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Repositioning Sanskrit in Indian Education: An Analysis of NEP 2020 Reforms and Challenges

Nandika Das

Research scholar, Dept. of Sanskrit, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

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Abstract

The New National Education Policy of India marks the beginning of a new era for India's approach to revive and cultivate the treasure of knowledge rooted in the classical Indian languages, with particular emphasis on Sanskrit. For decades, the language has been marginalised because of traditional and rigid teaching methods, unavailability of materials and teachers, and very limited interdisciplinary exposure.

This paper explores how NEP 2020 addresses these long-standing barriers. The policy places Sanskrit within the three-language formula, encourages its use as a medium of instruction, and emphasizes the need for stronger research and innovation. It also calls for single-stream Sanskrit universities to evolve into multidisciplinary institutions, signaling a broader vision for the language's place in modern higher education. The paper highlights the potential challenges such as teacher shortages, limited resources, and attitudinal resistance that may slow down the reforms. The study concludes that while NEP 2020 provides a promising framework, its success will depend on effective implementation and on presenting Sanskrit as both a cultural heritage and a relevant field of study in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP), Sanskrit, Interdisciplinary Universities, Policy Implementation.

Introduction:

Language is an integral factor in shaping a nation's cultural identity, academic outcomes, and societal cohesion. India is home to a total of 22 official languages, and over 19,500 dialects or mother tongue according to the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Hence, promoting, and nurturing multilingualism in our education system from an early stage is not only necessary but can also prove to be beneficial for the student's holistic development. As we speak about languages in India, we cannot help but emphasise on the importance of teaching, learning, and cultivating the core classical languages of India, like Sanskrit, Prakrit etc. Very few people speak or write these languages, yet most of our significant historic and religious texts are present in these languages. Our history, our ancient knowledge, our traditions, infrastructure all of it was documented in these classical languages. A deep dive into these languages will make us more aware of our heritage. Giving proper attention and infrastructure to preserve and promote these languages is essential for our cultural development. Sanskrit is one of the ancient languages which is

not only rich in culture, but is a treasure house for scientific and medical knowledge. Indian knowledge system is a direct reflection of the ancient Sanskrit literature. The western countries like Germany and Russia have taken noticeable interest in learning, deciphering and cultivating Sanskrit. Yet we have not been able to include Sanskrit in our mainstream education and research because of various societal prejudice, lack of administrative support and awareness. To change this narrative, the Government of India has brought the New Education Policy of India (NEP 2020) after 34 years, proposing radical changes in our educational framework. One of the main goals of the new policy is to promote multilingualism and to revive and integrate classical languages. The policy has proposed a number of reforms to bring Sanskrit in the limelight and make the new generation of our nation more intrigued in taking Sanskrit in all stages of their education.

The status of Sanskrit in Indian education system before NEP

Sanskrit is regarded as the language of Gods. It is arguably one of the earliest languages in the world. There are thousands of texts available in Sanskrit from the ancient times on all domains, such as Mathematics, Astronomy, Astrology, Medical sciences, Ayurveda, Mindfulness, Philosophy etc. Valuable scriptures on Hindu and Buddhist religion are also available in Sanskrit. Despite being an inherent part of the ancient Indian knowledge depository, its academic presence has diminished over time. Even though Sanskrit has been available to students in most states, it hasn't exactly been prospering in India as much as it has in other European countries in the recent decade.

Key reasons behind the decline of Sanskrit in the Modern Education System:

- Traditional teaching methods focused heavily on memorization and grammar, with little effort to connect Sanskrit with modern life or inter disciplinary fields.¹ For students in preparatory or secondary classes it is especially hard to head right in critical grammar and technical studies. Hence, fewer students choose Sanskrit in the early stages.
- Even though the Sanskrit depository is filled with valuable and impactful literature, texts which can help in the cognitive, social and moral development of the students, very few comprehensive learning materials are available in the market. 'Absence of modern textbooks, digital tools, or creative content made the subject less competitive compared to other languages.'²
- Sanskrit has always remained as an ancient Indian language, which is scoring but not as much of a professionally intriguing subject. We as a society and the education system have not been successful in making Sanskrit more relevant with the global trends of the current decade. Hence, lesser youths are choosing Sanskrit for their higher education, and the ones who are studying Sanskrit are having a hard time fitting into the recent employment demands.
- Because of the lack of career relevance of Sanskrit as a lone linguistic subject, there are not many qualified educators available. "There was a significant gap in trained and motivated Sanskrit teachers, especially in government and rural schools, affecting learning outcomes and student interest"³. Schools often give less importance to Sanskrit as it is an optional subject and focus more on recruiting educators of the mainstream subjects.
- Even though there are a handful of Sanskrit universities in our country it is not getting the recognition that it needs. The universities are aimed to promote and

preserve the language but they are rigid in their traditional ways and have not upgraded their methods of teaching or research possibilities to cater to the modern trends. "This narrow focus has led to limited career prospects for graduates, who often find employment in teaching or priestly roles, thereby discouraging wider student enrolment".⁴

