and 'concepts') and an army of skilled workers. The documents do not mention anything named social justice, but devote a section to inclusive education and discuss the inclusion of SCs, STs, OBCs, differently abled and women. However, the document also makes a distinction between merit and equity and thus it should be assumed that those who are there through merit (or those who have cleared the cut-offs arbitrarily decided by the admitting institutions) and those who are there because of 'equity 'are different in terms of 'quality'. Thus there is a process of filtering within those who are included, as those part of meritocracy and belonging to the 'cream' of society, who can genuinely deemed to have 'quality'. Others are there because of the condescending nature of the powers that be. This filtering of quality is further accentuated by the restructuring of fees, where fees will have to be collected by institutions, and those who could not afford it could be maintained by educational loans and scholarships. Interestingly there is not a word about the rapidly 'universal' phenomenon of self-financing as they have been allowed to function off-the-Government by the Courts. It should assumed that self-financing is to be the normal form of resource mobilization by institutions, and also a normal requirement of those who aspire to do 'post-elementary'

education. Restructuring and the regime of self-financing would even drive the meritorious students outside the framework of 'quality assurance'. Finally one has the PPP and 'autonomous' colleges already endorsed by the RUSA, through which the whole process of quality assurance and maintenance is transferred to the educational entrepreneurs including caste-communal forces and the state does its facilitating job through its apex agencies and maintains its own accreditation agency, presumably to serve 'national' goals.

18. Our major criticism regarding this document and questionnaire is that it is essentially meant as a blueprint for an education system that would produce entrepreneurs, managers, and their workforce, there is no use for antiquated phrases such as 'academic community' and there is none. Students are there to study, be disciplined, follow instructions, never question anything, take their examinations, prepare for their recruitment and become entrepreneurs, managers, or workforce according to their 'quality' and 'merit' or be damned. But there is the teacher, and the documents appear to become nervous while dealing with this group. There are hints (repeated in more than one place) that teachers are people who do not teach, and punishment to such teachers, including removal is indicated in several places. Teachers are to be brought under the surveillance of managements, Government and parents. There is a question whether a teacher will have to be kept in probation for five years, and whether a contract teacher will have to be made permanent. Thus a teacher is not part of 'academic community' but a person to be kept under strict scrutiny, to be hired and fired at will, used as a casual worker, or 'on probation' (the logic of a five year probation is not mentioned anywhere, why not ten, or until the end of his service?). In higher education, the same person will have to acquire API scores, publish in 'international' journals, undertake research projects, which will be evaluated according to their 'outcomes' by great men, and teach at the same time. At the same time the document complains that colleges and Universities have become teaching departments that do little research. Obviously the teacher is a category that has to be moulded to the needs of the new education system, as a new class of knowledge workers who are no longer 'academic'. Hence the academic community of the Kothari commission stands dissolved.
19. The approach of the documents is hierarchical as far as teaching Departments and institutions are concerned. The best demonstration of this hierarchy is the concept of incubators. Apparently the Central Universities are at the top of the hierarchy along with the IITs, followed by the State Universities, deemed Universities, and colleges. There is a further hierarchy according to ratings international and national, the latter by the NAAC. This should have demonstrated to the policy makers the diversified multilayered character of our education and suggested the implementation of diversified strategies. Instead the policy makers have chosen to see it as a single hierarchy. They are aggrieved by the fact that only a handful of Universities have acquired A grade or more. Instead of asking the question why, they go into administrative-technical solutions like revamping the administrative apparatus, monitoring the functioning of teachers (the inevitable category) and streamline the selection of Vice Chancellors. Incubator becomes relevant in this context, those educated in central Universities will become 'incubators' deployed for the advancement of state Universities and colleges. This is an interesting reformulation of infamous trickle-down theory of education advocated by British Colonialists, this time from the Central Universities to the rural colleges. Unfortunately for policy makers, Central Universities and IITs appear to act more as a global filter, their teachers seeking fellowships, and appointments abroad, and encouraging their students to do the same, instead of wasting their time in a rural college (unless they feel that their student is eminently dispensable). Global filter produces the upper layer of the hierarchy, as the expatriate Nobel laureate is an evident demonstration of our 'National pride'.
20. What is the Government doing anyway? No Government has set apart 6% of the GDP on education, although the central Government agencies are permitting the establishment of scores of colleges, Universities, deemed Universities. The NKC envisaged the establishment of 1500 Universities, the money for which will have to be fleeced from the purses of knowledge seekers. There has been talk of corporate

