Lead Article

School Complex in National Education Policy: An Opportunity for Social Work Profession

Sanjai Bhatt[*]

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)

Replacing the previous National Policy on Education, 1986, the Union Cabinet, Government of India has approved a new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) on 29th July 2020. This policy was outcome of a series of multi-stakeholders' consultations, discussions, and deliberations. Started with the *Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy* under the chairmanship of Late TSR Subramaniam, followed by HRD Ministry report "Some Inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016, Government of India has appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr K Kasturirangan with eight members to examine all inputs/suggestion and prepare a draft policy on education. The committee submitted its report in December 2018 which was published as *The Draft National Educational Policy 2019*. The N E P 2020 envisions an India centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all. It aims at "producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution. (NEP, 2020, p 5)."

The National Education Policy envisions an education system deeply rooted in Indian ethos, driving the transformation of India (Bharat) into a sustainable and equitable knowledge-based society. It aims to provide high-quality education to one and all, elevating India to a global knowledge superpower. The policy emphasises nurturing a profound respect for Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, fostering a strong bond with the nation and Indian Culture, and creating an awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision is to instil in learners a profound pride in being an Indian, evident not only in their thought processes but also in their actions and intellect and their reflections in being the future leaders and citizens of India. The policy seeks to develop amongst students' knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that promote responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable living, and global well-being, making them true global citizens (Sagar,2023: p1). Based on the five foundational pillars of Access, Equity Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, the NEP has looked at the sector in a single organic continuum from pre-school to higher

[*]Former Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi, Delhi - 110 007, India. Email: sanjaibhatt@gmail.com

education. The fundamental principles of the NEP 2020 includes :i) Rootedness and pride in the Indian culture, ii) Recognising, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, iii) Ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy in all students by Grade 3, iv) Flexibility and no hard separation between various subject combinations, streams and vocations, v) Multidisciplinary and holistic education, vii) Promoting multilingualism and the power of language, and viii)Focus on regular formative assessment for Learning rather than rote learning. This 484-page new document on future education has been divided into four section- i) School education, ii) Higher education, iii) Any other key areas and iv) Transforming education with addendum (p.5). Under school education, NEP 2020 has included i) Early Childhood Care and Education: The Foundation of Learning ii) Foundational Literacy and Numeracy as an urgent & necessary prerequisite to learning, iii) Curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels, iv) Curriculum and pedagogy in schools to ensure that learning is holistic, integrated, enjoyable, and engaging, v) Teachers, vi) Equitable and inclusive education to realize goal of learning for all, vii) Efficient resourcing and effective governance through school complexes, and viii) Regulation and accreditation of school education. While there are many other opportunities for social work professionals in this new energized policy, the most exciting one is discussed as efficient resourcing and effective governance through school complexes. Counsellors or well-trained social workers are connected to schools/school complexes.

The draft report has elaborately added almost a revolutionary system of higher education. Starting with a new and forward-looking vision for India's higher education system for developing standard Universities and Colleges, it has emphasized on institutional restructuring and consolidation including a more liberal education, and outstanding learning environments and support for students. The report has laid more emphasis on teacher education and motivated, energized, and capable faculty on one hand whereas it also put perspective on Reimagining Vocational Education and Professional education in the country. It has proposed to create a new National Re- search Foundation for catalysing quality academic research in all fields and ensuring Equity and Inclusion in higher education. The report has worked out ways for effective governance and leadership for higher education institutions and transforming the regulatory system of higher education. It has proposed creation of new institutions like Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), four years graduation programmes, abolition of M.Phil. courses in all subjects, induction of Ph.D. programme after four-year graduation, multiple exit and entry provisions etc. The report seems to be tilted towards higher education rather than school education. In last three years, more visible measures have been taken to implement proposed reforms in higher education in comparison to school education.

The other key areas of focus in the field which were discussed in the draft report include Adult Education; Promotion of Indian languages, Arts, and Culture; and use of technology and its integration. It was wonderfully followed by a brilliant commentary on how to make it happen in reality- a practical approach which argue the establishing an apex body for Indian education; financing for affordable and quality education for all, and the implementation of the report. It is needless to say that the NEP report has touched many chords of education and

suggested an elaborate and effective policy. However, it still requires a political will, changed mind sets and stakeholders' acceptance.

