

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION NEP @5: Laying the foundation for Viksit Bharat

From chalkboards to credit banks: India's five-year revolution

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. What once revolutionized industries from packaging to healthcare has now turned into a global crisis, choking our ecosystems, harming marine and terrestrial life, and threatening human health.

The statistics are staggering. Over 400 million tonnes of plastic are produced globally every year, with more than one-third being single-use. Despite increased awareness, only 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled.

Plastic does not biodegrade; it breaks down into smaller toxic particles called microplastics, which find their way into our soil, rivers, oceans, and ultimately our bodies.

The fight against plastic pollution requires a multi-pronged and collaborative approach. Governments must take bold policy actions. Bans on single-use plastics, extended producer responsibility (EPR), and incentives for eco-friendly alternatives are vital.

Corporations must assume responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products. Greenwashing campaigns and token measures are no longer acceptable.

Individuals, too, have a powerful role to play. Reducing personal plastic use, choosing reusable over disposable, supporting zero-waste businesses, and participating in clean-up initiatives are all small yet meaningful steps.

Education and awareness are critical. Citizens, especially youth, must be empowered to understand the long-term consequences of plastic pollution and inspired to be part of the solution.

Technology and innovation offer promising solutions from biodegradable plastics to plastic-eating bacteria and advanced recycling methods.

Ending plastic pollution is not a choice-it is a necessity. It demands urgent, coordinated action at all levels: local, national, and global.

DHARMENDRA PRADHAN

In 2020, India did more than release a policy, it rekindled an ancient ideal. With the National Education Policy, learning was once again placed at the heart of nation-building, drawing from our civilisational wisdom to shape the possibilities of the future.

Five years on, the NEP's transformational impact is visible not just in policy corridors but across classrooms, campuses, and communities. It has redefined both the structure and spirit of India's education system.

Today, NEP's imprint can be seen in early childhood classrooms where joyful, play-based learning is displacing rote memorisation; in schools where children read with fluency in their mother tongue; in vocational labs where Class 6 students explore hands-on skills;

Our foremost priority has been to rebuild the foundation of learning. The NIPUN Bharat Mission has been instrumental in bringing about a positive impact with significant improvement in learning outcomes by ensuring that all children attain foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 2 as envisioned in NEP 2020.

Initiatives like Vidya Pravesh and the institutionalisation of Balvatikas have laid a strong foundation for integrating early childhood care and education across the country.

Further supporting this is the development of new age textbooks and the introduction of Jaadui Pitara and e-Jaadui Pitara in 22 Indian languages. More than 14 lakh teachers have completed NISHTHA training, and platforms like DIKSHA have expanded access to high-quality teaching resources nationwide.

Equally foundational is the policy's focus on language. NEP recognised that language is not a hurdle but a powerful medium of empowerment. With 117 language primers developed and the introduction of Indian Sign Language as a subject, the vision of multilingual, inclusive education is being realised at scale.

Subsequently, the NEP has reimagined new curriculum and textbooks for igniting curiosity and critical thinking among students. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) and new textbooks for Grades 1-8 are already in place, promoting competency-based learning and integration across disciplines.

With the vibrant efforts of centrally sponsored schemes like Samagra Shiksha and PM POSHAN, India has achieved near-universal enrolment, with GER reaching 91.7% at the elementary level. The focus now is on improving learning outcomes across all levels of school education.

The NEP's reach has also extended to previously underserved populations. More than 7.12 lakh girls from disadvantaged groups are enrolled in over 5,138 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, over 490 hostels have been sanctioned for PVTG learners and 692 hostels under DhartiAabaJanjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DAJGUA).

These efforts to expand equitable access and reduce dropouts reflect another defining achievement of NEP 2020, universal access to school education. With stronger infrastructure, inclusive programs like PRASHAST for disability screening, and new digital tools, the

schooling system is becoming more resilient and inclusive.

A key driver of this transformation is the establishment of 14,500 PM SHRI Schools. These modern, inclusive, and green institutions are being developed as exemplar schools aligned with the NEP vision, redefining infrastructure and pedagogy while catalyzing innovation and best practices in their regions.

To foster community engagement, the Vidyanjali platform has connected over 8.2 lakh schools with more than 5.3 lakh volunteers and 2000 CSR partners, directly benefiting 1.7 crore students. It is an extraordinary example of Jan Bhagidari, strengthening the learning ecosystem through shared responsibility.