social responsibility, but the corporate capitalists have not demonstrated their social responsibility apart from starting a few business schools (which they require anyway), and setting up 'foundations'. Despite all the tall talk, the institutions where the common person seeks knowledge or a means of livelihood are left to languish. There is no indication anywhere that the situation will be different under the present dispensation also, and in fact they have reduced the outlay for education. At the same time the Government has demonstrated the tendency for centralization, in the form of setting up a Central nodal agency( similar to the NCHER of UPA Government), national CAT( again a legacy of UPA government), centralized funding in all fields(NSRF being an example)and effective transformation of all state Governments into implementing agencies.. The centralization is taking place to ensure liberalization, the entry of private capital to all fields, effective transformation of the education system itself as a vehicle for ensuring effective labour supply to corporate capital, and to eliminate all form of possible resistance.

21. The document has posted their set of questions in order to ensure that one answers their questions and one can neither ask nor answer questions of their own. This is an effective way of parrying a debate, something we always do through an MCQ test, as the technique of supplying possible answers is a ploy to eliminate other answers.. This is also an effective way to obtain the consent of those who answer and ensure their subservience, even if they disagree with the questioner, that they disagree to agree. Alternatives are impossible in such a method and we play our game in a field set by someone else for a definite purpose. That purpose is the educational agenda of corporate capital, embellished with doses of 'cultural integration', a phrase that clearly replaces the earlier liberal idea of 'National Integration'. This is a clever strategy through which secular nationalism that recognizes the multi-cultural, multi-regional aspects of Indian nation to be replaced by cultural nationalism of the variety favoured by Hindutva. This strategy dispenses with it. The possibility of diversification courses, curricula and examinations that would address the needs of the regional population, and the development of equivalences that would ensure parity of standards. This dispenses with academic democracy, and along with it, freedom in designing curricula and courses and evaluation, innovative forms of courses and research projects, freedom of opinion, thought, practice and organization, fundamental principles in the production and dissemination of knowledge. The principle of social justice and social accountability of all academic practice is also done away with. Production and dissemination of knowledge of all kind works under the behest of corporate capital and funding agencies, in which religious and caste communal forces also play a significant role. Academic democracy, social accountability and justice are replaced by systemic management and enterprise and concepts of merit, quality, excellence and other similar concepts are being redefined accordingly. Most importantly, in their zest in serving the interests of the corporate capital and the communal forces, the policy makers have failed to address the lacunae that are revealed by their own data, the gross disparities in educational opportunities between the rich and downtrodden classes in Indian population, disparities created by caste, ethnicity and gender, and the differences between rural and urban populations. Although it has been historically demonstrated that the top-down 'trickle-down, theory does not work in Indian conditions, they have chosen to go ahead with it, there by completely ignoring the real needs and aspirations of the Indian population.
22. Those who are standing for a scientific and democratic education system will have to reject the enterprise management model that is being advocated and attempted to be imposed on the education system. This does not mean that all the aspects of the new proposals will have to be rejected in toto, but they will have to be redefined and restructured in accordance with scientific and democratic principles, CBCSS being an example. Elements of centralization and 'cultural integration' that has gone along with it will have to be replaced by elements of decentralization and an appreciation of the diverse multi-regional and multi-cultural character of the education process as a whole. The development of models of teaching learning process that address the children at the grassroots level and help to bring out their capabilities, knowledge and practical and technical skills, enabling them to reach international standards will have to assume

priority. Such a starting point will have to be from the reorganization of common schools and common colleges and one should reject the trickle-down procedure advocated in the documents.

## **Part 2**

### **On Themes and Questions -- School Education –**

#### **Consultations on School Education:**

##### **1. Themes**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has put out a list of themes for consultative discussion on school education. It is problematic in many ways: not only does it drive the discussion towards specific proposals but also there is critical substance missing from the list. Rather than discuss this further, we propose an alternate listing of themes for structuring the discussion. Admittedly, any such exercise is again selective, and would be again not comprehensive. Our proposal is merely to generate discussion that is more aligned to citizens' concerns from a democratic perspective.