School Complexes for School Education – Salient Features

Before initiating discussion on the concept of and its operational aspects of the proposed school complex in NEP, it will be useful to discuss the salient features of school education. The extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18 years. Currently, children in the age group of 3-6 are not covered in the 10+2 structure as Class 1 begins at age 6. In the new 5+3+3+4 structure, a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3 is also included as the age group for the Right to Education (RTE) is now 3 to 18 years (earlier 14 years). The New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) also emphasizes access, affordability, equity, quality, accountability & universalization of ECCE. Since the aim of ECCE is to attain optimal outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy, a suitable national curricular and pedagogical framework for ECCE upto the age of 8 has been developed. It has embodied numerous rich local traditions like art, stories, poetry, games, songs, and more. For the ECCE delivery, a significantly expanded and strengthened system of ECCE institutions has been proposed which will consist of Anganwadis co-located with primary schools or pre-primary schools. Above all, it talks of introducing school complex (NEP, 2020, pp 5-14).

Schools can be grouped into school complexes to facilitate the sharing of resources and render school governance more local, effective, and efficient. Each school complex will be a semi-autonomous unit that will offer education services from the Foundational stage (age 3-8 years) till Grade 12 (age 18). The complex will consist of one secondary school (covering Grades 9-12) and all the public schools in its neighbourhood that offer education from pre-primary till Grade 8. All the schools that are part of a complex will be chosen due to their proximity to each other, forming a logical geographical group (NAPSWI, 2020).

There are other prominent changes in school education. Some of these are : Preparatory Class or "Balavatika" (that is, before Class 1), ECCE-qualified teacher; the learning in the Preparatory Class based primarily on play-based learning with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy; no hard separation between 'arts' and 'science' streams, or between 'academic' and 'vocational' streams; and education in the local language/mother tongue; multilingualism and the power of language; Anganwadi's to be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters; Anganwadi children, parents, and teachers will be invited to attend and participation of in school/school complex programmes and vice versa. The whole idea behind is to bring back the gurukul system of education where from the very onset a child is trained through a nature-nurture pedagogy very similar to the one proposed by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore through his schools Patha Bhavana and Siksha Satra in Santiniketan.

School Complex – An Old Concept in with Renewed Focus in NEP

Commenting on Facilitating transformation of the education system Dr Kasturirangan in the preamble of the report has mentioned "with regard to schools, the introduction of school complexes will bring about a new culture of sharing common resources in an optimal way. The concept of School Complex (SC) originated from the report of Kothari Commission 1964-66 which was mooted as an innovation in school education. Kothari Commission 1964-66, was formed for two years under the chairman ship of Prof D S Kothari, was formed in 1964 to create the fundamental principles and policies for the development of the education system from the primary level to the highest. Recognising the education as an important tool for societal reconstruction, the Kothari Commission has kept principles of awareness, citizens' participation in the nation-building and developmental process as its cornerstones. The people's participation in national development was coined by the Kothari Commission's report. This concept was also mentioned in the Programme of Action 1992 document of the NPE 1986/92, but has faltered in its implementation. An attitudinal change needs to be brought in so that the implementation effort is carefully nurtured, and best practices and processes developed at successful school complexes can be replicated at many places. The culture of openness and resource sharing this brings will contribute to a paradigm shift in attitude and mindset, that will help in successful implementation of this Policy. It is only when institutions, school complexes, colleges and universities are autonomous and empowered to deliver on the goals of the Policy that we will have a responsive education that is key to achieving a knowledge society. (Draft NEP, 2019: p 32).

