

Chennai Declaration on 5 Years of NEP

National Education Assembly

27-28 December 2025

(revised Draft)

1. In the fifth year of implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP), which was unilaterally announced by the Union Government without democratic discussion or approval of Parliament, the NEP is being vigorously implemented across the country adopting multiple strategies in different States.
2. In the years since NEP was rolled out, stakeholders such as school and university/ college teachers and their associations, student organizations, educationists, non-teaching staff, civil society organizations and different State Governments and political parties have all voiced serious concerns about different aspects of NEP. The All India Peoples Science Network (AIPSN) and Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) had organized a National Convention of stakeholders in New Delhi in 2023 which, based on wide consultations, had recorded these concerns and raised related demands. AIPSN/BGVS felt it was now time to assess the implementation of NEP and its impacts. Towards that end, AIPSN/BGVS has conducted extensive studies and surveys in different parts of the country, and convened this National Education Assembly in Chennai where Delegates from 17 States/UTs have gathered with reports and studies.
3. This Assembly affirms that lived experience and evidence from across the nation confirm our gravest apprehensions, namely that NEP 2020 is:
 - systematically dismantling India's public education system;
 - centralizing control by the Union Government over-riding constitutional powers of States;
 - eroding access to quality affordable education and deepening inequalities;
 - commercializing knowledge; and
 - imposing a majoritarian ideological agenda while suppressing cultural and knowledge traditions of diverse religious, linguistic, ethnic, regional and tribal or other communities.

School Education

4. India has become the most populous country in the world and is expecting a youth dividend. India needs a modern, equitable, publicly-funded and run education system ensuring universal literacy and providing universal and free quality school education, equitable early childhood care and continuing education, vocational education and higher education. Only this will enable the country and broad sections of the population to participate effectively in, and benefit from, the global economy in the knowledge era.
5. However, NEP has become a blueprint for withdrawal of the State from public education at all levels, and for privatization and commercialization of education, leading to exclusion and reduced access of poor and marginalized sections of the people to increasingly expensive education.
6. Large-scale closures and mergers of schools have taken place under NEP. Official data show a decline of 25.6 million children in publicly funded common schools during the past 5 years, while children in private schools have increased by 3.252 million, clearly revealing widening inequality. 87,430 common schools, including 81,221 government schools, have been closed between 2017- 18 and 2024-25, while private

schools have increased by 13,355. School drop-out rates also remain high, with children being pushed out of schooling due to poor access and facilities. Public expenditure on education, already languishing at less than 3 percent of GDP, is much lower than in comparable developing countries and emerging economies. Further shrinking of State responsibilities and expenditure under NEP is condemnable.

7. Under NEP, many government schools have been privatized outright, handed over to private management or converted to other public-private institutional models, all having higher fees than before, further impacting access and exacerbating inequity. All the above measures undermine the hard-won gains under the Right to Education (RtE) Act.
8. NCERT school textbooks have been made a means of propaganda by the ruling dispensation for its sectarian brand of cultural nationalism with an exclusionary Vedic-Sanskritic Hindu tradition at its core, conditioning impressionable minds of children with this blinkered perspective which ignores or neglects all other cultures and linguistic, regional traditions. The NCERT textbooks also selectively erase or distort large parts medieval Indian history in which Muslim rulers played major roles, and also distort the history of the Independence movement. AIPSN/BGVS is dismayed that the NCERT textbooks have dropped textbook chapters or sections on Darwin, genetics, the periodic table, and even subjects such as the environment and India's natural and mineral resources, undermining science, a scientific outlook and critical thinking among school children.
9. Lakhs of teacher vacancies continue to plague the system, with little teacher recruitment. Starved of funds from the Centre, States are appointing temporary teachers with meager wages and poor service conditions. NEP encourages such harmful practices, further hampering public education.
10. NEP gives the State an alibi for its abdication of responsibility for formal education by promoting distance, on-line, informal, and home/volunteer-based education especially in school years. Well documented experience during the Covid pandemic shows that learning declines sharply, exacerbated by the digital divide. Children from low-income families with no or insufficient smart phones, and those living in rural or other areas with poor connectivity, suffer the most.

Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE)

11. Field level studies have revealed a grave distortion of the pre-school system. Internationally recognized best practices in ECCE emphasize nutritional, cognitive and developmental support for the growing child through care and play. Under NEP, ECCE is instead being erroneously structured towards preparing children for school and integrating ECCE into the school system, whose staff is already over-burdened with many extra-curricular responsibilities. Neighbourhood Anganwadis are the logical and preferred locations for ECCE since they already look after infants, nutrition, and mother-and-child care, with the much lauded Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The shift of ECCE towards schools with co-located Anganwadis and/or "Balvatikas" under NEP opens the door for neglect or dismantling of the neighbourhood Anganwadi system, gives additional tasks to Anganwadi Workers without adequate remuneration and professional upgradation. This also legitimizes the growing commercialized private pre-school institutions. The Samagra Shiksha scheme of NEP is being used by the Union Government to snatch the autonomy of states and impose its will by strangling fund flows.

Literacy and Continuing Education

12. Despite all the earlier effort in the Total Literacy Programme in the 1990s, in which AIPSN/BGVS played a major role, but which was then allowed to drift, India continues to battle substantial illiteracy, with an estimated 340 million non-literate persons. Under the life-long learning programme (ULLAS) of NEP, a purely voluntary on-line Literacy programme is being implemented with both learners and instructors enrolling themselves via an App, with all the pitfalls of on-line education noted above. Against a target of making 50 million people literate in 5 years, only around 6.6 million have been made neo-literate even according to official figures, exposing the total failure of the programme, especially in the context of poor school enrolment and high drop-out rates.
13. Experience of the Total Literacy Programme led by the Peoples Science Movement based on the Ernakulam (Kerala) model clearly showed the potential for success of a mass movement approach rooted in the community with motivated local volunteers galvanized through a multi-dimensional campaign. AIPSN, including BGVS, reiterates its belief, and the need for, such a mass movement.
14. Many constituent organizations of the AIPSN, including BGVS, in different States continue to run community-based Literacy Programmes. AIPSN is also currently running Community Learning Centres in over 2500 Villages/Panchayats/ Localities where motivated local volunteers help create a wide-ranging learning environment for school and out-of-school children and neo-literate adults in community-driven facilities and programmes. AIPSN/BGVS hopes to gradually build these into Citizens' Learning Centres and a mass movement. This Assembly re-dedicates AIPSN/ BGVS to this programme.

Higher Education

15. Implementation of NEP at all levels has been characterized by authoritarian centralization, violating Constitutional arrangements in which Education is in the Concurrent List. Autonomy and role of the States has been usurped by the Union Government through instruments like multiple examinations at different stages of school education under centralized Assessment Standards, curricular frameworks, the National Testing Agency (NTA), the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), and the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), over-riding state boards, universities and other bodies, thus undermining region-specific diversity and social justice, and promoting an expensive and exclusionary coaching industry. NEP and its various measures are being imposed on States through control over central grants, for example in school education through the Samagra Shiksha and PM SHRI schemes, and other coercive methods.
16. In Higher Education, the role of Governors as Chancellors has been weaponized to by-pass elected state governments, and to impose unilateral decisions on appointments, curricula and university governance.
17. This centralization is being further cemented through a new body called the "Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan" (VBSA), a renamed version of the earlier-conceived Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). VBSA will replace the UGC, AICTE and Teachers Education body and bring their functions under a single-window, along with three Councils for regulation, standards and accreditation. All grant giving powers are being brought directly under the Union Education Ministry, removing any vestiges of autonomy in regulating education. This extreme centralization will have serious negative impact on

autonomy of higher education institutions, academic freedom and institutional flexibility required in modern education.