***We disagree with the classification and reject the themes proposed in the MHRD document circulated for discussion and we suggest a grouping of themes along the following lines:***

1. Systemic issues
2. Curriculum and pedagogy
3. School ethos
4. Policy issues

We first present the grouped list and then describe the themes briefly.

##### **SE1 Systemic issues**

SE1.1 Aims of education

SE1.2 Quality education as a right

SE1.3 Equality and education

##### **SE2 Curriculum and pedagogy**

SE2.1 Stages in education

SE2.2 Curricular areas

SE2.3 Language and medium of instruction

SE2.4 Aesthetics

SE2.5 Vocational education

##### **SE3 School ethos**

SE3.1 Assessment and examinations

SE3.2 Teacher education and professional development

SE3.3 Physical education and health

SE3.4 Role of technology in education

##### **SE4 Policy issues**

SE4.1 School administration and higher levels

SE4.2 Educational resources

#### SE4.3 Financing school education

##### ***Brief description on these themes.***

#### **SE1 Systemic issues**

##### **SE1.1 Aims of education**

In a country where education is the means of social upliftment and upward mobility for the middle classes and a large percentage of first generation learners, the aspirations of people need to be centrally addressed by the education system. In today's world, universal schooling is taken to be an essential indicator of modernity of a society. The goals of universal education are articulated by the society and the state in terms of its social, political and economic development agenda, while the individual parent or child has certain life goals that are addressed by education as well.

In addition, experts from various academic disciplines delineate curricular aims of education as preparation for life and for further development of human knowledge. Synchronizing these aims and obtaining clarity of purpose is important and hence discussion on the aims of education is important for a national policy.

##### **SE1.2 Quality education as a right**

With the legislation of the Right to Education Act, we have quality education as the right of every child. This calls for a discussion and articulation of what quality in education means and how it is to be ensured.

##### **SE1.3 Equality and education**

In a society that is riven by deep divisions of caste, class and gender, the socially and economically disadvantaged are deprived of education in many ways, despite legislative guarantees. On the other hand, education remains the most powerful weapon for combating social inequality and for breaking the shackles of poverty. Without acknowledging and addressing the processes by which inequality is perpetuated, we cannot hope to bring about social change. The system needs to not only provide equality of educational opportunity but also ensure equality of outcome. Children with special needs, facing a variety of physical challenges, need to be considered with sincerity, ways and means must be found for their education.

#### **SE2 Curriculum and pedagogy**

##### **SE2.1 Stages in education**

Schooling in the country is largely structured in 4 stages: 4 to 5 years at the primary stage, 3 to 4 years of upper primary stage, 2 years at the secondary stage and 2 years at the higher secondary stage. In some states, the last is located in colleges, signalling that they are seen as "higher education". This structure itself needs to be discussed.

##### **SE2.2 Curricular areas**

Again, school education across the country follows the "Curriculum for the 10-year school" formulated in 1975 comprising language education, mathematics, science, and social studies as core subjects of study, with "arts and crafts", and "physical education" as "co-curricular" areas. This structure and linkages between them, as well as curricular choices and options, need discussion. The role of the social sciences and the humanities in providing a reflection and critique of society and its mores while articulating what constitutes a just development path needs a strong emphasis.

The promotion of science and mathematics, not from pedagogic principles or the goals of promoting scientific temper and analytical reasoning, but from an economic opportunity perspective, needs to be challenged.

##### **SE2.3 Language and medium of instruction**

While the country largely has "The local language" and English as compulsory, with perhaps a third language in several Boards, there are many issues on which discussion is necessary. When the language of domicile is

different from the student's mother tongue, the system is largely unhelpful. The language policy has generated heated debate in the past, but the experts' call for plurality and multi-linguality as having great pedagogic value remains largely unheeded. Similarly the discussion on medium of instruction runs on class lines rather than on intrinsic academic considerations. There won't be any circumstances to deny the right of the child to undergo education through its mother tongue which is a universally accepted pedagogic principle.

#### **SE2.4 Aesthetics**

Art and aesthetics largely lie outside the purview of formal education and the large educational activity in the arts in the country runs parallel, on an informal, apprenticeship mode. This needs to be addressed seriously, listening to educationist advice that they are indispensable to holistic development of children.