A School Complex is a group of public schools brought together to pool common resources for effective delivery of services in a given geographical area and serve different stakeholders in a better way. The Policy recommends that multiple public schools can be brought together to form a school complex or any innovative grouping mechanism for efficient governance. School Complex is organized by taking a group of Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools and Senior Secondary Schools. These schools will function cooperatively, sharing teaching, staff, and infrastructural resources. The NEP on School Complex says that

> One possible mechanism for accomplishing the above would be the establishment of a grouping structure called the school complex, consisting of one secondary school together with all other schools offering lower grades in its neighbourhood including Anganwadis, in a radius of five to ten kilometers. This suggestion was first made by the Education Commission (1964–66) but was left unimplemented. This Policy strongly endorses the idea of the school complex/cluster, wherever possible. The aim of the school complex/ cluster will be greater resource efficiency and more effective functioning, coordination, leadership, governance, and management of schools in the cluster (NEP, 2020, para 7.6).

> The establishment of school complexes/clusters and the sharing of resources across complexes will have a number of other benefits as a consequence, such as improved support for children with disabilities, more topic-centred clubs

and academic/sports/arts/crafts events across school complexes, better incorporation of art, music, language, vocational subjects, physical education, and other subjects in the classroom through the sharing of teachers in these subjects including use of ICT tools to conduct virtual classes, better student support, enrolment, attendance, and performance through the sharing of social workers and counsellors, and School Complex Management Committees (rather than simply School Management Committees) for more robust and improved governance, monitoring, oversight, innovations, and initiatives by local stakeholders. Building such larger communities of schools, school leaders, teachers, students, supporting staff, parents, and local citizens would energize and empower the schooling system, and in a resource-efficient manner (NEP, 2020, para 7.7).

The aim of the school complex/cluster will be to: a) build vibrant communities of teachers, school leaders, and other supporting staff; b) better integrate education across all school levels, from early childhood education through Grade 12, as well as vocational and adult education; c) share key material resources, such as libraries, science laboratories and equipment, computer labs, sports facilities and equipment, as well as human resources, such as social workers,………(NEP, 2020, Para7.7)" In addition to this, NEP suggested that school complexes are '….to ensure the participation of community members in adult education. Social workers travelling through their communities to track and ensure participation of non-enrolled students and dropouts (Draft NEP, 2019, Para P6.6.2, p 152).

Besides explaining the concept, functions, and expected roles, NEP has also dwelt upon its establishment, and financial implications and other aspect like linkages and networking with existing institution. It says that

"Suitable infrastructure will be ensured so that all interested adults will have access to adult education and lifelong learning. A key initiative in this direction will be to use schools/ school complexes after school hours and on weekends and public library spaces for adult education courses which will be ICT-equipped when possible and for other community engagement and enrichment activities. The sharing of infrastructure for school, higher, adult, and vocational education, and for other community and volunteer activities, will be critical for ensuring efficient use of both physical and human resources as well as for creating synergy among these five types of education and beyond. For these reasons, Adult Education Centres (AECs) could also be included within other public institutions such as HEIs, vocational training centres, etc. (NEP 2019, Para 21.6, p 376).

Every State will be encouraged to strengthen existing or establish "Bal Bhavans" where children of all ages can visit once a week (e.g., on weekends) or more often, as a special daytime boarding school, to partake in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Such Bal Bhavans may be

incorporated as a part of school complexes/clusters if possible (NEP 2020, Para 7.11, p 31).

The most crucial part of any new initiative under any policy is the adequate budget and its implementation. The NEP 2019 has taken care of this aspect by adding a chapter Making it to Happen which has included first addendum-1 Financing. It declares its intention to happen by saying "Education will be vital to individual, social and national development in the 21st century. To build and run an equitable and high-quality education system, which enables such development, substantial investments will be required. These investments will require expertise, energy, time, and money. This Policy unequivocally commits to raising investment in education substantially - including a significant increase in public financial investment, as also in philanthropic investment. It needs to be noted that this Policy considers all financial support and spend on education as 'investment', and not as 'expenditure'. Clearly, monies spent on education are all investment into the future of our nation (Draft NEP, 2019, p.399). The implementation of this Policy will require additional resources. Some of the additional investment will be of 'one-time' nature, and some will be of continuing/recurring nature. The increase in public expenditure on education from the current 10% of the overall public expenditure in the country to 20% over a period will support the Policy implementation.

