Suggested Directions For Educational Reforms

INDIA'S NEW NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

The article reflects on the profound and momentous changes taking place in many areas of knowledge and on the need to adopt educational methods and materials to this rapid evolution in the sciences and techniques, while honouring and restoring the valid traditions and indigenous cultures of learning of ancient civilisations. The author provides an overview of the proposed National Education Policy being mooted by the government of India. This article is based on lecture given on October 23rd, 2023 at the 7th international conference on Globalistics held at Moscow State University, Russian Federation, Faculty of Global Studies, in connection with the G-20 and BRICS-NECSTT programs for international cooperation.

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PREAMBLE

The last few decades have brought radical and often stunning transformations in the state of scientific knowledge, both in the hard (physical-chemical) and the soft (social and psychological) domains. The learning disciplines and methods have often failed to keep pace with the multiple and rapid developments that are bringing about a paradigm change in our understanding of the universe and of our place in it. *(Kuhn, T.S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962)) (Loeb, A. Lost Civilizations (2023) https://avi-loeb.medium.com/lost-civilizations-from-our-cosmic-past-a778e50b5c55)*

UNFOLDING NEW HORIZONS

At the outset, we should acknowledge that the emerging paradigm visibly takes us closer in some ways to some of the biospheric and noöspheric discoveries and theories of VI Vernadsky (1926) *(Vernadsky, V.I. The Biosphere (1926); English edition (2012))* and the other "Cosmists". A brief enumeration of the most significant aspects of this "new science of life" should include:

- Systems Science as an approach to the study of living systems as nested holons *(Capra, F. and Luigi, P.L. The Systems View of Life – A Unifying Vision (2016))*
- The Implicate-Explicate dual nature of Reality *(Bohm, D. Wholeness and The Implicate Order (1980))* and Dual Aspect Monism *(Atmanspacher, H. Dual Aspect Monism and The Deep Structure of Meaning (2022))* as a possible reconciliation of physicalism and panpsychism *(Sheldrake, R. A New Science of Life, The hypothesis of Morphic Resonance (1995))*
- Quantum Entanglement and Non-Locality as fundamental features of the subatomic cosmic architecture *(Bohm D. the Undivided Universe – An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory (1995))*
- The likely omnipresence of organic life and the potential ability of digital systems (neural networks) to compete with it and perhaps one day replace it *(Werbos, P. J. The Phenomenon of Man, reviewed – Evolution and IT versus Extinction in the Years to Come (2019) Radin, D. Conscious Universe (2000))*
- Gradual recognition of plausible records of a much longer history of human/humanoid existence and civilisation on Earth. *(Ramasamy S M et al. on Poompuhar submarine archeology, South India https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/ancient-port-city-of-poompuhar-traced-ndersea-claim-researchers/article66413969.ece, Sunken cities in the Gulf of Khambat, India: https://www.express.co.uk/news/weird/1370272/india-ancient-discovery-lost-underwater-city-gulf-cambay-civilisation-archaeology-spt, Natadwijaja D H et al. on Gunung Padang,Indonesia https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/arp.1912, Schmidt, K. et al on Gobekli Tepe and other sites https://www.academia.edu/20215433/Klaus_Schmidt_Gobekli_Tepe), (7)*
- Scientific verification of "anomalous" or extraordinary psychosomatic human abilities alluded to in numerous ancient documents *(Radin, D. Supernormal: Science, Yoga and the Evidence for Extraordinary Psychic Abilities (2013) Sheldrake, R. Science and Spiritual Practices - Transformative Experiences and their effects on our bodies, brains and health (2018))*
- Rapid advances in space travel capabilities and in exoplanetary exploration and industrial prospecting

All the above findings and perspectives are loaded with effects and consequences that are empowering and risky, promising and dangerous. By upsetting or discrediting many hitherto fundamental notions and beliefs about the nature of reality they also contribute, directly or indirectly to the rising confusion and conflict at the cognitive level and hence in the socio-political and cultural spheres as well.