Policy Interventions for the future of Sanskrit:

After 34 years the government has introduced a new set of policies for educational reforms and growth in 2020. Several tweaks have been made to benefit the Indian classical languages, especially Sanskrit. Keeping in mind the growing discordance between Sanskrit and the modern educational requirements, The New Education policy has made some significant reforms to change the narrative for Sanskrit. It has proposed to re-evaluate and rectify the sore points for decline of the subject. For decades Sanskrit has been the optional subject for students in the school level and secondary level, but the new policy aims to emphasise on the importance of knowing our classical languages.

Reforms in School Education:

To resolve the issues, we need to start from the very root, school education is where students get the exposure to new knowledge, subjects and streams of study. It is crucial to introduce new subjects in a more pedagogical and comprehensive way to get their attention. The policy clearly states that "Sanskrit will be offered at all level of schools and higher education as one of the important modern and classical languages of India" (Ministry of education, 2020, p. 14). Under the Three Language Formula introduced by the new policy, students will have to show proficiency in three languages of their choice. The third language is encouraged to be any of the Indian classical languages in order to preserve them. This move can significantly help in promoting the subject if taught in a student centric way that is easy to comprehend. The policy highlights that Sanskrit despite being an ancient classical language can still be a living and viable language. The policy also states the lack of well-structured materials and calls for the creation of "simple yet comprehensive materials, including digital resources, translations, and innovative pedagogy" (MoE, p. 15). This directly tries to solve one of the major hurdles in preserving the Language.

The Three Language Policy under Nep 2020:

The New Education policy has introduced The Three Language Policy that serves as a linchpin for promoting linguistic equity and cultural integration in the education sector. "According to this policy students will learn three languages at the school level, two of them must be native to India (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 14)".⁵ The first language can preferably be the mother tongue of the student or the regional language. The second language can be the official or associate language of the Union, which are mostly Hindi and English. And then the third language can be any classical or modern Indian language. Students can also choose any foreign language after reaching a certain standard. The implementation is to be guided by constitutional provisions and local community preferences, ensuring that no language is imposed on any region (MoE, 2020). This policy offers flexibility to states and schools in choosing the three languages while encouraging the use of Sanskrit as one of the options describing it as a 'rich, classical language of great heritage' (MoE, 2020, p.14).⁶ The New Education Policy has made a point to make Sanskrit

and other classical Indian languages more comprehensible and relevant by presenting them in both school and higher education with a more modern and experimental approach.

Reforms in Higher Education And Research

The New Policy also prioritised turning the Sanskrit Universities into multidisciplinary institutes, which will help to make Sanskrit more accessible and approachable to people who want to learn and contribute to the language. Combining or comparing it with other closely related main-stream subjects will increase its relevance and also attract more students. It is really important loosen our strings a little so that others can see Sanskrit as more than a traditional scholastic language, and get to know about the rich history, and the gems of ancient Indian literature. This change will create more opportunities for students with specialised Sanskrit Universities becoming multidisciplinary we will get to connect the dots of how a lot of key modern topics or developments in any mainstream subject has its roots long sown in the ancient knowledge of Indian literature which are not widely studied because the texts are written in Sanskrit. Here, the importance of relevant and futuristic research becomes crucial.

The policy highlights the importance of revitalizing Sanskrit research. It aims to promote more research related to “Translation, interpretation, and comparative study of Indian and foreign languages and texts” (MoE, 2020, p. 45). This might induce young Sanskrit scholars to pursue their research in more contemporary fields, such as comparative research between Sanskrit and other western or Indian languages, or do translations and critical interpretations of ancient Sanskrit texts. For decades research niche for Sanskrit has been too specialised and text centric. There is a need for more progressive and inter-disciplinary research in Sanskrit, which are backed by the suggestions of the new policy which is to make Sanskrit more relevant and modernised.

Challenges in the Implementation Of Nep 2020 For Sanskrit:

The policy is highly ambitious and if implemented properly will bring commendable development in the education sector of our country. But the reforms will not come without challenges, specifically for Sanskrit. Decades long structures will not move so swiftly to make room for the subject which does not have a high enrolment. These challenges grow from systematic gaps, structural dysfunction, and contemporary educational demands, which can slow down the implementation. There are a number of reasons which are and will be hurdles on the road to make Sanskrit more accessible to students.

