NEP 2020 : REDEFINING LIS EDUCATION

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Introduction :

Education has always been regarded as the backbone of national progress and social transformation. A strong and inclusive education system nurtures responsible citizens, empowers individuals to achieve their potential, and contributes to economic growth, innovation, and cultural preservation. Recognizing this, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the first comprehensive education reform of the 21st century.

The policy, framed after extensive consultations and analysis, replaced the 1986 National Policy on Education, which had been guiding Indian education for more than three decades. NEP 2020 addresses modern challenges and opportunities in education, ranging from early childhood learning to higher education, vocational training, and lifelong learning.

Although libraries are not the central theme of the policy, the NEP 2020 explicitly and implicitly underscores the importance of libraries and information centres as vital enablers of quality education. Libraries, whether in schools, colleges, universities, or communities, act as knowledge hubs. They provide access to books, digital resources, research tools, and collaborative spaces that empower learners of all ages. More importantly, they nurture a culture of reading, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation — qualities essential to building India as a knowledge society.

This paper seeks to explore the role of libraries in the NEP 2020 and examine perspectives for its effective implementation. It draws upon policy documents, earlier education reforms, international best practices, and case studies to highlight how libraries can become catalysts in realizing the ambitious goals of the new education framework.

Historical Background of Education Policies in India :

Understanding NEP 2020 requires a brief review of India's earlier national education policies, which laid the foundation for contemporary reforms.

1. The First Education Policy (1968) :

The first National Education Policy was formulated in 1968, based on therecommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964–66). Its vision was to promote nationalintegration, social cohesion, and modernization through education. The policy highlighted :

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- Compulsory education for children up to the age of 14.
- Equal opportunities for all, regardless of caste, gender, or socio-economic status.
- Promotion of regional languages alongside Hindi and English.
- Adoption of the 10+2+3 system.
- Improvement in teacher training and expansion of educational infrastructure.

While the policy was progressive for its time, it faced implementation challenges, particularly due to inadequate resources and poor monitoring mechanisms.

2. The Second Education Policy (1986, Revised 1992) :

The 1986 policy, introduced by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, placed greater emphasis on equity and access, especially for women, marginalized groups, and rural communities. Key initiatives included :

- Establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs).
- Expansion of open universities and distance learning.
- Encouragement of non-formal education and adult literacy programmes.
- Strengthening of institutions of national importance.

In 1992, the policy was revised under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to adapt to socio-economic changes. It emphasized :

- Entrance examinations for professional education.
- Integration of vocational education.
- Broader access to secondary and higher education.
  Despite its strengths, the policy struggled to keep pace with globalization, technological advancements, and India's growing demographic needs.

3.   The National Education Policy 2020 :

After 34 years, the NEP 2020 emerged as a holistic and futuristic reform. It seeks to transform the education system into one that promotes flexibility, interdisciplinarity, inclusion, innovation, and lifelong learning. Notably, it aims for :

- 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030.
- Reintegrating over 20 million out-of-school children.
- Replacing the 10+2 system with a 5+3+3+4 structure aligned with stages of cognitive development.
- Emphasizing multilingualism, digital learning, and experiential pedagogy.
- Establishing a National Assessment Centre – PARAKH for standardized learning outcomes.

Within this broad framework, libraries emerge as silent but crucial partners in achieving the NEP's objectives.

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Vision of NEP 2020 and the Place of Libraries
The overarching vision of NEP 2020 is :

"To develop an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower."

To realize this vision, libraries play multiple roles :

1. **Equal Access to Knowledge :** By offering books and digital resources to learners from diverse backgrounds, libraries democratize access to knowledge.

2. **Support for Multilingualism :** Libraries can provide materials in Indian languages alongside English, thus strengthening cultural identity.

3. **Reading and Research Culture :** By fostering curiosity, independent thinking, and creativity, libraries align with NEP's emphasis on critical learning rather than rote memorization.

4. **Lifelong Learning :** Libraries extend beyond formal education, enabling adults, professionals, and senior citizens to engage in continuous learning.

5. **Technology and Digital Literacy :** With e-resources, digital repositories, and online learning platforms, libraries bridge the gap between traditional learning and modern digital needs.

Explicit Provisions for Libraries in NEP 2020 :

While NEP 2020 does not dedicate a separate chapter to libraries, it integrates them within various sections. Some key references include :

Section 2.8 : Expansion of public and school libraries; availability of high-quality books in Indian languages; community use of libraries; establishment of book clubs.
Section 5.9 : Infrastructure development in schools, including libraries.

