



Kant's Educational Philosophy and the NEP 2020: A Critical Assessment

Tarak Nath Nandi, Ph. D

Assistant Professor in Philosophy,

Sambhu Nath College, Labpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India

Email. taraknathnandi7@gmail.com

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Abstract

In this paper, the alignment of Kant's educational philosophy with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is discussed, and Kantian principles are presented as a framework for educational reforms. With the ongoing process of globalization and the transformation of the education system in India, NEP 2020 aims to overhaul the nation's education system, raising questions about its alignment with ethical and philosophical principles, including those of Immanuel Kant. The paper also critically evaluates it through the comparative study of Kantian philosophy with the fundamental goal of NEP 2020. The research reveals that although the NEP 2020 aligns with Kant's concepts of autonomy, moral development, and rational thinking, it also emphasizes skill-based learning and addresses challenges such as digitalization and globalization faced by the modern education system. The paper concludes that Kantian philosophy is useful for understanding educational reforms, but care is needed when applying these abstract principles to a context-specific policy, such as the NEP 2020. Further studies are suggested to comprehensively assess the implementation of NEP 2020 and its consistency with its philosophical vision.

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1. Introduction:

The education sector in India has various challenges, such as the digital divide between rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban; high dropout rates; and disparities in access to education. Insufficient teachers, outdated curriculum, and poor infrastructure are factors that impact the quality of education (Dash, 2000; Singal, 2006). Economic pressures, low quality of education, and social factors are the reasons behind high dropout rates (Draboo, 2020). The digital divide is now a reality, more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, concerning access to technology and the integration of digital tools in the field of education (Mathrani et al., 2022). The problems related to the implementation of policy and governance are fragmented implementation, no monitoring, and quality problems in higher education. These challenges are further compounded by financial constraints such as underfunding and the influence of the private sector. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was initiated by the government to tackle the issues of education in India. The NEP's goals are to solve the problems at hand, build a just society, and make India a knowledge hub and a developed nation. Yet the effectiveness of the NEP in reaching its grand objectives and the potential challenges to its implementation are still questionable.

It is crucial to make a critical evaluation of the NEP and find out whether it is working well to solve the long-standing problems. Thus, Immanuel Kant's ideology on education (1724-1804) is used for analysis in this paper. His writings emphasize the crucial role of education in fostering critical thinking, ethical development, and individual autonomy. These are some of the elements of learning that make a contribution to the development of a just society. The NEP can be analyzed from a Kantian perspective to assess its compatibility with the principles of reason, morality, and autonomy. So, the question of this paper is: To what extent is NEP 2020 related to Immanuel Kant's vision of education? This analysis will be used to focus on those areas where the NEP is not successful in identifying potential targets for its improvement and implementation. When seen through this lens, the policy can be understood from a philosophical perspective, and thus helps us to better understand how it may impact Indian education. In this study, a qualitative research method is used, which is a comparison between Immanuel Kant's philosophy and NEP 2020. It looks at the fundamental tenets and consequences of both and identifies similarities and differences in primary texts, and spots underlying patterns.

The focus on moral development (Louden, 2016) and the development of autonomy of Kant offers a rich perspective on the policy's goals and practices. The analytes of this analysis are 'autonomy' (Taylor, 2005), 'moral education' (K. A. Moran, 2009; Sullivan, 1989), and 'holistic development' (Louden, 2016), which is an integrative approach that encompasses intellectual, emotional, and social growth. On the one hand, Kant's emphasis on autonomy is in line with the objectives of NEP 2020 of enhancing critical thinking and promoting lifelong learning, but on the other hand, it poses relevant questions about whether the policy has taken the moral aspect of education into account, which Kant considered a fundamental aspect of the education system. Kant suggested that the purpose of education is to make people self-governing and capable of moral decision-making, which may be urging students to reflect on the focus of vocational education and skill development over moral and ethical education in NEP 2020. This framework is based on the moral obligation of education, which is of paramount importance in determining the achievements of NEP 2020 in terms of its vision of producing not only skilled workforces, but also citizens of conscience. As such, the framework raises questions like: How does NEP 2020 encourage or discourage students' autonomy and moral thinking? What parts of the policy are consistent and what parts of the policy are inconsistent with Kantian educational principles? In the Indian educational landscape, NEP 2020 is an opportunity to revisit the visions of education in light of Kant's philosophical accounts, particularly in the current context of educational equity and moral education. This conceptual framework defines these concepts, discusses their interrelationships, and establishes a structured basis for a detailed analysis of NEP 2020 from a Kantian perspective.

