

**Ananta Kumar Giri**

**NEW EDUCATION POLICY OF INDIA: LEARNING,  
LANGUAGES AND TRANSLATIONS AND THE CALLING  
OF A NEW BHARAT-HIND-VISWA YATRA**

We, the educated classes, have received our education through a foreign tongue. We have, therefore, not reacted upon the masses. We want to represent the masses, but we fail. They recognize us not much more than they recognize the English officers. Their hearts are not an open book to neither. Their aspirations are not ours. Hence there is a break. And you witness not in reality failure to organize but want of correspondence between the representatives and the represented. If during the last fifty years we had been educated through the vernaculars, our elders and our servants and our neighbors would have partaken of our knowledge; the discoveries of a Bose or a Ray would have been household treasures as are the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. As it is, so far as the masses are concerned, those great discoveries might as well have been made by foreigners. Had instruction in all the branches of learning been given through the vernaculars, I make bold to say that they would have been enriched wonderfully.

—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1947), *India of My Dreams*, p. 124-125.

The network of agape involves a kind of fidelity to the new relations; and because we can all too easily fall away from this [..], we are led to shore up these relations; we institutionalize them, introduce rules, divide responsibilities.

Charles Taylor (2007), *A Secular Age*, p. 739.

You long to wander far and wide and are preparing for a speedy flight; be true to yourself and true to others, then even narrow confines will be wide enough.

—Goethe.

I am not a born traveller. I have not the energy and strength needed for knowing a strange country and helping the mind to gather materials from a wide area of new experiences for building its foreign nest.

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—Rabindranath Tagore in a letter to Victoria Ocampo in Ocampo (1961), “Tagore on the Banks of the River Plate: West Meets East,” p. 38.

New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims at initiating new visions and practices of learning. It discusses many aspects of education in India and future trajectories. In this article, I discuss mainly its thoughts on language and possible inter-cultural leaning and the challenges of experiencing the plurality and diversity of India and the world.

NEP (2020) puts a great deal of emphasis on learning with our mother languages in early years especially in the primary school and also learning other languages. It calls us for learning three languages as a stepping stone for learning many languages of India and the world. It invites us to open ourselves to all the classical and contemporary languages of India as well as Pali, Persian and Prakriti. It calls for us to learn Sanskrit as one of our modern languages as well as other equally significant classical languages of India such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Odia. For development of our contemporary Indian languages in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of India, it plans to set up an Academy of 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule Languages.

NEP also emphasizes on learning foreign languages such as German, Spanish etc. But what is the missing from the list is Chinese as possibly some other important languages. After Chinese aggression on India in Ladakh in June 2020 and the continuing stand off, we are justifiably hurt and enraged and we want to create our own space of dignity, honor and place in our neighborhood and the world. But Human Resource Development Ministry has taken Chinese out of learning options for many as Institutes and universities teaching Chinese language and literature seem to be under scanner. China funded Confucian Institutes are also under scanner. But here we need to move with caution as well as openness. HRD closing of Chinese language option is a case of thoughtless jingoism. India and China are two neighboring civilizations and we have so much to learn together in our intertwined worlds. A geopolitical difficulty now should not blind our approaches to our own responsibility to learn each others' languages, cultures and our ways of tackling contemporary challenges such as climate change, corona virus, authoritarianism and building what is enshrined in Chinese constitution as an ecological civilization for all of us in the world.

NEP refers to the outstanding centers of learning in India such as Nalanda and Takshashila. NEP wants to create world class universities now and make India become Viswaguru, teacher of the world. But there may be hidden and toxic pride in this which makes us oblivious of our own responsibility to learn other's languages and cultures and become a *Viswachatra*—a student of the world. Only when we become students of the world, learn the languages of the world, we can perform our humble role as a Viswaguru—teacher of the

