

# Local in Education Policy Discourse in India

Nidhi Gulati\*

Manish Jain\*\*

---

## Abstract

*This article looks at how local, as a concept, relates to education in the framework of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. To examine this, the paper is divided into five sections. It focusses on the urge for 'local' as an aesthetic. It provides a historical overview of the idea of local in the context of and in relation to education from colonial to contemporary times with attention to various policies, reports and 'innovative' programmes. It highlights how contemporary debates have been influenced by global players and ideologies. The paper explains how local as a leitmotif operates in NEP 2020 and offers suggestions to give space to it in policy implementation.*

---

## Introduction

The idea of local is a deliberate and political construct. As an idea, it has been employed at times as a strategy and at others as an approach and framework to refigure the relationship of education with the community in multiple arenas. This ranges from contextualisation and relevance of the curriculum and assessment, teacher recruitment and rootedness of the teachers in the community to address social distance between teachers and students and to ensure accountability.

The Government of India's (GoI) recent National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 lays out certain aspirations, poses a certain set of questions, articulates a particular conception of the problems, and sets forth a vision to address these goals. The relationship between the local and education has been the subject of long standing debates and concerns in the Indian education policy discourse. By making several references to the local, the

NEP rearticulates, reframes and constructs new dimensions to this discussion.

This paper is concerned with understanding the idea of local and its relationship with education in NEP 2020 in a historical frame. To examine this, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section dwells on the idea of and the urge for 'local'. The second section provides a historical overview of the idea of local, decentralisation and education from colonial India till the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986. The third section examines how the idea of local is configured in the context of several programme initiatives in education in India since the 1980s to the turn of the 20th century. In particular, it focusses on the Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish, DPEP and SSA projects and programmes. It also draws attention to how the global actors and discourses have participated in framing the debate in the recent past. The fourth section is woven around the idea of local in NEP 2020. The fifth section offers certain

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, Email: nidhi.gulati@ihe.du.ac.in

\*\* Associate Professor, School of Education Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD)  
Email: manish@aud.ac.in

suggestions to give shape to the idea of local in policy implementation.

### **The idea of local**

The idea of local and the multiple meanings associated with it are closely tied to the history of modernity with its (post) colonial entanglements (Chatterjee, 1997). Before we begin unravelling these meanings, it may be useful to remind ourselves of two other concepts, the national and the global, in relation to which the local gets invoked and discussed. These two concepts also bear imprints of modernity and its history.

Modernity can be understood with reference to its three dimensions – political, economic and cultural. Emergence of the nation-state and democracy in modern Europe from the 17th century onwards were based on ideas of common culture and popular sovereignty. The idea of popular sovereignty implies that people are the source of authority of the government and the government has to be based on their consent. Industrialisation and capitalism are the economic facets of modernity. As global systems of production, relations and distribution, they came to dominate ideas and aspirations about development and progress. The rational, thinking and autonomous individual with capacity to refashion one's own life and social institutions in the light of individual and collective reflections constituted the universalist cultural dimensions of modernity (Kaviraj, 2000).

In comparison to the political universalism of the modern nation-state, the local simultaneously represents three things. First, it denotes another layer of the modern nation-state – its decentralised avatar. It promises participation, representation and voice in the exercise of democracy. Besides this, it is supposed to act as a training ground for both citizens and future leaders in governance at the national level. Second, in the colonial discourse, the confinement of native's loyalty to one's caste, religion and village, the local and not the nation, marked

the difference between the colonised and the coloniser. Anti-colonial struggle aspired for and led to a national community and an independent nation-state in India. Confining oneself to the local denoted an inability to rise above the parochial and to embrace the nation. But to be a worthy member of this incipient national community, the native Indian needed to improve themselves (Srivastava, 1998). Third, in contrast to universalism, the local represented particularism, specificity and rootedness. In the post-structural framework, the local came to represent the fragment, which stood on its own and was neither a unit nor just a representation of the nation.

Several other meanings of the 'local' can be gleaned from its everyday use. It denotes familiarity, knowledge, insider knowledge about problems, issues, people, networks, language, lingo and myths and beliefs. Being local suggests rootedness, a place of belonging and growing up, not distance but being an insider and embedded in the community. With this locality, one can speak to and resonate with others, can draw on social connections and use it to assert power. Being local, one is expected to be sensitive to the nuances of culture. In forms of governance, it has been deployed for decentralisation. In its negative connotations, the local would refer to being parochial, particularistic, narrow, restricted to a particular location and absence of a wider framework, affiliations and commitments. The 'local' draws on dual meanings. It is a 'place', a geographical location and simultaneously connotes caste and class. Often geography is privileged over the caste and class locations to constitute and convey a distinct meaning. Identity locations based on spatial mask the social locations based on caste and class.