#### **SE2.5 Vocational education**

What vocation and vocational education mean and ought to mean in itself calls for debate. In any case, the extant system entirely ignores working with hands and is a far cry from the Gandhian Nai Talim vision of school as a centre of production rooted in the local economy. On the other hand, attempts to branch early into work based education needs to be viewed with caution in a society where physical work is often aligned to caste to perpetuate social inequality.

The pedagogic value of hands-on work-based education needs to be stressed rather than branching approaches dictated by market-driven needs of production skills.

### **SE3 School ethos**

#### **SE3.1 Assessment and examinations**

While the systems of mass examination in the country are marked by mediocrity and a crisis of integrity, it is sad that these exams cast long shadows, influencing even classroom assessment of children in Classes 6 or 7. The terrible costs of numerical assessments in terms of rote learning, lowering of educational expectations and damage to self-esteem are evident to all. Moreover, assessment is seen as pronouncing judgement on individual student rather than as a part of a feedback process towards corrective action in pedagogy. This needs all round discussion, as urgently needed reform in the area needs action by all sections of society.

#### **SE3.2 Teacher education and professional development**

With crores of children coming into the education system, the country needs a large number of teachers in the coming decades and we have a desperate paucity of teachers. The problem of quantity and quality in terms of qualified and competent teachers is already significant but is likely to assume dire proportions with universal schooling and its demands on secondary education.

At the secondary levels, content knowledge is a challenge, and we have no mechanisms in place to ensure this. Once the teachers are in the system, their professional development is also a big demand that we are currently ill equipped to meet. During the last decade there is improvement in this regard in elementary education, but teachers at the secondary and higher secondary levels there are big challenges.

#### **SE3.3 Physical education and health**

It is rather unfortunate that physical activity and games, high priority for children themselves, tend to be low in schools' own priority across the country, mainly because they do not figure in board examinations. Even the few schools where sports are considered important, a few children who are 'good in sports' get to excel in them whereas the majority do not get systematic physical exercise. Closely tied to this is health awareness in children and continued health education. Practical measures need to be discussed, and involving everyone requires wide consultation.

#### **SE3.4 Role of technology in education**

The new emphasis on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classrooms and pedagogy needs to be welcomed in a cautious manner. That children take to this technology in a big way is clear, and ICT has the potential to unlock creativity and expand the resource base of teachers and students massively. On the other hand, it is seductive and can absorb energies not only in an unproductive manner, but can also do harm when handled immaturely. Indeed, the education system needs to develop and inculcate a healthy attitude to all technology in general, its use and its impact on society. As it stands, science education is entirely divorced from technology and the relationship of science to technology. The NEP needs to take a stand not only on the use of technology in education but also on how technology figures in all aspects of education. For a forward looking society in the 21st century, this is indispensable.

#### **SE4 Policy issues**

##### **SE4.1 Administration issues**

While the language of proposed themes and discussion is managerial in nature, it misses essential aspects of educational administration that deeply concern all sections of society. Government schools across the country need full-time qualified teachers and resources.

While Village Education Committees and Parent Teacher Associations exist on paper, the poor rarely have a voice to raise issues. Community participation in education remains mostly a term on policy documents.

Private schools are largely unregulated in many parts of the country in terms of fees, teachers' qualifications and salaries, infrastructure and so on. Inspection and systemic assessment tend to be hierarchical, rooted in colonial modes rather than helpful. Any sincere attempt to look at the problems will need a deep and wide ranging discussion at every level.

##### **SE4.2 Educational resources**

For a majority of school children in the country, and even more sadly, for the majority of school teachers in the country as well, the textbook is the \*only\* educational resource, and typically it is \*one single\* Government Issue textbook. In recent times, Sarva Shiksha Abhyan has made some laudable efforts to offer additional reading material at primary levels, but the fact remains that this is very little in the overall educational scenario. Viewing everything around in the world as educational material requires backing up by appropriate educational resources, and we have very little of that. The resource base needs to be expanded manifold, using a multiplicity of media, for all stages in education, and once again the use of technology should be assessed in this regard. Teachers' guidebooks and workbooks cannot be substituted by the prevalent ``notes'' published in the market currently. This again needs wide ranging discussions.

##### **SE4.3. Financing school education**

It is axiomatic that schooling is the responsibility of the State, one that it should discharge with full commitment. With the RTE legislation, financing universal school education is an obligation and substantial increase in allocation is called for. The increasing commercialisation and privatisation of school education, dismantling a successful public education system over a mere generation, calls for serious introspection on the part of all sections of society, and the NEP should halt this trend, take steps to reverse the decline of the public education system.