2. Immanuel Kant's Philosophy on Education:

The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant had deep insight into education. Though his ideas are 18th-century, his concepts are still relevant in the modern educational landscape. Immanuel Kant was a philosopher of education whose emphasis was on education for autonomy and moral reasoning. Education, in Kant's view, serves the purpose of teaching people to think for themselves and exercise self-determination (Bayrak, 2015; Sullivan, 1989). By disciplining the child in rational principles, he is moved away from impulsiveness and brought to emancipate and liberate himself. Kant's pedagogical ideas have been influential in modern pedagogical thought; his ideas are the foundation of ideas for future thinkers and educators (Allison, 1990).

Education is a way to develop a moral character; this is a central role given to education by Immanuel Kant. Starting from the idea of morality as an innate quality, he suggested that all people are molded by their environment and education, and that moral formation begins in childhood (Assunção et al., 2024). Kant conceived education as a means to advance society and suggested that education might be the path to enlightenment and the development of virtues like “humility” and “self-respect” for humanity (K. A. Moran, 2009). This perspective places education not only on the level of intellectual activity, but also as a moral obligation (Kant, 2012, pp. 434–485).

At the heart of Kant’s educational philosophy is the balancing of the autonomy of the individual with a responsibility to society. He outlined an integrated approach to moral education, which includes several aspects (Kant, 2012, pp. 434–485). First, basic education is a precondition to the “real world” versus the logical philosophical concept of morality. Secondly, it is very important for people to develop their motivation to internalize the moral law and act accordingly. Thirdly, by philosophical education, the foundations of morality are enhanced, increasing the level of understanding and thus enabling people to question their morals and values. Last, however, moral principles must be applied in actual life, and practical wisdom is necessary for this. Moral wisdom extends to moral judgment (Sticker, 2015). All these are related in Kant's discussions and are signs of his belief that the process of education is a process that leads to the formation of individuals as responsible and ethical citizens.

Immanuel Kant is referred to as the father of critical thinking, and he ushered in a new era of questioning everything in philosophy. The “critical philosophy” he formulated is the foundation of contemporary critical investigation, and the term “critique” was introduced by him to signify that the investigation of the limits and potentialities of knowledge was done in a “critical” way. Kant thought that reason is the most important power in the understanding of the world, and that this could be attained through critical examination, which implies the uncovering of the basic structures of the world (Faraj, 2020). He also differentiated between perceived reality (phenomena) and true reality (noumena), which encouraged an inquiry into reality (Allais, 2017). Individual autonomy and the strength of individual thought were central to his philosophy; the critical thinking skills. However, there are challenges with the conceptual foundations of critical thinking. The difficulties to be found in reconciling the Kantian and Humean viewpoints on practical reason, for example, might be very illuminating about the limits of critical thought (Cuypers, 2004). The idea of the critical thinking movement in education can be summarized as: It is desirable that human beings be able to apply reason in a

rational way to obtain good beliefs. This value is crucial for individual autonomy and liberty, but poses certain philosophical and practical challenges for educators dealing with its implementation in teaching while keeping in mind other values in education (Ritola, 2021). Kant's critical thinking has thus paved the way for the critical enquiry in many subjects in modern times (Kant et al., 2000).

Hence, Kant considered education to be an educational activity which was to nurture rational thinking, autonomy and moral development. He placed several points on the table: Education should foster reason; he considered it to be the basis for human understanding and morality. This includes promoting the ability to reason, think critically and assess ideas and arguments. Second, Kant grouped autonomy as a key point to consider; education should give student opportunities to think independently, make choices and be independent themselves. Lastly, he was convinced of the value of moral character. For Kant, the moral education has a significant role in the development of a just and equitable society. Thus, the moral values should be inculcated by education, thought process should be encouraged towards ethics and responsibility to others should be developed.