### **Local, decentralisation and education in history**

#### **Colonial India**

There are two possible frames to discuss how the 'local' surfaced in the context of

education in colonial India. The first frame focuses on how the colonial state and Indians made meaning of and responded to the 'local'. The colonial state's response can be classified as pertaining to decentralisation (both financial and political), neglect of mass education, recognition and sensitivity to local needs, confabulation of the 'local' and 'people' to mean Indians and intervention in the decisions of the local educational bodies.

The Indian response focussed on using the political and financial decentralisation to enable their participation and control in decision making, expansion of educational provisions, indifference to local bodies, and use of local bodies to assert and counter entrenched social domination and stake claim over public resources. We discuss these multiple dimensions with reference to specific historical decisions and developments.

The first dimension pertains to decentralisation with implications for governance and fiscal control. The three levels of the colonial state, namely central, provincial and local, were involved in education in different ways. Chaudhary (2010, pp. 187-8) gradually traces the shift in responsibility of education from the government at the centre to the provincial and municipal to Indian hands. Until the mid-19th century, the central government had absolute financial control over the provision of education. Decentralisation began from the 1870s first to the provincial governments and in the 1880s to the rural district and urban municipal boards. A decentralised structure shared responsibilities across different levels of education. The responsibility of primary education lay with the local boards of education, and the control and supervision of secondary and collegiate education were in the hands of the provincial government.

With the system of dyarchy, introduced in 1919, Indian members were elected to the provincial legislatures and education became a transferred subject under their control. These members controlled land revenue, etc. and used it to increase the expenditure on education. The Government of India Act

1935 introduced provincial autonomy and concomitantly increased fiscal independence and greater investments in education.

The second dimension relates to the impact of colonial policies on the 'local'. This reflected itself in the idea of difference between the colonised and the coloniser. While in England, from the 1870s, various acts introduced compulsory education but in India the high rhetoric about the need and effects of education was not matched by resources. Paucity of funds was used to justify private funding and grant-in-aid system. Transferring responsibility of primary education to the local bodies who had very limited resources at their disposal had an adverse effect on mass education in India (Jain, 2018). Here, the 'local' came to bear responsibility for the neglect by the national government.

The third dimension draws attention to the fractures within the local, attempts to entrench social power or counter it and the ambiguous colonial policy about education of the depressed classes. The colonial government committed itself to 'mass education within a framework of equality and individual rights before law'. The Hunter Commission (1883) recognised that owing to local 'prejudice' not everybody, particularly the low castes, could access education. The commission recognised that the lower caste groups paid local cesses, therefore they had a stake and could 'claim some return for their contributions' (1883, pp. 513-7). However, in practice, the depressed classes were denied education through denial of admission and entry, physical violence, threats of social boycott (Constable, 2000, Nambissan, 2020, 128, Satyanarayana, 2002, pp. 74-75).

Constable (2000) in his historically rich narrative points out how the dominant caste groups having representation in local boards and municipal bodies stifled access of depressed classes to education. Depressed classes showed their own agency in countering such moves and asserted their right to and access to education. Beginning with the Satyashodhak movement by Phule in the

late 19th century, the anti-caste movements did not remain local and increasingly took regional and national forms during the 1920s and 1930s. Several questions can be raised such as, who is the local, who can stake a claim over public resources, what can be the nature and justification of these claims.

### **Independent India**

In this section, we will look at four specific policy texts and programmes where the idea of local figures prominently to understand distinct meanings, continuities and shifts in the discourse about both the idea and relationship of the local and education in Independent India. Four key policy texts and programmes discussed in this section are Mudaliar Commission (1952-53), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1986, modified 1992) and the District Primary Education Programme (1994).

The idea of local figures in at least three ways in the Mudaliar Commission (GOI 1953). Of these three, two references were in relation to 'community'. One, the school itself is envisioned as community and second, the community refers to the local community outside the school with which school is to forge ties (pp. 21). In this latter conception, the local and community are both a geographical and social entity and are largely rural. By being embedded and rooted in it, the secondary school was expected to 'initiate the students into the many-sided art of living in a community', train students to assume 'leadership in their own social groups of community or locality' and 'enrich rural life' by creating a 'better social and cultural atmosphere' (pp. 24-25, 29, 39). The third reference to the local in the report pertains to the mother tongue, which 'may or may not be regional or central language' (pp. 59).

In the Kothari Commission (NCERT 1970) the idea of local figures in seven distinct ways. First, the 'local, regional, linguistic, religious and other sectional or parochial loyalties' are a threat to the nation (pp.

