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## National education policy-2020: Vision of inclusive education for 21st century learners

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### Abstract

India's cultural heritage and rich historical past has always promoted the philosophy and commitment towards inclusive education, but despite many international and national efforts in past, inclusive education has remained a distant dream and far from becoming a reality. Recent National Education Policy-2020 has come with a new promise, vision and hope to thoroughly conceptualize, systematically plan and implement various comprehensive and concrete strategies to overcome various issues and challenges associated with inclusive education so far. As is clear from the policy document, it has huge potential to change the face of the education ecosystem in India. There are high hopes from this latest government initiative, but this is also imperative to understand that the benefits of any policy lie in its implementation in a properly planned and conceptualized manner.

At the outset, as one critically analyzes the document, it gives hope and promise for creating huge mass of educated population empowered with innovative thinking, life skills, rigorous research skills with an ability to give effective contribution in the growth and development of national in diverse sectors. Therefore, it is expected that the huge reforms which are warranted in NEP-2020 will transformation the face of present education and modify the psyche of upcoming generation towards becoming an informed and committed citizen of India with a progressive mindset.

At concrete level, with maximum emphasis on equity and inclusivity the real outcome of NEP-2020 would be realized when the children in remote areas get access to education. Many students from the underrepresented and disadvantaged sections should find various ways to be fully included in the learning experiences of different educational institutions in the coming decades. Policy also guides for the incorporation of sustainable development goals in the curriculum. It spells a long-term vision with far reaching impacts. It will also strengthen the culture of inclusion, innovation and institution in the large sphere of Education. The idea of imparting education in mother tongue has also been emphasized in order to help the young minds grow spontaneously. In a nutshell, NEP- 2020 has the potential to be a powerful agent of social change and thus celebrating and promoting the children with diverse needs across domains and contours.

**Keywords:** National education policy-2020, diversity, skills, inclusion

### Introduction

Inclusive education has been a frequently used word across different knowledge domains and areas of study. A lot of literature has been written on the theme and many scholars of eminence are working in the area. Although an in-depth knowledge and understanding of inclusive education along with associated issues and challenges has been developed in many corners of educational discourse, still the irony of this scholarly area of education which is worthy of not only reflection but also is in dire need of action, is that its achievement at the grassroots level is far from the goal of inclusive education as envisaged by our Indian constitution.

Whereas the role of implementation of any mission and vision cannot be understated, it must also need to be understood and realized that if we want to achieve reforms in the field of education, it has to begin with our national education policy. An education policy that is conceptualized, designed and presented to the nation, is of utmost significance as this is the very foundation of all the reforms and practices which will take place in the coming years.

It is common knowledge that if anything is not implemented well, is always a journey half travelled, but a more important fact than this is, that if something is not articulated well in the policy, then the journey has not even begun. In this context, National Education Policy-2020 gives us high hopes as it is a very comprehensive document that outlines and guides the detailed provisions for achieving inclusive education for all in a time-bound manner.

After almost 34 years, India has seen the light of conceptualization and formulation of many educational reforms in the form of the latest National Education Policy-2020. The last national education policy had come in 1986.

While last 34 years have taught us many things in the field of inclusion which range right from its philosophy, commitment, planning, implementation, issues and related challenges at the grass-root level. Now it is the time to take stalk of our field realities with the critical assessment of the extent of inclusive education achieved in our education system so far.

As one delves deeper into the critical study of NEP-2020, it becomes clear that the philosophy of inclusive education has been *included* throughout the document. To mention specifically, chapter-06 and chapter-14 of the policy discuss the key concepts of inclusive education at the school level and at the level of higher education respectively. These chapters have highlighted various crucial components which are quintessential in proceeding towards the goal of realizing inclusive education in our country.

Let's begin with the understanding of the concept of inclusive education in a brief manner.

