NEP@FIVE

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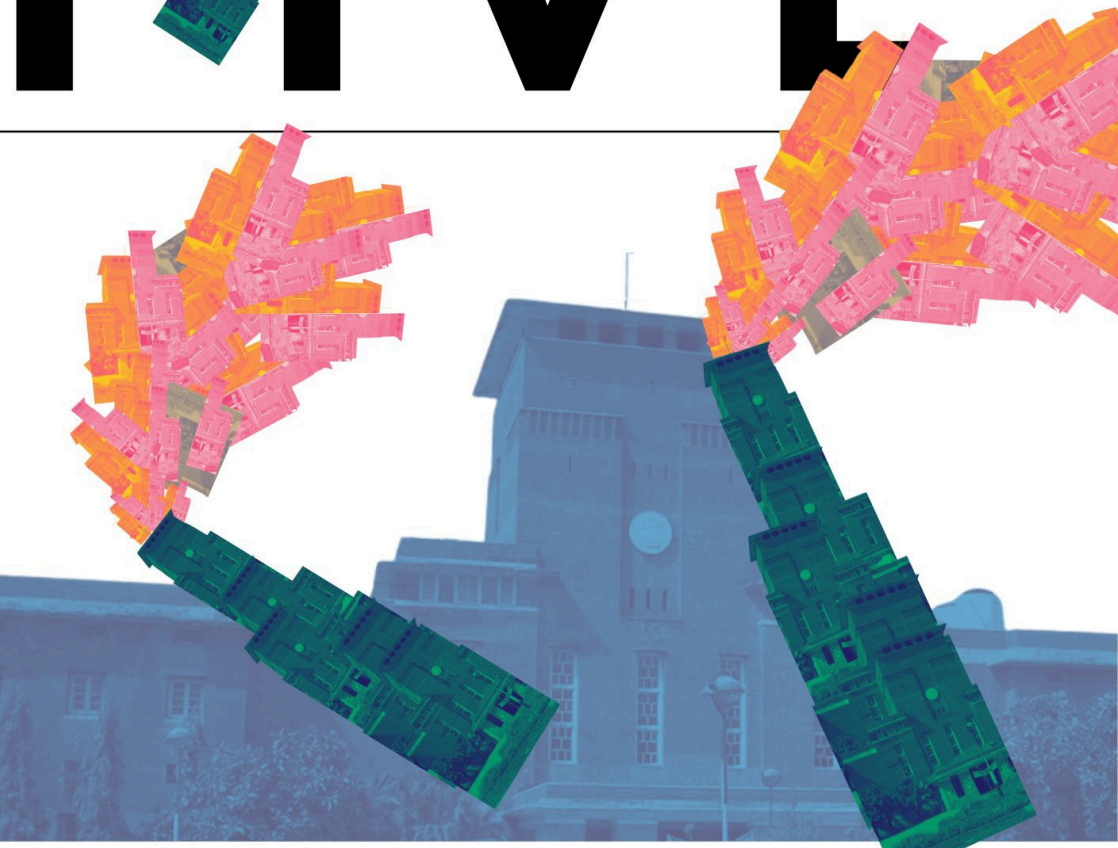

A GROUND REPORT ON THE DISMANTLING OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOLS

AN AISA PUBLICATION

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1. Introduction

In 2000, under the rule of the NDA government led by Vajpayee, a report was published to suggest reforms in the education system of India - "Report on a Policy Framework for Reforms in Education", popularly called the Ambani-Birla report, with Mukesh Ambani as the convenor and Kumar Mangalam Birla as a member of the committee. The report, advocating for a market-oriented approach towards education, focused on the "user-pay principle supported by loan schemes", depoliticization and banning of politics from campuses, and an increase in Private educational institutions, among other measures. Though never implemented, the report finds resonance in the National Education Policy (2020), implemented by the BJP Government. The aim of drawing such a parallel is to emphasise the BJP's long-standing belief and vision of commodifying and privatising education, supposed to be a public good.

The National Education Policy (NEP) "envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system" to overcome the current problems in higher education. But how does it envisage doing so? What policy measures has the government undertaken to implement its vision of so-called "holistic development"? The following report attempts to present the policy's implementation in various HEIs (Higher Educational Institutes) in the country, cutting across some of the core changes under the NEP: funding, fee hikes, change in curriculum, FYUP (Four-year undergraduate programme), and CUET (Common University Entrance Test).

The NEP document repeatedly emphasises a “light but tight” approach to education. How this is unfolding on the ground has become clearer as the policy has begun to entrench itself. A “light", market-oriented, nightwatchman role of the state towards the funding of education, abandoning public educational institutions to fend for themselves and compete for private funding. And a “tight” iron-fist, centralised position towards administration and governance of educational institutions, with little to no consultation with the stakeholders in education.