14). Second, it is 'traditions of the people', and when education is not rooted in these traditions, it leads to 'alienation' of the educated 'from their own culture' (pp. 14). Third, local is equated with diversity in a vast country like India justifying 'flexibility in the educational structure' (pp. 45). Fourth, it is the community outside school, which can use school in 'innumerable' ways throughout the year and the local community, in turn, can cooperate to improve the facilities in the school (pp. 61, 474). Fifth, along with certain minimum national parameters about service conditions and salary to teachers, local context is to permit 'variable pay' meaning additional remuneration to redress disparities and 'equalise opportunities between districts through a grant-in-aid' (pp. 70, 88, 315). Sixth, with increasing emphasis on community development, 'good relations with the local community' are expected to pave the way for 'improvement of village', contributing to the welfare of old, ailing and young (pp. 374). Seventh, school education is 'essentially a local-state partnership'. The local is conceived as another state structure to constitute district school boards (pp. 477).

NPE 1986 and its modified version in 1992 laid considerable emphasis on education as an agent of social change to counter 'accumulated distortions of the past' and achieve 'empowerment of women'. It recommended locating school buildings and balwadis 'in such a way as to facilitate full participation of the Scheduled Castes' (Government of India 1992, pp. 8-9). Taking note of the distinct 'social-cultural milieu of the Scheduled Tribes' and their spoken languages, it recommended development of curriculum and instruction material in 'tribal languages at initial stages'. In these articulations, local figures with attention to social marginalisation and diversity.

### **Local in 'innovative' programmes in education**

For various reasons, state's investments in primary education continued to be

low in India. With increasing recognition and demand for universalising access to education, the idea of recruiting unemployed local youth as school teachers increasingly gained widespread policy attention. In this section, we discuss the historical antecedents of the 'innovative' programmes and practices, by both state and non-state players from the 1970s onwards, to give shape to this idea. We also examine the multiple ways in which the idea of local was employed to justify pan-India policy shifts operationalised at the local level.

In the latter part of the 1970s, centrally sponsored non-formal education schemes (like the Sahaj Shiksha Programme) employed teachers from the community for the first time. This teacher was often associated with the part time education programmes. The rationale of such part-time programmes was drawn from children who at the time, were not available for full time studies, and therefore, joined schools only for a smaller duration (less than three hours) than the regular school. Part-time teachers were employed for such schools and the teachers were paid about Rs 100 a month, which was later revised to Rs 200. Teacher training qualifications were not a prerequisite for appointment. Further, there were no provisions for intensive full time training. Instead a short duration induction training was imparted. This model underwent a significant change in the 1980s. Now teachers began to be appointed on a contractual basis at a lower salary in the regular schools without any prerequisite of teacher qualifications. This model, which became widespread, came to be known as the para-teacher model. It was adopted and known by various local names in different states<sup>1</sup>.

1 This was seen in Gujarat (Vidya Sahayaks of the Vidya Upasak Yojana), Maharashtra (Shikshan Sevak), Andhra Pradesh (Vidya Volunteer Scheme), Rajasthan - DPEP (Shiksha Swayam Sevi Scheme) and Uttar Pradesh (Guru Mitra Scheme), Himachal Pradesh (Vidya Sahayak Yojana) and Maharashtra (Shikshan Sevak Scheme), etc.

The para-teacher was appointed in regular primary schools initially under the volunteer teachers' scheme of the state of Himachal Pradesh in 1984. The norms of school warranted at least two teachers to be appointed in every school. Most often, the second teacher appointed in a single teacher school came to be a para teacher. This kind of appointment later spread to other states. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the state stopped most recruitment of regular teachers and instead appointed teachers on a contractual basis, which was done by the Block and District panchayats.

In the 1980s, Rajasthan was the first state to hire teachers on contract. The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) began in the Silora Block by the Rajasthan Government. The regular school teacher was substituted by a team of two local 'Shiksha Karmis'. The Shiksha Karmi project was recognised as an innovation to reduce teacher absenteeism, ensure teacher availability in remote areas, poor enrolment with special focus on girls, high dropout rate, and poor local relevance of the curriculum (Dayaram, n.d.). The government led project was supported initially by Swedish funds (Swedish International Development Agency, SIDA) and after Sweden's withdrawal, the British Development Aid agency DFID supported the project. Norms for appointment of shiksha karmis were lax. The eligibility conditions were eighth class pass or above boys/ men and fifth class pass girls/women. In SKP, the teacher was a voluntary worker with close ties to the community. The community was involved in the evaluation of the Shiksha Karmis work with the help of the Village Education Committee (VEC). Following the success of the project, the contract teacher or the local Shikha Karmi became the norm in Rajasthan and spread to other states. In states like Madhya Pradesh, regular teachers began to disappear. In these cases, the accountability of the state to primary education was diluted and 'decentralised' as the Janpad Panchayat or Zila Parishad appointed teachers. The SKP has been

able to “validate its key hypothesis that demand and a hunger for learning exists in all segments of society and that ordinary persons, appropriately selected, trained and supported can function effectively as teachers and agents for social change” (Ramachandran, 2000, pp. 5).

