

## **Education Policies of Nepal : A Socialist Perspective**

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*Socialist education system is the education model that adjoins education with productive labour, provides equal opportunities of personality development to all, respects the labour and labourer, disapproves oppression upon mankind by mankind. Constitution in Nepal, 2015 has mention to being committed to socialism based on democratic norms and values including the people's competitive multiparty democratic system of governance, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, adult franchise, periodic elections, full freedom of the press, and independent, impartial and competent judiciary and concept of the rule of law, and build a prosperous nation. In simple language socialism can be regarded as a movement against the inequality existing in the present social order. It is a plan for a new social order based on justice, equality, free from exploitation of man by man, a co-operative commonwealth of mankind. Though socialists differ among themselves on several points, there are certain basic principles, on which every socialist agrees. This article tries to explore the history of education policies of Nepal through socialist perspective.*

**[Keywords :** Education, Socialist education, Education policies, Constitution in Nepal]

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## 1. Introduction

Nepal has short and unique history of formal education. While analyzing the education policies through the socialist perspective the historical development of policies cannot be ignored. The Constitution in Nepal, 2015 has mention to being committed to socialism based on democratic norms and values including the people's competitive multiparty democratic system of governance, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, adult franchise, periodic elections, full freedom of the press, and independent, impartial and competent judiciary and concept of the rule of law, and build a prosperous nation. In simple language socialism can be regarded as a movement against the inequality existing in the present social order. It is a plan for a new social order based on justice, equality, free from exploitation of man by man, a co-operative commonwealth of mankind. Though socialists differ among themselves on several points, there are certain basic principles, on which every socialist agrees.

In this short paper, I shall attempt a quick and preliminary discussion and analysis of the historical development of the education policies through the lens of socialist education model. The research was conducted over a period of two months April to May 2020. The research methods employed were content analysis and a review of relevant literature.

## 2. Education Policies before 2007 BS

As all the countries have their own history of development of education, Nepal also has a golden and illustrious history of education. The formal education in Nepal had started after the establishment of the Durbar School in 1910 BS. Before that, *Gurukul*, *Madarasa*, *Gumba* education systems were there but these were informally carried out. According to Bista (1996 BS), in Lichhavi period, people of Nepal were highly skilled and even China used to hire the Nepali skilled human resources to design and fabricate buildings and other architectural constructions. Similarly, the so-called *Dalit* and *Janajaties* had their own types of indigenous skills and technology. The parents used to transfer these skills and technology to their new generations. They were independent. According to *Mundaka Upanishad*, that system was considered as the *Aparabidya* (Acharya, 2072 BS). Thus we can say that, that system

was a kind of informal technical and vocational education. The children, in this system, used to learn and earn together that is called now apprenticeship model in technical and vocational education. During the Rana period traditional skill transfer system was neither recognized nor promoted and certainly for that reason indigenous skills did not flourish. Moreover, the bitter fact is that those who had skills transferred from their forefather were considered as *Dalit* and treated as untouchable (Bista, 1996 BS). They had to work for the ruler and so-called upper caste (*Brahmin*) and they would get nominal wages for their livelihood. There was a huge gap in between the recognition of physical labour and mental labour.

The First Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, after visiting Britain and France, realized the importance of education. After returning back from there he established a school, Durbar High School in 1910 BS for teaching the offspring of Rana family. He had temptation of English language, thus, Mr. Rose and Mr. Canning from Britain had come to Nepal with him to establish the school. Mr. Rose and Mr. Canning became inspector and head teacher of Durbar School respectively. Unfortunately that school was not for public (Sharma, 2060 BS).

Very few Sanskrit schools, in the individual initiation, were established in various parts of the country but all types of people (social cultural background) did not have access in these schools too. Bir Sumsher, seemed to be liberal to some extent, than Jung Bahadur. He initiated to establish more schools in the country. He is also considered as the initiator of education for women in Nepal. Dev Sumsher was more liberal to public education and initiated to establish more than 300 schools. He could not give continuity for a long because he was soon dethroned by his own brother Chandra Sumsher in 1957. In 1963, Jaya Prithivi Bahadur Singh established a 'Satyabadi School'. The children from *Dalit* community also could attend that school. He initiated the education for working class people but the Rana Regime did not entertain that initiation (Rana, 2066). To catch the public sentiment, Chandra Sumsher apathetically established The Tri-chandra College in 1975 BS for higher education. Although that college was open for all but very few people from the upper class had passed the secondary level to become eligible. In the tenure of Chandra Sumsher, the first formal technical school was established at Basantapur, Kathmandu in 1987.

