

Revamping the Secondary Education in India: A Journey from Independence to National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

ABSTRACT

In the dynamic landscape of developing nations, secondary school education emerges as a pivotal policy focus after being the most neglected segment of school education for a long, marking a significant juncture in the educational trajectory. With primary education achieving widespread accessibility and nearly 100% enrollment, attention gradually shifted to the adolescent demographic, focusing on secondary school education. This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination and critical evaluation of the evolution of secondary school education in India since its independence. Commencing with the seminal Board of Secondary Education report of 1948, traversing through significant milestones like Mudaliar Commission, Kothari Commission, NPE-1986, CABE Committee Report, National Knowledge Commission, RMSA and finally culminating in the landmark National Education Policy 2020, it traverses through the numerous initiatives shaping the present landscape of secondary schooling in the nation. Emphasizing key milestones and recommendations put forth by various commissions, the article offers an insightful analysis of the implementation and efficacy of these measures. The paper attempts to meticulously scrutinize and thoroughly analyze the major commissions and their recommendations, illuminating the successes and shortcomings in attaining the prescribed objectives within the secondary education sphere.

Keywords: Secondary School Education; India; Secondary Education Commission; NEP 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since gaining independence, India has grappled with the pivotal question of governmental responsibility in the realm of education, a discourse intricately woven into the fabric of its constitutional framework. In the embryonic stages of nation-building, the framers of the Indian Constitution found themselves at a crossroads, swayed by two primary deliberations, namely, the established model in the United States and the Hartog Committee recommendations. This juncture led to a seminal decision, mirroring the American approach, to designate education as a State subject, thus endowing the residual powers in education to State Governments, with a precise record of powers kept for the Government of India (GOI).

Since the pivotal year of 1947, the Education department at the Centre has undergone a profound metamorphosis, evolving into a formidable Ministry under the aegis of the Central Government[28,.29,30]. However, the trajectory of India's education system has been marked by a series of incremental changes, notably exemplified by the transition from the inaugural education policy in 1968 to subsequent iterations, such as the seminal 1986 policy, with minor adjustments in 1992. Yet, the nation has adhered steadfastly to a seemingly stagnant paradigm for the past three and a half decades.

It is against this backdrop of historical continuity that in 2020, the GOI unveiled the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, heralding a paradigm shift aimed at modernizing the archaic educational framework rooted in the ethos of the 1980s to one aligned with the challenges of the 21st century, necessitated by the rapid advancement of technology and shifting socio-economic landscapes.

Traditionally overshadowed by the fervent pursuit of universal elementary education, secondary education has emerged as a focal point in the developmental agenda of many developing nations, India included. Universal elementary enrollment in the country has created a direct demand for secondary education. Additionally, the growing need for a highly skilled workforce in the global economy indirectly boosts its demand. Secondary school graduates are particularly prized because they can be trained to meet the needs of the globalized market. Moreover, effective secondary education equips students with formal reasoning, abstract problem-solving skills, and critical thinking, alongside job-related content. Consequently, secondary education fosters the development of a skilled and knowledgeable population, enabling participation in both the national and global economies (Lewin & Caillods, 2001). In addition to fostering the development of active citizens (Alvarez, 2000; Briseid & Caillods, 2004; World Bank, 2003, 2009), secondary education also plays a crucial role in addressing emerging human development challenges in countries striving to build knowledge societies and integrate into the globalized world. The landscape of secondary education policy, concurrently within the purview of both State and Central governments, reflects the intricate interplay of policy dynamics and socio-economic imperatives. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of secondary school education in India necessitates a meticulous examination of the policy interventions that have shaped its contemporary landscape.

In this research paper, we embark on a journey through time, delving into the labyrinth of policy formulation and implementation that has sculpted secondary education in India into its present form. Through a critical analysis of the historical antecedents and contemporary

imperatives, we seek to elucidate the intricate tapestry of factors that have contributed to the evolution of secondary education policy, thereby providing valuable insights for future policy formulations and educational reforms.

