Focussing on the critical years of a child's life A leaf out of Yunnan's book

What the draft National Education Policy omits in its chapter on early childhood care and education



The draft National Education Policy starts its opening sentence with a hitherto little-known fact: "The learning process for a child commences immediately at birth." Many believe that children start learning only in school. It is true that language and numerical proficiency, and analytical skills, are attained in school, but the foundation for such a learning capacity is laid much earlier, and it happens without our knowledge. Higher cognitive functions attain their peak of growth between the ages of one and three – before school education begins.

However, the next sentence of the draft says, "Evidence from neuroscience shows that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6". This is grossly inaccurate because the global focus for optimal brain development is on the first 1,000 days of a person's life (The Lancet, 2007). Stretching the window of opportunity to six years is a mistake. This wrong understanding leads to misplaced priorities for a nation to boost its human development potential.

Laying the foundation

These 1,000 days are when rapid and dramatic changes take place in the brain and fundamental cognitive and interpersonal skills are developed. The centres for vision and hearing in the cerebrum develop between the second and fifth months of one's life. In these areas, the formation of nerve connections peaks by the fourth month, and is followed by a gradual retraction or "blooming and pruning" until the end of the preschool period. Similarly, the centres for language and speech proficiency develop maximally between the sixth and tenth month even before the child's speech and language makes any sense to us. Even as a toddler, a child's spoken vocabulary increases significantly.

Pregnancy and infancy are important periods for the formation of the brain. This is when the foundation is



care and educational requirements

of 0-3-year-olds in the region would

continue to be handled by neigh-

bourhood Anganwadis". That is a tall

order. Children below three are not

enrolled in the daily services of the

This gross design defect in the archi-

tecture of the ICDS has existed since

its inception in 1975. Policy direc-

tions and strategies for "care concept

with early stimulation for child deve-

lopment" are lacking in the ICDS.

The solution is to have an additional

worker trained in care and stimula-

tion for child development in every

Anganwadi. New workers will impart

psychosocial stimulation for the de-

velopment of the brain through five

sensory organs of the body, i.e., eye,

skin, ear, nose and tongue. The in-

tensity and frequency of flow of

these signals during early childhood

determines the level of intelligence

and mental development attained.

The baby's explorative learning and

storage of such inputs into the brain

takes place every moment of her ear-

ly life. Her storage capacity is expan-

sible and enormous. The baby also

derives analytical conclusions based

on which she develops value systems

Apart from breastfeeding, clean-

ing the baby, giving oil massages and

applying lotion adds to her under-

and character.

ICDS centre. They stay at home.

Filling the gap

laid for the development of cognitive, motor and socio-emotional skills. Apart from genetic determinants, environmental determinants play an equally critical role in shaping personality. In essence, an infant is born with the capacity to learn, but how much and what all the infant can learn is influenced by the

The drafting committee of the National Education Policy should have consulted a paediatrician or developmental neurologist on what needs to be done in the first 1,000 days. The policy has rightly categorised early childhood education into two parts. The first focuses on children below the age of three years; the second on children aged three to six years. While Anganwadi centres target children in the second category, the section on Early Childhood Care and Education up to three years is sketchy and inadequate. It only mentions health and nutrition services for both mothers and children. Takehome ration that is provided for children up to three years by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme only helps physical growth; it does not provide psychosocial stimulation for development. That responsibility is left entirely to the parents or family members.

The section on expansion and strengthening of facilities for early childhood education states that "the standing of love and care through tactile and pressure stimulation. Carrying the baby and rocking her provides her security.

From two months of age, the baby starts to interact socially. Playing with the baby with toys or by using facial expressions improves her social interaction skills. The baby recognises where sounds originate, the voice of her mother, and her own name by six months of age.

Showing the baby the colours of the sky, flying birds, fluttering butterflies and domestic animals improves visual stimulation. Songs, soft music and sweet talk stimulate the auditory areas of the brain. Making the child feel the softness of flowers, leaves and cheeks adds to her sensory learning. These are all not a waste of time, but good investment for a child's development.

By the time the child is two or three, she will be asking a volley of questions: who, when, what, why, how. Often the questions and answers are repeated but the child does not get bored. Stories stretch their imagination.