### **Diversity and Inclusive education**

Inclusive education is understood as a philosophy and practice where children of all types of diversities and special needs are able to learn together and able to realize their unique individual maximum potential. This of course requires making provisions that not only ensure access to education but also address the unique needs of learners. Therefore, to achieve this, it is very important to understand all the possible barriers of different nature and extent and then to systematically work towards removing them to facilitate quality learning among all the students.

Before proceeding further into the discourse of inclusive education, it is very important to understand the nature of diversity with which students come into our classrooms. Extensive research has been done in this field and it has been found that the nature of this diversity is immense and it becomes vast and deep keeping the multicultural nature of India in mind. Indian classrooms have always been extensively multicultural and diverse but this diversity has further increased after the enactment of RTE Act, 2009 (Right to Education Act, 2009). Students in our classrooms may have diversity due to region, religion, socio-cultural background, caste, class, language, gender, disability, giftedness, learning styles or because of their unique life circumstances. This is also crucial to understand that these diversities do not exist in isolation from other types of diversities. They may have complex overlapping and manifest themselves in the classroom in unique ways and present challenges and opportunities in front of all the stakeholders in the education system.

### **Inclusive education as conceptualized in NEP-2020**

National Education Policy-2020 (NEP-2020) begins with the statement that "education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. Inclusive and equitable education-while indeed an essential goal in its own right is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive and contribute to the nation. The education system must aim to benefit India's children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of birth or background." This Policy reaffirms that bridging the social category gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school education will continue to be one of the major goals of all education sector development programs.

While the Indian Education system and successive government policies have made steady progress towards bridging gender and social category gaps in all levels of school education, large disparities still remain especially at the secondary level-particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) that have been historically underrepresented in education. Let's try to understand the concept of inclusive education as discussed at school and higher education level in NEP-2020.

### **Inclusive education at school level**

NEP-2020 begins discussing the issues and challenges of inclusive education with the definition of SEDGs i.e., Socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

### **Meaning of SEDGs in NEP-2020**

As per NEP-2020, SEDGs can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly females and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, OBCs and minorities, geographical identities (such as students from villages and small towns and aspirational districts, disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low-income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).

Thus, an attempt has been made to include all the possible range of diversities that might exist in our school classrooms. Stating and defining these categories, in the beginning, helps us understand the broadness and depth of the issues and also it sets the tone of the discourse along with highlighting the possible confluence among all these diversities in different and unique permutations and combinations.

After defining SEDGs, the document moves towards highlighting the increasing dropout rates among children from different SEDGs. It also points towards the gender difference in the dropout rates and this being more in case of girls even among SEDGs. The difference in rate of drop varying across different stages of education can also be seen where the policy states that, while overall enrolments in schools decline steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 12, this decline in enrolments is significantly more pronounced for many of these SEDGs, with even greater declines for female students within each of these SEDGs and often even steeper in higher education.

A brief status overview of the SEDGs that come within socio-cultural identities is given in the following sub-sections.

- **Increasing drop-out rates among students from Scheduled Castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes and Gender dimension to it:** The policy states that according to U-DISE 2016-17 data, about 19.6% of students belong to Scheduled Castes at the primary level, but this fraction falls to 17.3% at the higher secondary level. These enrolment drop-offs are more severe for Scheduled Tribes students (10.6% to 6.8%), and differently-abled children (1.1% to 0.25%), with even greater declines for female students within each of these categories. The decline in enrolment in higher education is even steeper. According to the policy, a multiplicity of factors, including lack of access to quality schools, poverty, social mores and customs,

and language have had a detrimental effect on rates of enrolment and retention among the scheduled castes. Other backward classes (OBCs) which have been identified on the basis of historically being socially and educationally backward also need special focus.

It is clear from the data that as we move from primary classes to higher education, percentage of students belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribe decreases. This point is also worth noting that gender plays a very important role here and more female students end up leaving their education as compared to male students among almost all the SEDGs. Case of students belonging to other backward classes has also been highlighted well.