1.1 Post-independence to 1960

In the wake of India's independence in 1947, *the Board of Secondary Education* released a pivotal report in 1948. Recognizing the necessity for a comprehensive framework, the committee proposed a 12-year schooling structure preceding university education. This structure entailed five years of Junior Basic followed by three years of Senior Basic, offering an educational endpoint for those wishing to conclude their studies at this juncture. A modified trajectory was suggested for students pursuing further education at the collegiate level: five years of Junior Basic, three years of pre-secondary, and four years of Secondary education. Within this continuum, the final four years could be further subdivided into either a 3+1 or 2+2 format, providing flexibility tailored to the preferences of each province. In the envisioned 5+3+4 model, the concluding four years were envisaged to incorporate two years of intermediate courses. However, the integration of these Intermediate classes into either the High School or degree college framework remained undetermined (Government of India, 1948).

Despite these proposals, *the University Education Commission*, colloquially known as the *Radhakrishnan Commission*, was established in 1948 with a specific mandate to scrutinize the university education system and offer recommendations regarding collegiate education. This commission lamented the lack of recognition, both by the public and the Indian government, regarding the significance of intermediate colleges within the Indian educational landscape.

The commission's sobering assessment underscored the critical need for reform within India's secondary education system, emphasizing it as the weakest link in the nation's educational infrastructure, demanding urgent attention and remedial measures (Government of India, 1950).

A significant milestone in secondary education emerged with the advent of the *Secondary Education Commission* in 1952, often called the *Mudaliar Commission*. Tasked exclusively with investigating and assessing the state of secondary education across its myriad dimensions, this commission suggested measures for its restructuring and enhancement.

Central to its recommendations was the delineation of the aims and objectives of secondary education, which encompassed the cultivation of democratic citizenship, the promotion of vocational proficiency, the nurturing of leadership skills, and the fostering of personality development. To elevate the quality of school education to desired standards, the commission advocated for a seven-year duration of secondary education targeting the age group of 11-17 (Government of India, 1953).

The proposed organizational structure for secondary education post 4 or 5 years of primary/junior basic education comprises (a) a middle/junior secondary/senior basic stage spanning three years and (b) a Higher Secondary stage extending over four years.

Moreover, the commission advocated for eliminating the prevailing intermediate system, proposing that the 12th grade be integrated into the university framework while the 11th grade be incorporated into high schools. This restructuring aimed to establish a one-year pre-university phase preceding three-year degree courses. Critically evaluating the existing curriculum, the commission identified various deficiencies such as its narrow scope, theoretical orientation, overcrowded nature, and undue emphasis on examinations. It advocated for a revamped curriculum construction guided by principles such as experiential learning, diversity, flexibility, relevance to community life, leisure education, and inter-subject correlation (Ibid.).

The commission recommended a diversified curriculum comprising compulsory/main subjects and optional subjects for high and higher secondary schools. The inclusion of disciplines like crafts, social studies, and general science aimed to acquaint students with the practicalities of industrial and science-oriented lifestyles. Additionally, the commission introduced the concept of multipurpose secondary schools, embodying an innovative educational approach.

Subsequent endorsements from key educational bodies such as the 1962 Conference of Vice-Chancellors, the All India Council for Secondary Education held in 1963, and the Conference of State Education Ministers in 1964 underscored the significance of a 12-year schooling framework preceding enrollment in any three-year degree program.