world. In Indic tradition, no true Guru tries to claim himself as Guru. One offers oneself as a humble seeker and servant of Truth and others consider one as a Guru. Indians take pride in the fact that Hiuen Tsang from Xian, China came to study in Nalanda and also visited many centers of learning such as Pusphagiri in present day Jajpur, Odisha. On his way back, he with great difficulties brought thousands of manuscripts back to his monastery in Xian. Hiuen Tsang spent the rest of his life translating these manuscripts into Chinese. I was visiting Xian in 2004 and visited the monastery where he was living, leaning and translating which was a great spiritual experience for me. But how many Indians had visited China, learnt the language and also offered their whole lives like Hiuen Tsang to translate works in Chinese to Indian languages? Despite the so-called Indian openness to the world which we assert by referring to the following lines in Rgveda, “let noble thoughts come from us from all corners,” there is an entrenched parochialism in Indian engagement with the world. This is reflected in, among other things, our current knowledge and ignorance of Chinese language and other languages and cultures of the world. In post-independent India, we have been happily imprisoned in domestic studies of India in humanities and social sciences and our departments of international relations have been primarily concerned with geopolitical issues and rarely concerned with wider issues of philosophy and cultures. Our current geopolitical standoff with China must not be allowed to be used as an excuse to deprive us of our rights and responsibility to learn languages and cultures of China as well as other parts of the world.

But this lack of openness to learning other languages is also seen in India. A case in point is the reaction to three language policy in NEP in Tamil Nadu. The then Chief Minister Palaniswamy and then Opposition Leader and now Chief Minister Stalin and other political leaders opposed it. The editorial in *The Hindu* on August 5, 2020 on this also endorsed this political stand. The editorial in *The Hindu* asserted that the two language formula in Tamil Nadu—Tamil and English—has done well (also see Samas 2020).<sup>1</sup> Three language policy in NEP is a way to impose Hindi in Tamil Nadu through the back door. Though this apprehension is understandable against the backdrop of the anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu and resistance against granting Hindi primacy as a link language of India but is it still possible to move forward on this issue? The author of this editorial seems not to have done justice to the letter and spirit of what is written in NEP:

The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union, and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves,

so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India. In particular, students who wish to change one or more of the three languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6 or 7, as long as they are able to demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages (including one language of India at the literature level) by the end of secondary school.

NEP makes categorically clear that it is a flexible policy which the State would implement as it chooses. Tamil Nadu may choose to teach Kannada, or Malayalam, or Hindi. Similarly other States such as West Bengal may like to teach Odia and Odisha Bangla as one of the languages which would lead to much needed regionalization and cross-fertilization of our languages, literatures and consciousness helping us overcome the limits of linguistic provincialism as well as colonial legacy in our treatment of each other's languages as in case of Bangla, Odia and Assamese. Two language formulae of Tamil Nadu faces with the limits of the two in any interaction and the creative possibility of inviting a third to our learning and consciousness which may help us open up with the third to fourth, fifth and many more. Here we can benefit from the critical and creative social theory of triple contingency which urges us to realize the significance of three not just numerically but as a matter of opening consciousness to the third as a starting point for the plural infinite and understand the limits of the double contingency of the self and the other, in this case possibly Tamil and Hindi, and even Tamil and English (see Strydom 2009). This editorial as well as reproduction of the earlier anti-Hindi agitation of an earlier generation does not take into the account the way the two language formula in Tamil Nadu has deprived many students especially in the rural areas in Tamil Nadu in learning Hindi. Here what E. Balaguruswamy, the former VC of Anna University, tells us deserves our careful consideration:

By favouring two-language formula, only the poor and rural students studying in government schools are deprived of learning any additional language while the rich and urban joining CBSE, central and private schools have the freedom to study any language they wish. You are very well aware that the children and grandchildren of the leaders who oppose the three-language formula are all studying (or have studied) Hindi happily. Not only this, many of these leaders are running CBSE schools where Hindi is compulsory (Balaguruswamy 2020).

During a discussion at University of Madras on draft NEP 2020, I had shared that the NEP challenges us to learn our mother languages and each other's languages. One of the panelists, a respected friend of a mine, narrated his own experience of studying Hindi in Tamil Nadu in his school days where the Hindi teacher was a butt of a joke. But what is the point of repeating this "butt of a joke" narrative now? My respected friend is a deep votary of inter-religious dialogues but he seems not to be able to bring his openness of heart in religious and inter-religious matters to matters of languages. Moreover,

from the perspectives of human development, we are all called upon to be stages of human growth and maturation where we are called upon to grow from my reactive stages to a fuller understanding of mutual worth and mutualization. This is also the calling of science, spirituality, religions and creative calling such as art, poetry and literature.

