

New Education Policy (2020) and Dravidian Ideology (1916-2022): Educational and Social Implications in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: This study explores the implications of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within the framework of Dravidian ideology (1916–2022) and its effects on the educational and social landscape of Tamil Nadu. By tracing the historical development of Dravidian educational thought—from the Justice Party (1916), Self-Respect Movement (1925), and Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) pre- and post-1967 policies—the paper highlights how education has been employed as a mechanism for social justice, rationalism, linguistic equality, and empowerment of marginalized communities. The article examines key Government Orders, legislative resolutions, and committee reports, including the Communal G.O. of 1921, midday meal scheme G.O.s, and the Justice A.K. Rajan Committee report (2022), to demonstrate Tamil Nadu's strategic opposition to centralisation and privatisation under the NEP. By juxtaposing pre-1967 resolutions with contemporary reforms, it argues that the state's educational approach reflects a sustained ideological continuity rooted in Dravidian principles rather than mere political resistance. The findings underscore the importance of aligning educational reforms with historical, social, and federal considerations to ensure equitable and empowering outcomes.

Keywords: New Education Policy 2020, Dravidian ideology, educational social justice, Tamil Nadu education policy, federalism in education

1. Introduction

Education in India has always been intertwined with social hierarchies and cultural dominance. The NEP 2020, introduced by the Government of India, represents a major overhaul, proposing changes in curriculum design, governance, institutional structure, language policy, and private participation.¹ Although it emphasizes flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, and global competitiveness, concerns have been raised regarding its centralizing tendencies, privatization, language hierarchy, and potential dilution of social justice.

In Tamil Nadu, responses are deeply influenced by the Dravidian ideological tradition, which envisions education as a tool for social empowerment, rational thought, equality, and self-respect. Opposition to the NEP has been formalized through legislative resolutions, Government Orders (G.O.s), policy documents, and expert reports, reflecting a consistent ideological stance rather than temporary political disagreement.

Pre-1967 Dravidian Movement and Educational Philosophy

Justice Party and Educational Advocacy

The Justice Party (1916) actively challenged Brahminical dominance in education and administration, advocating for communal representation in schools and colleges.² The 1921 Justice Party Conference Resolution recommended proportional representation of non-Brahmins in education and government employment.³ This culminated in the Communal Government Order (1921), institutionalizing reservations in education and public employment.⁴

Self-Respect Movement's Educational Reforms

Led by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, the Self-Respect Movement (1925) critiqued caste-based and religiously biased education.⁵ The 1929 Chengalpattu Conference endorsed secular, state-controlled education, removal of religious instruction, equal access for women and marginalized communities, and promotion of rationalist thinking.⁶

Dravidar Kazhagam and Democratization of Education

After 1944, DK resolutions opposed Sanskritization and elite control, demanding free education, expansion of government colleges, reservation in higher education, and greater use of Tamil as the medium of instruction.⁷

DMK and Policy Integration (1949–1967)

The DMK, established in 1949, integrated educational goals into political strategy. Its 1957 election manifesto promised free education, protection of reservations, opposition to compulsory Hindi, and promotion of Tamil-medium instruction.⁸ By 1961, the party emphasized education as a vehicle for social justice rather than elite privilege.⁹

Post-1967 Dravidian Governments and Educational Policy

Successive Dravidian governments reinforced reservation policies to ensure access for Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes.¹⁰ G.O.(Ms) No. 196, Education Department (1978) expanded free education and fee concessions.¹¹ Welfare programs, including the midday meal scheme (G.O.(Ms) No. 45, 1982), contributed to reducing dropouts.¹²

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Government hostels for disadvantaged students were established via G.O.(Ms) No. 54, 1990.¹³

Language Policy and Dravidian Ideology

Tamil Nadu reaffirmed its Two-Language Policy (Tamil and English) through G.O.(Ms) No. 20, 2000.¹⁴ The NEP's three-language formula contradicts this approach, prompting policy clarifications by the state.¹⁵

New Education Policy (2020) and its Implications

The NEP proposes a 5+3+3+4 structure, multiple exit options, academic credit banks, and increased private participation. 16 Critics argue it may increase dropout rates among disadvantaged students and dilute affirmative action measures.¹⁷

Reservation, Equity, and State Strategy

Reservation continues to be a central feature of Tamil Nadu's education system, reaffirmed through G.O.(Ms) No. 65, 2010, and the 2022 Higher Education Policy Note.^{18 19}

Federalism and Legislative Resistance

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, through its 2021 resolution, stated that NEP would not be implemented in its current form.²⁰

Justice A.K. Rajan Committee and State Analysis

The G.O.(Ms) No. 216, 2021, established a High-Level Committee under Justice A.K. Rajan.²¹ The committee concluded that NEP could weaken reservations, promote privatization, increase dropout rates, and undermine state autonomy.^{22 23}

Privatization, Digital Education, and Equity

NEP's emphasis on private and foreign institutions contrasts with Tamil Nadu's commitment to public education (G.O.(Ms) No. 102, 2019).²⁴ Digital access issues were addressed through G.O.(Ms) No. 88, 2020.²⁵

2. Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's critique of NEP 2020 reflects a century-long educational philosophy rooted in Dravidian ideology—from the Communal G.O. of 1921 to the Justice A.K. Rajan Committee report of 2022. The state's consistent focus on social justice, rationalism, linguistic equality, and federal autonomy demonstrates that any meaningful reform must consider historical, social, and political contexts to ensure education serves as a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion.

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