The implementation of HEFA (Higher Education Funding Agency) shifts the onus of funding higher educational institutions to a loan-based model - a joint venture between the Ministry of Education and Canara Bank, which holds 9.09 per cent and 90.91 per cent equity in the agency, respectively. It provides loans to institutions to meet their budgetary needs and infrastructure expansion; a responsibility usually accorded to the UGC (University Grants Commission). As educational institutions become dependent on loans for their infrastructure, the onus of paying back these loans falls on the students through fee hikes and an increase in self-financed courses. Thus, the institutions have to open and orient themselves to the competition of the market for funding to generate internal revenue and pay back their loans.

Moreover, a larger trend needs to be identified with changes in education, corresponding with the privatisation of other sectors across the country. Public institutions were not without problems of their own,

but nevertheless, they are aspirational centres of education for students across the socio-economic spectrum, wherein they could get an education, inculcate critical thinking andaspire to do quality research.

The increased emphasis on skill-based and vocational courses, at the cost of diluting in-depth Honours courses with an option to opt out after every year, caters to the mass proletarianization of the population in an already insecure and volatile service economy. The NEP Act refers to the 12th 5-year plan in drawing a comparison of the number of formally educated workers in the workforce between India and developed nations like the US, Germany and South Korea. The numbers are 52%, 75% and 96% respectively. While the number for India is as low as 5%. This is given as a reason for "the urgency of the need to hasten the spread of vocational education in India" (NEP). However, the government has presented no concrete plan for improving the manufacturing sector and has only been withdrawing from its developmental role to generate dignified employment to complement the increased focus on vocational education. Instead, the current government is paving the way for young people to enter an increasingly insecure and volatile job market with an inflated service sector.

The following report represents the data pertaining to

specific policy measures introduced under the NEP from central and state university campuses across the country. The rampant changes introduced in a chaotic and unplanned manner portray the infrastructural lack and incompatibility of a policy like the NEP to fulfil the aim of providing quality education for all, in a deeply hierarchical society. An educational policy which does not address the issues of caste, class, religious and gender inequalities in a society like India only works to exacerbate these differences, gatekeep education, and mould a student-citizen subservient and deprived of critical thinking.

2. Financial Restructuring & HEFA

The official HEFA website states that Rs 6,773.58 crore of HEFA loans have been approved for 32 central universities, with no available public data on the bifurcation of these funds. Delhi University (DU from hereon), which caters to a large student population from the country, across socio-economic backgrounds, is the experimental lab for the implementation of NEP in HEIs. The government approved a Rs 930cr HEFA loan to DU, following which the university has seen a fee hike. An Indian Express report states that the internal revenue of DU through fees doubled from Rs 100 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 200 crore in 2023-24(Indian Express, 2024).

JNU has taken approximately ₹495 crores in loans from HEFA (Higher Education Financing Agency) but to the strong presence of the Left-led JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) and the massive student protests in 2019 against fee hikes, there has not been any significant or direct increase in general course fees. However, fee escalation has taken a more covert and structural route. Through the introduction of self-financed courses such as BTech and MBA, the university has effectively created a parallel, exclusionary tier of education. Admissions to these programs come with hefty fees, transforming them into what are functionally private courses within a public institution. This model starkly contrasts with the traditional ethos of JNU, which has long upheld affordability and accessibility in higher education. What is particularly concerning is that these programs are not merely exceptions—they represent a larger shift under NEP-era reforms, where financial autonomy is pursued at the cost of public accountability.

This trend risks normalizing fee-based segregation, undermining the very foundation of egalitarian and publicly funded education that JNU once championed.

These structural shifts are not occurring in isolation. They are tied to a broader agenda of privatisation and ideological control under NEP 2020, where public funding is being withdrawn, and students are being pushed toward self-financed models without safety nets. Simultaneously, support systems that made higher education viable for historically excluded groups are being quietly dismantled.

Central University of Jharkhand (CUJ), Ranchi, caters to a diverse regional and socioeconomic population. The university has taken Rs 396.74 Cr through HEFA, following which the university saw an increase in fees. The fees for the M.A. Chemistry programme during the session 2021-23 were Rs 64,700 for the four-semester period. Now, for the session 2025-27, it has increased to Rs 88,366. The fee for M.A. Political Science for the 2021-23 session was Rs 21,700, and for the 2025-27 session, it has now increased to Rs 29,444. For M.A. English, the fee for the 2021-23 session was Rs 29,700, which has been increased to Rs 40,720 for the session 2025-27. Not just academic fee, but hostel fee for PhD and PG students is now Rs 9,100 and for UG-PG is Rs 6,700, from Rs 1,500 before the implementation of the NEP. Same as the case with DU and other universities which have introduced FYUP, the imposition of extra courses has extended the class hours in a day at CUJ by almost 3-4 hours. The increase in courses, tutorials, and internal assessments comes at the cost of the core subject – impacting the quality of the education.