- **Case of Cultural and academic aloofness for the scheduled tribe children:** Tribal communities and children from scheduled tribes also face disadvantages and marginalization at multiple levels due to various historical and geographical factors. Children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically. It has been found through many types of researches that children from tribal communities' face incongruence in their learning experiences and their voice often does not find space in formal classroom discourse. Multiple reasons have been found for such disadvantages in the learning experiences of the scheduled castes children. On a critical analysis of various school subjects, strong colonial roots can still be traced in our school curriculum. It has been found that formal school subjects are still heavily influenced by the western philosophy and thought and there is very little respect for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and traditions in formal set up. This often leads to various difficulties and alienation for the children belonging to tribal communities. It is therefore needed that special mechanisms be made to ensure that children belonging to tribal communities are fully included in the learning experiences of school classrooms not only in terms of their physical presence but also their cognitive and cultural participation as well.
- **Inclusion of Minority students:** The policy clearly states that minorities are also relatively underrepresented in school and higher education. It not only acknowledges but strongly affirms the importance of interventions to promote education of children belonging to all minority communities, and particularly those communities that are educationally underrepresented.
- **Creation of Gender Inclusion Fund:** The policy makes us note that women cut across all underrepresented groups, making up about half of all SEDGs. Unfortunately, the exclusion and inequity that SEDGs face is only amplified for the women in these SEDGs. The policy additionally recognizes the special and critical role that women play in society and in shaping social mores; therefore, providing a quality education to girls is the best way to increase the education levels for these SEDGs, not just in the present but also in future generations. It emphasizes that the policies and the schemes designed to include students from SEDGs should be specially targeted towards girls in these SEDGs. It also directs the government to constitute a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to

build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students.

- **Inclusion of Children with Special Needs:** The policy also recognizes the importance of creating enabling mechanisms for providing children with special needs (CWSN) or Divyang the same opportunities of obtaining quality education as any other child. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a 'system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities. This Policy is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education. Therefore, keeping all the issues and challenges faced by children with special needs, this is very important to make all the provisions at school level to ensure not only access but participation, learning and the realization of maximum potential of all children including the children with special needs. Inclusion of children with special needs an overhauling in our approach, attitude, awareness and understanding of the entire repertoire of disadvantages and marginalization that children with special need face in their overall educational journey in schools. Main stakeholders including the parents, teachers, administrators and community need to be made aware and be educated in scientific way of understanding the challenges of CwSN and to address the same. Along with knowledge and awareness, fundamental changes are required to be made in our official documents, curriculum and pedagogical approaches to make them as inclusive as possible.
- In sync with the above line of thought, the policy promises that ensuring the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system will be accorded the highest priority. Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the Foundational Stage to higher education. While preparing the National Curriculum Framework, NCERT will ensure that consultations are held with expert bodies such as the National Institutes of DEPwD.
- **Various measures to promote inclusion:** The policy guides that it is important to take into account various researches that ascertain the measures which are particularly effective for certain SEDGs. It suggests to consider providing bicycles and organizing cycling and walking groups to provide access to school as it have been shown to be particularly powerful methods in increasing participation of female students. It is useful even at lesser distances because of the safety benefits and comfort to parents that it provides. It also suggests one-on-one teachers and tutors, peer tutoring, open schooling, appropriate infrastructure, and suitable technological interventions ensure access as it can be particularly effective for certain children with disabilities. The policy emphasizes the importance of providing quality ECCE as it increases the benefits for children who come from economically disadvantaged families. It also quotes that the counsellors and/or well-trained social workers that work with and connect with students, parents, schools, and teachers in order to

improve attendance and learning outcomes have been found to be especially effective for children in urban poor areas.