Next came the *National Committee on Women's Education, 1958* which proposed a new educational framework, suggesting that secondary education should follow a four or five-year period of primary or junior basic education. This proposed structure comprised two key phases: the middle or senior basic secondary stage lasting three years and the higher secondary stage spanning four years. The committee advocated replacing the existing intermediate stage with this expanded higher secondary stage. In line with this recommendation for secondary

education, it was proposed that the first-degree course in universities be shortened to three years. Additionally, the committee suggested a one-year pre-university course for those who had already completed high school. In essence, admission to professional colleges was expanded to include those who completed either the higher secondary course or a one-year pre-university program. Language studies were emphasized, with at least two languages required at both high and higher secondary levels, one of which should be the mother tongue or a regional language. The curriculum was designed to be comprehensive. Middle school subjects encompassed languages, social studies, general science, mathematics, art and music, crafts, and physical education. More specialized instruction was introduced as students progressed to the second year of high school or the higher secondary stage. Diverse courses were offered, including humanities, sciences, technical subjects, commercial subjects, agricultural subjects, fine arts, and home science. Regardless of the chosen course of study, core subjects such as languages, general science, social studies, and craft were deemed essential for all students. This approach aimed to provide a well-rounded education while allowing for specialization in various fields according to individual interests and career aspirations.

Keeping in view of students' varied interests, multipurpose schools were also proposed to be established wherever possible to provide courses with diverse aims, aptitudes, and abilities (Government of India, 1959).

The most significant contribution of this era was made by the *Mudaliar Commission* by diversifying the curriculum at secondary stage and its advocacy for a revamped curriculum construction.

1.2 The era of 1960s to 1990

Indian Education Commission, 1964-66 (Kothari Commission) did not bind its inquiry to a specific sector of education; instead, it conducted a comprehensive review of the education system as a whole. This commission underscored the pivotal role of education in national development, asserting that the advancement of the nation, financial growth, social security, and welfare initiatives all hinge upon a robust educational system. It advocated for the introduction of subject specialization at the higher secondary level. According to its proposals, the new structural framework of education, termed 10+2+3, featured a lower secondary stage comprising three to two years of general education or alternatively, one to three years of vocational education. This was followed by a higher secondary stage consisting of two years of general education or again, one to three years of vocational education. This approach aimed

to provide students with a solid foundation in either general knowledge or practical vocational skills, preparing them for further academic pursuits or entry into the workforce, thus contributing to both individual growth and national progress.

The commission did not favor any selective admissions at the lower secondary level so that the nation could move ahead and make ten years of school education available to one and all; hence, it recommended a liberal policy of expansion at the lower secondary level of education. It agreed that the community demand for secondary and higher education had amplified and would continue to increase soon. So, against the policy of liberal expansion at the lower secondary level, adopting a policy of selective admissions to higher secondary and university education was suggested to bridge the gap between public demand and on-hand facilities. This commission did not favor school fees as a resource for generating revenue and proposed complete fee abolishment till class 10th and extending free education till the 12th standard for needy and deserving candidates. A pivotal recommendation underscored the imperative for crafting an overarching National Policy on Education. This seminal document would function as a beacon and a cornerstone for state and local entities, offering invaluable guidance in the meticulous crafting and execution of their educational blueprints for the foreseeable future. By furnishing a comprehensive framework, it aimed to orchestrate a symphony of educational initiatives, ensuring seamless alignment and effective realization of educational aspirations across diverse administrative echelons. This visionary endeavor aspired to catalyze a collective journey toward educational excellence and societal transformation (Government of India, 1966).

The commission stressed that in any well-planned national education system, secondary education must have one of two specific objectives: to prepare a student for university or a student for some vocation in life. So, following the recommendations of this commission, the GOI framed a National Policy Statement in 1968, which affirmed that it would be beneficial to have a broadly consistent and homogenous educational pattern across the country, and the ultimate objective was prescribed for the adoption of the 10+2+3 pattern (Ibid.).

The Conference of Education Secretaries and Directors of Public Instruction, 1972 approved the resolution advocating the implementation of a uniform pattern of classes in schools and Colleges following the 10+2+3 pattern. During its 36th session, the CABE committee also endorsed the Conference of the Education Secretaries and Directors of Public Instruction recommendations.