It was ridiculed as being too intellectualistic in its educational philosophy, but has been re-interpreted to show its relevance to today's education (Webb 2020). His ideas are applied to challenge the commercialization of education, but some argue that these do not sufficiently focus on the primary issues (S. Moran, 2015). The problems of today's educational environment are comparable to those Kant noted, but it is not easy to apply his philosophy in today's technologically-driven world (Kornilaev, 2023). However, there is a conflict between his concept of moral agency and his way of moral education, which appears to be the one based on external guidance. The tension can be overcome when moral education's ultimate purpose is to pursue the highest good and to create an ethical community (K.A. Moran, 2009).

3. National Education Policy, 2020:

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to fundamentally reshape the country's education system by tackling key challenges and concerns such as access, quality, and holistic development (Ramesh, 2023). The main objectives are: development of a knowledge-based society, grooming young people for the 21st-century challenges, and inclusive and equitable quality education (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Sethi, 2023). It is anticipated that this policy will usher in a paradigm shift in the school curriculum with a new curricular structure known as "NEP 5+3+3+4" based on the developmental stages of children and focusing on the

development of foundational literacy and numeracy skills. NEP 2020 promotes multi-streams and flexibility in curriculum in higher education, with students choosing a course from different streams that will enhance inter-disciplinary learning. Moreover, the creation of the National Educational Technology Forum is to encourage the utilization of technology in learning, especially digital learning and online resources (Ministry of Education, p. 56, 2020; Tungoe, 2024). The policy emphasizes continuous professional development of teachers, including the setting up of the National Mission for Teacher Training, with a thrust on improving the quality of teachers. Moreover, the establishment of a National Assessment Center (SASHAKT) aims to improve learning outcomes through the use of a standardized assessment and educational quality monitoring (Ministry of Education, 2020, 18, 60).

The NEP 2020 has the goal of creating a holistic education that covers every dimension of the human person, be it the intellectual, artistic, social, physical, emotional, or moral dimension. It aims to provide people with 21st-century skills in different areas, so as to increase their involvement in society and stimulate their critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 36). Moreover, NEP 2020 reiterates the demand for autonomy at various levels: institutions are empowered to frame their curriculum and pedagogies; students are allowed to opt for subjects of their interest, and teachers are allowed to choose their pedagogies. Both academic and administrative aspects of institutional autonomy are emphasized. Further, the policy is designed to encourage critical thinking by embedding aspects of the curriculum, utilizing problem-based learning, as well as developing assessments that will focus on higher-order thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 5).

Unlike the previous policy documents, NEP 2020 has put greater focus on early childhood education. It offers flexibility in higher education, with the ability to offer a number of entry points as well as exit points, encouraging a learner-centric approach. The NEP 2020 is different from the previous policies that tended to keep vocational education in isolation from mainstream education and now aims to integrate vocational education into mainstream education. The current policy also emphasizes the role of technology in education, which was not adequately given due consideration in the previous policies, but was noted as a gap in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, the agenda of inclusivity and equity is also a key component of NEP 2020, and it has been deeply emphasized that addressing the issue of equal opportunity to education for those who have been at the margins of the system. In addition, NEP 2020 has a stronger focus on inclusion and equity, providing a level playing field in education to the disadvantaged segments of society. In brief, this comprehensive

strategy could be considered a giant leap towards a more inclusive and flexible education system across India, centered on technology.

4. Discussion:

NEP 2020 is aligned with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, where the focus is on training the whole person to think, create, and do good, consistent with the concept of Kantian education, which emphasizes the education of children to be autonomous and take ethical action. The policy's emphasis on equity and inclusion is in line with Kant's categorical imperative that aims to ensure that every student receives quality education, regardless of their socio-economic background. Furthermore, NEP 2020's focus on autonomy and professional development of teachers is a respect for teachers as rational agents, according to Kant's ethics. Considering moral and ethical education as a part of the agenda of NEP 2020, the development of moral reasoning and social responsibility in students has been a vision of Kant, which seeks to nurture moral citizens.