Languages and translations go together. NEP speaks of establishing Departments of Translations in Institutes of Higher Education. But what about translations in schools and colleges? India has her own tradition of translations. Mughal Emperor Akbar had made translation integral to school systems during his reign where each school had training in practices of translation. Even before Akbar, the Muslim rulers of Bengal had commissioned “Bengali translations of the Sanskrit epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*” (Sen 2021: 133). As Amartya Sen tells us: “Indeed, several of the early Muslim kings, who learned Bengali despite their origins elsewhere were sufficiently impressed by the multicultural history of Bengal to commission good Bengali translations of the Sanskrit epics [...] This was in the fourteenth century, and these early translations are still among the most read versions of these ancient epics” (ibid). Akbar took great efforts to translate the *Ramayana* into Persian and he tried his best to employ some of the finest Persian artists to illustrate and illumine his translation. It is such cultures of translation that created such exemplary translators as Akbar’s great-great grandson Dara Shukoh who translated the Upanishads into Persian. One of Dara Shukoh’s books was entitled *Majma-Ul-Bahrain, The Mingling of Two Oceans* (Dara Shukoh 2006). It is a great tragedy of history that Shukoh was killed by his younger brother Aurangzeb in his struggle for power, but the spirit of Dara Shukoh is a spirit of translation as well as a spirit of love and *Satyagraha*. Dara Sukho did not translate to become a Viswa Guru nor even a Guru and those of us who are intoxicated with our anxiety to become Viswaguru can read the following from his *Compass of Truth*: “There is no asceticism in it, everything is easy, gracious and a free gift [...] Even the blessed Prophet used to call his disciples by the words companions and friends. And there was no mention of *Piri* and *Muridi* (Teacher and Disciple) between them. Therefore, whenever, in this book there occurs the word “friend,” understand by it the seeker of God” (Dara Shukoh 1912: 5). In learning and translations, we can cultivate this way of friendship rather than *apriori* enmity and hatred and realize this as our walk with Truth, our Satyagraha. It is no wonder that Gandhi who lived a life of Satyagraha was also a humble learner of languages as well as translator Gandhi wrote his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* in his mother language Gujarati, and was learning Bangla during his work for peace in Noakhali at his ripe age of 78. Gandhi also translated Tolstoy into Gujarati.

NEP talks about going through fun museum of languages of India at the school level where we can find similarities and common words between and among our languages as it writes:

Thus, every student in the country will participate in a fun project/activity on 'The Languages of India', sometime in Grades 6-8, such as, under the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative. In this project/activity, students will learn about the remarkable unity of most of the major Indian languages, starting with their common phonetic and scientifically-arranged alphabets and scripts, their common grammatical structures, their origins and sources of vocabularies from Sanskrit and other classical languages, as well as their rich inter-influences and differences. They will also learn what geographical areas speak which languages, get a sense of the nature and structure of tribal languages, and learn to say commonly spoken phrases and sentences in every major language of India and also learn a bit about the rich and uplifting literature of each (through suitable translations as necessary).

In the above paragraph, NEP refers to translation only parenthetically but now we can give it a primal significance even at the school level where students and teachers are engaged in creative translations of the two Indian languages they study. NEP talks about learning languages creatively and artistically. It talks about art integration at the general level of pedagogy and art integration also can be brought to language learning and here art integration and translations can be woven together.

Learning and translations make us realize that we are all finite and grateful passages with the gift of life and languages and we are not possessors and proprietors of any language including our mother languages. Like all of us coming from one source, our languages Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi or Chinese come from one source of Nature, Human, Divine and Transcendence. With our difficulties of histories and societies we all cannot afford to forget this and our gratitude to our own mother languages and all the languages of the world. All the languages of the world are our mother languages when we start loving them, learn and translate them. This has been the peripatetic wisdom of all the teachers of humanity such as Thiruvallavur, Buddha, Kabir, Nanak, Erasmus, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, Pandita Ramabai (who translated Bible from original Hebrew to a beautiful Marathi) and philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger, the latter urging us to realize language as a way making movement. With our learning, love and translations languages become way-making movements, movements of weaving threads among each other and not only accentuate threats such as the danger of imposing Hindi though the this flexible policy of three language policy. While being cautious and vigilant let us also be open and courageous in our trust and responsibility and realize the limits of our own pride and open ourselves to our own cross-currents of co-learning and mutual responsibility.