Sections 6.11 & 6.15 : Provision of Braille, large print, and assistive technology for learners with disabilities; strengthening of libraries and laboratories.

Section 7.5 : Strengthening of school complexes with adequate library facilities.
Sections 21.6 & 21.9 : Use of public libraries for adult education; ensuring accessibility and affordability of books in rural and disadvantaged areas; expansion of digital libraries; adequate staffing of libraries.

Section 22.6 : Continuous production of quality learning materials — textbooks, storybooks, plays, poems, magazines — in all 22 official languages.

These provisions reflect that libraries are not peripheral, but rather structural pillars supporting the NEP.

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Implementation Perspectives : Role of Libraries at Different Levels :

1. Libraries in Schools :

- Providing age-appropriate storybooks, picture books, and reference materials.
- Promoting reading culture through book clubs, storytelling sessions, and competitions.
- Sharing digital resources among schools in rural clusters. Training school librarians to guide children in digital literacy.

2. Libraries in Higher Education Institutions :

- Supporting research and innovation through access to journals, databases, and repositories.
- Embedding librarianship in curriculum design and research guidance.
- Facilitating interdisciplinary projects by providing cross-domain resources.
- Collaborating with national digital initiatives like the National Digital Library of India (NDLI).

3. Public and Community Libraries :

- Acting as centres for adult literacy, vocational training, and lifelong learning.
- Extending services beyond book lending, such as internet access, e-learning workshops, and career guidance.
- Serving as safe community spaces that encourage social interaction and inclusivity.

Libraries in the Digital Era :

The digital revolution has transformed how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed. NEP 2020 aligns with this reality, and libraries must embrace technology to remain relevant.

Key aspects include :

E-books and E-journals: Expanding digital collections to reach remote learners. Digital Repositories: Contributing to platforms such as NDLI, Shodhganga, and e-ShodhSindhu.

Open Educational Resources (OER): Promoting free and accessible learning materials.

Embedded Librarianship: Librarians actively collaborating with faculty in designing courses and guiding research.

Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics: Using smart tools for cataloguing, personalized recommendations, and user analytics.

Challenges in Implementing Library Provisions :

While the policy's vision is commendable, practical challenges exist:

1. **Funding Gaps :** Many schools and colleges lack resources for modern libraries.

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2. **Infrastructure Limitations :** Rural and semi-urban areas often face poor connectivity and inadequate facilities.

3. **Shortage of Trained Librarians :** Professional development opportunities for librarians remain limited.

4. **Digital Divide :** Not all students have access to devices or the internet.

5. **Policy Awareness :** Administrators and educators may underestimate the importance of libraries in implementing NEP goals.

Global Comparisons and Lessons for India :

International experiences offer valuable insights:

Finland : Strong integration of school libraries with pedagogy has contributed to its high educational rankings.

Singapore : National libraries promote lifelong learning through community programmes.

United States : Academic libraries play a proactive role in research, innovation, and student engagement.

India can adopt similar strategies, tailoring them to its multilingual and diverse socio-economic context.

Case Studies and Best Practices :

1. **Bhilar – Village of Books (Maharashtra) :** India's first book village, where houses serve as libraries for visitors. This model could inspire community-led reading initiatives.

2. **Delhi Public Library** : Offers not only lending services but also digital access, mobile libraries, and community programmes.

3. **Kerala State Library Council :** Promotes digital inclusion and has pioneered public library networks.

Future Directions and Recommendations :

1. **National Library Network :** Establish a centralized digital network connecting all libraries.

2. **Library Grants :** Ensure regular financial support under schemes like Samagra Shiksha.

3. **Capacity Building :** Continuous training programmes for librarians on digital tools and pedagogy.

4. **Inclusive Access :** More resources for differently-abled learners through accessible

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formats.

5. **Public-Private Partnerships :** Collaborate with publishers, tech companies, and NGOs for resource sharing.

6. **Community Engagement :** Expand the role of libraries as social learning hubs beyond academics.

Conclusion :

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions India as a global knowledge superpower. Libraries, though not given a separate chapter, are deeply embedded in this vision. They serve as bridges between policy and practice, tradition and modernity, individual growth and national development.

If implemented effectively, with adequate funding, innovation, and collaboration, libraries can transform education from rote memorization to meaningful, lifelong learning. They are not merely repositories of books but dynamic learning ecosystems that will play a decisive role in shaping India's educational and cultural future.

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