Parents and caregivers do not have sufficient time earmarked for the care of their children. More than money, they must invest time for the development of the child. Working parents offload this responsibility to grandparents or domestic workers or leave their children in care centres or crèches. But these places don't have qualified or trained staff to provide scientific care.

There is no government system to take care of babies of poor families or of mothers who go to work for a daily wage. The experimental project of Fulwari, or community-managed crèches in Chhattisgarh, is one answer to this gap. Policymakers may have a look at Fulwari for replication.

The 86th Amendment of the Constitution 2002 and Section 11 of the Right to Education Act also mandate public provision of early childhood care and education. Interestingly the policy states: "Universal access to quality Early Childhood Education is perhaps the best investment that India can make for our children's and our nation's future".

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The province in China offers some ideas for the Northeast in the areas of connectivity, border trade and ecotourism



ASHISH KUNDRA

The Northeast, positioned as the gateway to ASEAN, lies at the heart of India's 'Act East Policy'. Development of the region, so far a domestic policy concern, has now been aligned with national strategic and economic objectives. The underlying assumption is that trade across the borders will usher in economic prosperity to this hitherto neglected frontier. It would be useful to draw comparisons with China's approach in Yunnan, a 'bridgehead' to South and Southeast Asia, as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.

Similarities and differences

Yunnan and the Northeast have much in common: populations of a similar size, mountainous regions, diverse indigenous communities, a rich natural resource base, huge hydropower potential and historically lower levels of development. Yunnan shares a 4,000 km-long international border with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. The Northeast abuts China, Myanmar and Bangladesh over a length of 5,000 km. Yet, behind these apparent similarities lie stark contrasts in eco-

The GDP of Yunnan is about \$265 billion, of which tourism contributes nearly a quarter. Trade across the land border of Yunnan with ASEAN is in the range of \$14 billion, half of which is with Myanmar. In contrast, the combined GSDP of the Northeast is approximately \$65 billion. A restrictive regulatory regime (Inner Line Permit for domestic tourists and Restricted Area Permit for foreigners) poses entry barriers. Indian border trade with Myanmar (through the sole functional custom station at Moreh) has hovered around \$50 million for several years. This calls for a closer look at three crucial aspects: connectivity, border trade and ecotourism.

The Northeast is catching up in air, rail and highway connectivity, though it lags behind Yunnan. Kunming, the headquarter of Yunnan, has a flourishing international airport. For the first time, all eight States of the Northeast have at least one functional civilian airport, with efficient internal connectivity via Kolkata and Guwahati. International flights to Dhaka have commenced from Guwahati recently, and flights to Bangkok and four more cities of ASEAN are in the pipeline under the UDAN scheme. Yunnan has a rail network connecting cities like Beijing,

Shanghai and Guangzhou. The rail footprint in the Northeast is weak, though the Railway Ministry has announced its intent to ensure internal rail connectivity by March 2022. Yunnan has an impressive highway network providing city to port connectivity. The Northeast has seen a spurt of public investments in national highways and bridges, with remarkable results in the last few years, though internal roads remain a challenge.

Yunnan has a well crafted trade strategy, while border trade across the Northeast has been sluggish. The Ruili Border Economic Zone is the main hub for facilitating Yunnan's trade with Myanmar. Ruili city has transformed from being a sleepy border town to a thriving economic zone. China is now aspiring to develop an economic zone with Myanmar between Ruili and Muse. The project aims to develop core infrastructure and invite private investment for manufacturing, processing, trading and warehousing. The Zokhawthar land customs station in Mizoram has fragmented infrastructure and barely sees any formal trade. Trade across the integrated check post at Moreh in Manipur has shown promise. Absence of robust internal connectivity, infrastructure for logistics, warehousing and processing has hampered meaningful trade. Ambitious transnational projects, such as the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project, have also been slow to take off on account of niggling land acquisition problems.