1. Shortage of Trained Teachers

To start with the school level implementation of the policy, Sanskrit has to be offered as one of the Three Languages, as a classical Indian language. But for that there are not enough qualified teachers available across schools. In order to introduce a new language to young students we need enthusiastic teachers properly equipped with pedagogical training, teachers who will be able to teach the ancient language in a way that sparks interest in the young minds, the lessons will need to be more student centric. Adequate teacher training is non-negotiable to better set the tone for the new policy. The Central Sanskrit Universities have not been able to supply adequate teachers due to limited intake and traditional training models (Sanskrit Commission Report, 1957).

2. Balancing Sanskrit with Regional and Global Languages

NEP promotes Sanskrit as a “vibrant option” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 37) for the students to excel in school under the three-language formula. But implementing this alongside other regional languages is a tricky job. Parents prefer English for career prospects, while regional languages rule daily communication. There have been several studies on this, and it has been noted that students perceive Sanskrit as less practical compared to English or Hindi (Sathe, 2018). This discordance can slow down the uptake of Sanskrit. The administration and the faculty need to present Sanskrit in an appealing way without hurting any regional sentiments. Instead of presenting it as just a language subject we need to show that there are various practical uses of the knowledge embedded in it.

3. Institutional and Financial constraints

One of the biggest reforms suggested by the NEP is to transform Sanskrit universities into multidisciplinary institutions, but this kind of structural changes demand extensive resources. The policy has recognised that single stream institutions fail to provide a holistic education. This observation is also true for the Sanskrit universities, which often lack diverse faculty, research scope and facilities, and inter-disciplinary collaboration. Further as Chaturvedi (2021) observes, higher education in India frequently suffers from “inadequate and irregular funding for institutional development”⁷. The transformation calls for a sustained financial investment, administrative commitment and transparency, without that the proposition may remain limited to policy documents rather than becoming reality on the ground.

4. Resistance and Attitudinal barriers

The most critical issue lies in tackling the prevailing attitudes towards Sanskrit. Despite many reforms and inclusion, Sanskrit is still widely seen as “difficult, outdated, and disconnected from employment opportunities”⁸. This prejudice makes it difficult for the administration to increase the enrolment, even when it is made available under NEP. There is a deep-rooted belief in people that Sanskrit is a subject of religious and cultural study, rather than as a field with modern relevance and employment scope. As Sathe remarks, there exists a “widespread belief that Sanskrit does not provide practical benefits in higher education or professional careers”⁹. To overcome this obstacle, we need a multi-faceted approach, organising ground level campaigns, showcasing Sanskrit’s application in computational linguistics, Yoga practices, cultural diplomacy, comparative research studies, and various translation or transliteration works. Implementation of policies will be more effective and smoother if these problems are actively addressed, otherwise resistance at the societal level will continue to undermine policy goals.

Conclusion:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a notable milestone for Sanskrit within India’s educational framework. For many years, Sanskrit encountered disregard because of conventional teaching methods, lack of modern resources, insufficient teacher education, and the highly specific framework of Sanskrit universities. These elements led to reduced enrolment and a view of the language as obsolete or unfeasible. By placing Sanskrit alongside contemporary languages in the three-language framework designating it as a medium of teaching, NEP 2020 has reinforced its role not just as a classical language but also as a means of cultural and intellectual dialogue.

The policy reforms including making Sanskrit accessible at every educational level, converting single stream Sanskrit universities into multidisciplinary institutions, and emphasising on research and innovation, can significantly rejuvenate the field. These measures if implemented sincerely, may correct long-standing structural imbalance and reposition Sanskrit as a living tradition with global relevance.

At the same time, various obstacles remain. Shortage of trained teachers, resistance rooted in societal attitudes, and financial constraints continue to limit the reach of reforms. If these barriers are not confronted, NEP's commitment might stay merely aspirational. Consequently the future of this ancient language relies on the efficacy of policy implementation through curriculum innovation, integration with modern disciplines, and active promotion of Sanskrit's contemporary applications, from computational linguistics to cultural diplomacy. To conclude, NEP 2020 offers not only a path of Sanskrit's survival but also a way to revitalize and globalise the subject by erasing the harsh lines of tradition and showing its practicality. Its success will determine whether Sanskrit stays confined to tradition or re-emerges as an interesting, accessible and globally significant language in the twenty-first century.

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