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Uttar Pradesh has borrowed ₹356 crore from the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) till 2023. As a Scroll report indicates, "Banaras Hindu University's Masters courses saw hikes of up to 500% – for students of the MSc Agriculture programme, for instance, fees went up from Rs 3,500 per year to Rs 18,500, an increase of nearly 430%"(Deeksha, 2023). The university has also seen an increase in hostel fees. AISA is also protesting for the abolition of the 'Paid' seat in courses, for which a student can pay six to seven times the normal fees and get admission. BHU has become one of the centres for implementing RSS's ideology in the academic curriculum. It has opened well-funded departments of 'Hindu Studies' and 'Vedic Sciences', while critical departments such as Gender Studies, Rural Development, and Social Exclusion Studies remain under-resourced. Yoga and Ayurveda are now compulsory courses in the Undergraduate degree.

Universities wherein HEFA loans were not borrowed, have adopted other means to raise funds and generate a stream of internal revenue funds. University of Allahabad is resorting to other methods of raising revenue in the form of monetising university assets - commercialising buildings through allowing film shooting, asking for alumni contribution for infrastructural development, constantly fee hiking and compelling JRF scholars to contribute to the university for its functioning from their fellowship. There has been a common issue of a change in the demographic of the university, affecting students from marginalised communities the most.

Like BHU, there is a strong push in the University of Allahabad towards saffronisation of the campus. In the political science department, a "Deendayal Upadhyay Chair" has been established under which the learnings of the Manu Smriti and Varna system are dictated. Such a chair has high priority for the Government and administration, while other core subjects are facing infrastructural and funding-related barriers. The administration instead needs to invest in permanent faculty appointments for the University of Allahabad, where the PTR (Pupil to Teacher ratio) is at an abysmal 55:1, lower even than the concerning state average of Uttar Pradesh of 35:1.

Let's take Panjab University (PU) for instance - PU is not a strictly central or state university, and the funding for it is shared between the Union government and the state government of Punjab, with the Union Government having a majority share. In 2019, when the university administration applied for funds to the UGC, the UGC directed the administration to apply for HEFA loan instead. While there is no record of HEFA loans being directed towards Panjab University, the administration has received funds under the RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan) 2.0 scheme (in 2024-25, RUSA was renamed as PM-Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyaan – PM USHA). RUSA 2.0 consists of joint funding for Punjab from the centre and state, with the centre's share around 129.17 Cr and 86.12 Cr as the State's share. RUSA 2.0 emphasises the funding of "HEIs to build digital infrastructure and convert single-stream HEIs into multi-disciplinary institutions".

The fund is prescribed for the whole of Punjab and is significantly insufficient to cover the expenses for Panjab University. Budget allocation under RUSA is significantly decreasing in terms of the Budget estimate(BE) for it.
In 2021-22, it reached negative numbers due to net recoveries, and received a revised estimate of Rs 895 Crore in 2024-25 from the BE of Rs 1,815 Crore.

Karnataka has 11% of the top 100 universities in the country, i.e., of the 495 State Public Universities, Karnataka has 43. Karnataka leads in college density in India with 66 colleges per one lakh eligible population (18-23 years of age), which is more than twice the national average of 30. Karnataka has a 36.2% Gross Enrolment Ratio, which was considerably higher than the national average of 28.4%. In the pupil-teacher ratio, Karnataka was among the best performers. Against the national average of 23:1, it stood at 15:1 in Karnataka. States like Jharkhand (54:1), Bihar (64:1) and Uttar Pradesh (35:1) fall well below the target in terms of Pupil Teacher ratio (PTR). Despite such good ratings on education, the funding for Karnataka state universities, which educates students from Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities, is in dire straits. The debt-ridden Hampi University got a Rs 1 Crore grant from the central government as part of a package of Rs 8 Crores for seven universities. While the grant of Rs. 1 crore is insufficient, the delay in approval of its action plan, even two months after submission, has crippled research activities at the university. State-run universities face the threat of losing funds under the PM-USHA (Prime Minister Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyaan) scheme because of the Congress government's decision

to scrap the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Karnataka. The states resisting and refusing implementation of the NEP are at a potential risk of losing funding from central government-sponsored schemes. The oldest institutions in the state- Mysuru University and Karnataka University are facing severe financial crises as they do not have money. Several teaching and non-teaching posts are vacant in these two institutions. The budget allocation for education has been cut to 10 per cent in 2025-26 from 12 per cent in 2024-25. In the budget, Rs 419 Crore is allocated for "subsidy and financial assistance, which was ₹481 crore last year, and can affect scholarships and other programmes" (The Hindu, 2025).