In this context, a visible phenomenon in many societies, especially in the more affluent and technologically sophisticated ones, is mistrust and even rejection of what is presented as "official", accepted scientific knowledge. This is not a mere Luddite, misological fear of intelligence and progress. It stems from a widespread awareness that science is not a body of precise and definitive answers to the great questions of existence but rather a discipline and a methodology that proceeds by trial and error and often goes wrong, thus producing many undesirable or even fateful effects and consequences. The discovery of atomic fission is a notorious example of the threats that technical knowledge always enshrines, but medicine affects even more people through the good or bad effects of its prescriptions and formulas. We are living the aftermath of the disastrous COVID-19 crisis, during which thoroughly misled, misleading, irrational and counter-productive decisions and measures were taken in many parts of the world, in the name of public health safety, to fight an epidemic that was almost certainly caused by the accidental or deliberate release of a virus manufactured during dual-use "gain of function" research. The Pfizer, Moderna and other experimental genic mRNA vaccines manufactured by pharmaceutical multinationals have contributed to aggravating the global health crisis.

There is no denying, as has been acknowledged by a large number of eminent epidemiologists, immunologists, physicians and biologists, *(cf. Montagnier, Raoult, Malone, McCullough, Vandenbosche, Yeadon, Tritto, Peronne et al.)* that medical science has fallen under the control of Big Pharma, one of the world's most profitable and powerful industries that has an undue and dangerous influence on national and international public health bodies and foundations, a topic to which we will return in subsequent parts of this paper.

It is noteworthy, however, that the widespread distrust of science either conflicts or combines with widespread uncritical acceptance of some of the allegedly scientific, but in fact arbitrary fashionable ideas and theories that lead to a decadence of society, is often rooted in the misguided revolutionary Leftist quest for social justice known as wokeism.

PARADOXICAL COROLLARIES: THE ATTEMPT TO REINVENT HUMAN NATURE

One unexpected but very tangible phenomenon is the so-called woke ideology that has acquired vast influence over many "Western" educational and political institutions and has shaped dominant theories, are in fact anti-scientific

in essence. This trend leads to a rejection of empirically grounded common-sense facts, such as sexual dimorphism and anatomic differences in order to place feelings and wishes above objective conditions and to replace abilities and knowledge by beliefs and theories.

The resulting articulation of the doctrine is that individuals should be the sole deciders of their gender, age and identity, from early childhood and that the State's role is to encourage and protect solipsistic expressions of self-determination while segmenting society into an infinite number of self-defined minorities.

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Other applications of the woke ideology is to replace various traditional subjects of study with subjectively envisioned areas of "research" promoted by the new "liberal" Left, such as "race studies", "queer studies" and "patriarchy studies", all rooted in the agenda of "social justice warriors" to overthrow the "old order" and create an undefined Utopia of genderless equality impossibly combined with multigendered segregation, often promoting drugs and surgery to change the anatomic identities of people.

Although this description may appear satirical, it actually reflects the spirit and the actions undertaken by several governments in the Americas and in Europe to transform society by exposing very young children to those ideas and inciting them to make "personal choices" in order to "liberate" them from "sexist roles" and sexual identities that are supposedly created by social oppression. In practice, what is presented as empowerment of free choice turns into propaganda and the exercise of pressure on immature individuals to follow new standards of behaviour specifically designed to break all the "taboos" of traditional morality and religions in the name of something described as universal values, much of it derived from the Marxist-Freudian critical theory of the Frankfurt School and the anarchistic revolutionary theories of the 1960s championed by Marcuse, Reich and Horkheimer among others.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND THE FUNCTION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

There is a nearly universal awareness of the need to transform the prevalent educational systems in order to conform to the changing concepts of knowledge and methods of learning and also to integrate the new technologies that are making certain long-standing approaches to teaching and study obsolete or inadequate. To give one of the best-known examples, the appearance of ChatGPT and other similar automatic research and writing AI powered language models, in the wake of ever-expanding databases and increasing power and search engines makes the work of teachers and students easier and in many cases superfluous at the same time. In the near future, how will researchers compete with (rapidly improving) ChatGPT-like software that can write in a manner of seconds a report or an essay on the same subject after surveying all existing online literature and contextualising it? Are humans not wasting time by collecting information and painstakingly writing results of investigations that are already available in the global memory bank of the Web? Many corporations are henceforth instructing their staff to let ChatGPT write for them correspondence and reports and reducing their workforce as many tasks are becoming redundant.