In higher education, the transformation is no less profound. Total enrolment has risen from 3.42 crore to 4.46 crore, a 30.5% increase. Women now comprise nearly 48% of all students, and female PhD enrolment has more than doubled from 0.48 lakh to 1.12 lakh.

This expansion in enrolment, especially for SC, ST, OBC, and minority students, marks a historic achievement for inclusivity in higher education. Female GER has surpassed male GER for six consecutive years, an inspiring testament to NEP's equity vision.

Parallel to this, the structural fabric of higher education has been reshaped. The introduction of Multiple Entry and Exit (MEME), the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) with over 21.12 crore APAAR IDs issued, and the National Credit Framework (NCF) have provided unprecedented flexibility and mobility. With 153 universities offering multiple entry and 74 offering multiple exit options, learning is no longer linear; it is modular, student-driven, and future-ready.

The operationalisation of these frameworks, MEME, ABC, and NCF, has made India one of the few countries to support lifelong learning through such integrated digital academic systems.

NEP's emphasis on research and innovation has already yielded dividends. From improving India's Global Innovation Index rank from 81st to 39th, to incubating over 18,000 start-ups across 400 HEIs, our campuses are fast becoming innovation hubs. The Anusandhan NRF, revamped PMRF 2.0, and the ₹6,000 crore One Nation One Subscription initiative further demonstrate

our commitment to democratising and decentralising access to research.

Technology continues to be a driving force. Platforms like SWAYAM and SWAYAM Plus have collectively recorded over 5.3 crore enrolments, and with the support of initiatives like DIKSHA and PM E-Vidya with over 200 DTH Channels, are making high-quality content available to learners across the country.

The success of India's digital learning ecosystem, including the roll-out of biannual admissions, dual degree regulations, has made higher education more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and industry-relevant.

India's rising academic standing is now reflected globally. In the QS World University Rankings 2026, 54 Indian institutions made the list, up from just 11 in 2014. Simultaneously, global universities like Deakin, Wollongong, and Southampton have set up campuses in India, a testament to our growing credibility and ambition.

This transformative journey is being celebrated through the Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam, but more importantly, it is being measured in the quiet confidence of millions of learners, teachers, and parents. NEP 2020 was never an announcement. It is an unfolding renaissance, not marked by noise but by depth, not by speed but by scale.

Yet, we remain mindful of the road ahead. We must continue to green our campuses, expand critical research infrastructure, nurture talent in frontier technologies, and deepen learning outcomes in every district. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, we have realised that education is not just policy, it is our greatest national investment, our moral compass, and our collective promise to the future.

The flame that was lit in 2020 now lights up every corner of our education system. But its true purpose is to spark a million more, across homes, hearts, and horizons. Yatra vidya, tatrapragati, where there is learning, there is progress. A billion minds, unshackled and empowered, are not just a demographic dividend; they are the supernova of a new India.

This is Bharat's sankalp, unfolding each day in the luminous dreams of children who now believe they can soar high while staying rooted, and who will shape the destiny of a developed India.

(The writer is Union Minister for Education, Government of India)

A Family Rooted in Values, Service and Cultural Contribution

RAJ KUMAR BEHRUPA

Nestled in the hills of Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, a region marked by its rich cultural heritage and social complexities, there exists a family whose name has become synonymous with integrity, public service, and cultural consciousness: the Kundria family.

At the core of the Kundria family's values is Abdul Quddir, a man known in the region not for political posturing or social flamboyance, but for his humility, wisdom, and the quiet strength that only a few possess. A man of simple habits and profound thoughts, Abdul Quddir earned respect not through positions of power but through a life rooted in service, compassion, and fairness.

roles in society and a clear sense of right and wrong. It was not mere academic education he emphasized, but moral education, teaching them that service is not an act of charity but a duty everyone owes to the society they belong to.

The legacy of Abdul Quddir found its most immediate political expression in his daughter Sajra Qadir, who currently serves as the Vice Chairperson of the District Development Council (DDC), Reasi. In a region and a societal setup where women in politics often have to fight harder for their space, Sajra's rise is both significant and symbolic.