### **New Education Policy and the Calling of Bharat-Hind-Viswa Learning Yatra**

Such courage of co-learning and responsibility is awaiting us in fields of undertaking travel or *yatra* to learn languages as well as life worlds which animate these which is different from being a tourist. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes on touring across the country on the part of the students to realize the unity and diversity of India. It writes: “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. Towards this direction under ‘Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat’, 100 tourist destinations in the country will be identified where educational institutions will send students to study these destinations and their history, scientific contributions, traditions, indigenous literature and knowledge, etc., as a part of augmenting their knowledge about these areas.” But this misses the creative challenge of making students learning travelers to other places and institutions of learning in our vast country. The policy suffers from a poverty of creative imagination and policy making in this regard. We do not realize the multiplicity and creative and critical diversity of India that is Bharat by visiting only tourist destinations. Moreover, it does not understand the limitations of tourist mode of being with the world, which is ephemeral and the need for developing a learning-traveler mode,—a *yatra*-mode of being with diversities of India and the world.

India is a vast and diverse country and here we realize the unity and plurality of India with our own individual and institutional learning, experience and realization. In this context, we need to make it compulsory on the part of our newly envisioned four-year degree program for learners to spend a semester in another part of India with a Higher Education Institute (HEI). In this new place of location and learning, along with learning in colleges and universities, they also need to intern with local civic and voluntary organizations working in the fields of social action, community development and cultural regeneration in the fields of local languages, literature and cultures. These civic organizations can provide civic mentorship to students. With such many-sided academic and experiential learning, students can realize the beauty, depth and oneness of India across space and time which would also help us realizing India as a thread of our minds and hearts. Despite all our efforts in nation-building, national integration including logic of military centralization in post-India we have not yet realized the oneness of India. Our brothers and sisters of India in different parts of India are yet to develop habits of minds and hearts in this regard. Such an educational program would help us in this. Our brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and children in different parts of our country such as Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur and other parts of North East have complex and structural

grievances against the way they have been dealt by Indian State over the years. Here we need to send our students to these parts of our country and enable them to experience their realities and experiences of injustice, marginalization, degradation as well as their struggles for autonomy, dignity and belonging to India with their heads high. Our student participants as *yatrees*—learning travelers—would be able to develop a different perspective on our differential realities of Indian belonging and learn how to weave new threads of head and heart. They would be able to realize our oneness of India with love and mutual learning in the midst of challenges instead of just mouthing slogans such as *Ek Bharat, Srestha Bharat*. We need to realize One India, Great India with our works and meditations of love, labor and learning and not just throwing these as stones from the top by the powers that be.

In contemporary India, there is a politically charged discourse about patriotism, nationalism and anti-nationalism. But in India we do not have any program where young people such as school and university students can visit and spend a semester in another center of learning in another part of India. In European Union, Erasmus program named after the great traveler and soul-touching bridge builder Erasmus who through his travel and letters had created a Republic of Letters has helped European Union to create a bond of European consciousness despite many challenges. In India travelers such as Buddha, Shankara, Guru Nanak, Swami Vivekananda, Pandita Ramabai, Gandhi, Vinoba and P.V. Rajagopal—the inspiring and hard-working nurturer of Ekta Parisha—had created such a journey of pan Indian awareness and consciousness. The proposed learning yatra can draw inspiration from both the Erasmus learning program in European Union as well as travelling learners from India.

When learners undertake such a yatra, they including some of their outmoded teachers and political masters would realize that India is not just Bharat that is mentioned in our Constitution. India is also called Hindustan and *al Hind*. Jai Hind—our energizing slogan still mechanically uttered—does not bring us to the Hind and Hindustan dimension of our existence realizing the signal contributions of Islamic culture and civilization as an interlinked and integral part of Bharat-India to the making of Bharat-India. In North India, Hindi and Urdu grew as sister languages mutually influencing each other, and in the Deccan also there was a long tradition of interaction of Persian and Arabic with local languages of the land. Our discourse of India-Bharat with a political valorization of the discourse and symbol of Bharat Mata does not realize that we are also Hind, al-Hind as told to us in the immortal lines of Alama Iqbal: *Sara Jahan Se Achha Hindustan Hamara*. NEP's reference to *Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat* calls for a radical interrogation of its possible closed, one-dimensional reading of Bharat that is India as the utterers of this term seem not to have the experience of the confluence of Hindi and Urdu, the Ganga-Yamuna culture that is part our journey that is India that is Bharat. We also might lack similar experiences of making and realization of India with



our plural contributions from each part of our land from Kanayakumari to Kashmir, From Lakhwadeep to Leh, from Punjab to Assam.