The Kantian approach to moral education focuses on developing rational, autonomous persons who act out of universal moral principles (Kant et al., 2012). It is important to teach responsibility, and the appreciation of moral law, and moral education should have more than to teach students the rules they must follow and help them internalize a moral program. This stress on the role of reason in moral decision-making, and not on motives or incentives, resonates with Kant's stress on making moral citizens. The problem with moral education in India is the education system, where schools vary in their educational approaches, and society is constantly changing (Seshadri, 1978). The country's focus, however, on spiritual and moral development is consistent with the Kantian principle of habituation of the values into the conduct. The recognition of value education as a vital part of the technical curriculum of schools and colleges (Lakshmi, 2009; Mefodeva et al., 2017) shows that India is gradually progressing towards the dream of Kant that it can produce ethical professionals to solve the global problems. With the advent of the digital age, however, other issues have emerged that require adjustments from teachers and institutions, such as how to control digital content and how to make sure that it is culturally congruent, and how children acquire moral norms. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has identified issues pertaining to the digital era in moral education, including and emphasizing the incorporation of ethics and values in all levels of education. It is promoting the use of technology in a balanced and responsible way that supports critical thinking, empathy, and responsible use of technology online. The aim of the

education system in India is slowly changing, and it has the potential to tackle these contemporary issues and still uphold the basic moral aspirations as laid out by Kant.

For Immanuel Kant, the method of autonomy in education is the education of a person who can think and act on their own in accordance with rational principles of morals. Education should give pupils the freedom and autonomy to make moral decisions and decisions that lead to self-governance. Autonomy is particularly linked to students' access to higher education and higher education institutions that enable this in the context of education policy in a given country. But higher education students and institutions teaching this are plagued by problems of autonomy in India. They are facing significant structural and substantial challenges related to the concept of autonomy in Indian higher education, which has been in constant debate and change. The spirit of autonomy is said to be very significant in achieving academic excellence and innovation, and there can be problems in implementing autonomy (Sankaran & Joshi, 2016). In Indian institutions, there is sometimes a lack of autonomy, and accountability is either not clear or autonomy is enhanced, but accountability is not (Majhi, 2021). This has led to 'quantitative expansion' and not 'qualitative improvement' owing to the number of controls and interventions by the government (Sankaran & Joshi, 2016). State and institutional autonomy struggle, and the universities continue to be over-regulated, despite the policy efforts for their autonomy. There are a number of policy statements that have attempted to impart directions on the way the university should function, but none that have actually made the university more autonomous (Gandhi, 2013; Trivedi, 2024). The NEP 2020 is expected to provide autonomy to the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their students and faculty members to meet a longstanding demand for autonomy. It will only be time that will reveal the extent to which this promise has been fulfilled.

Despite India being one of the fastest-growing economies, there are some challenges that are yet to be overcome in the education sector. These challenges have been repeatedly mentioned, including lack of funding, lack of infrastructure, and lack of qualified teachers (Katiry, 2023; Sheik, 2017). The quality of education is very uneven, in some cases, even a socio-economic gradient (Serneels & Dercon, 2021). While access to low-cost university education has grown in India, there has been a huge disparity between the demand for higher education and its supply (Prakash, 2007). A second challenge is ensuring the quality of education, supporting research and development initiatives, and the educational requirements of the disabled students in the country (Singal, 2006). India launched its system of vocational education and training in 2015 to promote adult education and lifelong learning through market-driven vocational education

and training. Started in 2015 with a mission to provide employment to millions of young people, the Skill India Mission has been under criticism for its failure to provide quality training and to get young people to the right jobs. Although millions have taken part in the program, only around 24% of them have found jobs, leading to concerns regarding the effectiveness of the mission (Ruthven, 2018; Upadhya & RoyChowdhury, 2024).

Globalization has had a tremendous impact on everyone's life, even in India. In the education system, education has become a commodity, and there is disparity in access and equity (R. Venkatesh, 2023). This transition has changed the values of education towards market demands, rather than towards the whole person development (Zajda, 2020). Competition is becoming a greater stress for both students and teachers, and Western models are impacting students' culture and ethics (Baranowski, 2020). The problems and difficulties must be dealt with, and education should be geared towards the broader goals of society.