The Tamil Nadu state government outrightly rejected the NEP 2020 in 2021. The state cited reasons of threat to social justice and federalism and imposition of Hindi in educational institutions as some of its central concerns (educationforallinindia, 2025). Refusal to implement the NEP is being used by the central government as leverage to withhold funds for important centrally funded schemes and scholarships. The Central government retained ₹573 crore of the first instalment of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) during FY 2024-25 after Tamil Nadu turned down NEP provisions such as the three-language formula and PM-SHRI compliance. The Tamil Nadu state has filed an original suit against the central government for the payment of Rs 2,291 crores (inclusive of interest) under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. As of 31st March, 2025, the central government has withheld the fund distribution allocated under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

of states which have resisted the provisions of the NEP - Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are "allocated Rs 328.90 crore, Rs 2,151.60 crore, and Rs 1,745.80 crore respectively for the 2024-25 fiscal year, no funds had been released from this central share to these States" (The Hindu Bureau, 2025). With the state tracking back from its constitutional duties, the Tamil Nadu government is funding school education from its own exchequer.

In terms of higher education, the CUET and FYUP implementation nationally is having an adverse impact on students of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu students studying under the state 3-year degree model may face trouble during scholarship documentation (credit mismatch, eligibility rules) or denial of access to centrally managed scholarship portals like NSP (National Scholarship Portal) if structural alignment is lacking. Many new central scholarships (UGC, AICTE, MoE) are designed to be implemented within NEP-aligned frameworks, especially for 4-year UG programmes, Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), and multiple exit/entry pathways. With the advent of CUET, there has been a drop in students from state boards in favour of students from the CBSE board, English medium education and access to coaching. University sources from the Central University of Tamil Nadu noted only 42% of admissions are from the state board, confirming a drop from their previous share. There has also been a shift towards the use of Hindi as an administrative language in central universities in Tamil Nadu.

3. FYUP Implementation & Academic Restructuring

The FYUP programme was scrapped by the NDA government in 2014, introduced before by the UPA government, only to be reinstated by them under the NEP. Under the programme, the traditional three-year undergraduate course has been extended to four years, while students are given the option to exit after one year with a certificate, after two years with a diploma, after three years with a degree and after four years – a degree with a research specialisation.

The FYUP implementation in DU and across campuses in the country is an adverse exercise for any commitment to serious education. An increased weightage for SEC (Skill enhancement course) and VAC (Value addition course) at the cost of subject-specific rigour in the name of oft-repeated 'multidisciplinary' turn is an ill-thought-out and unserious measure. N.P. Ashley, an English professor at St. Stephens, writes in The Wire, "today we seem to go through a managerial turn – an MBAisation of all disciplines in their presentation: key takeaways, USPs, sales pitches, bullet points, SWOT analyses and so on. This process reformulated the student as a consumer who needs to be made happy, and thus their choice became central in the National Educational Policy (NEP)."

Academics and activists have emphasised the experimental role of the Delhi University as the site for the eventual break-up of affiliated colleges into autonomous multidisciplinary higher educational institutions. Extensive reports from across the country suggest the large-scale closure and merger of

schools according to the NEP. Higher education is to witness the same fate through the NEP, which suggests a "phasing out of the affiliated college sector over the next 15 years. And for this purpose, it reinstated a model of 'graded autonomy' – following which the total number of higher education institutions had to be reduced to one-fourth of its current size, and the remaining infrastructures re-arranged into three 'types'. The third and last 'type' – called 'autonomous degree-granting colleges' – is what the affiliated colleges were to be dissolved and clustered wholesale into, subject to a maximum count of 10,000 (the wire). More than 80 colleges of the University of Delhi have currently been piloted into creating a blueprint for how the affiliated college 'takeover' might be managed with minimum news and maximum confusion (The Wire)."

The feedback from students of JNU in a survey conducted by AISA on the FYUP reaffirmed concerns about increased academic and financial pressure. Approximately 80% of respondents believe that the academic burden has increased, and about 72% feel that the main course focus has reduced, either significantly or to some extent. Additionally, around 90% of students acknowledged that the additional year of FYUP increases the financial burden to some extent or certainly. These figures reflect a strong student sentiment that the FYUP structure adds pressure both in terms of workload and economic cost.

Beyond these core concerns, students of JNU reported frequent scheduling clashes between AEC and VAC classes and limited access to their desired electives.

Along with this, many feel their faculty didn't have enough time to cover the syllabus effectively.

Overall, the data clearly reflects the reality of a program that, while claiming for 'enrichment', has introduced new barriers for students.

Since the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, universities like Ambedkar University Delhi and Jamia Millia Islamia have undergone substantial academic and financial restructuring, which has raised serious concerns about affordability, academic freedom, and equity—especially by 2024–25. Both institutions report a mandatory shift toward MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and skill-based components in the curriculum. At Jamia, 20% of subject content is now delivered through MOOCs, while at AUD, MOOCs account for up to 4 credits per semester. Though intended to "digitally transform" education, these courses have been widely criticized by students and faculty as lacking academic depth and undermining classroom learning. Faculty members also view them as a threat to academic jobs and autonomy.

The implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) at the University of Allahabad under NEP 2020 reveals a top-down restructuring of higher education without adequate stakeholder engagement. Framed as offering flexibility and academic enrichment, FYUP in practice increases academic burden while undermining core disciplinary focus through dilution via "minor" and "value-addition" courses.

The supposed benefit of multiple exit points instead institutionalizes early dropouts as acceptable outcomes, normalizing educational discontinuity rather than addressing its root causes like socio-economic exclusion.

In regular undergraduate programs under the FYUP (Four-Year Undergraduate Programme) in Bihar, students are now charged under 18 different heads, including tuition, registration, cultural fees, environmental care charges, welfare fees, and building maintenance. This includes ₹600 per semester lab charges, despite the fact that most universities lack proper laboratory facilities, materials, or academic resources. Such an arrangement not only questions the rationale of these charges but exposes a deeply flawed model of revenue extraction in public institutions. The absence of proportional improvement in services further worsens the inequity

4. Fee Hikes & Self-Financed Courses

In Ambedkar University Delhi, between 2022 and 2025, the first-semester fee for BA (Hons.) programs in History and English increased from ₹28,230 to ₹33,500, an 18.7% hike, while fees for subsequent semesters rose from ₹23,230 to ₹28,500, a 22.7% increase. AUD's model further complicates affordability by requiring students to pay full fees upfront before applying for waivers or refunds—a system that disproportionately disadvantages working-class and first-generation learners.

These fee hikes are accompanied by a steady decline in scholarships and fellowships. At Jamia, critical support schemes such as the Maulana Azad National Fellowship (MANF) and Pre-Matric/Post-Matric scholarships have been discontinued. The remaining non-NET fellowship, stagnant at ₹8,000/month, is frequently delayed by 2–3 months, disrupting financial stability for research scholars. At AUD, although the non-NET fellowship is marginally higher at ₹13,000/month, it too suffers from regular delays and must be demanded repeatedly by students. Moreover, AUD's Learning Enhancement Fund, meant to support academic fieldwork, remains unused post-pandemic, revealing the gap between policy promises and actual implementation.

The drastic fee hikes in Allahabad University, most notably the PhD admission fee spiking by over 3,000% (from ₹500 to ₹16,000), expose NEP's covert agenda of commodifying education. These hikes, coupled with a sharp rise in self-financed programs such as BCA, B.Voc,

and integrated Data Science degrees, deepen the stratification of access.

These courses are unaffordable to a majority and lack parity in institutional support, fostering an internal two-tier education system—public in form but private in function. Students from marginalized backgrounds are disproportionately affected, with no robust scholarship or aid mechanisms in place.

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Lucknow University has seen a steady and deliberate increase in the number of self-financed courses—a trend that effectively serves as a backdoor mechanism for fee hikes. At the undergraduate level, core programs like B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. have undergone a structural shift, where regular seats are being reduced and replaced with self-financed ones. For example, in a B.A. programme, the semester fee for three regular subjects is ₹3,000. However, if even one of the three subjects is self-financed, the fee shoots up to ₹7,000 per semester, more than double the original amount. This represents a sharp and hidden escalation in cost under the guise of academic restructuring. The situation is even more stark at the postgraduate level, where many programs have been entirely converted into self-financed courses. Subjects like Psychology, Journalism & Mass Communication, Library Science, Public Health, Biotechnology, and Environmental Science now offer zero regular seats. The semester fees for these courses range from ₹25,000 to ₹35,000, making them largely inaccessible for students from low-income or marginalized backgrounds. Even within programs that still retain both regular and self-financed sea

-ts, such as Social Work, the disparity is striking. The semester fee for a regular seat is ₹7,000, while for a self-financed seat, it jumps to ₹28,000, marking a 400% increase for the same course content and classroom.

This drastic conversion of public education into a self-funded model under NEP is not just a matter of financial policy, it represents a shift in values. It signals a move away from accessible, inclusive education toward a market-driven system, where affordability becomes the gatekeeper to learning.

For example, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Bihar's universities has intensified the financial burden on students through structured multi-component fee hikes and the expansion of self-financed courses—without any significant investment in academic infrastructure or learning quality. These changes, observed and documented till 2024, reflect a broader pattern of exclusion and privatization in public education.

Simultaneously, self-financed courses have proliferated across Bihar's universities with exorbitant and arbitrary fee structures, and no regulatory oversight. The Bihar Engineering University, headed by the Chief Minister as Chancellor, is a stark example. Students have been failed for marginal discrepancies (0.1–0.3 marks), academic calendars are severely delayed, and cases of student suicides in districts like Gopalganj and Sheohar underline the psychological pressure induced by administrative negligence and academic instability.