The record of state governments in this regard has been especially poor, but this cannot translate to an argument for centralization. Rather, this should be seen as a call for the

centre as well as the states to examine the status quo and articulate sustainable policies for ensuring universal education over the next few decades.

#### **2. A vision**

The All India People's Science Network needs to articulate a vision of school education that can form the basis of our expectations of a New Education Policy.

Our vision places children at the centre of school education and sees the entire system as machinery constructed to enable and empower children to grow as actors in modern society, with hope and confidence, imbued with Constitutional values, equipped to meet the challenges of life in the twenty first century. When viewed from the perspective of a dalit girl from the family of rural agricultural labourers, her aspirations and expectations, as well as the obligation of the State to provide her quality education, we can meaningfully assess where we stand today and the distance we need to travel. The demand of an urban child from an educated family for education that enables him to be competitive in a world economy is not to be denied, but cannot occupy the centre of our vision. This premise provides us with an important desideratum: all statements that urge us to be 'realistic', to 'look at reality', need to be met with the question, 'whose reality?', and the answer is clear.

The RTE Act, with its assurance of quality education as a right of every child, can be seen as a basis to launch the discussion on, even as one criticises several aspects of the Act. Our vision must acknowledge the deep divisions in our society based on caste, as well as the role of gender and class in our feudal patriarchal society in perpetuating inequality, and subsequent deprivation of quality education among vast sections of society. Only a clear eyed vision can succeed in articulation of ways, using education as means, to transform such a society to one that is equitable and just.

The aims of education then acknowledge the lived reality of the child and seek to articulate the change that education can (and must) provide. There are social and national goals that seek to ensure responsible citizenship, participation in democratic processes and contribution to social and economical development. The enrichment of the inner resources of the child, and nurturing of the instinct must be seen as a primary individual goal within the overall physical, intellectual and emotional development of the child.

We see curriculum as a theatre that attempts to create structured educational experiences in which children are actors in a script that they help to create dynamically. Thus even while curriculum attempts to encapsulate the knowledge and wisdom that humanity has accumulated and pass it on to the next generation, children recreate and reconstruct such knowledge, in relation to their lived reality, thereby acquiring the ability to understand social and physical reality as well as the capacity to critique such reality. This implies curricula that are flexible, shaped by pedagogy and learner psychology and encourage critical construction of knowledge.

While curricular areas have evolved to arrive at what seems a fixed-point, in the set pattern of languages, mathematics, science and social studies, our vision seeks to view education as an integrated whole. Specialisation is important, and the unique strength of each discipline with its means of validation of knowledge is indeed to be cherished, but they are to be re-integrated in the child's mind in her preparation for life. Aesthetics and the arts are given pride of place; scholarship is given centrality in our view of education. The role of language education becomes central in our vision, as the key towards unlocking thought and creativity in the child. Working with hands, material and tools, as well as reshaping material and tool making become important aspects of education and become part of every day school experience. Science education promotes keen observation, primacy of data and experimental verification and science as a way of looking at phenomena. Mathematics education provides ways of analysis and thought, engaging with abstraction and representation, relating problem solving with theorising. Children engage with the physical and social world on a daily basis, growing things, making things, sharing and reflecting.

In our vision, the school then becomes a space for building a democratic microcosm of the world and society that is definitely sheltered but therefore also provides the freedom to understand and criticise the world. Physical space in school reflects this aspiration and rules and regulations embody democratic processes.

Assessment becomes a continuing opportunity to evaluate these processes and refine them, providing alternatives in resources and processes to those who need them.

We see the teacher's role as facilitator, as one who has clear educational goals, understands the processes that must be enacted and resources to be provided to achieve the goals. The teacher then works to ensure that

every child is engaged thus and has expectations of success from every child. The teacher assesses the classroom and the educational processes at work and attempts to take corrective action when required. In such a vision the teacher is also a learner, one who is self-assured, secure in knowledge and understanding, therefore willing to offer explorations to learners, offering support and instilling confidence in them.