In addition to one-time expenditures, primarily related to infrastructure and resources, this Policy identifies the following key long-term thrust areas for financing to cultivate an education system: (a) universal provisioning of quality early childhood care education; (b) ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy; (c) providing adequate and appropriate resourcing of school complexes/clusters; (d) providing food and nutrition (breakfast and midday meals); (e) investing in teacher education and continuing professional development of teachers; (f) revamping colleges and universities to foster excellence; (g) cultivating research; and (h) extensive use of technology and online education (NEP,2020, Para 26.4, p.62). The NEP also considers the productive interaction between other agencies and it says that Anganwadis/ Balvatika / Balbhawan and it suggest to integrate with school complexes/clusters.

> Anganwadis shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters, and Anganwadi children, parents, and teachers will be invited to attend and participate in school/school complex programmes and vice versa. (NEP, 2020, Para1.5, p.7).

All schools will be adequately and appropriately resourced, including physical infrastructure, learning resources, and human resources, including teachers. For this, school complexes will be looked at as the basic unit of educational administration, so that maximum efficiencies can be obtained. NEP suggests that the vacancies for all teachers shall be filled so that an appropriate pupil teacher ratio should be maintained and there is coverage of subjects. It also recommends to appoint teachers for areas such as special education, art, theatre, yoga etc. The intention of these appointments is very clear that each school complex is adequately resourced. Each school complex has adequate number of teaching staff including other

special area teachers across the complex. It is boldly recommended that social workers will be appointed the school complexes who will perform number of responsibilities. Each school complex will have sufficient learning resources of various kinds, including digital resources, books, and laboratory material. School complex must have resources appropriate to its proposed activities such as vocational education, sports, music, yoga, cultural and play activities. It also emphatically said that there should be adequate funds for maintaining all facilities, electricity, water, and general infrastructure upkeep in the schools. The suggested additional expenditure required activities for various activities are also suggested in Table no 1.

Table 1

Additional expenditure required for:	% to Total Government Expenditure*
1.Additional staff resourcing	
- Filling all teacher vacancies - salary impact	0.5
- Teachers for special education, theatre, arts, sports, etc.for every school complex	0.5
- Social workers for school complex	0.05
2.Increase in maintenance budget for Schools	0.7
3.Recurring expenditure on learning resources	0.3
Total additional expenditure required for adequate Resourcing of Schools 2.0	
*all % are rounded off to the closest first decimal, except item 3	

(Source: NEP Draft Report, 2019, Table 1.4, page 417)

School Social Work – A Concept Closer to School Complex

Looking at the conceptualisation of the concept of school complex and the expected role and functions of school complex in NEP on one hand, and the growth of school social work across the globe on the other, it can be easily said that school social work has closer proximity to the concept of School Complex. School social work is one of the specialised areas of social work discipline and profession.

School social work has been defined as an application of social work principles and methods to the main purpose of the school. The goal of school social work includes helping the students to attain a sense of competence, a readiness for continued learning, and an ability to adapt to change. School social work is increasingly focussing upon learning, thinking and problem solving as well as on traditional areas, namely relationships, emotions, motivation, and personality (Costin in Ahmad, 1980).

Friedlander has suggested that school social work works with four parties i) the child, ii) the parents and family iii) the school staff, and iv) the community. (1963: 370). Infact, school social work is related to anyone and everyone who is related to child like teacher, classmates, family members of child, and the school environment. It deals with the issues of relationships, maladjustment; inter personal and intra personal needs and problems; providing growth and development opportunities; directing interactional processes between children,

school, and home environment. Therefore, school social work services are of different nature such as preventive, developmental, problem solving, therapeutic, rehabilitative, reformative, and referral. Guidance and counselling are major part of services. Social work in schools has originated along with the development of social work as profession. In 1913, The Board of Education of Rochester, NY accepted the appointment of a trained social worker (then known as visiting teacher). The visiting teacher movement underwent a rapid expansion in 1920s with the support of Commonwealth Fund. From 1960 onwards, Government of United States passed a number legislations which were responded by School social work services (Gandhi, 2012: 1029-1030). In United Kingdom, School social work is known as education welfare and disbursed by Education Welfare Officers. Later, the Government through a legislation made the appointment of School Attendance Officers who were also known as Kid Catchers due to their strict disciplinarian approach. Ziauddin (2023) has mentioned two important aspects of school social work in U.K: i) the programme works within a statutory framework; social workers are employed by the local authority and then placed into local schools. If teachers or safeguarding staff identify an issue they will inform the social worker in the school, who will decide if the threshold for intervention or referral has been met, and ii) Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) programme is an opportunity to change the perceptions of the general public about social workers who are often viewed in a negative light. The SWIS pilot did a comparative analysis between schools who had social workers and matching schools who did not and found the number of section 47 child protection enquiries were significantly lower in the former in two of the three initial pilot areas. The third area had a reduced number of section 17 child in need cases started (p1).