Yet, no systemic response or course correction has been initiated by the state. Despite charging such high fees, basic educational resources remain grossly inadequate, raising serious concerns about the misuse of student funds and the absence of public accountability.

These developments reveal a dangerous shift: the transformation of public universities from centres of accessible education into self-financed entities run on profit logic—without the protections, resources, or transparency of private institutions.

As of 2024, it is evident that NEP's structural changes in Bihar have disproportionately affected students from marginalized backgrounds by creating financial and psychological barriers to education. These trends are unfolding without robust public debate, and in the absence of strong regulatory mechanisms, pose a long-term threat to the right to equitable and affordable higher education in the state.

Panjab University saw a considerable fee hike of 15 per cent in courses and a hike of 7.5 per cent in self-financed courses in 2023. Panjab University caters to a considerable student population from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal and Jammu and Kashmir. The renowned 5-year law department of the university has become increasingly unaffordable, with the yearly fees for 2025 reaching Rs 1,17,555. Another instance of a push towards establishing an overarching authority with no consultation is evident from the fact that PU-affiliated colleges resisted the imposition of the NEP on their campuses.

While the NEP was implemented on the main campus, the implementation for the rest was deferred by one year. The elections for the senate body, which governs the Panjab University, have not been held since the end of its previous term in October 2024, for which university-wide protests were held. The Vice-Chancellor has appropriated the functions of the Senate and is operating in an increasingly authoritarian manner, following the centre's diktats. Before the commencement of the 2025 session, the administration also issued a notice which stated that any new students taking admission in the university must sign an affidavit to ensure that they will not participate in any protest on the campus.

5. CUET & Centralised Admissions

The CUET (Common Undergraduate Entrance Test) was introduced to implement uniformity for admissions across universities. How it has played out demands immediate attention. The NEP implores the deplorable coaching culture that exists in the education system; however, the introduction of an exam such as the CUET advocates for external educational centres beyond the school classroom. One only has to draw a parallel with the cut-throat business and pressure that surrounds the JEE exam for admission in engineering colleges to understand the impact the CUET will have. Coaching centres have sprouted overnight, offering competitive pricing and promising admissions in India's premier universities. A student who is able to afford the preparation at a coaching centre will be able to do better and have a higher chance of clearing the entrance.

The impact of it has been felt in the demographic change in universities across the country. Wherein students doing their school education from state boards were able to secure admission in premier central universities for undergraduate programmes, it is increasingly shifting and favouring students from a common CBSE background, and availing the coaching preparation available. As reported by comrades in CUJ, the demographic shift is towards students from an English education background and with a school education from a specific board.

Delhi University, which caters to students from across the country from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and education boards,

has seen a similar shift in its demographic as well. The demography of the Pondicherry University which primarily catered to students from across education boards from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and the North-East has changed with the new batch coming in through CUET.

Reportedly, there has been increase in students from North India with an English and CBSE background. A trend that is also being observed in Hyderabad Central University (HCU). While in a university like BHU, the institute has become regionally more diverse, but at the cost of an increased economic homogeneity. Almost 750 students in BHU were not able to get admission even after clearing CUET, because of a technical fault with the upgrade option on the SAMARTH portal. On being asked about this discrepancy, the university administration claimed that the portal is managed by Delhi University and is not up to them.

The adoption of CUET (Common University Entrance Test) for undergraduate admissions in Allahabad University furthers this exclusionary framework. Marketed as a meritocratic measure, CUET privileges students from urban, upper-class backgrounds who can afford coaching. It disrupts localized, context-sensitive admission systems, and has led to increased confusion and financial stress among aspirants. Students from marginalized communities face systemic exclusion due to the test's design, language bias, and logistical hurdles, resulting in a demographic shift within campuses that undermines the principle of inclusive education.

This increased centralisation to conduct exams, and doing away with universities holding their own entrances, has only brought more chaos and confusion. Semesters on most campuses are delayed by a month or two on account of the NTA (National Testing Agency) delaying the publishing of results. Moreover, repeated reports of exams being leaked and conducted in a haphazard manner have put the NTA under fire. The teachers and student union in JNU have been protesting to scrap the CUET, and reinstation the erstwhile JNUEE for JNU to conduct their own entrances. Increased focus on organising such a large-scale entrance exam without the infrastructural capability is doomed to fail and to leave students behind.

6. Dismantling School Education Through NEP

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, rather than strengthening universal education, has opened the door to selective privileging and exclusion through extra-constitutional mechanisms. Under the guise of excellence, the Union and state governments are promoting "model" or "exemplar" schools like PM SHRI by diverting disproportionate funding and resources to a few "high-performing" institutions. This creates educational oases, while systematically undermining and withdrawing support from the wider public schooling system, especially under-resourced rural and marginalised schools.