The Lok Jumbish project (LJP), also initiated in Rajasthan in the early 1990s, was based on a unique fund sharing model between an international donor (SIDA), the central and the state government. The focus and key strength of the project was the empowerment of local representatives, especially women. The project invested in formation and capacity building of the Village Education Committees (VECs). LJP brought together different government agencies, teachers, NGOs, elected representatives and the local people as allies and partners, as the core group working for achieving the goals of primary education. For the first time, partnerships with local communities were forged, multiple levels of local leadership were recognised and flexible participatory management with a concerted focus on processes was emphasised. Achievement of universal primary education was driven in a mission mode.

Jomtien conference on Education for All (1990) introduced and reconfigured a new set of ideas in the inter/national educational discourse and practice. In India, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was initiated in 1994 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India as an umbrella scheme. It received funds from foreign agencies and disbursed them for primary education (Sarangpani and Vasavi, 2003). The DPEP aimed to provide primary education in 42 districts in seven states with low literacy rates, which later expanded to cover all elementary classes in 242 districts. The DPEP adopted an area specific approach where the local district is the fundamental unit for planning and strategy. The localisation of the efforts aimed to be responsive and conscious to local contexts and elicit community support. The DPEP

aimed to fill gaps in primary education, by improving enrolment and reducing dropout of children from marginalised groups, particularly the scheduled castes and tribes and girls. In 2001, the programme goals were revisited and named Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which retained most of the DPEP goals.

The idea of local was used in different ways to justify the widespread adoption of this model from the 1980s onwards. First, local was equated with the local rural community. Major role was assigned to this community in appointments, accountability and remuneration of the para teachers in the schools. This was presented as a corrective measure of isolation of the school from the community and its participation in the running and management of schools. The legal dimensions of such appointments were questioned by the judiciary as they were made by authorities ‘not competent to appoint’, on honorarium basis, under non-statutory schemes and a ‘stop-gap arrangement’<sup>2</sup>.

Second, the local community was conceived as not just a community located in a geographic space but also socially differentiated. With increasing focus on the education of hitherto marginalised and excluded communities in both national and international education policy discourse, the local teacher, albeit untrained, was conceptualised as more invested in the community’s development, more accountable to the local community and less distant. This was seen all the more significant for Dalit and Tribal children. The underlying assumptions of these projects was that “barefoot teachers belonging to the local community, once intensively trained and enjoying local community support can overcome the lack of formal educational qualification” (Vimala Ramachandran, 2000, pp. 7). The apologists for the para-teachers scheme argued that this will lead to reduced teacher absenteeism and more commitment on the part of the

<sup>2</sup> See Richhpal Singh and Ors. vs State Of Rajasthan on 4 January, 2005 and West Bengal Primary Organiser ... vs The State Of West Bengal And Ors. on 7 July, 2006

teachers. The teachers in Ashramshalas, tribal schools, Education Guarantee Centre (EGCs) were invariably drawn from the community<sup>3</sup>.

Third, local also became the vehicle to introduce political and administrative decentralisation. With the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, the power to appoint teachers came to be vested in the Gram Panchayat. In a furtherance of decentralisation, most often it became the responsibility of the parents to find teachers for their own children. The process of recruitment of the teachers in the local schools in small numbers through the gram panchayat and the village education committees was expected to be faster than the lethargic recruitment process of large numbers of teachers undertaken by state bodies.

Fourth, this emphasis on local was seen as an egress by the state governments to address large numbers of teacher vacancies in regular schools. This accumulated shortfall had resulted in high and adverse pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) with the retirement of regular teachers and increasing enrolment.

Fifth, the local systems developed as a consequence of these projects were parallel to the mainstream structures. Issues of quality, parity and equity have been the concerns that harangue the discourse on the parallel local systems.

It is important to recognise the underpinning political economy in the deployment of local for these policy shifts. First, in the context of increasing fiscal constraints and unwillingness of the states to increase expenditure on education,

---

3 Similar appointments of teachers drawn from the local community were deployed in small full-time schools in remote habitations. These were: Alternative schools (Assam and Orissa), Multigrade centres (Kerala), Education Guarantee Scheme (Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), Vasti Shala (Maharashtra), Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi (West Bengal) and Rajeev Gandhi Swaran Jayanti Pathshala (Rajasthan).

contractual appointment of teachers from the local community and by local bodies promised to reduce the financial burden on the government. Kingdon (2000) has argued that for the cost of a regular teacher's salary more than five para teachers could be appointed. This precedent of state hiring para-teachers under different programmes was used as a justification by proponents to employ contractual teachers in the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode to meet the PTR requirements of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 (Jain and Dholakia 2009: 41, 2010: 80). Such recommendations mark continuity of under investment by the state in the training of teachers and keep teacher education in India weak and dependent on private players.