There are many countries in the world implementing school social services at present. School social work is a growing specialty around the world. There are school social workers practicing in over 50 countries. A variety of models for school social work are being used. In some countries, social work services are part of the school system, while in others, social work is provided through a collaboration with family and child welfare agencies, both governmental and non-governmental (UNICEF & Global Alliances, 2021, p3). Interestingly, in June 2018, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a new 'Law on Social Work' which created opportunities to improve social work and the numbers of social workers across Georgia, including their introduction in schools. The "Social Work Concept and Standards in the Education system" have been approved by a Ministerial Order, and the roles and responsibilities of the social workers in the education system have been approved and adopted. Social work is thus being progressively institutionalized in the education system and professionals are being supported via individual and group supervision and capacity building (UNICEF, 2023, p 22). In India, A comprehensive School Health Programme was launched in 2018, to promote mental health, nutrition, and prevention of violence in schools for more than 220 million children in 2.6 million secondary schools in India. This has included the design of a teacher training curriculum which integrates elements of personal safety education to prevent sexual abuse, peer-to-peer violence as well as corporal punishment in schools. Under the programme, a cadre of school counsellors was developed to provide psychosocial support to children, facilitated by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (UNICEF, 2021: p.32). Global Social service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA)

calls all those social service workers / employees working in a school to ensure rights and well being of children as social service workforce in schools.

A school social worker requires to perform a variety of functions in educational setting. The list is quite comprehensive. A school social worker offers following services: i) case work services to a school child, his/her parents, ii) dealing with attendance, behavioural and disciplinary issues, iii) Extending counselling, emotional support, iv) Bring out reconciliation between the needs, expectations, resources and capacities of all three stakeholders- child, parent and school, v) organising group activities for promoting group adjustment, cohesion and group living, vi) Dealing with attendance, bunking the class and deviant issues, vii) dealing with drop outs, interaction with their parents and exploring personal and societal reasons. viii) understanding and participating in administrative issues, ix) resolving dilemmas such as equity and equality, traditional vs modernity, generational gap issues, x) gender sensitisation and awareness, xi) responding to the situations and issues to end violence in any form, xii) disengaging over involvement in digital world, xiii) responding to social justice issues- discrimination, devaluation, socially and economically disadvantaged children, children with disability and special needs and many other services for parents to participate in Adult education centre, community services, administration and so on.

It will not be inappropriate to look back the origin and development of school in India. 'The education system of ancient times was regarded as a source for the knowledge, traditions and practices that guided and encouraged humanity. In ancient India, both formal and informal ways of education system existed. Indigenous education was imparted at home, in temples, pathshalas, tols, chatuspadis and gurukuls. There were people in homes, villages and temples who guided young children in imbibing pious ways of life (NCERT,2022-23; p 89-91). Gore (2015) has mentioned that the reformers established schools for boys and for girls in the 1830s and 40s. It must be realised that in the nineteenth century, even the starting of educational institutions which charged little or no fees was an act of service. It was a basic need. The government of the country took no firm lead in that matter. The establishment of school was an act of faith and an expression of social awareness and of sensitivity to social needs on the part of a small band of forward-looking individuals (p.17). School system in India is unfortunately the bye product of post-industrial society modelled on the pattern of British education thoughts and influence. Presently, education is a considered a tool of empowerment as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, was brought to represents constitutional commitment envisaged under Article 21-A. This article confers that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Further, Sustainable development goals number.