The teaching profession is in crisis as it becomes increasingly challenging, in part because of the access students can instantly access information (reliable or not but burgeoning) on any subject and, because of the additional effort required of teachers who need to remain relevant and up to date in a context of widely diverse and divergent inputs and opinions in which ideology often trumps factual information (e.g. the rejection of anatomic education in certain politically correct settings on the grounds that they contradict the "anti-sexist" dogmas, or the rewriting of history according to anti-colonialist, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal etc. ideologies).

Whereas history is an inevitably subjective narrative, a "conjectural science" (according to the definition given by the French nineteenth century historian of religion and Hellenicist Ernest Renan) inspired by data that are never comprehensive and verifiably accurate—especially when it concerns events, situations and characters located in the remote past—and inevitably shaped by contemporary political and sociological interpretations, there is also a tendency to revise geography, geology and climate science in the light of controversial and insufficiently proven scenarii of "anthropogenic carbon/methane-related global

warming", predicting a looming global apocalypse and leaving little if any space for dissenting voices.

We all know that various eminent members of the Russian scientific community have raised serious caveats and doubts about the dominant and even hegemonic narrative of climate change, sponsored by many big governments and supported by powerful political and business interests, even though the proponents mostly fail to act on their own radical recipes and recommendations for preventing the feared outcomes of the ongoing process. Alternative explanations and forecasts presented by numerous other experts are generally ignored and dismissed, even though they are consonant with some well-researched historical records which should incite us to be more circumspect in our predictions of future climate evolution and less definitive regarding its main causes.

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While many Western countries are swamped by post-rational, post-democratic and "post-truth" subjectivism which leads certain academic administrators and politicians to limit and "dumb down" the teaching of "difficult" subjects such as mathematics or physics in order not to disadvantage those less able to master them, developing countries have the possibility to avoid the pitfalls created by wokeism and extreme (i.e. anti-spiritual) secularism before they also spread to their own educational systems and scientific research policies. Russia and China are two Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) that have demonstrated resistance to those destructive intellectual viruses. Public education has always been shaped by civilisational factors, combined with national circumstances, ideologies and politics but today the paramount influence of big business (including the largely globalised military-industrial complex) and supra-national lobbies is felt not only in the academic curriculum of most countries but also in the scientific research institutions that usually depend on it for funding and recognition.

In the context briefly described above, I will review the new National Education Policy (NEP) recently (2020) promulgated by the Government of India, another founding member of the BRICS and suggest some of the promises it holds and challenges it faces.

The policy is predicated on the official recognition that "the entire education system [is] to be reconfigured to support and foster learning, so that all the critical targets and goals (SDGS) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved […]. Children must not only learn but learn how to learn".

The document goes on to say: "Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, enquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible and, of course, enjoyable".

These sentences confirm that the current system, in India as in many other countries, is far from adequate to achieve the intended objectives. The NEP specifies: "Education must build character, enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate and caring, while at the same time prepare them for gainful, fulfilling employment".

The main challenge is described as making the curriculum and methods "aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDGs, while building upon's traditions and value systems", in keeping with the present Government's nationalist character and agenda that aims to instill "national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation and integration".

In the spirit of the "heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought" the policy aims to promote and facilitate multi-disciplinarity: "no hard separations between arts and sciences" for a holistic education based on the "unity and integrity of knowledge".

The policy proclaims the need to "respect the local context" in drafting the curriculum, given that education is a concurrent subject in the Indian federal policy, in which the Centre and the States share decisional attributions. It also emphasises the often neglected principle that "education is a public service" whereas it is increasingly seen all around the world as a commercial product whose quality depends upon the prices that consumers pay for it.