- **Creation of Special Education Zones:** Keeping the specific needs of SEDGs in mind, the policy recommends that the regions of the country which have large populations from educationally disadvantaged SEDGs should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape. This, recommendation by the policy reflects the focus and commitment toward inclusive education.
- **Provisions for the special education teachers' preparation and recruitment:** To this end, schools/school complexes will be provided resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training, and for the establishment of resource centers, wherever needed, especially for children with severe or multiple disabilities. Barrier-free access for all children with disabilities will be enabled as per the RPwD Act. Different categories of children with disabilities have differing needs. Schools and school complexes will work and be supported for providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classroom. In particular, assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille) will be made available to help children with disabilities integrate more easily into classrooms and engage with teachers and their peers. This will apply to all school activities including arts, sports, and vocational education. NIOS will develop high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language and to teach other basic subjects using Indian Sign Language. Adequate attention will be paid to the safety and security of children with disabilities.

#### **Inclusive education at higher education level**

With a focus on the SEDGs, NEP 2020 aims to guarantee that all students have equitable access to high-quality education. Access to high-quality higher education can lead to a wide range of opportunities that can help communities and people break the cycle of disadvantage. Making high-quality higher education options accessible to everyone must therefore rank among the top goals. All schools and institutions of higher education must use the same strategy for inclusion and equity. To promote lasting reform, there must also be continuity between the stages. In order to achieve the aims of fairness and inclusion in higher education, legislative efforts must be taken into account alongside those for school education. There are several characteristics of exclusion that are unique to or far more intense in a university setting. These issues must be specifically addressed, including lack of awareness of higher education opportunities, the cost of lost economic opportunity associated with pursuing a degree, financial limitations, admissions procedures, geographic and linguistic barriers, the low employability potential of many

higher education programmes, and a lack of adequate student support systems. Difficulties due to distance and language, the low employability of many higher education programmes, and a lack of adequate student support systems.

Das, Desai & Kumar (2017) <sup>[14]</sup> have also discussed that “understanding students with disabilities and accommodating their needs has become a central focus for higher education. Obtaining higher education can certainly lead towards functional independence. The students’ experience of disability is in the margin of higher education’s focus. Given enrolment trends, this status is ironic, but despite their increase in number, many students with disabilities in many campuses/universities are viewed as different in ways that fails to affirm diversity or to facilitate their inclusion.”

A brief overview of the actions that are specific to higher education shall be adopted by all Governments and HEIs as per the policy is as follows:

#### **Suitable government funds for the education of SEDGs**

With a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, underprivileged groups have more opportunities in both higher education and the classroom. To ensure that the rules, regulations, and schemes created with relation to SEDGs reflect the objective and emphasis so clearly stated in NEP 2020, community leaders must make well-planned efforts to engage with MHRD, the Ministry of Minority Affairs, and other pertinent agencies. Previous National Education Policies recommended that public spending on education be increased to 6 percent of GDP in order to provide the necessary financial support to ensure an equitable, high-quality public education system, universal access, learning resources, student safety, adequate numbers of teachers and staff, teacher development, and other factors. Sadly, this amounts to about 4.43 percent of GDP. The Central government and the State Governments should significantly expand their public investment in the education sector, but the NEP 2020 makes no recommendations for how much of that investment should be split between the two.

#### **Setting up clear targets for higher GER for SEDGs**

Even though higher education institutions are continually working to improve, there are currently 37.4 million students enrolled in universities, with a GER of 26.3. The goal of NEP 2020 is to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035. Will the bold policy be able to make it happen? Yes, but only with a solid execution strategy and active involvement from all parties involved.

History has shown that, despite the fact that improving GER has historically been one of the key goals of educational systems, relatively little actual change has been realized. Looking back, the 1968 publication of the first National Policy on Education called for “fundamental reorganization” of the educational system. Equal educational opportunities were suggested, particularly for Scheduled Tribes. Given that teaching is not one of the most desirable careers and that few young people are willing to pursue it, this presents a significant obstacle. It is essential that NEP 2020 be implemented quickly if it is to achieve its goal of improving GER. Additionally, a competent task force may make sure by supporting the development and design of curricula in local and regional languages and keeping track of the standards of excellence set by universities and colleges. By

2025, all states must provide the framework for the strategy, and by 2040, it must be implemented smoothly. Any further delay will reduce the benefit of our demographic dividend.