In Delhi, for instance, the 'Abhishikt' programme identifies a few "gifted" students through multi-stage testing, ironically in violation of RTE norms that prohibit selection tests in school admissions. These students, chosen in collaboration with ideologically inclined institutions, are promised advanced pedagogy like inquiry-based learning, which ironically is a right for all children under RTE. This approach implicitly reserves quality education for a select few, repackaging meritocracy as a justification for segregation. At a national level, the SATH-E project led by NITI Aayog has recommended closure of 4.5 lakh schools under the claim of 'optimisation', branding 11 lakh schools as 'sub-scale'. With already 10 lakh teacher vacancies—mainly in rural areas—and a dropout rate exceeding 40% before Grade 11, the consolidation of schools is worsening access.

The assumption that fewer, bigger schools improve quality overlooks accessibility, local needs, and inclusion. These closures disproportionately affect Dalits, Adivasis, girls, and children with disabilities, exacerbating inequality.

Between 2017–2023, India lost over 87,000 schools, including nearly 77,000 government schools. The government has failed to maintain accurate data on these closures, as noted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, which sharply criticised the Ministry for the lack of transparency and urged immediate corrective action. The Committee warned that the RTE Act cannot be bypassed by an executive policy like NEP, and denounced the withholding of SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) funds from states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal for not signing on to PM SHRI. In essence, NEP 2020 is enabling a silent restructuring — centralising control, hollowing out mass public education, and privileging elite institutions — while masking it as quality reform. The closure of schools without clear accountability or constitutional compliance threatens to reverse decades of progress on educational equity and access.

In Uttar Pradesh, this pattern is replicated. Over 5,000 public schools are being shut down under the pretext of "resource optimization." Low enrolment, often caused by poor facilities and underfunding, is blamed on communities, shifting the burden of failure to the marginalised. As students, especially girls, are forced to travel long distances, dropout rates soar. Meanwhile, the private school sector has grown by 14% in a decade, as 10% of governmen

-t schools have vanished.

Privatisation fills the vacuum, but at great cost: unregulated fee structures, exploitative teaching conditions, and exclusion of the poor, thus intensifying educational inequality.

Even in states resisting NEP, like Karnataka, which is formulating its own State Education Policy (SEP), NEP's principles of school mergers and privatisation are being mirrored. More than 6,000 schools in the state have been closed or merged, particularly in tribal and rural districts. Students are being pushed into distant institutions, and college and university closures are being discussed due to "financial unviability." These changes are disproportionately harming marginalised students who cannot afford private education.

The Chirag scheme introduced by the Haryana government exemplifies the similar trend of school closer through a systematic shift in public education policy—redirecting state resources away from government schools and toward private institutions, under the guise of expanding choice for economically weaker sections (EWS). By offering reimbursements ranging from ₹700 to ₹1,100 per student (from Classes II to XII) to private schools that admit students under the scheme, the state effectively subsidizes private education using public funds. This comes even as Haryana grapples with over 50,000 vacant teacher posts and crumbling infrastructure in government schools, an area that desperately needs investment.

The scheme, which replaced the earlier RTE mandate, now incentivizes parents to move their children out of government schools into private ones, particularly “budget” schools that are already mushrooming across the state. Disturbingly, nearly 90% of students enrolled in state schools fall under the Chirag income threshold, making the potential for mass migration, and public school decline, immense. The consequences are already visible as between 2014 and 2022, the state shut down nearly 300 government schools, opening just eight new ones.

In essence, NEP 2020 is not just an education reform, it is a quiet reordering of the public education landscape, centralising control, corporatising access, and eroding the constitutional promise of equitable education. It promotes a logic of scarcity and elitism, camouflaged under buzzwords like quality, merit, and optimisation, while undermining the right to education for the many in favour of privilege for the few.