Her tenure as Vice Chairperson has been marked by several impactful initiatives, particularly in the domains of education, women's empowerment, rural infrastructure, and youth development. Under her leadership, various development works, ranging from road connectivity to health awareness programs, have gained momentum.

courtyards, listening to farmers in their fields, and discussing youth concerns with students. This grassroots-level engagement has made her one of the most trusted figures in Reasi's local governance. Moreover, she serves as a role model for young girls across the region, many of whom now see in her the possibility of stepping into public life without compromising on dignity or identity.

If Sajra Qadir represents the political and administrative face of the family's legacy, her brother Mohd Yaseen stands tall as its cultural and intellectual beacon. A prolific artist, columnist, and writer, Yaseen has carved a unique space for himself in the literary and artistic circles of Jammu and Kashmir. What makes his work noteworthy is not just its aesthetic depth but its social relevance.

As an artist, he is known for bringing local folklore, dialects, and regional history into the mainstream discourse. His performances, exhibitions, and literary sessions are rooted in the soil of Jammu and Kashmir, echoing the pulse of the region's multicultural and multilingual heritage.

not just to entertain or inform, but to provoke thought and inspire dialogue. Whether it is writing about displaced communities, advocating for the preservation of regional languages like Dogri and Gojri, or addressing contemporary social issues through metaphor and narrative, he remains a committed torch-bearer of cultural responsibility.

What is most compelling about the Kundria family is the diversity of their contributions, all anchored in a shared ethos of service and values. While Sajra channels her energies into policy and governance, Yaseen reaches the soul of society through his pen and brush. Both paths are distinct yet complementary, united in their desire to uplift, empower, and enlighten their community.

In an age where role models are increasingly drawn from glamorized professions or celebrity culture, the Kundria family offers a grounded alternative. Young boys and girls from Reasi and neighboring districts often look up to Sajra and Yaseen not for their fame, but for their fearlessness, conviction, and commitment. Local schools and colleges frequently invite them for motivational talks, cultural events, and aware-

ness campaigns. Whether it is Sajra encouraging girls to join Panchayati Raj Institutions, or Yaseen conducting creative writing workshops for budding authors, the siblings remain accessible and involved. The rise of social media has amplified their reach, but it has not diluted their values. They continue to maintain authenticity in their public interactions and use their platforms to amplify voices that often go unheard.

No impactful journey is without its share of obstacles. Sajra and Yaseen have faced resistance, both from traditional power structures and within institutional frameworks. As a woman in leadership, Sajra has had to assert her authority in male-dominated spaces and is often scrutinized more than her peers. Yaseen, on the other hand, has encountered criticism from ideological quarters who view his candid writings as uncomfortable truths. Yet both have handled these challenges with grace and resilience, never resorting to populism or retaliation. Sajra's responses are grounded in policy, logic, and data. Yaseen allows his work to speak for itself. Each of his columns becomes a carefully crafted rebuttal to societal complacency. Their ability to stay rooted in values while adapting to modern demands is a lesson in emotional intelligence and strategic clarity.

The combined impact of the Kundria family could best be described as a quiet revolution. There are no loud slogans or

aggressive campaigns, yet the transformation they have initiated-whether in administrative delivery, social consciousness, or cultural revival-is undeniable. From initiating water conservation drives in remote villages to advocating for better healthcare infrastructure, from reviving forgotten art forms to writing about neglected communities, the family has touched lives in ways that are both subtle and profound. Reasi, once seen as a district caught between geographical isolation and administrative neglect, is slowly emerging as a district of aspirations. This shift is, in part, due to families like the Kundrias, who chose not to migrate to big cities or chase personal fame, but instead to build something meaningful at home.

The story of the Kundria family is a testimony to the power of values passed from one generation to the next. In Abdul Quddir, we see the seed of integrity. In Sajra Qadir, the flower of leadership. And in Mohd Yaseen, the fragrance of cultural consciousness. They are not merely individuals. They represent a living legacy, one that proves how personal values can ripple outward to create social change. Their lives remind us that in a world hungry for headlines, it is often the quietest contributions that leave the deepest impact. As Reasi and the wider Jammu and Kashmir region look to the future, the Kundria family stands not just as a symbol of what has been achieved, but as a beacon of what is still possible.