Similarly, in the initiation of Juddha Shamsheer, the Agriculture School was established in 1989 (Sharma, 2060 BS). These two schools were also for the public. It can be said that The Rana Regime needed some skills human resources to sustain their economy; so, they initiated establishing technical schools to produce the skilled human resources. The idea of Lenin implies here, as he had said ‘capitalists do not want to train the brain of the people but train their hands to increase the production’.

### **3. Education Policies from 2007 BS to 2063 BS**

It is believed that the modern education system in Nepal had commenced after the establishment of Democracy in 2007 BS. The autocratic Rana regime was dethroned by public movement and the democracy was established in 2007 BS. The ministry of education was established in the same year. There was only 2% of literacy rate in Nepal when the democracy was established. The democratic government started expanding the education for all. In the mean time, Nepal as a member of United Nations Organization signed in the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 AD. Article 26 of that declaration spells out that the education shall be the fundamental right of the people. Further, in this article, it has been clearly articulated that the basic education shall be free and compulsory, secondary education shall be free, higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of aptitude and capacity of the students and technical and vocational education shall be made affordable to all. According to that declaration, the member countries have been given the entire responsibilities for securing rights mentioned in the declaration (UN, 1948 AD). Unfortunately, Nepalese people did not get a chance to enjoy these rights in equitable manner.

In 2009 BS, the democratic government had formed a National Education Plan Commission in the leadership of Saradar Rudraraj Pande, to suggest government regarding education policies in the changing context. The commission submitted its report in 2011 BS. The main essences of that reports (NEPC, 2011 BS) were :

- a. Education shall be expanded countrywide,
- b. Education shall be national in nature,
- c. Education shall be free to all,
- d. The terms of education shall be different as per the nature,

- e. Education shall respect the human being,
- f. Education shall address diversity of the country,
- g. Secondary education shall have multi-purpose,
- h. Higher education shall be managed under the national university,
- i. Adult education shall be accessible to all and
- j. Education shall be decentralized.

Taking advantages from this liberal policy of government on education, the schools were established in community level. Some schools were also established in individual effort. During the period of 2007 to 2017 BS, the majority of the schools were managed by community and private level. Most interesting fact is that the privately managed schools were service oriented and not profit oriented. These schools were not entirely free to all, consequently, children from economically poor family could not attend those schools. Women, *Dalit* and other children from marginalized community were left far behind.

King Mahendra dismissed the elected parliament and banded the political party in 2017 BS. As he started autocratic rule, he strived to make such policies which would safeguard his autocratic rule. He had realized that the education could be the means of indoctrinating people to accept the Panchayat System. In doing so, King Mahendra Formed a high level commission named All Round National Education Commission 2018. Bisshowbandhu Thapa was the head of that commission. The commission had suggested the following policies (ARNEC, 2018) :

- a. National education system should be implemented,
- b. The means of education should be same all over the country,
- c. The education should be pragmatic for nation, society and individual,
- d. Primary education should be made free and compulsory,
- e. A special focus should be given to technical and vocational education,
- f. Priority should be given to Sanskrit education, this should be integrated in general education, and this Sanskrit education should be made free and

- g. The whole education system should be controlled by the government.

In order to implement these policies into practice, one education act called 'Byabharbidhi' became effective in 2019BS. Outwardly, that policy seems quite nationalistic but its vested interest was different. That policy was no longer effective.