In the operational sector, the 10+2 structure (from the ages of 6 to 18) presently in place will be replaced by a 5+3+3+4 (from ages 3 to 18) system, starting with a pre-school Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in which emphasis is placed on basic human and national values and on the teaching of local traditions in art, storytelling, poetry, games, songs and folk crafts.

The policy puts priority on a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, in view of the alarming number of elementary schooled children who lack those basic skills, because a mass-oriented educational system, overwhelmed by numbers and a lack of resources, has been unable to form enough qualified and committed teachers, deliver good didactic tools and build many of the physical facilities required.

Let us acknowledge that similar problems are increasingly appearing in "developed" and prosperous countries where the literacy and numeracy levels are falling alarmingly, in part due to the lowering of standards and to the loss of discipline among both teachers and pupils, following the rejection of many traditional social values. Another cause is to be found in the proliferation of technical aids and "crutches" that eliminate the need for such simple tasks as mental or written calculations, writing full sentences, and memorising. Can children be easily motivated to sit in a library and read various books on a subject on which they can find a vast amount of ready-made information on their phones at the click of a button? Will they learn another language when their phones translate instantly all they want to say in their own tongue? Knowledge is not widely pursued when it is not seen as necessary. For many centuries, literacy was restricted to specialised segments of society, such as the clerics in the West, as long as books could not be printed and manual and physical skills were far more useful than the ability to read or write. Are we going towards a post-literate society in which AI and machine learning devices will perform many of the tasks regarded as characteristic of human civilisation? It is beginning to happen as we write.

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This situation is being seemingly anticipated by the creation of DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) in India and also by the desire to reduce the curriculum content in each subject to its core essentials, in order to make space for more interactive teaching and critical thinking.

This step has come under criticism from certain quarters accusing the Government of wanting to suppress certain chapters of the old curriculum that it may find inconvenient for ideological reasons. For example, it is said that the sections of the history programme dedicated to the period of Muslim rule in

India, including the mighty Mughal Empire, will be sharply reduced in size and replaced with more detailed narrations about more ancient Hindu (indigenous) periods and the regional rulers and states that resisted and often eluded Muslim conquest. Although there is controversy as to whether such changes will be implemented, one should also realise that the teaching of history at present is rather superficial at the school level, given the enormous scope in time and space of the nation's past, not to mention the rest of the world's history that is also covered. There is no question that only personally interested students or those who live in families that have an affinity with particular aspects of history are able to go more deeply into subjects that are only cursorily evoked in basic public education.

Another notable aspect of the NEP is the resolve to use the local language of pupils as the medium of instruction until Grade 5 at least and where possible, till Grade 8. This emphasis on the vernacular in a multi-linguistic country like India is tempered by the policy to teach two other languages, one according to the choice of the child and the other being English. The intent is to prevent the cultural deracination that comes with the loss of one's native tongue and the alienation that an early English medium education can bring in young minds that are at a disadvantage when they don't belong to "Westernized" families. Those who are schooled early in English are likely to imbibe the colonially instilled prejudice that the foreign culture is superior to one's own and must be adopted if one is to rise economically and be successful in society.

As a multi-lingual country India cannot but be affected by the creeping homogenisation of education and culture that affects all other countries to a growing extent. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data, India has lost 220 local languages in the last half-a-century and almost 200 others are at risk of disappearing. Even among the 22 "scheduled" languages in the Constitutions, some are faring badly as more and people switch to Hindi, English, Bengali, Tamil and other widely spoken linguistic media. To reverse that trend that brings about cultural impoverishment, the NEP proposes to revitalise ailing languages by promoting and supporting the production of books, films, magazines and newspapers as well as literary academies. All the nation's languages will be documented through a web-based platform/portal/wiki to record their vocabularies, native legends, poems, songs and other creations with the contribution of the respective populations so that people may keep in touch with their roots. For that endeavour to bear the desired

fruit, the digital divide must be eliminated through the existing Digital India Campaign for providing affordable computing devides. The goal is to create "an open, interoperable, evolvable, public digital infrastructure […] that can be used by multiple platforms and point-solutions".