In 1968, a *National Policy on Education (NPE)* was formulated for the first time to prepare eligible hands for shouldering responsibilities in the diverse fields of our national reconstructions. The policy initiated the restructuring of courses at the undergraduate level. Still, the most crucial development under this plan was the approval of the conventional education structure throughout the nation by introducing the 10+2+3 system in most states. Much emphasis was placed on the increasing need for technical and vocational education facilities in an efficient linkage at the secondary stage to make them effectively terminal and yield ample employment opportunities. The commission visualized the importance of secondary education. It stated, "Educational opportunity at the secondary (and higher) level is a major instrument of social change and transformation. Facilities for secondary school education should accordingly be extended expeditiously to areas and classes which have been denied these in the past." The three-language formula was proposed at the secondary stage. The state governments were suggested to adopt and actively execute this formula that included the learning of one modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, other than Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States, and of Hindi besides the regional language and English in the Non-Hindi-speaking States (Government of India, 1968).

Following April 20th, 1986, a new education policy called the *National Policy on Education (1986)* was proposed before the Indian parliament for consideration and approval with the foremost objective of vocationalization of education, particularly at the secondary stage of education. This policy emphasized the enhancement of the quality of secondary education. It proposed to emphasize the enrolment of female students along with SC/ST students, principally in science, commerce & vocational streams, and extend the access to secondary education. It recommended reorganizing the boards of secondary education and vesting with the autonomy to augment its ability to upgrade the quality of secondary education. Many efforts were made to provide computer literacy in the maximum number of secondary-level institutions to equip students with essential computer skills to be efficient in the promising technological world. It was suggested that vocationalisation should be through specialized institutions or via re-fashioning of secondary education to supply valuable human resources for economic growth & efforts should be made to equip children at the higher secondary school stage with generic vocational courses that divide several occupational fields and should not be occupation-specific. Vocational education was also brought forward as a distinct stream anticipating to prepare students for acknowledged occupations. To enhance the flexibility, these courses, which would usually be provided after the secondary stage, might also be made accessible

immediately after standard 8th. Pace-setting residential schools, i.e., Navodya schools that came into being to provide children with unique talent or aptitude and superior quality education, were recognized to have full scope for innovation and experimentation (Government of India, 1986).

In this era, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) stood out by making remarkable contributions in the meadow of secondary education. The breakthrough of this commission was the recommendation of a system of 4-year secondary education and hanging up the practice of streaming up to 10th standard. It was interesting to note that ten years after the commission submitted its report, education was positioned in the concurrent list-making States and the Centre liable for its development which altogether shifted the focus of policy context for the development of secondary education.

The major setback of this era was the lack of funding to the secondary education by the government. Up until the late 1980s, the Indian government provided only modest support for school education. The funding for the school system largely came from domestic sources, with most of the aid being directed towards post-secondary, technical, and vocational education. The government held the view that involving external parties in elementary education was neither necessary nor desirable. However, by the late 1980s, significant changes in both the educational landscape and the economy prompted a shift in this approach (Colclough & De, 2010). Consequently, aid for education increased substantially, however the strong focus shifted only on the elementary education, while secondary education received comparatively little to no attention.

1.3 From 1990 to NEP 2020

In this era, the first feat was the *Programme of Action, 1992 (Revised NPE)*, which was set up to appraise the implementation of the different parameters of NPE while contemplating the report of the Ramamurti Review Committee. The National education system predicted a common educational structure, i.e., the 10+2+3 structure accepted in all parts of the country. It was strongly advocated that the 10+2 stage must be accepted as a part of school education throughout the country, and efforts for the same were advised. Regarding secondary education, the committee proposed that creating a planned and systematized expansion of secondary education facilities throughout the nation would be obligatory to muddle through the new increased demands for secondary education. It also proposed that the existing vocational stream being offered at the +2 level should be rightfully reinforced. Further, it strongly urged that the

vocational courses commence from the 9th standard, wherever feasible. Also, the work experience program should have a practical reference point for various subjects (Government of India, 1992).