2028 BS is considered as a milestone of Nepali education system. King Mahendra enforced the National Education System in 2028 BS. The first education act became effective in 2028 BS and is being effective till now. Before that policy, the schools were run by government, community as well as private level. Following the new policy these all types of schools were brought under the government. Private sector was not allowed to run schools at all. The salient features of that policy (NES, 2028 BS) were :

- a. Nationalization of education,
- b. Centralized system,
- c. Focused on technical and vocational education,
- d. National development service,
- e. Focused on mass education,
- f. Comprehensive and specific programs,
- g. Establishment of scientific examination system,
- h. Focused in teacher training,
- i. Self terminating higher education,
- j. Entrance exam for higher education and
- k. Focused on adult education.

That education system was seemingly nationalistic and patriotic but the King Mahendra wanted to produce human resources who would be subservient to the Panchayat regime. Piere Bourdieu's (1986) idea of cultural capitalism implies here. Few positive aspect of that policy were; that the technical and vocational education had been taken into consideration as an integral part of the total education system. 34 different areas in vocational education had been identified and the program in these areas had been lunched to produce skilled and productive human resources. These programs were believed to be developed as per the need of the country. These programs were for the people of basic class (economically poor). National development service was another popular program. In this

program, graduates were supposed to go to the community to serve the community people. Unfortunately, both of these programs could not withstand for long time. National development service program was dismissed by the government itself suspecting that the graduates had spread the awareness of democracy in community. They were also blamed for provoking people against the system and consequently promoting public outrage against the government.

The autocratic Panchayat regime could not resist the public outrage as a result Multi Party Democracy was reestablished through public movement in 2046 BS. The new democratic constitution was promulgated in 2047 BS. The new democratic government formed the National Education Commission led by KesharJung Rayamajhi, to suggest the new education policy that suits in the changed context. The commission submitted its comprehensive reports to the government in 2049. The salient features of that report (NEC, 2049 BS) were :

- a. Adjustment of technical and vocational education in the main stream of the education,
- b. Given the national definition of literacy,
- c. Paved the way for education in mother tongue,
- d. Open the door for private sector running the schools,
- e. Atleast one woman teacher in a school,
- f. Concept of multi-university,
- g. Focused on open and distance learning,
- h. Massification of education,
- i. Establishment of production unit in every schools and
- j. Priority given to special education, etc.

The primary education had been made free to all. Schools were massively established throughout the country. These schools were for all the children regardless of their caste, ethnicity, religion, sex, geography, etc. That policy helped to significantly increase the access of children to basic education. Taking advantages of this liberal policy of the government, private sector started to establish schools particularly in rural areas. These schools were profit oriented. Most of the private school had used English language as a medium of instruction. Due to the parent's temptation of English language, upper class family started sending their children to the private

schools. The liberal policy of education gradually and eventually created classes in education. Looking at the private school from Marxist perspective, it can be seen that these schools were not for working class people. Private schools backed up the capitalism. According to Gramsci, using foreign language like English as medium of instruction in school is to create space for a kind of hegemony. In long run, it would provide a room for the new type of colonization of imperialist such as America.

High Level National Education Commission had been formed by the government in 2054 BS to suggest government on education policy. The commission submitted its report to government in 2055 BS. The main suggested policies measures by commission as following national objectives were :

- Pre primary education to be brought into school structure,
- Free and compulsory primary education would be ensured within ten years,
- Secondary education would be affordable to all,
- Free and qualitative education should be ensured,
- Priority should be given to mother tongue,
- Schools should be open on the basis of zoning,
- Women teacher should be appointed for pre primary school and
- Local level should be more responsible for education, etc.

That policy also helped in expanding the access to education but the quality education still remained questionable on the one hand. Poor and marginalized family did not become able to send their children to school on the other. The policy was unable to squeeze the gap between rich and poor through education. This is the prominent challenge for the developing countries like Nepal. The main aim of socialist education is to narrow down the gap between poor and rich. On the contrary, these policies are further expanding the gap.

A high level task force which was formed in 2058 BS by the government, identified the three main problems in education-quality of public education has been stunted, free secondary education has not been implemented in a right manner, the private schools have not been monitored as per the law. That task force suggested some policies on education which are as follows :

- All types of schools (private and public) should use the curriculum and text book developed by the government,
- Formation of teacher parents association,
- At least 17% of the total national budget should be allocated in education,
- There should be a provision of social audit in school,
- School should be classified as per the standard norms and
- Fee system should be based on formula, etc.