For the primary schools, NEP has clearly earmarked that "while the establishment of primary schools in every habitation across the country-driven by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), now subsumed under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme and other important efforts across the States - has helped to ensure near-universal access to primary schools, it has also led to the development of numerous very small schools. According to U-DISE 2016–17 data, nearly

28% of India's public primary schools and 14.8% of India's upper primary schools have less than 30 students. The average number of students per grade in the elementary schooling system (primary and upper primary, i.e., Grades 1–8) is about 14, with a notable proportion having below 6; during the year 2016–17, there were 1,08,017 single-teacher schools, the majority of them (85743) being primary schools serving Grades 1–5 (Para 7.1). The statistics available regarding Indian school is mind blowing. There is a grand total of 14,89,115 schools in India where the number of rural schools amounts to around 12.34 lakhs and 2.54 lakh schools in urban India. The number of teachers that are actively working at present at honing the future citizens is 95,07,123 and the number of students currently enrolled in schools across India stands at 26,52,35,830. A whopping 12.73 crore school students in India are female while 13.79 crores are male. The gross enrolment of primary school students in India currently stands at 100.13%, and the gross enrolment ratio of secondary schools currently stands at 79.56%. Total enrolment in schools (Class 1 to 12) increased by 0.76 % in 2021-22 as compared to 2020-21. (UDISE+ Report 2022). The data shows that there is gigantic task for all stakeholders. As per the rough estimate, our country will require at least 2 lakh school complexes and subsequently two lakh trained social workers to manage these school complexes.

Advocacy for Setting up School Complexes – A NAPSWI Efforts

Since the proposed Draft of New Education Policy 2019, has recommended that the nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be seriously addressed, through healthy meals and hiring school social workers in the context of urban poor, it commits the introduction of counsellors and social workers into the schooling system as well as through various continuing measures for addressing poverty that may lie beyond the education system (Draft NEP, 2019,p 58). It proposed that adequate numbers of social workers will be appointed to the school complexes depending on the student population and the population of adult learners in that geography (Draft NEP, 2019,Para 7.2.3, p.162); School and school complex counsellors and social workers will be trained to confidentially advise parents and teachers on adolescent problems faced by growing boys and girls (Draft NEP, 2019,Para 8.6.7,p. 197) and the Draft Policy puts emphasis on role of social workers. Taking a cue from this policy commitment, National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) has initiated a campaign to establish school complex and appointment of school social workers in schools.

Being the largest association of Professional Social Workers in India, NAPSWI is committed to advance excellence in education, training, and practice of professional social work in India. NAPSWI aims to advance the knowledge and practice base of social work interventions that enhance quality of life and standard of living of persons, their family and environment. In India, professional social workers have been employed in various government, private, and non-government organisations (NGOs) since past many decades. For the last two decades, NAPSWI is working on diverse issues related to different groups of population with the objective of promoting the well-being of human beings. Social work as a subject is being taught at graduate and post graduate level throughout the country in 526 colleges/universities and enrols 1.26 lakhs students every year to train the largest social service work force for

many fields in India Bhatt and Phukan, 2016: 44-66).

Since Social work is an academic discipline and human service profession globally, it has many areas for its intervention to enhance social functioning and overall well-being. School social work is one of them which is being practiced for more than six decades in the country. A school social worker provides psycho-social services and support, counselling to children and adolescents in schools at both micro and macro levels. School social workers are addressing students' issues, concerns and problems on one hand and they align with peers, teachers, school, and community especially with parents on other. These professionals are not only working on the crisis intervention, problem solving, developmental needs. Besides health, mental health issues, they take care of social and emotional development and well being of the school children, school community, family-school liaisons, and program development.

Keeping the nature and scope of school social work interventions in consideration, it will be no hyperbole to put on record that the professional social work is well equipped with innovative strategies, knowledge, and skill base for interventions with the lives of school-going children (6-14 years). The Government and Nongovernmental organisations are constantly making efforts to increase enrolment, to decrease drop-out rates, and to improve the quality of education imparted at school level. The government programmes have improved access to education and its quality and it goes without saying that the environment in which the school-age children (6-14 years) are growing-up has witnessed a drastic change in the last few decades. COVID 19 pandemic has affected children and families both, to newer threats at all levels including schools.

