

Rejuvenating UP's education sector

From implementing NEP to setting up e-learning parks and colleges for vocational training, the state has taken a slew of steps to boost education. This can help economic and social progress

It is a rare opportunity to witness and contribute to the rejuvenation of higher education in a country and a state. Over centuries, India's *gurukul* system of education has undergone several changes. First, the indigenous education system served the learning needs of the residents of *Jambu Dwipa*, a name used to describe the territory of Greater India in ancient texts. Later, the British introduced the modern education system to cater to the requirements of a society on the cusp of industrialisation. Today, India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies with a massive cohort of young people, the nation's demographic dividend. Therefore, the country's higher education system must be strong enough to nurture the potential of the young so that the country can regain its glory. In addition, a robust educational system is also vital to ensure that the country attains its United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that focus on education, eradication of poverty and deprivation and accelerating economic growth.

"We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind

is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet," said Swami Vivekananda. Taking inspiration from this, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 talks about "access, equity, and quality" to aim for an increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio and improve the employability and entrepreneurship (self-employment) skills of students. The holistic and multi-disciplinary approach of NEP 2020, which focuses on multifaceted development opportunities in higher education, is being implemented by restructuring courses and pedagogy, emphasising the Indian knowledge system in the curriculum. In addition, it gives students the flexibility to enter and exit any programme, ensures inter-institutional mobility and the opportunity to choose and study subjects from different domains. The third aspect facilitates the integration of the humanities with STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). This initiative encourages cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary thinking.

But all this is easier said than done. India is diverse, which poses a challenge to inclusivity at different levels of the education system. For decades, the higher education system of Uttar Pradesh (UP) has been waiting to witness reforms because it has its own set of challenges: High density of population, diverse demographics and inadequate investment, especially from the private sector. But the silver lining was the quality of talent of students and teachers.

The rejuvenation of the state's edu-

cation system was inevitable with proper policy protection, and encouragement from the top political leadership. The change started with the incentive for innovation and expansion of education from the top. Due to the determination and positive approach of the decision-makers, UP became the first state in the country to implement NEP 2020 when Lucknow University revamped its post-graduate course structure from the 2020-21 academic session in line with the policy. It also implemented a four-year undergraduate programme, compulsory co-curricular and vocational courses, mandatory internship and dissertation, inter-departmental and intra-departmental credit transfer system, flexible entry and exit, and a part-time PhD programme.

All the state universities of UP have implemented most provisions of NEP. In addition, new initiatives, such as Academic Bank for College and University Students — Uttar Pradesh (ABACUS-UP), have been a remarkable attempt to connect teachers and students. Further, e-learning parks will be set up to help students from rural areas access high-speed internet to facilitate accessing online learning opportunities. The government is also setting up colleges for vocational and skill development courses to increase the employability of the youth.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "True education must correspond to the surrounding circumstances or it is not a healthy growth." This aspect is being addressed by establishing a centre for advanced study and various



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research schemes that encourage quality and need-based inter-disciplinary and innovative research work that is relevant at social, national, and global levels. There is also an emphasis on teaching and learning using digital platforms and advanced information technology to ensure accessibility and equity.

The Uttar Pradesh Centre for Ranking, Accreditation and Mentoring (UPCRAM) has been established to assess the performance of students and mentor universities for better performance at the national and international levels. The recent accreditation of several UP universities by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council speaks of the efforts put in for improving and upgrading the quality of education in the state. Two public universities in the state recently got A++ accreditation, and many institutions are striving for higher QS and National Institutional Ranking Framework ranking. The rejuvenated higher education ecosystem in UP is attracting enormous attention from the private sector, and several leading universities

are exploring the prospect of investment in the state.

These reforms cater to the objective of internationalisation of higher education. The number of international students applying for various programmes has increased significantly recently. In addition, MoUs between institutions within and outside the state have been prioritised to facilitate collaboration and sharing of teaching and research activities. The government has established innovation centres in universities with funding to inspire and encourage students to establish start-ups and generate self-employment. Furthermore, it has allocated special grants for setting up university incubation centres.

Education today is a movement towards enlightenment that provides a way to be economically stable and shows us how to make the world a better place to live. In this endeavour, UP has shaken off decades of inertia and is keen to lead the way.

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