These policies had been implemented into practice to some extent but could not create justifiable environment for working class children. Due to the privatization in higher education, most of the SLC graduates from middle class students could not attend higher education. Same case had also been applied in technical and vocational education. Outwardly, technical and vocational education seemed to be designed for the working class people but in reality most of the technical and vocational education institutions were managed by private sector and as they were profit oriented by nature, socially, economically, and culturally excluded communities could not be benefitted as were expected to be. The seventh amendment of Education Act, 2028 BS provisioned the formation of school management committee in every school to manage school from the public level. That provision essentially promoted public involvement in school governance. Similarly, the special education policy came into force in 2053 BS which paved the way for expanding the special education for children with disabilities. It also helped in creating public awareness about the importance of special need education.

#### **4. Education Policies : From 2063 BS till Now**

After the establishment of the Democratic Republic system, Nepal politically turned to progressive stage. Some Marxists of Nepal have argued that the people's movement in 2062/63 BS was a kind of *Janabadi* movement (people's revolution) (Bhusal, 2013 AD). They further argue that Nepal has entered into the capitalism. The political reports and manifestos of Nepal communist Party have stated that Nepal has already gone through the *Janabadi* stage and now entered into the capitalism and the main responsibility of the party now onwards is to develop national capital and prepare the basis for socialism. Some other communist parties in Nepal disagree

with this argument and give stress on *Janabadi* revolution. They argue that Nepal is still in semi feudal and semi colonial phase

The interim constitution of Nepal was promulgated in 2063BS. This was the first constitution of Nepal which ensured the education as a fundamental right of the people. Article 17 in the constitution stated that “basic education shall be free and compulsory, secondary education shall be free and higher education shall be affordable to all”. The constitution also introduced inclusive education. Unfortunately, education act 2028 could not be amended for a long time as per the spirit of the constitution. However, other education policies were made in line with the constitution. Distance learning policy came into force in 2063 BS which paved the way for open learning to the students those who are not able to attend school regularly. In the vision of that policy (Distance Learning Policy, 2063 BS) it has been stated that :

Creating supplementary/alternative open and distance learning system to benefit with all the possible opportunities for the citizens belonging to diverse need contexts to give access to education and opportunities to acquire formal education and overall personality development especially to the deprived community, women and working people through distance mode.

This policy seems to be useful for expanding full access to school and higher education. Learners having diverse and special needs such as out of school children, deprived groups, working people, housewives and so on can learn through open and distance learning system as supplementary to the existing system of education. It is helpful for improving the quality of conventional education through different kind of support mechanism on the one hand and promoting the lifelong learning on the other. But in reality, this policy also supported the people from middle class compared to the working class because the working class has less access to the devices of information technology and other modern materials.

Technical and Vocational Education Policy became effective in 2064BS. It has given stress on expansion of opportunity to the children from marginalized and deprived community in technical and vocational education. In addition, this policy focuses on inclusive and equitable access in TVET. Relevancy, structural development and sustainable investment are the core themes of this policy (TVET Policy, 2064 BS). But the TVET policy failed to ensure the free quality

technical and vocational education to the children from working class. The policy opened the room for private sector running the TVET institutions which eventually became profit oriented. For this reason, economically poor family could not get benefits from this policy.

Nepal had made a commitment in the 'Education for All' convention in 2000AD. After that Nepal adopted various policies such as Basic and Primary Education Project-II, 1999-2004, School Sector Reform Plan 2066 BS, etc. to successfully achieve the target set in EFA. These all policies essentially focused on achieving equitable access by all in school education. In 2015 AD, Nepal as a member country of United Nations Organization had signed in the common commitment of sustainable development goals. Goal 4 of SDG stated that "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2015 AD). In order to achieve the targets set in the SDGs 4, in Incheon Declaration, Nepal has made a plan called 'Education 2032 : A framework for action'. This framework has been developed in line with constitution.