Report of the CABE Committee, 2004 (Universalization of Secondary Education) had one of the seven committees to prepare a blueprint for the universalization of secondary education, ensuring the attainment of universalization of elementary education. This committee had the vision to provide superior quality secondary education to the adolescent population of 16 by 2015 and up to 18 by 2020 across the country. The committee recommended that the guiding principles of secondary education should be accessibility, equality and social justice, relevance and development, and structural curricular considerations. It was believed that the above-mentioned four guiding principles imply a paradigm shift necessary for moving toward the goal of universalizing secondary education. It was put forward that secondary education demands to be re-conceptualized, and new concepts should be built up so that the system shifts from mere mugging up to a more holistic living experience. Future secondary education needs to be designed so that it matures multiple intelligences like linguistics, logic, musical, spatial, etc. so that there are adequate opportunities for all types of intelligence and the potential of each student completely unfolded (Government of India, 2005).

This committee strongly recommended that schools' norms be developed so that each state has typical national and state-specific parameters. For the same, each state should establish a perspective plan. For that, a Secondary Education Management Information System (SEIMS) was proposed, in which a block should be considered a unit. The committee further recommended guidance and counseling provisions and avoided including para-teachers in secondary education. This report stated that it was essential to create access to universal secondary education that need not be free & compulsory but must be differentially subsidized to an economically weaker section of society and moderately subsidized for those who can afford it. The committee strongly urged that mere expansion of the secondary education system in its present structure would not be sufficient; it demands to be re-conceptualized and re-designed in terms of many essential characteristics such as curricular aspects, student assessment, and evaluation, instructional process and pedagogy and all this must be done keeping in mind the compatible quality infrastructure. It was put forward to replace the practice of examination result mark sheets with student portfolios indicating their performance in various domains, comprehensively revealing the students' total being (Ibid.).

The next important action in the direction was *the National Knowledge Commission Report (2006-09)*. It trusted that the positive changes in schooling systems would certainly guarantee full access to secondary education as well as better quality and higher relevance to all of the schooling, and called for the active involvement of both central as well as state governments. Further, their association should be obligatory in providing resources and promoting organizational and other changes. The committee strongly supported the speedy enactment of the central legislation to ensure all children's right to quality school education up to Class VIII. It urged to extend it to envelop universal schooling up to Class X as soon as possible. This commission also supported the importance of increasing the funding for secondary school education. It was advocated that spending on secondary education was more necessary at that time than ever before because there was a considerable shortage of middle and secondary schools, which stood as one of the crucial reasons for the low retention rates after Class 5th. Also, secondary school education was severely underfunded, which led to absolute shortages and tribulations of laughable quality in most government secondary and higher secondary schools. The commission aimed to reach universal secondary school education within 10 years. To achieve universal secondary school education, expenditure on secondary schooling must be increased by several multiples within the next two years, indeed by at least five times the current level if the CAFE estimates were to be utilized. NKC also pinpointed that many primary schools were being upgraded to secondary school status in an ongoing scenario despite their lack of adequate teachers, rooms, and other pedagogical requirements, resulting in brutal compromises with the quality of secondary education. Hence, it was recommended that there must be strict adherence to the norms for secondary schools, which include providing specialized subject teachers and science labs, counseling, etc. (Government of India, 2009a).

The *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)*, launched in 2009, stood as a beacon of the Government of India's profound commitment to fostering a more robust, accessible, and advanced secondary education system. This flagship initiative reflected a heightened awareness within the government of the imperative for a secondary education framework capable of propelling the nation's growth and development on a more assured trajectory. RMSA set ambitious targets to elevate the enrolment rate from 52.26% in 2005-06 to an impressive 75% for classes IX-X within five years of implementation. Central to its vision was establishing secondary schools within reachable proximity of every habitation, ensuring universal access to quality education. Moreover, it aimed to address multifaceted barriers such as gender disparity, socio-economic disparities, and disabilities, striving to eliminate these obstacles and extend

educational opportunities to all segments of society by 2017. Further, it had set its sights on achieving universal retention by 2020 (Government of India, 2009b).

