

National Education Policy-2020: Language, Literature And Culture

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Abstract

India is a treasure house of culture, developed over thousands of years and manifested in the form of arts, works of literature, customs, traditions, linguistic expressions, artifacts, heritage sites and more. Ever since human beings have invented scripts, writing has reflected the culture, lifestyle, society and the polity of contemporary society. In the process, each culture evolved its own language and created a huge literary base. This literary base of a civilization tells us about the evolution of each of its languages and culture through the span of centuries. Indian literature, which has its origin to the most ancient times, has been exemplary for the rest of the world. The term, 'Indian literature' refers to the literary work that had been produced in various Indian languages since ages. In ancient times, the literary work used to be imparted orally. The first ever ancient Indian literature was Sanskrit literature comprising of the Rig Veda, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which were written in the first millennium BCE. Kannada and Telugu Literature were developed during the medieval era. They were followed by Marathi, Bengali and Urdu literature. Later, the Indian literature got new dimensions in various other Indian languages like Assamese, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Konkani, Malayali, Manipuri, Marathi, Mizo, Oriya, Punjabi, Rajasthani and Tamil. The literary tradition in India dominates a large part of Indian culture.

Key Words: culture, education, heritage, history, humanity, languages, literature, skill, teaching

Introduction

Culture plays an important role in the development of any nation. It represents a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices. Culture and creativity manifest themselves in almost all economic, social and other activities. A country as diverse as India is symbolized by the plurality of its culture. India has one of the world's largest collections of songs, music, dance, theatre, folk traditions, performing arts, rites and rituals, paintings and writings that are known as the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' of humanity. In order to preserve these elements, the Ministry of Culture, Government of India implements a number of schemes and programmes aimed at providing financial support to individuals, groups and cultural organizations engaged in performing, visual and literary arts.

The promotion of Indian arts and culture is important not only for the nation but also for the individual. Cultural awareness and expression are among the major competencies considered important to develop in children, in order to

provide them with a sense of identity, belongingness, as well as an appreciation of other cultures and identities.

It is through the development of a strong sense and knowledge of their own cultural history, arts, languages and traditions that children can build a positive cultural identity and self-esteem. Thus, cultural awareness and expression are important contributors both to individual as well as societal well-being. Additionally, there has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India, despite various measures being taken. Language-teaching should also be improved to be more experiential; and to focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language and not just on the literature, vocabulary and grammar of the language. Languages must be used more extensively for conversation and for teaching-learning.

National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality

education to all; and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The policy recognizes that the knowledge of the rich diversity of India should be imbibed first hand by learners. This would mean including simple activities like touring by students to different parts of the country, which will not only give a boost to tourism but will also lead to an understanding and appreciation of diversity, culture, traditions and knowledge of different parts of India.

The policy suggests various measures to be taken by the Educational Institutions at different levels in order to bring about awareness among the students, who are the torch-bearers to transmit our rich Indian culture and heritage to the other generations. The present paper discusses in detail various initiatives suggested by the National Education Policy-2020 to promote an awareness of Indian literature, culture and heritage among our students at different stages of education. It is heartening to note that National Education Policy-2020 has not only recognized the glorious past of ancient India in terms of the contribution of our world-class Indian Universities like Nalanda and Takshasila for the noble cause of Indian culture and heritage; but picked up the right elements and incorporated the building blocks into the framing of NEP-2020 both at the School and the University levels.

Indian Culture and Heritage

Several people from across the globe partake in, enjoy and benefit from the cultural prosperity of the country, in the form of visiting India for tourism, experiencing Indian hospitality, purchasing India's handicrafts and handmade textiles, reading the classical literature of India, practicing yoga and meditation, being inspired by Indian philosophy, participating in India's unique festivals, appreciating India's diverse music and art and watching Indian films, amongst many other aspects. It is this cultural and natural wealth that truly makes India, "Incredible India", as per India's tourism slogan. The preservation and promotion of India's cultural wealth must be considered a high priority for the country, as it is truly important for the nation's identity as well as for its economy. The National Education Policy-2020 envisages that the students at different levels of education should be made aware of the cultural heritage of the country in order to make them feel proud of being Indians. This is mentioned in the policy document and is addressed through the following:

"All curriculum and pedagogy, from the foundational stage onwards, will be redesigned to be strongly rooted in the Indian and local context

and ethos in terms of culture, traditions, heritage, customs, language, philosophy, geography, ancient and contemporary knowledge, societal and scientific needs, indigenous and traditional ways of learning etc. – in order to ensure that education is maximally relatable, relevant, interesting and effective for our students. Stories, arts, games, sports, examples, problems, etc. will be chosen as much as possible to be rooted in the Indian and local geographic context. Ideas, abstractions, and creativity will indeed best flourish when learning is thus rooted."

The promotion of Indian arts and culture is important not only for the nation but also for the individual. Cultural awareness and expression are among the major competencies to be developed in children in order to provide them with a sense of identity, belongingness as well as a feeling of appreciation for people of other identities and culture.

It is through the development of a strong sense and knowledge of their own cultural history, arts, languages and traditions that children can build a positive cultural identity and self-esteem. Thus, cultural awareness and expression are important contributors for the development of an individual and also for the well-being of the society.

Indian Languages and Arts

The arts form a major medium for imparting culture among the students. The arts, besides strengthening cultural identity, awareness and uplifting societies, are well known to enhance cognitive and creative abilities in individuals and increase individual happiness. The happiness and well-being, cognitive development and cultural identity of individuals are important reasons that Indian arts of all kinds must be offered to students at all levels of education, starting with the early childhood care and education.