Building blocks

Yunnan has experimented with some imaginative approaches for ecotourism embracing local communities. Ecotourism in Xishuangbanna has been anchored in 'ecological villages', showcasing the culture, architecture, customs and cuisine of the Dai ethnic community. The villagers partner through land leasing arrangements with companies, allowing tourists to catch a glimpse into the Dai way of life. Nagaland has made a good beginning with the Hornbill festival, but there are opportunities in other States too. Following this path would help encourage private investment in tourism infrastructure. Tourism revolving around ecology, culture and ethnicity would ensure that there is no disruption in the tribal way of life and contribute to the economy.

A discernible focus on the development of the Northeast has yielded results in the last few years. Now is the time to empower the States to build blocks. Taking a leaf out of the experience of Yunnan could provide a template for the transformation of this frontier.

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The Odisha model

Other States could take a cue from Odisha, which has empowered women politically and financially

ANANYA BEHERA

It is widely acknowledged that women's empowerment helps in the achievement of critical development goals. If there are a greater number of women in politics, there is a concomitant increase in the level of attention given to gender-specific policy and planning. However, the number of women taking leadership roles in India is rather small compared to the global average. The representation of women MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha has seen an improvement from 11% in 2014 to 14% in 2019, but it is still lower than the world average of 24.3%. In 2019, 715 women candidates contested the Lok Sabha election, while the number of men who contested stood at 7,334.

Odisha may be seen as one of the underdeveloped States in the country and a laggard in terms of some human development indicators. However, other States could take a cue from the Odisha government's model for women's empowerment. The Biju Janata Dal (BJD)-led State government was among the first to reserve 50% of seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women. Further, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik nominated women for one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha election. Thus, seven candidates out of 21 fielded by the party for the 2019 election were women. The success rate among the women candidates was higher than for men, as five out of seven won the elections.

The power of self-help groups

Besides empowering women politically, the BJD government has been organising women into self-help groups in order to empower them economically ever since the BJD assumed power two decades ago. As of now, Odisha has six lakh self-help groups with seven million women under its flagship 'Mission Shakti' programme. The programme aims at empowering women by helping them start income-generating activities. The self-help groups are linked to the Odisha Livelihoods Mission and Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society. Members of the self-help groups are encouraged to sell products at fairs and exhibitions

organised by the State round the year. This gives them an opportunity to travel across different parts of the State and gain greater exposure. The State government had announced an interest-free loan of ₹3 lakh in January 2019 to each of the self-help groups. This amount was increased to ₹5 lakh just before the general election. The Women and Child Development Department has been rechristened as the Women and Child Development and Mission Shakti Department.

The nomination of Pramila Bisoi, a self-help group leader, by Mr. Patnaik as a candidate for a Lok Sabha constituency might have come across as a surprise to many. But it could be seen



as a deliberate and strategic move to bring self-help group members to the forefront of public life. The decision also sent the signal that rural women can also aspire to reach higher echelons in politics.

Many sops

In a bid to win the trust of women and also to empower them, the Naveen Patnaik government has announced several sops like smartphones, award of work contracts, and higher entitlements in the State's health insurance scheme, arguably superior to the national level scheme, Ayushman Bharat. The State government has announced an accident insurance scheme for all members of self-help groups. It is no wonder that all this has paid rich dividends and helped propel the BJD to its fifth straight term.

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DATA POINT

Why India migrates

In India, most men migrate for work while most women migrate after marriage. However, some States, especially those in the northeast, don't follow this trend. By **Sumant Sen and** Niharika Pandya

A Migration for work among male migrants and relocation after marriage among female migrants are relatively low in most of the northeastern States **B** After the Northeast, the States in the

western and southern regions witnessed relatively lower migration rates of men for work. The States in the south also recorded low migration rates of women post marriage

C The eastern States recorded some of the highest male migration rates for

D In every State, < 1% of female migrants moved for education. On the contrary, in all the States >1% men migrants moved for education. Relocation for education was more pronounced in the northeastern States Close to 10% male migrants in Meghalaya moved out due to marriage while Manipur saw the highest female migration rates for work Source: Census 2011

Kerala

Tamil Nadu

The table shows the % of migrants in each cohort. For instance, 26.1% of J&K's total male migrants moved out for work while 49.51% of U.P.'s female migrants moved after marriage