Second, in the neoliberal ethos, there was increasing emphasis on cutting down state expenditure, downsizing the state, promoting market and privatisation and adopting the market principles in recruitment and running of the public institutions (Jain and Saxena, 2010). Accordingly, multilateral bodies like the World Bank (WB) had also expressed concern about providing higher wages to state employees including teachers (Jain, 2004, pp. 36-37). In comparison to 39 other Asian countries where teachers' salaries were 1.7 to 1 with reference to per capita GDP, in India the ratio was 5 to 1 (World Bank 2003: 36).

Third, in the post-Jomtien discourse, local, community participation and decentralisation had emerged as buzzwords to enlist new participants in provisioning of education with 'flexibility'. Set in the backdrop of the World Bank's structural adjustment programme (SAP), the local actors and NGOs, the civil society were to fill the void created by increasing state withdrawal from several social sectors such as health and education. With the state conceding its failure to provide employment, growing 'informalisation' of the formal sector and WB increasingly funding self-employment and income-generation activities run by NGOs, the idea of recruiting local youth as teachers

at low salaries provided a political gloss to these significant departures (Dayaram, n.d., Jain 2004, Kumar, Priyam and Saxena 2001, Prapanna 1998). This focus on the local community's involvement in running rural primary schools overlooked both economic pauperisation of the weaker sections of the community and the unequal power and resource division within it.

Fourth, with the contractual status of para-teachers and a local body based appointment, the possibilities of a state-wide and national collective resistance by teachers to the reform process could be scuttled (Govinda and Josephine 2005). In the subsequent decades, the state has been drawn into several court battles with demands for regularisation and welfare benefits, and has had to bow down to these demands.

Fifth, the contractual nature of appointment with no increments or medical, retirement or benefits was a significant shift from the Kothari Commission's recommendations for parity in service conditions and minimum pay. It formalised the informalisation of the teacher's labour and legitimised their exploitation in the name of local. The fact that it coincided with increasing demand for education by the poor and marginalised amidst the rising global assertions and funding for education for all and introduced such untrained teachers in public provisioning of education is not so benign. It is both ironical and contradictory in terms of commitment to equality and quality in/of education.

### **The local in NEP 2020**

Recently, after a gap of 34 years and through several kinds of consultations, committee reports and drafts, the Government of India has unveiled the NEP 2020 (GoI, 2020). The local appears as a leitmotif in the new education policy, finding a total of 72 mentions. It figures in multiple ways, marking both continuities and shifts with the above discussed policies, practices and discourse.

We are analysing various references to the local in the NEP 2020 in three ways. First, we notice the differential emphasis as evident in the number of references to each idea about the local. Second, we look at what these ideas suggest individually and collectively. Third, we analyse the continuities and ruptures with the earlier policy discourses and practices.

The four significant moments in which the local appears are: as a geographical location with focus on decentralisation; with reference to local languages in the context of school; as emphasis on epistemologies through a recognition of local arts and crafts; and as community<sup>4</sup>.

First, local emerges as a geographical location, as the site/area where schools, students and teachers are located. It finds repeated mention in the context of teacher recruitment, where teachers should be offered 'preferential employment in their local areas' (20). The local is the site for proposed shorter teacher education programmes, which must be responsive and flexible to cater to local needs. It also appears as the field-site of practicum training of B.Ed. programmes. It is also used as a site for prospective employment and a setting for vocational and adult education.

The policy's fundamental principles urge for 'respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy' (5). The local is diverse and varied on 'account of culture, geography, & demographics' and 'issues facing local communities' (11). Both government and non-government organisations are directed to be alert to ground realities at the local level while setting up schools. The local, appears as the site where specific needs and issues can be gleaned for varied purposes. The data gathered from such exercises in

<sup>4</sup> The local languages are also highlighted in the higher education institutions (HEIs), which is a continuity of school education. However, given the limited scope of this article, we focus only on the local languages in the context of school education.



context-specific barriers, skilling needs, gap analysis, mapping of local opportunities and the flexibility needed by each school in its decision-making about standard setting and regulation places the local at the fulcrum of planning and implementation in all areas related to education. The geographical location is privileged to place, assess, arrive at felt local needs and plan at the local level.