We see the role of the system as providing educational resources for the learners and the teacher, removing all impediments to successful teaching / learning, and provide encouragement, recognition and platforms for sharing of experiences and capacity building. We see the State as guarantor and primary implementer of school education, providing economic and structural means for ensuring universal success in education.

### **Consultations on Higher Education: Themes and questions**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has put out a list of themes for consultative discussion on higher education. It is problematic in many ways: not only does it drive the discussion towards specific proposals but also there is critical substance missing from the list. Rather than discuss this further, we propose an alternate listing of themes for structuring the discussion. Admittedly, any such exercise is again selective, and would be again not comprehensive. Our proposal is merely to generate discussion that is more aligned to citizens' concerns from a democratic perspective.

We suggest a grouping of themes along the following lines:

1. Systemic issues
2. Curriculum and pedagogy
3. Ethos of higher education
4. Policy issues.

We first present the grouped list and then describe the themes briefly.

#### **HE1 Systemic issues**

HE1.1 Aims of higher education

HE1.2 Expansion and inclusion

HE1.3 Decentralization

#### **HE2 Curriculum and pedagogy**

HE2.1 Disciplines and departments

HE2.2 Academia and certification

HE2.3 Teachers and capacity development

#### **HE3 Ethos of higher education**

HE3.1 University, society and employment

HE3.2 Industry and academia

HE3.3 Research and innovation

HE3.4 Technology and learning

#### **HE4 Policy issues**

HE4.1 Regulation

HE4.2 Financing higher education

We now briefly discuss the listed themes.

#### **HE1 Systemic issues**

### **HE1.1 Aims of higher education**

While schooling is considered an inalienable right in every modern society, higher education is not universal in much of the world. With the exception of European nations, very few countries in the world have high participation in university education today. However, it can be reasonably asked what the aim of universal university education could be. Without having clarity on the goals of higher education it is hard to understand social obligations and individual opportunity.

It can be meaningfully argued that life in the 21st century with fast market driven technological development and slow ways of social response to it, threats to global environment and vast access to information requires greater analytical capabilities on the part of citizens and hence that high participation in university education is essential. The critical social and national goal of academia becoming creators of knowledge, providing paths to national development and critiquing society needs to be emphasized.

### **HE1.2 Expansion and inclusion**

The participation of people in higher education is abysmally low in India and we are obliged to bring a vast number into its ambit within a generation. This not only calls for an aggressive expansion of availability and access but also serious engagement with factors that currently inhibit such participation. Caste, class and gender are the markers of social discrimination and blatant injustice, and lack of participation in higher education is deeply reflective of such structural and systemic injustice in society. Ensuring that higher education addresses this challenge successfully calls for national endeavour.

### **HE1.3 Decentralization**

That centralization and uniformization work well for industrial products but not for development of the intellect is well known. Decentralization needs to be an essential fabric of university education, with autonomy of thought and function as a basic principle. If this were not built in the foundation of the system, it would be hard to build academia that act as centres of "higher" education and learning.

## **HE2 Curriculum and pedagogy**

### **HE2.1 Disciplines and departments**

The country needs a curricular framework that spells out the assumptions on which universities function, and the intellectual contract between student and university on what is sought to be taught. Disciplines are domains of knowledge that acquire maturity over time with boundaries being breached constantly and redefined. Departments are administrative entities to facilitate everyday practice of teaching and learning. Confusing the two is at the heart of structure dictating function at the university rather than the other way about, and this needs considerable discussion. The role of the social sciences and the humanities in providing a reflection and critique of society and its mores while articulating what constitutes a socially just development path needs a strong emphasis. The promotion of science, technology and mathematics needs to be aligned with intrinsic disciplinary goals as well as social and developmental goals, if we are to realise universities as sites of knowledge creation. Reducing to these goals to patent regimes and economic goals may be tempting in the short term but can be deeply damaging in the long run.

### **HE2.2 Academia and certification**

While certification of competence is an important aspect of a university's functioning, it has become the principal, if not the only, goal of the university system. Academia as sites of intellect and creation of knowledge need to engage with a variety of actors in society that can enter, interact and exit thus enriching themselves and academia in the process. This calls for flexible models of student engagement and processes of certification. Current practices need an in-depth review. Moreover, the role of academia in constructing and sustaining an ever-involving knowledge community in an ever-learning society needs deep introspection.