The mission delineated a comprehensive strategy, focusing on essential quality interventions. This included recruiting additional teachers to achieve a pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1, with a special emphasis on enhancing instruction in Science, Mathematics, and English. It prioritized the establishment and enhancement of science laboratories, the integration of ICT-enabled education, and the provision of ongoing in-service training for educators. Curriculum reforms and pedagogical enhancements were also central to its agenda.

Furthermore, RMSA was poised to address infrastructural deficiencies by providing essential physical amenities. This encompassed the construction of additional classrooms, the establishment of libraries and laboratories, provisions for arts and crafts facilities, access to clean drinking water, the construction of sanitation facilities, and the development of residential hostels for educators in remote areas, thereby uplifting existing secondary schools and fostering a conducive learning environment for all.

MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource and Development), now called the Ministry of Education, was the nodal central government ministry to synchronize RMSA with State Implementation Societies (SIS) in every state. A National Resource Group (NRG) provided supervision for reforms in teaching-learning processes, curriculum, teaching-learning material, ICT education, and mechanisms of monitoring & evaluation. NCERT and NUEPA also laid their support through dedicated RMSA units (Ibid.)

RMSA embarked on a commendable journey towards realizing its ambitious objectives. A total of 10,513 new secondary schools were greenlit under the program, with an impressive 9,239 of these being operational. Furthermore, the initiative aimed to fortify 35,539 existing schools, establishing 24,581 new science labs, 30,761 art/craft/culture rooms, 19,510 toilet blocks, 12,275 drinking water facilities, and 2,130 residential quarters. Remarkably, significant progress was made, with 7,315 science labs, 7,959 art/craft/culture rooms, 5,975 toilet blocks, 5,324 computer rooms, 7,406 libraries, 4,255 drinking water facilities, and 441 residential quarters were completed. Additionally, 51,750 additional classrooms were sanctioned, with 14,644 completed and 12,562 in progress. Addressing teacher availability, RMSA approved 107,480 teaching positions for secondary schools, including 41,507 additional teachers, with 59,353 recruited. The scheme also integrated various secondary education initiatives such as girls' hostels, vocational education, and ICT at schools under its umbrella. This consolidation

aimed to enhance efficiency and coordination and ensure the optimal utilization of financial resources, thus maximizing the impact of these interventions on the secondary education landscape.

In April 2018, GOI launched Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan as an integrated centrally sponsored Scheme for school education aimed at guaranteeing inclusive & equitable quality education from preschool to senior secondary classes. This scheme subsumed three existing schemes: SSA, RMSA, and teacher education. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal for Education, the scheme embraced a holistic perspective on school education, viewing it as a seamless journey from preschool to the 12th standard. Its overarching objective was to assist states in effectively implementing the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009.

Its mission was central to ensuring universal access to quality secondary school education. The scheme aimed to achieve this by supporting the establishment of new schools by converting upper primary schools into secondary schools and elevating secondary schools into senior secondary institutions, thereby facilitating the creation of composite schools across states and union territories. Additionally, it sought to bolster existing schools, prioritizing their strengthening before considering the provision of additional sections or upgrading upper primary to secondary and secondary to senior secondary schools

Recognizing the challenges children face in sparsely populated areas, where establishing standalone schools may not be feasible, the scheme pledged to fund residential facilities. These accommodations would cater to both boys and girls, either as hostels integrated within existing secondary and senior secondary schools or as standalone residential schools in areas lacking such educational infrastructure. This initiative aimed to ensure that all children, regardless of geographical location, had access to quality secondary education and the necessary support structures to thrive academically.

According to Financial Year (FY) 2018-19 Revised Estimates (RE), 30,781 crores were allocated for Samagra Shiksha, while in FY 2019-20, Rs. 36,322 crores were allocated to the same. This corresponds to an increase of 18% over combined SSA allocations, RMSA, and TE in 2019-20 compared to the previous FY, i.e., 2018-19. However, in FY 2018-19, across 29 states, 77% of the approved budget was for activities under elementary education, only 21% for secondary education, and merely 2% for teacher education. Moreover, the scheme's

expenditure was low, as in 2018-19, less than two-thirds (63%) of the approved funds were utilized (Government of India, 2019).