Workshops, opportunities for faculty capacity building and improvement are envisaged to be organised at local, regional, state, national, and international levels. The policy places the local School Complex Management Committees as the hub of 'improved governance, monitoring, oversight, innovations, and initiatives by local stakeholders' (29). At the local level, these Committees help operationalise a 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system' (5). The school complexes at the local level are also proposed to pool resources, build capacities, invigorate through this coming together of communities of 'schools, school leaders, teachers, students, supporting staff, parents, and local citizens' (29).

Second, the idea of local significantly cinches to the linguistic dimensions of schooling, finding expression as 'local' language with 37 mentions. The multiple references to languages in the policy document differentiate between home language, mother tongue, local and regional language. NEP 2020 recognises that 'home language is usually the same language as the mother tongue or that which is spoken by local communities' (13). It also includes 'local sign languages' and the development of a web-based platform/portal/wiki to document and preserve 'all Indian languages and their associated rich local arts and culture' (55). Local language has been used interchangeably as regional language or mother tongue.

The focus on local language finds expression in the appointment of teachers who are 'familiar with local languages' and

incentivises their deployment in 'the areas with high dropout rates' (10). Selection of teachers will involve assessment about their 'comfort and proficiency in teaching in the local language' (20). Consequently, at least a few teachers 'in every school/school complex' should have the ability to 'converse with students in the local language and other prevalent home languages' (20). This expectation about knowledge of local language(s) is not limited to teachers in the public schools but includes teachers in the private schools within its ambit. As far as possible, the textbooks and reading material are to be translated 'in all local and Indian languages' (9). To promote multilingualism, NEP 2020 proposes 'early implementation of the three-language formula' and commits to 'teaching in the home/local language wherever possible' (54). However, the use of punctuation (/) and repeated use of 'wherever possible' points to both challenges involved and the need of reaffirming the state's own commitment. 'Local language' is used interchangeably with mother tongue, regional, local, state, scheduled language, state language, Indian languages, and major Indian languages in the NEP. Local language becomes identical with regional or official state languages as defined in the Constitution's Eighth Schedule. The local language is aligned to the 1956 three-language formula and departs from the 2009 Right to Education Act, which reaffirmed the usage of mother tongue till Class 5 as far as possible.

Third, the local is a repertoire of knowledge, 'strongly rooted' in national and local 'ethos in terms of culture, traditions, heritage, customs, language, philosophy, geography, ancient and contemporary knowledge, societal and scientific needs, indigenous and traditional ways of learning' (16). From the pre-primary stage, the curricula and pedagogy must draw on folk songs, stories, games, recognise oral traditions where language is the bearer of this intangible cultural heritage.

The NEP puts the national at the core of discipline subject knowledge in textbooks,

with the local 'supplementing' or 'nuanced' it (17). While the local is continuously stressed and restated, it is articulated as a complement to knowledge domains rather than as the core. Local epistemologies are evoked in response to specific requirements, situations, resources, and choices. Thus, the 'local' manifests itself in the form of 'knowledge', curricula, and pedagogies. The policy defines 'Knowledge of India' as 'knowledge from ancient India and its contributions to contemporary India', as well as 'Indian Knowledge Systems' as 'tribal knowledge and indigenous and traditional modes of learning' (16). Local knowledge is held by 'eminent local persons' who are capable of promoting "local professions, knowledge, and skills" in 'local art, music, agriculture, business, sports, carpentry, and other vocational crafts', 'handicrafts', 'electric work, metal work, gardening, and pottery making' (24). Art and craft, as well as entrepreneurship, are key facets of expertise and knowledge that appear complementary to ICT and technology.

Fourth, community appears both as a proxy and as a suffix to the local in the NEP 2020. For the 'development of a strong, vibrant public education system', substantial investment and encouragement to the 'true philanthropic private and community participation' is one of the principles of NEP 2020 (6). Community refigures in the discussions about 'the current learning crisis' as the 'trained volunteers' from the 'local community and beyond' are enlisted by NEP 2020 in the 'mission of attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy' (9). All the literate members of the community are expected to volunteer for 'one-on-one peer tutoring' to achieve this goal (ibid). Community is also to be involved in the 'nutrition and health of children' and in the community-based interventions for 'gender inclusion' (9, 26). Schools are expected to 'promote social, intellectual, and volunteer activities for the community' through libraries and other means (9, 30). Assessment of the teacher's performance will

include their service to the community (22).

This discussion about the local in NEP 2020 marks both continuities and departures from the earlier discourse about local and education. In terms of continuities, there are parallels with the recommendations of the Kothari Commission about school complexes, teacher's involvement in the community and the role of the school in the revitalisation and development of the community. These recommendations draw upon previous concerns about control and involvement of the community as well as school as a modern institution with a pedagogic role beyond its students. The discourse about decentralised planning for the professional preparation and support of teachers, both pre-service and in-service, was mentioned in NPE 1986. How decentralisation can lead to improved governance is an idea reiterated in inter/national policy discourse and programmes since the 1980s and now it conjoins the republican spirit of volunteerism to aid state's efforts in nation-building.