#### **Enhancement of gender balance in admissions to HEIs**

The idea of equality should not only be determined by statistics, but also by a culture that values equality between the sexes. The percentage of women enrolled in higher education has increased from less than 10% of all students on the eve of Independence to 48.6% in 2018-19. With 19.2 million male students and 18.2 million female students, there are now 37.4 million people enrolled in higher education worldwide. In central universities, deemed universities, and government-aided institutions, there are now significantly more female students than male students for every 100 students. There has been an overall increase in the enrolment of women in higher education as a result of numerous government efforts, such as maternity leave/child care leave, supernumerary seats, course length relaxation, The Gender Parity Index has improved as a result of this (GPI). From 0.92 in 2013-14 to 1 in 2018-19, the GPI has risen. India will be able to significantly contribute to sustainable development thanks to the equitable involvement of women in higher education. Quality and affordability must be emphasized together with the availability of equal access to education.

#### **Provision of access by establishing more high-quality HEIs in aspirational districts and creation of special education zones containing larger numbers of SEDGs**

The current policy suggests that the areas of the nation with a significant population of SEDGs be designated as Special Education Zones (SEZs), where the policies are implemented to the fullest extent possible through additional initiatives to support access, equity, and inclusion in higher education as well.

#### **Local Indian language for teaching in HEIs**

The National Education Policy emphasizes the importance of using a child's mother tongue as the education medium. The NEP does not mandate the use of mother tongue as the primary language of teaching; it just suggests it. According to the policy, children learn and understand complex ideas more rapidly when speaking their mother tongue.

"Whenever possible, the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language will be used as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably until Grade 8 and beyond. After that, whenever possible, the native tongue must be taught in its whole. Both public and private schools will adhere to this, the policy adds. Sanskrit will be a choice for students at all stages of secondary and postsecondary education, including in the three-language model. A new policy encourages multilingualism in both higher education and the classroom. To be established are the Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation and the National Institute for Pali, Persian, and Prakrit.

NEP 2020 also ensures that language is no longer a barrier for children as the use of local/regional vernacular has been permitted as the medium of instruction. Schools have also been directed to recruit special educators to address the academic requirements of children with special needs." (Bhatt, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### **Provision of more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs in both public and private HEIs and conducting outreach programs on higher education opportunities**

According to the policy, "Scholarships will be developed for people of all ages to study Indian Languages, Arts, and Culture with local masters and/or inside the higher education system." This creates chances to interact with highly accomplished artists and learn about and promote their specialties. The policy also places a strong emphasis on internationalizing education to draw in more foreign students and promote India as a top study destination offering top-notch education at reasonable costs. The establishment of campuses abroad would be encouraged for successful Indian universities. It is clear that the National Education Policy's provisions might fundamentally alter how the socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are educated if there is proactive of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, provided there is proactive engagement with all agencies responsible for its implementation and appropriate responses from the stakeholders within these marginalized groups themselves.

#### **Developing technology tools for better participation and learning outcomes**

Any culture should place a high focus on education, but notably India. The country is working to increase access to education and enhance learning results. Technology can thereby multiply our efforts. When provided the necessary technological resources, teachers can significantly raise student performance. Interactivity is the key. Students today have access to a variety of knowledge since they live in a connected world. They must be taught to be participatory, whether they are visual, auditory, or text-based. This calls for a change in the way we instruct. Technology-based tools foster increased engagement and retention, teach valuable skills, and encourage collaboration.

#### **Make admissions processes more inclusive**

"The RPwD act affirmed the provision of free education for the child with disability up to the age of 18 years in an adequate condition" (Banga, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>. "The RPwD act also increased the 3% reservation to 5% for the people with benchmark disabilities in all government institution for higher education. Any person with at least 40% of the listed 21 disabilities in the RPwD act is known as the person with benchmark disability. The act also emphasized on the barrier free access as a non-discrimination measure" (Narayan, 2017).