National Unity Vs Linguistic Diversity

SHIV KUMAR PADHA

In India the election agenda of many political parties is not development and welfare of the masses but to resume and capture the power lock stock and barrel by playing language, east, religious, regional and others which help them achieve their inherent motive to reach the apex of power. The recent row over the Marathi and non Marathi language in Maharashtra, which has resulted into many cases of man handling of the non Marathi speaking people by the bouncers of the Shiv Sena UBT and Raj Thakre group in Mumbai. This has been condemned by every sensible, sensitive and true nationalist in the nook and corner of the country. It is for the first time in India the language is being dragged and made tool to disintegrate the nation.

lates to "Every three Kilometers (KOS), the water changes, and every 12 Kilometers (four kos), the language changes". This highlight show regional variations in language and even taste of water can occur relatively quickly within the country. This saying is a testament to India's rich linguistic and cultural diversity where regional variation are prominent features. India's "unity in diversity" is an exemplified by its vibrant mix of cultures, religions, languages and traditions co existing harmoniously. Despite the regional and social differences a shared sense of Indian identity and language and national pride binds the country together. While many languages and dialects are spoken in India Hindi and English serve as common languages for communication and unity. It is the language, sense of oneness, cultural fusion, linguistic diversity religious harmony, shared national identity, acceptance and tolerance and festivals are the testaments of India's unity and integrity.

with mortar and bricks, but rather, it grows in the minds and hearts of the people. He emphasized that true integration is a matter of consciousness and thought not of physical structures or industrial plants. Radhakrishnan highlighted that national integration is fundamentally a matter of shared values, beliefs and collective consciousness. The covetous political parties, in order to gain political mileage and get an edge over their opponents, do not hesitate playing the language, religious or cast card even if it results in fragmenting the integrity and solidarity of the country and loosening the cohesion. These political tactics are so sensitive which prove a biggest blow to the peace and sense of goodwill among the people. Use of language card by the political parties is not new to India. There had been many such incidents in the southern state where the innocent citizens fell prey to the wrath of political parties hell bent destroying the delicate network of co existence and interdependence and belongingness in the society.

ally led to many riots and unrest in India, notably in non Hindi speaking regions. These protests, often involving student demonstrations, have sometimes escalated into violence, resulting casualties and state of emergency. After India's independence, there was a push to adapt Hindi as the sole official language. This was met with resistance from the non Hindi speaking areas especially in the south. From 1937-1940 and again after independence, protests erupted against the imposition of Hindi as compulsory language in schools.

In 1965 when Hindi was declared the official language, riots broke in Madras leading to students protests and clashes with the authorities and the declaration of state of emergency. Before 1965, there were earlier instances of protests against the imposition of Hindi, notably in the Madras presidency during the 1930 and 1940s led by figures like paeriyar. Besides Hindi, other languages related conflicts have occurred, such as the 1991 anti Tamil violence in Karnataka and the 1994 anti Urdu riots in Bangalore highlighting the sensitivity surrounding lan-

guage in India.

The riots over language in India demonstrate the complex interplay between national identity, regional aspirations, and linguistic diversity. While the immediate crises have been addressed, the underlying tensions continue to surface, making language a persistent factor in India's social and political landscape.

The language riots highlight the challenge of balancing the desire for national unity with the preservation of linguistic diversity in India.

The way the Shiv Sena UBT and Raj Thackeray manhandled the persons in public over their non speaking Marathi raises many Yaksh Prashnas.

1. Why do such incidents happen in Maharashtra and southern states only, that too in the metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai where the people from all the Indian states and from other nations live.

2. Why such incidents do not occur in the Hindi speaking states, and why the non Hindi speaking people enjoy social security there. They are never man-

handled nor asked to leave these states over trivial matters of languages.

3. Have the people from non Hindi speaking southern, eastern and western states ever complained having met such disgracefully treatment in the Hindi speaking state as is meted out to their counter parts in their own non Hindi speaking areas.

4. India is a vast and multilingual country where nobody can ever claim having knowledge and mastery over the languages being spoken in the entire country.

It is worthwhile to mention here that due to the language diversity the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh regions are as strange to each other as Indians and Chinese. Same is the case between the Hindi and Non Hindi speaking population living in Hindi speaking areas even if they are aliens to each other in the matters of language and culture, live in peace and harmony with each other. The language is a link between different lingual groups not a reason to fight with each other.