There are certain crucial departures and new alliances at work in NEP 2020. First, the increasing global emphasis on performance, efficiency and accountability of teachers conjoins with the local community in their evaluation. Can human relationships be built on performance evaluation and what other mechanisms may be helpful, is a question worth thinking about. Second, NEP 2020 draws upon the postcolonial critique of western hegemony, distance and alienation of education and curriculum from the culture, knowledge systems and local communities. It equates indigenous with tribal. But along with these critiques, it privileges global discourses about education with focus on learning crisis, accountability, efficiency and performance. We need to examine how these two thrusts sit together, whether there are any contradictions between the epistemologies of the indigenous, tribal and local with the dominant western and global, and are the former supposed to substitute the later or just be an additional appendage to it.

## Implementing local in NEP 2020: Some suggestions

To implement NEPs agenda of decentralisation, collation of district-wise disaggregated data and its analysis along several dimensions at the local level will be needed. Any community has ties that bind it together but it also has fissures and fragments. Accordingly, it is imperative that the social composition and educational demographics of each habitation, village, and district are captured. This helps define who represents what, who are residents of local and speakers of its different languages, and therefore, has a stake to participate in the teaching community. The animation of the local in discerning felt needs and field realities helps build into the rationale, perspective and content of the training, curricula and most importantly, attend to marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

This underscores the need to strengthen and promote research at the local level. There is an urgent need for knowledge generated from research to be fed back into the planning process of the school system, with liaison and linkages between universities and schools.

The local has the capacity and wherewithal to articulate the urgency, the need and the scope for reforms in education. This may be a shift from the local simply serving as a programmatic response to the provisions and changes in various government schemes. For instance, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan initially forayed into pan-India planning and later adapted to the local communities with innovative programmes<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Residential bridge course for domestic child labourers in Andhra Pradesh; boat school for fishermen community in Andhra Pradesh (2004); learning centres and residential bridge courses for street and children who participate in productive work in Delhi (SSA Delhi, 2009); special provision for children from migrating communities in Jammu & Kashmir; flexible schools, schools in tents or mobile units, evening schools in Karnataka (2005-06).

Also, several aspects of the policy need attention. For instance, for appointments, the implementation plan needs to define who is the 'local' competent authority with the mandate to make appointments and a clarity of working and service conditions, salaries and benefits and nature of appointments is imperative. We need to arrive at a concerted needs assessment-based 'local' plan for capacity building and attempt to bring parity among teachers already in the system.

Teachers also have a repertoire of knowledge from field experience and practice. Any exercise in needs assessment, planning and preparation of inservice programmes at the local level should include groups of teachers. Peer groups of teachers from the local school complexes must be legitimised as a community of practitioners (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger, 2000). This represents a paradigm shift away from hierarchical systems and toward small, creative, and independent groups (Barton & Tusting, 2005). These communities assist in addressing concerns of individual and collective identities coming together for social change, as discussed in the work of Bakhtin, Bourdieu and Vygotsky. In order to serve their members' active engagement with, and orienting to, the outside world, communities of practice emerge and are useful. Both the speech community (based on the socio-linguistic community of speakers) and the community of practice methods are important, and both can be deployed in tandem (Eckert, 2006).

Most initial orientation inservice training tends to be repetitive leading to fatigue, boredom and restiveness. The peer groups can go beyond the initial induction to include real classroom dilemmas and discussions around content and pedagogy and concerns of inclusion. Such recognised and empowered teacher communities can work to revamp service conditions, school culture, revision of curriculum and aligning it to the local, development of instructional materials, research in education, linkages between HEIs, particularly TEIs and ensure that

teachers' capacities to teach are augmented. The communities must become spaces of flourishing and care (Ramachandran, 2020).

Languages live through our stories, riddles, metaphors, melodies, ballads and myths, not dictionaries. Public discussion and performance of local languages preserve the oral traditions and histories. Both (i) the performing arts that serve as a thread linking local languages and local knowledge, and (ii) knowledge and practices about nature and the universe as part of our heritage need to be explicitly acknowledged in the policy implementation.

At the local level, a systematic mapping of the multiplicity of the home language(s) that children bring to the classroom is necessary. An examination of disaggregated data should inform the medium of instruction, availability of resources, printing of textbooks, employment of instructors, and translations. The policy's goal of recognising and empowering local languages must be grounded in a viable pedagogical approach.