4.81

	— % of male migrants—			
State	Work	Marriage	Education	
J&K	26.1	0.98	3.91	
Himachal	43.39	1.45	3.63	
Punjab	37.33	1.66	1.92	
Uttarakhand	53.17	1.15	2.46	
Haryana	38.21	2	2.19	
Delhi	33.3	1.4	2.11	
U.P.	55,82	1.04	1.49	_
Sikkim (A)	29.35	2.15	13.02	O
Arunachal	22.36	0.91	14.56	
Nagaland	24.95	1.34	7.34	
Manipur	32.02	1.23	14.96	
Mizoram	12.49	0.91	6.35	
Tripura	31.92	1.71	4.68	
Meghalaya	29.17	9.55	5.34	
Assam	43.34	2 . 31	3.3	
W.B. G	54.56	2.14	1.89	
Jharkhand	51.09	3 . 54	3.72	
Bihar	54.97	1.11	2.48	
Odisha	57 . 62	1.75	1.46	
Chhattisgarh	46.61	3.01	2.26	
M.P.	45.35	2 . 53	2.02	
Goa	30.11	1.79	3.93	
Rajasthan	39.9	1.67	1.63	
Gujarat B	32.84	1 . 95	2.49	
Maharashtra	32.65	2.14	1.43	
A.P. (united)	42.27	2.98	3.18	

——% c	of female i	migrants—
Work	Marriage	Education
3,32	35.88	<1
3.32	53.18	<1
3.15	59.99	<1
3.07	55.75	<1
2.15	68.76	<1
3.98	45.94	D <1
4.04	49.51	<1
4.29	56.55 🛕	<1
3.16	40.39	<1
4.82	37.24	<1
12.36	23.33	<1
4.15	12.91	<1
2.84	54.53	<1
4.87	50.25	<1
6 . 57	47.14	<1
4.48	63	<1
4.09	70.06	<1
4.11	49.28	<1
6.11	57 . 76	<1
8.93	57.7	<1
4.12	65.44	<1
5.09	53.38	<1
2.86	60.14	<1
2.99	50.94	<1
3.67	52.9 B	<1
5.72	51.06	<1
5	41.6	<1
9.17	36.86	<1
7.23	44.42	<1

The Man Findu. FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 31, 1969

Nixon visits Saigon

The American President Mr. Richard Nixon paid a fleeting five and three-quarter hour visit to Viet Nam to-day [July 30] which included nearly four hours of consultations with Government leaders in Saigon. He was the first American President to visit the capital city [Saigon] since the war started. Mr. Nixon, accompanied by his wife, flew in from Bangkok and was taken to the Presidential Palace in Central Saigon by a fleet of helicopters. Amid the strictest security precautions Saigon has ever seen, Mr. Nixon had one-and-a-half-hour-long talks with President Nguyen Van Thieu, a working lunch and 75 minutes in private talks with Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky. Just before leaving, Mr. Nixon delivered a speech on the steps of Independence Palace in which he said: "We have gone as far as we can or should go in opening the door to peace and it is time for the other side to respond." Twenty minutes before the President arrived in Saigon, all international telecommunications were cut off and were not restored until well after he had left. In his speech, which was broadcast live over South Viet Namese Radio, Mr. Nixon said Mr. Thieu's latest initiative to hold elections with the Viet Cong was an offer "as generous as any ever made in the history of warfare."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 31, 1919.

Punjab Riots.

In the course of a statement to the press, Swami Shradhanand, vice president of Seva Samiti, praying for funds to undertake the organisation of relief of sufferers from recent disturbances in the Punjab says [as reported from Lahore]: The Samiti has so far got about Rs. 6000, almost the whole of which has already been pledged and every fresh case of relief imposed additional liability on the Samiti. The rush of persons seeking relief is so great that unless a prompt response is made to the appeal there is a grave risk of our work being hampered if not stopped. I therefore earnestly request all generous donors to immediately remit their contributions to me. While the Punjab was passing through a crisis, other provinces could only look on with helpless sympathy. An opportunity is now offered to various provinces to come to the rescue of the distressed in the Punjab and by their generous support show their profound sympathy with our fellow countrymen in the Punjab in their hour of need.