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National Education Policy, 2020 and Environmental Sustainability in Legal Education

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy, 2020 has replaced the earlier policy of 1986. The new policy stresses on multidisciplinary education with an emphasis on holistic learning of the students. The policy directs that the higher education institutions should include courses in fields like environmental education. In this paper, the author aims to evaluate the current legal education in India through the lens of National Education Policy, 2020 with special emphasis on sustainable development. Law aids in social transformation which is why it is extremely important that legal education becomes more inclusive of the crucial subject of environment and environmental sustainability. Today the whole world is burdened with the perpetually and rapidly deteriorating quality of the environment. The Indian society is especially oblivious of the dire urgency of the need of sustainability. In this backdrop, it becomes all the more important that legal education in India is imparted in such a way so that it encourages sustainable development and also includes multi-disciplinary courses in law and environment. The author also wants to emphasise on the need of including mandatory practical learning in environmental law subjects. Merely studying about the environment and related laws without actually practising its principles is meaningless bearing in mind how crucial it is to protect the environment which is reflecting in the NEP, 2020 as well.

Keywords: *Environmental sustainability, environment, National education policy, NEP, legal education, environmental studies, EVS, UNCCC, Climate change, COP 27, environment protection.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index, India ranked as the seventh most impacted country in the world. Recently, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change was held in Egypt from 6th to 18th November, 2022 in which experts, teachers, students and many other stakeholders from around the world got together to discuss the various ways of combating deteriorating climate changes in the world. While the governments across the globe continue to meet and

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discuss ways of mitigating environmental damage, the people in general and the Indian citizens in particular have failed to accept ways of living an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. The National Education Policy, 2020 has rightly so emphasised on introducing more studies on environment and technologies that promote sustainable living. The policy has made environmental education a mandatory part of the curriculum. Education is a catalyst that can be used to change the mindset of the Indian society towards sustainable living and go back to our ancient roots when we as a culture used to be attached to nature in more ways than one. Legal and medical education has been given autonomy, however, both cannot function in isolation. Legal education, in particular has the force of transforming the socio-legal set up in order to facilitate more stringent laws when it comes to protecting the environment. But the studies on environmental laws need to be more practical and diversified in terms of courses offered. The current method of classroom teaching is insufficient to mobilise environment education and awareness. The National Education Policy also emphasises on multi- disciplinary courses to promote holistic learning. That is why we require new courses combining law and environmental studies because promoting environmental awareness is no longer a recommendation but rather a necessity. There is a lot which needs to be done to reform legal education in the fight against environment degradation.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE NEP

India today stands burdened with a plethora of environmental issues that needs urgent attention else the damages would be unprecedented. With New Delhi being declared as the world's most polluted city and among the 100 most polluted cities in the world, 63 are Indian cities. Our population is growing continuously at the rate of 2.11% each year. The intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its fourth assessment report mentioned that there will be a fall of 17 per cent in wheat yields in India if temperatures rise even by half degree centigrade. 2035 is the year when Himalayan Glaciers may totally disappear causing catastrophic disruptions. There may be a risk of 50 per cent of the total bio-diversity in India because of climate change, as the grass lands are expected to decline sharply. 40 per cent of Himalayan glaciers would perish and Mumbai's Nariman point will be submerged.

Recently, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt from 6th to 18th November, 2022 in which nearly two hundred nations participated to set up a "loss and damage" fund to cope with climate changes. But the author submits that all the governments of the world can meet all the days in a year and yet this problem would remain unsolved unless the general public starts to realise that it is us who have to take the initiative

and start practicing environmentally sustainable ways of living.

This is why the National Education Policy of 2022 is so important in context of environment sustainability. This new education policy correctly places importance on integrated environment education in fields like biodiversity, climate changes, waste management and sustainable development. The policy has laid great emphasis on the sensitisation of teachers and students. Environmental education has been made a mandatory part of the curriculum. The policy mandates that the Higher Education Institutions should incorporate credit courses and programmes on environment education and other fields of community service in order to promote holistic learning. It also directs the professional courses to promote new technologies in areas like biotechnology, environment and sustainable living.

In this context, it is extremely important that the current legal education be transformed in such a way that it allows the students to study law with a purpose, the purpose of actually contributing something worthy to the community. One of such purposes is environmental sustainability in society. There is an extremely urgent need to promote sustainable living and there is no better tool to do is than education. We need to build a lot of better infrastructure in our country to fight against climate changes.

III. ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY AND ANCIENT INDIAN CULTURE

In our Indian culture, we worship the natural forces like the Sun as the Sun God, the trees like the “tulsi” plant and other trees and the rain. We worship water in the form of rivers as we all know that a few rivers are considered holy in India. We also have the concept of Sacred Groves by which certain patches of land are maintained and dedicated to a deity or God. We have such groves in Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka etc. These Groves are home to diverse species of animals and plants and thus aiding in biodiversity conservation. We also worship certain species of animals like the cow and consider a few as important animals attached to deities like the tiger, mouse, bull etc. all these practices have helped our society in protecting the environment.

There are certain communities in our country like the Bishnoi community which live in the Thar area and for them conserving environment is a matter of life and death. Besides, there are many examples of rain water conservation in India. But these ancient and traditional practices are slowly getting replaced by modern western practices which ignore the environment and primarily focus on luxury and comfort. The author would like to emphasise that there is nothing wrong in making life comfortable and better, but these must be struck a balance between comfort and sustainability.

We certainly have come a long way from the times when women used to toil extremely hard in

cooking on earthen stoves and travelling miles to fetch water as a common practice in most of the parts of India. But we as Indians have so many sustainable habits in day to day life, like for example, passing on books to the younger siblings or friends, passing on clothes to younger siblings, using things to their last bit of monetary value. There are even jokes on how Indians like to milk out the utility of things till the last drop. We must remember to take pride in such things instead of indulging in over consumption and wastage which is a result of social media trends and western marketing gimmicks that has completely consumed the Indian market. These practices of one-time-use commodities is leading to dangerous increase in carbon footprints in our country and the whole world.

Most of these problems can be solved if we educate our people of the dangerous consequences of over consumption and use and throw attitude in commodities.

IV. NEED OF MULTI-DISCIPLINARY EDUCATION AND PRACTICAL TRAINING

The new education policy has placed great importance on multi-disciplinary approach to education. It is submitted that there is dire need to change the approach towards legal education and include more skill development by recognising unique capacities of different students. There should be more practical training in fields like environmental law, criminal law and many other branches of law. We can introduce new courses in law like “law and environmental studies”, “law and biodiversity”, “law and disaster management”, etc. With the introduction of courses like these, students can actually be trained to study law in context of environmental sustainability and in turn promote new sustainable technologies and legal principles.

Legal education needs to be reformed to promote more of conceptual and applied understanding rather than mere routine classroom classes taken just to pass the examinations. The new policy focuses on innovative and critical thinking to provide holistic learning of students. It also reminds us to respect our Constitutional duties and it is, in fact, our fundamental duty to protect and improve environment: “To instill a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen”.

There is a huge gap between government mandates on environment protection and public understanding of these laws in India. We consider the protection of environment as the sole responsibility of the government without realising that unless we start cooperating, it gets extremely difficult for our leaders to implement environmental laws. There is immense lack of awareness among the people in terms of environment degradation and even if they are aware

they choose to ignore that facts and continue to indulge themselves in unsustainable practices. The poor Indian is already reeling under growing economic crunch and has no time or resources to spare upon environment friendly practices.

In a study (see Shri GU, Tiwari RR. (2021) conducted over college students, it was observed that 40% students were not aware of the problems our environment faces today. Half of them did not know about what causes water pollution, or what is the population in the world, or much about global warming. 44% of them did not know that oil and fossil fuel is a non-renewable source of energy. From all this data it can be concluded that their awareness on environment was only 60%.

V. CONCLUSION

It is like a paradox that the poor have got no resources to invest in environmentally friendly practices and the rich have got enough resources to comfortably ignore environment degradation. Environmental education is a weapon that can be used to bridge the gap between government agendas on environment protection and the people's apathetic attitude towards the same. It helps us in exploring burning issues of global warming, facilitate problem solving techniques and actually push the people to take positive action towards sustainability.

A lot needs to be done in terms of creating environmental awareness in our country. The government needs to initiate many more awareness programmes like the ones already in practice on garbage disposal, saving water, etc. A lot can be achieved if the government starts investing more in such awareness schemes throughout the country.

As far as legal education is concerned, the current pedagogy in most of the universities is insufficient to aptly address environmental education. There is no practical learning or environment education related multi-disciplinary courses offered. Legal education is the only field of study where the practitioners and the professors are completely separated. The Bar Council of India prohibits practice and teaching at the same time. Besides, there are multiple bodies that regulate legal education which at times leads to confusion and lesser autonomy to introduce new courses.

As the National Education Policy has pointed out that the education institutes must instil a deep sense of pride towards our country and respect towards our fundamental duties, the onus is now on the institutions to offer such courses that produce environmentally aware students that one day become responsible citizens and come up with sustainable approaches to development.

The author finally would like to offer four solutions which could serve as little keys to achieve

the above discussed objectives. These are: awareness among the masses, a change in the attitude of the affluent people towards carbon footprint, generating skills to create more environment-friendly technologies and offering more courses in environment studies in various fields of education.

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