7. Conclusion

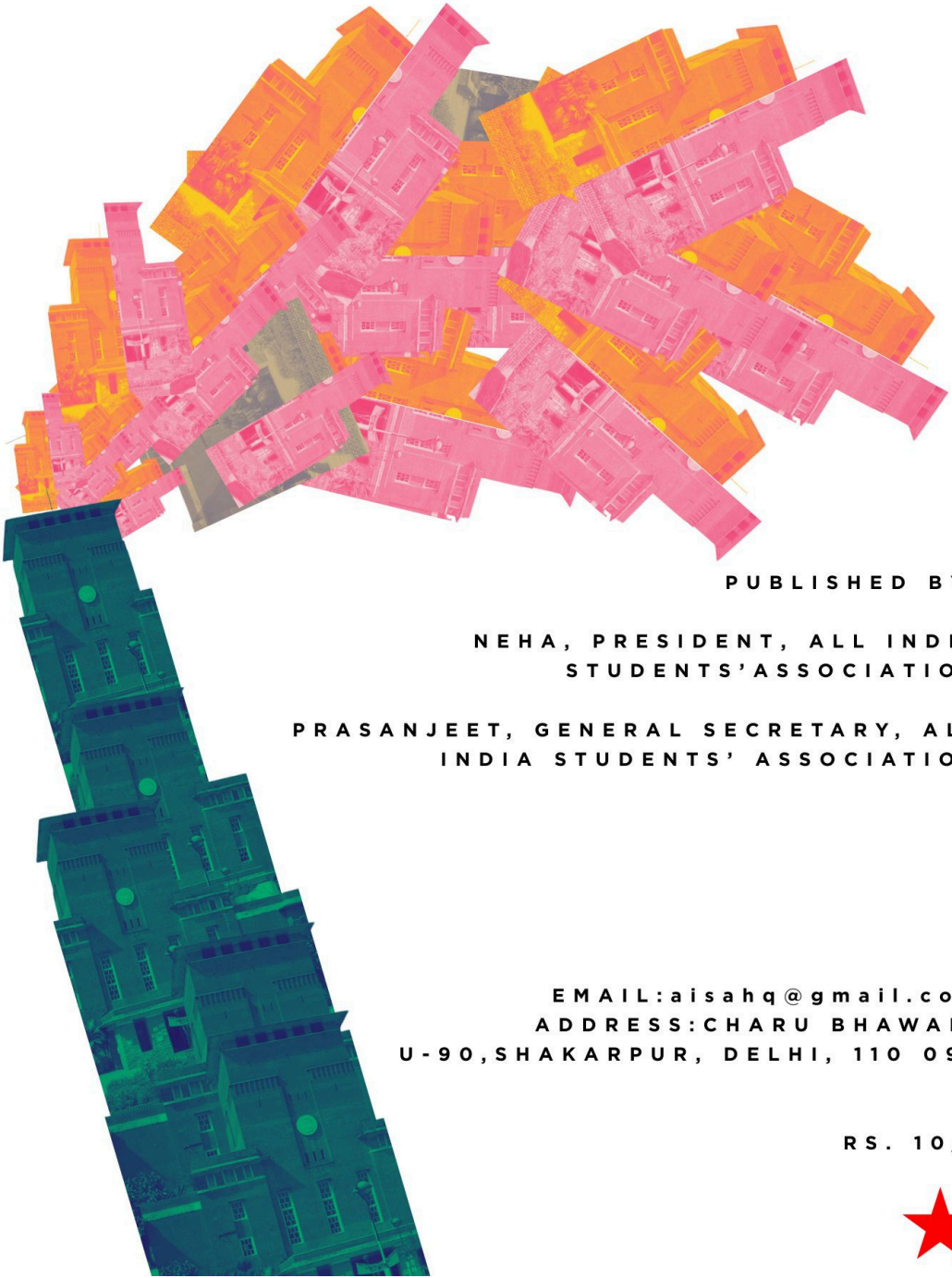
In a country where occupation and opportunities for a better life are dictated along class, caste and gender lines, education remains one of the sole avenues for economic mobility and a more dignified life. The access to public education was already not expansive enough to cater to students across the socioeconomic spectrum. The policy is riddled with contradictions, chaos and confusion and worsens the state of public education. For instance, as universities like Delhi University enter the 4th year of the FYUP programme this August of 2025, there is no clarity to the students and teachers on the research intended 4th year, and it remains to be seen how it unfolds. The NEP is particularly insidious in its application of transforming education into an enclosed, privileged bubble of a consumer-client relationship.

The NEP commits to increasing public spending on education to reach the policy target of 6% of the GDP. However, it is at 4.6%, and still short of its desired target. UGC & AICTE funding has been cut from Rs 6,676 Crore in 2023-24 to Rs 3,152 Crore in 2024-25, and the Budget Estimate (BE) shows a marginal increase to Rs 3,536 Crore for 2025-26. The spending on research & development was just 0.64% in 2020-21 and only a negligible increase to 0.65% in 2022.

While driving public education towards the whims of Capital, the NEP, in a seemingly contradictory manner, stresses the importance of ancient Indian knowledge as part of the higher education curriculum. The introduction of Hindu epics like the Mahabharata

and the Ramayana as part of the syllabus and the push towards Hindi language education represent the dual vision of the BJP - Neoliberal Capitalism and Hindutva.

It is pertinent for students across to organize on university and college campuses to resist the implementation of the NEP 2020, since this policy rather than democratizing education, institutionalizes economic exclusion, caste-gender disparities, & privatization. It shifts the state's role from provider to regulator, paving the way for a market-driven education system that is inaccessible to the marginalized, undemocratic in governance, and regressive in pedagogical values.



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