### **HE2.3 Teachers and capacity development**

Teachers at the university level are supposed to be 'masters' of their disciplines and consequently expected to understand and reshape the syllabus as required, within the broad curricular specification set out by the university. They are also expected to come up with assessment models as required.

Working towards such a vision calls for considerable capacity building, and we do not even have the articulation of the elements that go into such capacity development.

### **HE3 Ethos of higher education**

#### **HE3.1 University, society and employment**

We have talked of the university's role in holding a mirror to society, its explicit modes of function as well as implicit assumptions that inform social structure and practice. Social demand for employable individuals and accountability to society from this viewpoint need to be acknowledged while stressing at the same time that the relationship between society and centres of learning cannot be reduced to this dimension. Economic development and social well-being need a variety of skills available among the population in sufficient numbers when required, and universities have a critical role to play in this regard. This calls for strengthening academic foundations so as to provide flexibility and adaptability in knowledge structures built on them, rather than academic disciplines twisting in the wind, going after the fashion of the day.

Keeping channels of communication open and live between different sections of industry and society is essential for this purpose.

#### **HE3.2 Industry and academia**

Close cooperation is often advocated between industries that produce goods and services and centres of learning that are producers of knowledge. It is often decried that India lacks such cooperation and partnership. Science and technology education broadly serves only the purpose of providing skilled individuals to the industry, with few channels of further interaction. Instances of collaborative engagement between academia and the industry exist but are rare.

Assessing the scenario carefully, articulating the demand for such interaction in a way that takes into account the processes constituting the strengths of each side and offering ways of enabling such cooperation requires much work on all sides. This may require a considerable overhaul of existing systems.

#### **HE3.3 Research and innovation**

While research has traditionally been the domain of universities, India has also seen the development of separate research institutions outside the university framework and promotion of 'centres of excellence' in research. While some attribute the decline of research in universities to this, others argue precisely the other way, pointing to the decline of research in universities for the creation and promotion of such institutions.

On the other hand, a reductionist approach to research promotion in universities by making Ph.D. degrees mandatory for university teachers has only led to the proliferation of mediocrity. The need to spell out what meaningful research consists of, how it engages and deepens scholarship and understanding, its impact on curriculum and pedagogy and finally, how it leads to innovation in centres of learning is urgent and demands sincere attention of scholars and planners. We need a wide ranging debate on this issue to come up with meaningful solutions.

#### **HE3.4 Technology and learning**

The role of new technology in considerably expanding educational space and resources in higher education, in transforming pedagogic practice, and perhaps even in influencing assessment modes, needs to be acknowledged, while being clear-eyed and cautious on its limitations as well. This has strong implications for the Open University system, one that needs considerable expansion and strengthening in India. Seeing Information and Communication Technology based 'solutions' as providing reach in the context of the

required expansion in higher education in India is problematic in general. It is likely that such attempts will only further marginalize the disadvantaged who might need closer contact and help.

In any case, the NEP needs to take a long term view in this regard and offer guidelines for a rapidly evolving scenario.

#### **HE4 Policy issues**

##### **HE4.1 Regulation**

This is perhaps the area that requires the most serious measures, as acknowledged by popular sentiment, all empowered committees of experts that have studied the issues and the government as well. That serious systemic change is needed seems to be agreed on by almost everyone, but what the change needs to be seems to be the arena of considerable divergence. The record of state governments has been notorious, especially in terms of political influence in university functioning and systemic corruption (which is not to be seen merely in monetary terms but also in terms of systemic negligence and lowering of quality and standards). State regulation has largely been ineffective in checking decline and in promoting progress. New ways can and must be found, and this has to be done urgently. The NEP seems an excellent opportunity for the country to take a stand on this critical issue and move forward.

##### **HE4.2. Financing higher education**

The stand of the Government with regard to financing higher education seems to be one of despair. Statements such as, "Higher education cannot sustain only through public funding", and the promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs) almost as if it were a mantra make one suspect that the government has given up on its duty towards finding adequate resources for higher education. The experience of many countries, including China, the UK and European nations, needs to be studied for the lessons they provide us. The burgeoning of private entrepreneurship in higher education capitalizing on social aspirations is a new reality in India and this needs careful evaluation. The NEP needs to list the assumptions and axioms of education financing, and set out a careful plan for the next decades, keeping in mind the tremendous need of the country in this area and socio-economic aspirations of a young and growing population.

-----