Admission system should be more user friendly. Both online and offline admission procedure should be provided. There should be centralize portal/web site which will display and facilitate online admission form submission of multiple colleges along with online Form Fee payment. Residences of the SEDG and PwD students are also kept in view while allotting them to the colleges. To reach full inclusion, Universities and Colleges including staff, faculty, students and boards of trustees-must change campus culture and the conversation about disability, accommodations, and access to create a welcoming community for all students. Reaching this goal requires attention to légal rights of students with disabilities and the responsibilities of institution saswell as a greater awareness of the bene fitstothe entire system of a disability-diverse student body. Although no higher

education institution has achieved full inclusion, many are striving to reach that goal. Drawing from a recent higher education inclusion guide on how to accommodate students while building a comprehensive climate of inclusion, specific action steps are highlighted which can be taken by campus leaders for students with disabilities to achieve their highest potential.

Education acts as an integrative force in society, imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity and also provide a basis for national development. Equal access to education including higher education is a matter of civil liberties. University grant commission has also created an equal opportunity cell (EOC) which establishes a computer lab for e-resources to the student with a disability to overcome the obstacles using various software emphasis on coordination of services related to health, nutrition, education, science, and technology, employment, sports, cultural, art & craft welfare programs was done by the government to promote accessibility among students with various disabilities in the context of the higher education system.

The primary objective of higher education is to promote services so that students with disabilities are encouraged to become functionally independent and productive members of the nation through different channels i.e., through education, vocational training, medical rehabilitation and socio-economic rehabilitation. Inclusion and enrolments in higher education can be increased by facilitating admission, providing guidance and counselling and assisting graduates to gain successful employment in the public as well as the private sector.

Higher education impacts different aspects of a person with a disability (PwD) and has its importance on a personal, social, national and global level. Higher education is essential to obtain knowledge. As they are opened up to new environments, new peers, they are likely to get /use more resources than earlier. Transitioning from a closed environment of secondary stages of education to a more open post-secondary stage of college brings many personality changes and improves critical thinking and working out problems. Higher education is a platform for them where they are opened to the outer world. They start interacting with new people, seek job opportunities, use different kinds of resources all these things boost up confidence in them at their personal level. Higher education teaches the individual to get acceptance and being their own best friend having values through this inner confidence. These improved skills in thoughts and logic make them better people with the ability to solve real-life crisis. A person with a degree is expected to be awarded a better salary. Through higher education, skilled disabled persons can also work in as many different job sectors. A wide range of jobs depending on their interest and skillsets. In the bigger picture, higher education brings monetary benefits. Higher education helps in changing the mindsets of people on social issues like discrimination, equality, and racism and develops thinking ability. The 21st century needs in students are learning, literacy and life skills. Systems, government regulations and mandates must be put in place to ensure that university students are actively engaged in departmental research and go through compulsory research training modules.

The disabled are more likely to obtain better employment with improved GDP and other national contributions as a

result of higher education. Employment generates income, domestic demand for products and services, and propels overall economic growth. Employment leads to earnings, and earnings result in the country's ability to generate more income, which benefits the economy. Almost every person in the country represents the identity of our country in their specific fields. Education teaches how to study, and it should include instruction in conduct, knowledge, science, trade, ethics, values, and other areas that we need to advance for both our own advancement and that of the country. Maximum dependency of individuals is caused by a greater number of disabilities. However, more education raises qualifications of individuals which makes people eligible for employment and employment makes people independent. Higher education systems must become disability-inclusive in order to meet international obligations and global frameworks.