Therefore, sciences and mathematics are to be taught both in the native language and in English. Sanskrit, the major repository of Indian civilisation, will be offered at all levels of school and higher education, along with an introduction to Sanskrit knowledge systems in all fields, in addition other historically important languages such as Pali (the original Buddhist medium), Prakrit and Persian are also to be made available and a national university or institute may be dedicated to them. The existing Sanskrit universities and new ones to be founded will be redesigned as multidisciplinary institutions, grounded in ancient indigenous knowledge but teaching 'modern' sciences and technologies as well.

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However, modern technologies cannot be neglected, as the NEP emphasises, and among those to which all students are to be introduced, AI, Design Thinking, holistic healthcare, and environmental education are primary.

We should point out that the promotion of traditional Indian medical systems marks a divergence from the international trend promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO), under the influence of (Western) medical associations and major pharmaceutical firms and private funders, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Under the influence of business interests the WHO and the Health Ministries of several "developed" nations are working to restrict or ban the use of alternative health therapies and products, in the name of scientific principles, consumer safety and prevention of fraud and "fake science".

On the other hand, the Indian Government is committed to 'reinvision' healthcare education by focusing on prevention, community medicine and (scientifically tested) traditional practices.

Potentially, India's NEP signals the greatest endeavour in our age to introduce and develop modes of thinking and operation in the natural and social sciences that are different and sometimes stand in opposition with the principles and

methods borrowed from Europe and North America, hitherto regarded as the only accurate and suitable ones for a complex and technologically advanced society. The challenge this poses to the global "liberal" system is not to be ignored and the Government of India is already being criticised for taking a new, more "native" course which some champions of the current system, founded on Western supremacy, label backward and unscientific.

India's attempt to harmonise its traditional knowledge and philosophical worldview with some of the prevailing global concepts is a momentous undertaking that can have a big impact both on the "developing" and "advanced" nations.

A practical aspect of the educational reform being intended is the radical transformation of Board and Entrance Examinations, in order to put an end to the pervasive "coaching culture" that leads many parents to hire private coaches for their children, to supplement the regulatory lessons. Due to the vast amount of texts and facts to be memorised, many students need outside professional help to pass exams. The goal of the NEP is to replace this system with the PARAKH, a Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic development, that will provide a more complete and accurate overview of a student's capabilities, achievements and progress than the exams, intended mostly to monitor the dedication of the student and his ability to learn by heart.

Higher Education Reform

Coming to higher education, the main problems are identified as:

- A fragmented system
- Rigid separation between disciplines and an early specialisation
- No emphasis on research and lack of funding for it
- Ineffective regulatory systems
- Large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education in many affiliated colleges

A revamping of the structure is advocated and a National Research Foundation is to be created, run by a rotating board of governors and made up of eminent experts in different disciplines and independent from the government. In parallel, all higher education institutions will be made multidisciplinary and an effort will be made to internationalise them, even though this may potentially go against

the primary emphasis on a national, domestically developed syllabus inspired by traditional knowledge because foreign academic bodies have different values and standards.

The establishment of the National Research Foundation is evidently intended to facilitate and improve quality research. Two other domains that require urgent attention and decisive action are teacher education, described as "a major weakness" at present and vocational education in need of massive support given that only 5 per cent of the Indian workforce formally follows it, according to the NEP document, compared with high numbers in nations like Germany and France or South Korea. The comparably low demand for vocational education is related to the perception, maintained by the current system, that it is an inferior curriculum, mostly offered to poor or failing students. In order to reverse that state of affairs vocational education will be integrated in the syllabus of secondary schools and focused on Lok Vidya, the popular and practical traditional knowledge and know-hows inherited from the past. Further, the Indian standard for vocational qualifications is to be aligned with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Standard Qualification of Occupations.

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Technical and agricultural education also comes into the Policy's focus as their current state is deemed unsatisfactory. The number of students in agricultural universities is falling in proportion to the overall increase in higher education, and technical education is not sufficiently linked with the world of industry. Virtual Labs are to be designed and made available on existing e-learning platforms. A National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) is to be set up as a platform for the free exchange of ideas. It will have the task of categorising emergent technologies according to their potential and estimated timeframe for causing socio-economic disruptions. Based on the NETF's assessment, the National Ministry of Education is to formally identify those potential threats that require a response from the system in order to face negative effects such as large-scale job losses, harmful effects on public and environmental health and security and eventual lethal utilisations.