The local teacher education plan cannot exist in isolation from the school system. Incorporating the challenges and needs of the school would help the teacher education institutions in becoming more relevant and symbiotic. The TEI and school system must evolve into an integrated and convergent system of academic gains at the local.

## Conclusion

The above discussion navigates the local in the historical contexts and helps chart how the spread of education within local communities has informed and shaped the policy over time. The foregoing discussion has helped frame and understand the politics of education in the 'local'. Following the trajectory of the local up to the NEP 2020, the paper dwells and deliberates on the four different dimensions of the local delineated in the policy. The paper has also suggested some ideas about giving shape to the local in the policy.

## References

- Barton, D., & Tusting, K. (Eds.). 2005. *Beyond communities of practice: Language power and social context*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. 1997. *Our modernity* (No. 1). Rotterdam: Saphis.
- Chaudhary, L. 2010. Land Revenues, Schools and Literacy. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 47(2): 179–204.
- Constable, P. 2000. Sitting on the School Verandah: The Ideology and Practice of “Untouchable” Educational Protest in Late Nineteenth-Century Western India. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 37(4):383–422.
- Dayaram. (n.d.) *Parateachers in Primary Education: A Status Report*. MHRD: DPEP.
- Eckert, P. 2006. Communities of practice. *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics*, 2(2006), 683-685.
- Government of India. 1953. *Report of the Secondary Education Commission*. New Delhi, India: Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- Government of India. 2020. *New Education Policy*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education.
- Govinda, R. and Josephine, Y. 2005. Para-teachers in India: A Review. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring. pp 193-224.
- Hunter, W. W. 1883. *Report of the Indian Education Commission*. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing.
- Jain, M. 2018. Public, Private and Education in India: A Historical Overview. In Jain, M., Mehendale, A., Mukhopadhyay, R., Sarangapani, P. M., & Winch, C. (Eds.). *School education in India: Market, State and Quality*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

- Jain, M. 2004. Civics, Citizens and Human Rights: Civics Discourse in India. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*. 1 (2), pp. 165-198.
- Jain, M. and Saxena, S. 2010. Politics of Low Cost Schooling and Low Teacher Salary. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 45 (18), pp.79-80.
- Jain, P.S. and Dholakia, H.R. 2009. Feasibility of Implementation of Right to Education Act. *Economic & Political Weekly*. Vol 44, No 25, 20 June, pp 38-43.
- Jain, P.S. and Dholakia, H.R. 2010. Right to Education Act and Public-Private Partnership. *Economic & Political Weekly*. Vol 45, No 8, 20 February, pp 78-80.
- Kaviraj, S. 2000. Modernity and politics in India. *Daedalus*, 129(1), 137-162.
- Kingdon. 2000. Para-Teachers in India: Status and Impact. *DPEP Calling*, Volume VI, No. 11, December 2000, Government of India, New Delhi.
- Kingdon, G. & Sipahimalani-Rao, V. 2010. Para Teachers in India: Status and Impact. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 2010. 45(12):59-67
- Kumar, K. Manisha, P. & Saxena, S. 2001. Looking Beyond the Smokescreen, DPEP & Primary Education in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 36(7): 560-68.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. 1991. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Nambissan, G. 2020. Caste and the Politics of the Early 'Public' in Schooling: Dalit Struggle for an Equitable Education. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*. 17(2) 126-154
- NCERT. 1970. *Education and National Development: Report of the Education Commission 1964-1966* (Kothari Commission). New Delhi, India: NCERT.
- Prapanna, Raghvendra. 1999. *Zila Prathmik Shiksha Karyakaram Mein Vikendrikaran Evam Jansehbhagita Ka Samikshatmak Adhyayan*. Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation. Delhi: Department of Education, University of Delhi.
- Ramachandran, V. and Sethi, H. 2000. *Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project: An Overall Appraisal*. New Education Division Documents No. 7. Education Division at Side, Department for Democracy and Social Development, Sweden & Educational Resource Unit, Jaipur.
- Ramachandran, V. 2020. NEP 2020 is silent on the contract teacher system. *The Hindustan Times*. 27 August 2020
- Sarangapani, P.M., & Vasavi, A.R. (2003). Aided programmes or guided policies? DPEP in Karnataka. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3401-3408.
- Satyanarayana, A. 2002. 'Growth of Education Among the Dalit-Bahujan Communities in Modern Andhra, 1890-1947', in B. Sabyasachi (Ed.), *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India* (pp. 50-83). Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Srivastava, S. 1998. *Constructing Post-Colonial India: National Character and the Doon School*. London: Routledge.
- UNICEF. 1999. *The State of World's Children*, Education.
- Wenger, E. 2000. *Communities of Practice*. New York, Cambridge University Press
- World Bank (2003). *India: Sustaining Reform, Reducing Poverty*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.