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020), approved by the Union Cabinet of India on July 29th, 2020, became the first education policy of the 21st century. It outlined the vision of a new education system to transform India's education system by 2040. The policy envisions an India-centric education system that contributes to transforming the country sustainably into an equitable & vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to its citizens. This policy is a comprehensive framework for elementary education, higher education, and vocational training in rural and urban India. The policy proposed a new pedagogical and curricular structure of 5+3+3+4 for school education, including three years in Anganwadi/preschool and 12 years in school. The mid-day meal scheme was proposed to be extended to include breakfasts, and more focus would be given to students' health, especially mental health, via deploying counselors and social workers.

The policy recommended secondary stage education of grades 9-12 for the age group 14-18 as a multidisciplinary study involving higher critical thinking, flexibility, and student choice of subjects. It was proposed that the board examination be continued at the secondary level. However, these would be designed for holistic development, and a new national assessment center, PARAKH, i.e., Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development, would be established. It was offered that board examinations would have fewer stakes and that students would be permitted to take board examinations twice during any given school year, one main examination and another for improvement, if desired. The exam would consist of two parts: objective and descriptive. It was offered that coding would be introduced from class 6th and experiential learning would be adopted. The policy intends to lessen students' curriculum load and make them more interdisciplinary and multi-lingual. The policy further recommended that students be given increased flexibility and choice of subjects to study, particularly at the secondary level, so that they could design their paths of study and life plans. Holistic development and an extensive choice of subjects & courses year to year were regarded as the distinguishing features of secondary school education. There would be no hard separation among curricular, extracurricular, or co-curricular, among various streams, i.e., arts, humanities, and sciences, or between vocational or academic streams. It was stated, "If a student wants to pursue fashion studies with physics, or if one wants to learn bakery with chemistry, they will be allowed to do so." Further, report cards would be holistic, offering information about the students' skills.

The policy strongly urged the government to increase public ventures in the education sector from the current 4.3% to 6% of GDP (Government of India, 2020).

1.4 Critique

The Mudaliar Commission gave plentiful, realistic, and practical suggestions for reorganizing secondary education and also drew attention to various defects of the existing secondary education system.

It can be easily said that despite a few blemishes in the commission's recommendations, if the suggestions had been implemented honestly and to the fullest extent, secondary school education would have surely attained a better pedestal in terms of quality and quantity. After the Mudaliar Commission, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) was the next standout to make remarkable contributions in the meadow of secondary education. The breakthrough of this commission was the recommendation of a system of 4-year secondary education and hanging up the practice of streaming up to 10th standard. It was interesting to note that ten years after the commission submitted its report, education was positioned in the concurrent list-making States, and the Centre was liable for its development, which altogether shifted the focus of policy context for the development of secondary school education. Another significant progress in secondary education was made by the NPE 1986, which afterward restated the Education Commission's recommendations to execute the 4-year secondary education system in all the states and Union Territories of the country. The commission accentuated unbiased access to secondary education and enrolment of girls, SCs, and STs, predominantly in science, commerce, and vocational streams. The NPE, along with the POA, 1992, identified secondary education as a significant instrument for social change and recognized the need for its planned expansion. The NPE, 1992 explicitly stressed escalating access to secondary education for the students of eligible age groups, laying meticulous focus on girls and SC/ST students' participation. Furthermore, it also emphasized increasing the autonomy of boards of secondary education to boost their ability to improve the quality of secondary education. Other major recommendations were the introduction of ICT in the school curriculum, vocationalization through specific institutions, or re-fashioning secondary school education to fulfill the human resources requirements of the budding Indian economy.