The NEP, 2020, has a challenging task at hand in the above difficult scenario to achieve the goal of the NEP. The investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and programs on socioeconomic disparities should be the focus of NEP 2020 to maximize its potential to address these challenges. It is crucial to incorporate the ideas of Kant in education to achieve the objectives of NEP 2020 and make India a global leader in education. NEP 2020 can bring a paradigm shift in the education system with emphasis on autonomy of the learner, equality, and moral education, which will help to encourage critical thinking, ethical practice, and social responsibility. Emphasizing these Kantian principles, India can tackle current educational issues and also move toward groundbreaking and sustainable solutions that will benefit both students and educators, as well as society.

There are several problems with Kantian philosophy, in that it has much to offer in terms of the general purpose of educational policy. While there is a focus on human development in both Kantian philosophy and in NEP 2020, there are significant differences in their origins, intentions, and practices. The study of Kantian philosophy is not just a timeless clarification of ethical principles, autonomy, and knowledge, but also a contemporary change in the education policy approach to the practical application of knowledge. The study of Kantian philosophy is not only an eternal enlightenment of ethical principles, autonomy, and knowledge, but is also a contemporary change in the approach to education policy, which is oriented towards practical applications. The concept of autonomy, moral law, rationality, etc., of Kant's harmonies differ with emphasis given to 'Practical educational reform' in NEP 2020. The only distinction

between the two is that Kant was focused on the nature of morality and freedom of humans, whereas NEP 2020 aimed to reform the Indian education system. The concepts of autonomy and epistemology are important aspects of Kant's philosophy, while the NEP 2020 focuses on the practical knowledge and skills. While Kantian ethics is rule-based and duty-oriented, the values mentioned in NEP 2020 are contextualized values under the Indian culture. The ideas of Kant are universal and abstract, whereas NEP 2020 is contextual. In conclusion, it can be stated that there is a difference between Kantian philosophy and NEP 2020, which indicates that the two have different roots and intentions. It is important to note, in this regard, that the National Education Policy document is analyzed here in a Kantian perspective of education, with caution.

5. Conclusion:

NEP 2020 is a policy document, and thus shares many of Kant's ideals in his educational philosophy (holistic development, autonomy, and moral reasoning); however, there are significant differences between the ideals and the timeless philosophy of Kant. NEP 2020 focuses on practical skills as opposed to Kant, who addresses the subjects of autonomy, rationality, and moral law, and also on the current educational problems, such as digitalization and globalization. Although NEP 2020 aims to include value-based education and critical thinking, it has a context-specific approach as opposed to the universal moral principles of Kant. It is important to point out that a Kantian approach could have other implications for other broader social, political, and moral education objectives, but a critical approach should be taken when examining NEP 2020 from this angle. The present paper is an attempt to examine whether the National Education Policy, 2020, is aligned with the Kantian philosophy of education or whether it has nothing to do with such an important philosophical idea on education. The present paper would like to stress the point that philosophical ideas are always relevant to check whether present-day policies are aligned with those ideals or not. It is needless to say that if a policy is not aligned with broader philosophical principles, such alignment can help reorient the policy to achieve more effective outcomes in both the short and long term. Since, after a long gap, the Indian government has re-oriented its education policy named National Education Policy 2020, it is the responsibility of researchers like us to critically evaluate it for better results. Such a critical evaluation is possible if we test such policies under major philosophical ideas. This is exactly what this paper has attempted to do.

It has been a detailed study of various provisions and sections of NEP 2020 and has tried to explain that the policy is a combination of the philosophical thoughts of Immanuel Kant, but it appears that the principles of Kantian educational philosophy are not the basis on which the policy, NEP 2020, is based. It is about something like that this paper is.

There are several challenges in providing quality and accessible education across all regions of the country. NEP 2020, as a policy document, attempts to address some of these challenges and aims to transform India into a knowledge society. In this endeavor, Kantian philosophy serves as a valuable benchmark for reassessing our stated goals. More research is needed to critically evaluate NEP 2020, and in such a process, Kantian philosophy will continue to guide this task.

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