18. Commercialization and privatization have accelerated dramatically under NEP. The policy has actively promoted the entry of private and foreign higher educational institutions (HEI), which operate with full autonomy as regards fees and admissions, with no obligations for reservations and social justice. Public universities and colleges are being starved of funds and pushed towards loan-based financing and self-generation of funds, forcing them to introduce high-fee short-term courses of uncertain value. The push for all colleges to become "autonomous," and the creation of "cluster universities," are steps towards full corporatization in which education is commoditized, governance is by corporate-style boards, the academic community is sidelined, and higher education will become a privilege of well-off sections, excluding the poor, marginalized, rural and the first-generation learners.
19. The academic heart of education is being destroyed by hastily implemented and untested courses. The four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP) with multiple entry and exit points, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), and the relentless promotion of online and blended learning through platforms like SWAYAM, have all fragmented knowledge and degraded learning outcomes. Students have been treated as guinea pigs, and left with weak core competencies, unrecognized certifications, and diminished career prospects. The expansion of multi-disciplinary education without solid grounding in core subjects or necessary infrastructure and faculty, as well as the imposition of an Outcome-Based Curriculum Framework (OBCF) dominated by so-called "Indian Knowledge Systems" (IKS), are diluting planned, well-structured education and critical thinking.
20. IKS is being aggressively pushed as a vehicle for indoctrination, promoting a regressive, culturally monolithic view of history and knowledge that negates India's pluralistic heritage. The IKS is portrayed almost exclusively as represented by the Vedic-Brahminic-Sanskritic traditions, ignoring or marginalizing all other religio-philosophical traditions under the broad Hindu umbrella, not to mention the Buddhist, Jaina, Islamic and other heterodox traditions, artisanal techniques and knowledge, as well as contributions through cultural exchanges with other civilizations. This propaganda in the name of IKS is not restricted to the compulsory or other courses, but also to recommended books, teacher training and research programmes which are required to be pursued by all HEIs. IKS curricula in this format must be resisted and reversed, including through alternative familiarization courses related to the rich multi-cultural religio-philosophical, epistemological and diverse technical heritage of the Indian sub-continent.
21. The attack on academic freedom and campus democracy continues relentlessly. Students and teachers unions are stifled and dissent is curbed. Hindutva ideological control and patronage through appointments of Vice-Chancellors, university bodies, and faculty is rampant. The introduction of Professors of Practice without safeguards opens the door for favouritism and packing of HEI with corporate and ideological cronies.
22. Research autonomy and States' roles are being crushed through the centralised Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), which inexplicably relies on historically unavailable corporate funding and drastically reduces public funding, while fellowships for researchers from SC/ST, minorities and other

marginalized sections are curtailed. R&D expenditure in India, at 0.7% of GDP, is badly lagging other emerging economies even during this knowledge era, needs to be stepped up to at least 2% of GDP.

23. This National Education Assembly categorically re-emphasizes its rejection of NEP 2020 and its five-year record of devastation of the higher education system. The Assembly calls for the following:

- free, quality, public education for all, from childhood to higher learning, that empowers citizens for a modern, diverse, and self-reliant India
- halt and reverse the privatization and commercialization of education, the restoration of full public funding of education to at least 6% of GDP
- keeping on-line education in an appropriate place in the education system, specifically for correspondence courses but otherwise as a supplement to but not a substitute for classroom teaching-learning
- scrapping the centralizing NEP 2020, CUET, NEET, ABC , ANRF, LOCF and the VBSA Bill, and protecting the rights of States
- scrap FYUP as it currently stands and re-imagine entry- and exit-points for continuing education
- re-writing of NCERT textbooks by independent eminent scholars and educationists
- re-imagining “Indian Knowledge Systems” in a way that understands knowledge creation, growth and limitations in diverse cultures and religio-philosophical traditions of India through a historical and critical assessment, building on the considerable existing such body of work in India and abroad
- increasing teacher recruitment and addressing the additional burden imposed on teachers by curricular changes in both school and higher education; re-thinking teacher training with specific provisions for different age-groups
- locating ECCE in the Anganwadi system with additional facilities, training and remuneration
- reinvigorate community-based Literacy programmes through a mass campaign mode and local volunteers
- overhaul regulation of higher education and research funding mechanisms with greater role for States, and re-conceptualization of ANRF, VBSA and relevant institutions under NEP
- build and intensify a nationwide movement for an alternative, pro-people education policy structured on the principles of equity, social justice, scientific temper and democratic federalism
- promote solidarity with students, teachers, non-teaching staff, Anganwadi workers, parents, civil society organizations and state governments to resist NEP and towards an equitable alternative