Bharat, Hind, India are part of our manifold worlds historically and contemporaneously. Our journey with Bharat-Hind-India is not only spatial but also temporal. When our students visit other spaces of India as well as visit other times of their locations and destinations they can realize this vastness of India and the world both temporally and spatially—temporally realizing the many layers of history and future that lie with us and awaiting for our touch and regeneration. We need to travel not only within India but across in South Asia as well as the world. The NEP talks about internationalization of education but it seems to forget our immediate South Asian neighborhood. India once had taken a lead role in the formation of SAARC but now SAARC seems almost dead. There is a South Asian University in New Delhi as part of SAARC which is doing a bit by bringing students and teachers from South Asian countries. Given the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, terrorism, war, pandemic and climate change, we need to foster closer learning exchanges with our SAARC neighbors such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. We also need to create special fellowships and admission policies for students and teachers from such countries. NEP is totally silent on this as the current political regime which has given rise to it is happily abandoning its responsibility towards reviving SAARC and is unfortunately imprisoned in an anti-Pakistan rhetoric and policy making which is self-destructive not to mention the irreparable damage and harm it does to fostering cultures of exchange, learning and peace in our South Asian neighborhood. A case in point is denial of visa to scholars from Pakistan at the last minute in the 2018 ASA (Association of Asian Studies) in Asia conference held in Delhi in July 2018. Denying visa to the students and scholars? Why? Are they going to blow us up? The inauguration of the Conference began with a protest against it by the organizers such as Ashoka University as well as the key note speaker Professor James Scott of Yale University. Professor Sugata Bose, a noted historian and then Member of Parliament, withdrew his panel from the Conference in protest and held it later in India International Center. I attended this and it was inspiring to listen to Professor Bose's reiteration for the need for greater South Asian dialogues and his reference to Netaji Subash Bose and Mahatma Gandhi's work on it. For this, we must not be a victim of a short sighted political blindness and open ourselves to seeing, meeting and learning with each other. For this, we need welcoming visa officials for our South Asian scholars and especially from Pakistan.

### **India as a Global Destination of Education and Viswa Guru?**

NEP wants to promote India as a global study destination as it writes:

India will be promoted as a global study destination providing premium education at affordable costs thereby helping to restore its role as a

Vishwa Guru. An International Students Office at each HEI hosting foreign students will be set up to coordinate all matters relating to welcoming and supporting students arriving from abroad. Research/teaching collaborations and faculty/student exchanges with high-quality foreign institutions will be facilitated, and relevant mutually beneficial MOUs with foreign countries will be signed. High performing Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses in other countries, and similarly, selected universities e.g., those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India.

These are laudable goals except that we need to foundationally rethink and re-realize the visions and practices of internationalization of education. Internationalization of education is not only a matter of structures such as building International Student Offices or building campuses overseas by Indian HEIs or vice versa. It is primarily a matter of consciousness; it needs new consciousness work, of developing our hands, heads and hearts. Internationalization of education is not only a matter of establishing right networks—social, digital, technological and infrastructural—but also developing love, labor and learning with other cultures, societies and educational institutions of the world (see Beteille 1980; Giri 2013). It calls for a mode of agape or love and Rasa or flow which would help us overcome our conscious and unconscious boundaries, veils of ignorance and arrogance and walls of separation. It would help us realize that born in Bharat-Hind-India we, at the same time, belong to both India and the World as to our Mother Earth and our learning journey is not only for realizing the oneness and greatness of India but also our world. As Vinoba Bhave used to sing, *Jai Jagat, Jai Jagat*-Victory to our world, Victory to our World. Vinoba was a tireless walker walking the length and breadth of India and around and PV Rajagopal and friends of Ekta Parsihad drawing inspiration from him had started a year-long yatra from Delhi to Geneva on the last birth day of Gandhi, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019 (see Reubke 2020). All these visions and practices can challenge us to undertake a creative contemporary Bharat-Hind-Viswa Yatra as part of our journey with education and learning and sing with Rabindra Nath Tagore in his *Gitanjali*:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
 Where knowledge is free  
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
 By narrow domestic walls  
 Where words come out from the depth of truth  
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee  
 Into ever-widening thought and action  
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

### **Notes**

- 1 While celebrating the two language formula of Tamil Nadu, Samas (2020) also writes: “Our students suffer a serious handicap while dealing with English and Tamil languages. And they do not have command over either. Yet this is not the failure of the two language formula per se but of its implementation and the present Indian educational ecosystem.”

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