CONCLUSION

The word that comes to mind upon reading the NEP programme is "ambitious" and perhaps too much so, given that it only allows a few years to carry out the fundamental transformation that is intended by the decade 2030-40, and in view of the fact that the education budget in India which represents only 4.3 per cent of the GDP and 10 per cent of the total government expenditure, despite the long-declared intent of raising it to 6 per cent of the GDP. India has to overcome the paucity of funds and the bureaucratic hurdles that can hamper or block even more modest reforms. Although the new information and communication technologies can assist in the achievement of the set goals they may also go against some of them in practice. As an instance, the increasing availability of and reliance on artificially assembled and analysed scholarly material could turn many away from painstakingly learning and explaining what is already served on a platter, so to speak.

We have evoked earlier the temptation to entrust mathematical tasks to computers. Many believe that, by relying on machines for relatively simpler or repetitive operations people should be able to dedicate themselves to far more complex and innovative tasks, but we should not forget that a rapidly increasing number of the latter are also being performed by the technologies we already possess. The space for human activity and employment is shrinking in many sectors, from education to office work, legal procedures, record keeping, secretarial tasks, business management and administration.

Will only the brightest of us be able to exercise necessary and important functions and will all others be confined to relatively menial activities? That situation could herald the onset of a new kind of techno-feudalism in which few knowledge finance magnates, like Bill Gates or Elon Musk, dictate the terms for the swarming numbers of contracted, partly employed temporary workers while leaving out vast crowds of unemployable ones.

The project of combining the Indian traditional knowledge systems with the contemporary theories and praxis of education, as the Policy advocates, is appealing but can lead to unsatisfactory results, especially in the training of physicians and pharmacologists, when and where the respective epistemologies and hermeneutics contradict each other. For instance, the holistic and "naturopathic" methods of healthcare and disease prevention and cure in India (collectively designated under the AYUSH acronym) and of other traditional

civilisations can be antithetical to the current, industrially organised and financially driven, medico-pharmaceutical system in which physicians are almost all narrowly specialised. Making Ayurveda, the Indian native medical science, conform with modern biochemical and posological standards implies sacrificing some of the basic principles and practices of the Indian therapeutic philosophy that involves recourse to meditation, astrology, spiritual and religious rituals, and other resources rejected and discredited in the name of the scientific temper and the materialistic approach. Natural compounds of plant and mineral substances prepared in small quantities for specific patients by their personal physician can lose much of their potency and even generate undesirable results when they are mass-produced from synthesised chemical extracts in automatic assembly lines.

Even the theories of mathematics differ in some important aspects, *(Raju, C.L. Cultural Traditions of Mathematics – The Nature of Mathematical Proof and the Transmission of the Calculus (2007))* in East and West and what to say of the radical differences between the respective attitudes to religion in Judeo-Christian (Abrahamic) and Indic cultures and societies?

Already, warnings have been voiced in certain quarters that, whereas the Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM) disciplines can and should follow standards and teaching methods perfected in the "developed" countries, there should be much more circumspection about adopting ideas and theories prevalent in the social sciences and humanities in those same countries, since they rest on and propagate concepts and critical approaches that undermine the indigenous spiritual and ethical foundations of the national culture and could defeat the very purpose of the NEP.

It is clear that the teaching of social sciences in states like China, North Korea, and some Muslim countries, for example, is "sui generis" and not acceptable in nations that don't subscribe to the same political or religious ideologies, but similar considerations apply to the "Western" societies that see themselves as models worldwide.

To address those concerns the NEP emphasises that the great challenges faced by Indian society require "not only top-notch science and technology but also deep understanding of social sciences, humanities and hermeneutics". Furthermore, "High quality interdisciplinary research must be done in India, not simply imported". (DI2742023SDERCCG@132145)