Despite the overt policy emphasis on central support for the expansion and quality enhancement of secondary education, the central government persistently fooled around having a negligible role in the growth and expansion of secondary education. Education continued to be the state's responsibility until 1976, due to which the relative monetary status of the States

fashioned the growth pattern of secondary education; this gave rise to a wide regional variation. The central government's indirect and limited support resulted in the paralyzed growth of secondary education.

There was quite an evident disproportion in the prototype of public expenses within the school education segment in India. The allocation of funds to secondary education in the total planned expenditure on education was highly oppressed, i.e., only around 11% in 2005-06. Even in 2008-09, out of the total planned education budget, a major chunk of approximately 62% went to elementary education; on the contrary, secondary school education was provided with a skimpy portion of just 16% of the education budget (2008-09, BE). The oppression of secondary education in budget allocation continued till the launch of RMSA in April 2009. Still, another matter of worry persists that, over the years, there has been a continuous augmentation in the private expenses of post-compulsory levels of education even if the public subsidy for the same remained almost stagnant. For example, the average annual per capita expenditure on secondary/higher secondary education was Rs. 1,577 in 1995-96 (NSS 52nd round), which increased to Rs. 4,351 in 2007-08 (NSS 64th round).

In 2018, RMSA, too, merged under the Samagra Shiksha program, in which secondary school education has not been given its due allocations. Learning levels had been low across secondary school classes. According to the National Achievement Survey (2018), merely 13% of 10th standard students could correctly answer more than half the questions for mathematics, while only 11% could do the same for science.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been hailed as progressive, aiming to achieve a 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2030 and introducing multidisciplinary and holistic approaches to secondary school education. The emphasis on making secondary education multidisciplinary and holistic by creating a flexible curriculum, designing e-courses in regional languages & adapting to times by advocating for increased use of technology are welcome reforms. The 10+2 structure of school curricula is proposed to replace a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. However, there is no indication in the policy of when it will be implemented.

Secondary education investments are instrumental in cultivating a robust foundation for societal and economic development, yielding substantial returns that are supported by a consensus among researchers (Duraisamy, 2002; Lewin, 2006; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Tilak, 2001; World Bank, 2005, 2009). NEP commits to increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP from the current 4.43%. However, it is uncertain how this increased expenditure would be shared between the central and state governments.

Reception of the NEP should not be uncritical, particularly because not many promises are time-bound. Although the policy has been called visionary, it seems to be exclusionary. The segment of the NEP relaying the information about the implementation of the policy, i.e., "*Part IV: Making It Happen*," comprises only two pages. Nonetheless, those two pages could not explain the policy's implementation. The policy aims to provide financial support to "various critical elements and components of education, such as ensuring universal access, learning resources, nutritional support, matters of student safety and well-being, adequate numbers of teachers and staff, teacher development, and support for all key initiatives towards equitable, high-quality education for underprivileged and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups." Yet, it failed to discuss the course of action for the implementation, how access will be managed and ensured, institutions to be involved, the type of learning resources to be added, the expected financial budget required, and whether this will come out from the 6% of our GDP that the policy claims the government will spend on education. A closer look at its implications for minorities and the nature of education reveals that its proposal to formulate a new National Curriculum Framework for school education may lead to ideological changes in the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

For several decades, it has been squabbled in the literature that secondary education needs to be stretched out both as a retort to amplified social demand and as a feeder cadre for higher education, thereby leaving little to no prominence to its added significant purposes. Furthermore, it is debated that investment in secondary education is crucial for national development as it capitulates substantial social and economic returns (World Bank, 2005, 2009; Tilak, 2001). Despite this, secondary education remained the most neglected segment of school education in many developing countries, including India, till recent years. After a prolonged battle, it is progressively recognized that secondary education holds a critical segment in the education chain and slowly positive reforms are being made in this section of school education. However, while India has made strides in reforming secondary education, significant challenges in implementation, funding, and inclusivity still need to be addressed. The NEP 2020 presents promising reforms, but its success will depend on effective implementation strategies and equitable distribution of resources.

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Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

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