The issue of language, both as a medium of instruction, as well as an independent discipline has been dealt with in great detail both at school and higher education level in the new policy. Language, of course, is intrinsically linked to art and culture. Different languages see the world differently; and the structure of a language, therefore, determines a native speaker's perception of experience. In particular, languages influence the way people of a given culture speak with others, including the family members, authority, peers and strangers; and influence the tone of conversation. Art, in the form of literature, plays, music, film, etc. cannot be fully appreciated without language. In order to preserve and promote culture, one must preserve and promote a culture's languages.

Unfortunately, Indian languages have not received their due attention and care, with the country losing over 220 languages in the last 50 years alone. Various unscripted languages are in danger of becoming extinct. When senior member(s) of a tribe or community that speak such languages pass away, these languages often perish with them; and no measures are taken to preserve or record these rich languages/expressions of culture.

It is the need of the hour to integrate teaching and learning of Indian languages with school and higher education at every level. For languages to remain relevant and vibrant in the system of education, it is necessary to provide a steady stream of high-quality learning and print materials in these languages including textbooks, workbooks, videos, plays, poems, novels, magazines etc. Languages should also have consistent official updates to their vocabulary and diction, widely disseminated, so that the most current issues and concepts can effectively be discussed in these languages. Enabling such learning materials, print materials and translations of important materials from world languages are carried out by countries around the world for languages such as English, French, German, Hebrew, Korean and Japanese. However, India has remained quite slow in producing such learning and print materials to help keeping its languages optimally vibrant and current with integrity. Further, there has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India, despite various measures being taken. Language teaching should also be improved to be more experiential and to focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language, but not simply on the literature, vocabulary and grammar of the language. It should be remembered that languages should be used more extensively for conversation and for teaching-learning.

Action Plan to integrate languages, arts and culture in education

The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 suggests a number of initiatives to foster languages, arts and culture among school children. These initiatives include a greater emphasis on music, arts and crafts throughout school education; early implementation of the three-language formula to promote multilingualism; teaching in the home/local language wherever possible; conducting more experiential language learning; the hiring of outstanding local artists, writers, craftsmen and other experts as master instructors in various subjects of local expertise; accurate inclusion of traditional Indian knowledge including tribal and other local knowledge

throughout into the curriculum, across humanities, sciences, arts, crafts and sports, whenever relevant; and a much greater flexibility in the curriculum, especially in secondary schools and in higher education, so that students can choose the ideal balance among courses for themselves to develop their own creative, artistic, cultural and academic paths.

The National Education Policy-2020 recognizes that the knowledge of the rich diversity of India should be imbibed first hand by learners. This would mean including simple activities like touring by students to different parts of the country, which will not only give a boost to tourism but will also lead to an understanding and appreciation of diversity, culture, traditions and knowledge of different parts of India. To meet this goal, under the mission, '*Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat*', it is suggested to identify 100 tourist destinations in the country, where educational institutions will send their students to study these places and their history, scientific contributions, traditions, indigenous literature and knowledge etc., as a part of augmenting their knowledge about these areas. The policy also suggested that India should urgently expand its translation and interpretation efforts in order to make high-quality learning materials and other important written and spoken material available to the public in various Indian and foreign languages. For this, an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (ITI) should be established. Such an institute would provide a truly important service for the country, as well as employ numerous multilingual language and subject experts, and experts in translation and interpretation, which will help to promote all Indian languages. The ITIs shall also make extensive use of technology to aid in its translation and interpretation efforts. The ITIs could naturally grow with time; and be housed in multiple locations including in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to facilitate collaborations with other research departments.

The NEP-2020 suggested that all languages in India including their associated arts and culture should be documented through a web-based platform/portal/wiki in order to preserve all Indian languages and their associated rich local arts and culture. The platform should contain videos, dictionaries, recordings and more, of people (especially elders) speaking the language, telling stories, reciting poetry, and performing plays, folk songs and dances; and more. People from across the country should be invited to contribute to these efforts by adding relevant material onto these platforms/portals/wikis. The Universities and other Higher Education Institutes together with

their research teams should work hand-in-hand and with communities across the country towards enriching such platforms. It is recommended that these preservation efforts and the associated research projects in history, archaeology, linguistics, etc., should be funded by the National Research Forum (NRF). The Policy also recommends for the establishment of Scholarships for people of all ages to study Indian Languages, Arts and Culture with local masters and/or within the higher education system.

The promotion of Indian languages is possible only if they are used regularly and used for teaching and learning. Incentives, such as prizes for outstanding poetry and prose in Indian languages across categories, should be established to ensure vibrant poetry, novels, non-fiction books, textbooks, journalism and other works in all Indian languages. Proficiency in Indian languages should be considered as a part of qualification parameters for employment opportunities.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of any Policy depends on its implementation. Therefore, the implementation of NEP-2020 should be led by various bodies including MHRD, CAGE, Union and State Governments, education-related Ministries, State Departments of Education, Boards, NTA, the regulatory bodies of school and higher education, NCERT, SCERTs, schools and HEIs including all the stakeholders in order to ensure that the policy is implemented in its true spirit and intent, through coherence in planning and synergy across all these bodies involved in education. Further, the curriculum at all levels in school education should be reframed in such a manner that it should reflect on the issues and concerns relating to the Indian languages, literature and culture; and there should be provision for the students to take advantage of experiencing the rich flavor of Indian culture. The efforts put forth by the policy makers will be fruitful only when the Policy is implemented in different states of the country successfully.

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