Article 24 of the UNCRPD, which focuses on the right to education, calls on nations to guarantee equal access to lifelong learning, adult education, and vocational training. If the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are not taken into account, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN will not be met. If we don't take steps to make higher education more accessible to people with disabilities, we won't be able to create an atmosphere where nobody falls behind. Higher education institutions are intended to take a leadership role in the country as the pinnacle of the educational system by producing individuals with unique skills and drive. Additionally, they are meant to give the person all the intellectual and physical abilities he needs to an innovative, creative, and self-reliant member of the society, able to cope with the economic and cultural demands of the society.

### Major Paradigm Shifts as Recommended by NEP-2020

Recently published mandate document which is responsible and is a guiding document for the development of national curriculum framework in the light of NEP-2020 outlines many important foundations aspects to work upon. "It advocates (Mandate document for NCF-2022)

- Transitioning to a more multidisciplinary and holistic education.
- Holistic development of the child in all capacities – intellectual, social, physical, ethical, and emotional.
- Universal access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- Emphasis on ensuring Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) for all students.
- Emphasis on the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction, particularly in the early years, along with high-quality teaching-learning of all languages.
- Education must involve family as well as community.
- Every student has innate talents, which must be discovered, nurtured, fostered, and developed.
- Cultural literacy and knowledge of one's country's languages, literature, culture, and traditions are important for developing a sense of identity as well as promoting an individual's creativity, empathy, humanity, etc.
- All children must be fully integrated into the system; equity and inclusion form a cornerstone for a successful educational system."

### Concluding Remarks

“Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education. Moreover, the number of students dropping out of school is getting higher, especially in poverty-stricken areas” (Singh, 2017). India is moving ahead to keep pace with the developed world and has introduced the current innovative policy and various programmes for the education of students with disabilities. In current situation education become the anticipation for emancipation and enlightenment of the students with various disabilities. Any policy’s effectiveness depends on its implementation. Such implementation will require multiple initiatives and actions, which will have to be taken by multiple bodies in a synchronized and systematic manner along with timelines and a plan for review, in order to ensure that the policy is implemented in its spirit and intent, through coherence in planning and synergy across all these bodies involved in education. Along with effective implementation the policy makers need to take into consideration the areas that are lagging behind and plan strategies to overcome these for the development of our education system.

It is believed that by the decade of 2030-40, the entire policy will be in an operational mode and since education is a public good, everyone is a stakeholder and should therefore be invited to contribute to actualize the vision of the NEP to make India’s education system strong, inclusive, and equitable. A pandemic and the world economy hitting the lowest makes us comprehend that our future generation will have to battle out a lot of challenges. In such dire circumstances, the National Education Policy 2020 shows a new path ahead.

As the commitment towards inclusion across the diversities of students can be clearly seen in the above discussed aspects of NEP-2020, the biggest challenge now is to include these aspects of inclusion in the curriculum in varied types of educational programs which are being run in our country for different stages and needs of learners. Also “It is important to note that an inclusive school must adopt changes in its overall structure in such a way that it becomes a part of the school’s culture. These changes are at various level i.e., Infrastructural, curriculum-based, pedagogical, or in classroom management, sports and cultural events, community level programs and assessment.” (CBSE Handbook of Inclusive Education, 2020) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Curriculum change should not be limited to the educational programs for school or higher education academic program students, but it must also be required in the curriculum and approaches for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs in the country. Malik and Panigrahi (2020) also emphasize the key role played by the attitude of teachers and students in the realization on inclusive education. They state that “Attitude is one of the most significant barriers to inclusion. Teacher as a pillar of the education system can bring a positive attitude among students towards inclusive education. This requires the teachers not only to be sensitized towards inclusion but also well trained for the inclusion. NEP 2020 talks about the reforms in teacher education program to inculcate the values and skills required for inclusive education.” As teachers are the main stakeholders which take the values attitude and approaches to the students, they must first be properly sensitized,

informed and empowered to implement the inclusion in action and spirit. School, college administration and policy decisions along with community form an essential core of inclusion. Thus, they should also be included in all the endeavors towards developing an inclusive society and inclusive nation.

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