On the basis of sector wide approach, the school sector development plan has been implemented in 2072 BS. This program has basically five broad areas- equitable access, quality education, efficiency, good governance and resilience. Nine different pulling development partners have been closely working with Nepal to implement this program effectively. In addition, numerous other non pulling partners have been supporting directly and indirectly in SSDP. Even though only less than 12 % of the total education budget comes from the developments partners but their influence in the planning as well as implementing phase is high. It shows that we are still not independent. This type of dependency would further degrade Nepalese potentialities.

Following the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal (2015 AD), the country has transitioned to a federal state. This is a very new experience for Nepal. In the preamble of the constitution, it has been stated that "expressing commitment to create the bases of socialism by adopting democratic norms and values..." (Constitution, 2015). It depicts that now Nepal has to move towards the socialism and bases for socialism should be laid out through education. The constitution is a mother policy of all sorts of policies including education policies. According to Constitution, education has been

assured as fundamental right of the citizens. Article 31 in the constitution stated that :

1. Every citizen shall have the right to access to basic education,
2. Every citizen shall have right to compulsory and free basic education, and free education up to the secondary level,
3. The physically impaired and citizens who are financially poor shall have the right to free higher education as provided in law,
4. The visually impaired person shall have the right to free education with medium of brail script,
5. Every Nepali community living in Nepal shall have the right to acquire education in its mother tongue up to the secondary level, and the right to open and sun schools and educational institutions as provided for by law.

According to Constitution, the school level education (up to 12 class) is the jurisdiction of local government. The province governments are responsible for managing province level universities and province level libraries. National universities and national libraries are the jurisdiction of federal government. Moreover, education is a concurrent responsibility of the local, provincial and federal governments. The constitution has clearly provided room for socialist education but its implementation largely depends on the subsidiary policies.

Following the constitution, The Free and Compulsory Education Act (2075 BS) came into force. This act has tried to assure the basic education (0-8 class) free and compulsory to all. But the act failed to precisely spell out the way of compulsorily bringing the children into school those who are breadwinner in the family. Moreover, the act failed to assure the way forward for the children who are studying in private schools. As private schools are profit making institutions, how can they provide education in free? More than 20 % students of age of 3 to 13 years are in private schools. Is the Free and Compulsory Education Act not for these children? If not then how can it be the concurrent to constitution? How can we achieve the dream of socialist education? and many questions like this are aroused.

The government of Nepal has envisioned Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali to be achieved by 2043 AD. The approach paper of 15<sup>th</sup> Periodic Plan has included short-term, mid-term and long-term plan in line with the vision set by government. Furthermore, the

government has announced that 2020 to 2030 will be the decade of public sector education reform, with a huge effort on increasing the quality of education offered by community schools across the country.

The comprehensive education policy came into force in 2076 BS. This policy abrogated previous five policies - teacher training policy 2062, non-formal education policy 2063, technical and vocational education policy 2069, higher education policy 2072 and inclusive education policy for children with disabilities. It is claimed that, this policy is formulated in line with the spirit of the constitution. The aim of this policy is to develop human resources needed for the country by making education competitive, technology friendly, employable and productive. The salient features of this policy are :

- ▶▶ Coverall level of education in line with federalism,
- ▶▶ Focus on STEM education,
- ▶▶ Technical and vocational education has to be given high priority,
- ▶▶ Envision of developing knowledge based society through higher education,
- ▶▶ Free and compulsory basic education,
- ▶▶ Development of national qualification framework,
- ▶▶ Continuous professional development,
- ▶▶ Priority given to eastern philosophies,
- ▶▶ Mobilization of graduates as national development service,
- ▶▶ Inclusive education,
- ▶▶ Corporate social responsibility of private institutions and
- ▶▶ Development of TVET fugit has found that among the developing countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and India have the maximum number of people in the world without access to safe water facilities, provision of formal, non-formal, informal, equivalency, mobility and permeability, value based education, open learning, etc.

Apparently, this policy is comprehensive and progressive. It would help to revamp and re-energize the education system in Nepal. However, this policy also failed to give the precise way out for settling down the issue of private institutions and ensure the free and compulsory basic education. Moreover, this policy is not able to provide socialist flavour in education to develop the bases for socialism.

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