In already prevailing situation as depicted by the content analysis of media reports on schools and school children in the last few years reveals a sharp increase in the number of cases of child abuse, stress and anxiety related disorders, violence, and even suicide among these children. Interestingly, these changes are not restricted to only urban spaces but have also been reported from rural areas. Information and Telecommunication (IT) revolution has made the situation even grimmer. The weakening of the traditional family system which was a major support system for these children has further has exacerbated the situation by increasing their vulnerabilities and reducing their ability to cope with the stressors.

Earlier also, the important policy documents on education like National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, 2012) have also laid emphasis on guidance and counselling at school level. It is noteworthy that in the context of Indian school education 'guidance and counselling' has remained restricted to employment counselling. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2015) in its guidelines has also stressed upon the need to address the problems/crises faced by students 'in their academic, social, emotional, and personal lives'. It mentions that such interventions should be 'based on the expressed needs, concerns of the students as well as aligned to the needs and demands of the students' immediate socio-economic and political environment'. The draft NEP report puts renewed perspectives as mentioned on Para 6.62

mentioning the role of social workers and counsellors.

> Research studies show that visits from and associations with social workers form the most effective intervention in encouraging children from urban poor families to go to school. The new and existing schools that will enhance access for children in urban poor areas, as per Para 6.6.1, will also invest in hiring excellent social workers and counsellors. The social workers will: work to find children and parents in urban poor areas; explain to them the value of school; connect parents and children with schools, teachers, remedial instructors, and tutors; plan with them methods (such as walking groups) and routes for children to reach school safely; inform parents of children's learning outcomes and help them to be involved in their children's learning (including arranging parent-teacher conferences as necessary); help children maintain connections with their parents' languages and culture; help keep children away from harmful activities; and, along with counsellors, generally be a source of support and advice to children and their families throughout the learning process as needed. (Draft NEP, 2019, para 6.6.2 ,p.152).

In view of the final National Education Policy 2020 states that 'Trained and qualified social workers from civil society organizations/departments of Social Justices and Empowerment could be connected to the schools through various innovative mechanisms to be adopted by State/UT Governments (NEP 2019, para 2.2, p 7). It further lays emphasis that 'Children are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell. Hence, the nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be addressed, through healthy meals and the introduction of well-trained social workers, counsellors and community involvement into the schooling system, as well as through various continuing measures for addressing poverty that may lie beyond the education system. (Draft NEP 2019, para 2.2, p 61)' Para (3.4)."

The need of school social workers in schools is undisputedly accepted in favour of the children, families, school, and society. The Professional social workers as School Social Workers are and will be an effective institution of preventing student related problems and promoting most student related issues in the schools, as mentioned in NEP. Trained with methods of working with individuals, groups and communities; professional social workers (PSW) will be an integral link between school, home, and community and will ensure students achieve academic success with lesser stress and strains. Their work will be encompassed in improvement in attendance; reduce bullying, personal and emotional crisis; responding to day-to-day stress, exam pressure, frustration, and suicidal tendencies; addressing behavioural problems and relational issues; prevention of child abuse and neglect; arresting increasing violence, and many other intertwined issues. These PSWs will inculcate family values, cater to the needs of special populations, students with disabilities, career guidance, crisis interventions, parents counselling, and many other issues that may impede or inhibit students' academic success and overall personality growth. NAPSWI (2020) has conceptualised that every school/ school complex needs to have a School Social Work Centre to support the school/s towards students' well-being, through the following goals: 1) Increase

school enrolment and attendance; 2) Promote students' psychosocial development that support their academic development and enrich their lives; 3) Promote awareness of child rights among the students, school, teachers, parents and the community; and 4) Prevent school failures and dropouts. School social workers can use the following approaches in their work with children and their families: Child rights approach, Preventative approach, Strengths-based approach, Culture-Sensitive approach, Participatory approach, and Ethical approach.

This is most appropriate time to establish school complex. In addition to the existing ABCD (Academic, Behavioural, Cognitive and Developmental) needs of the children, it is also time to respond another new set of ABCD needs (related to or arising out of Abuse, Breach, Consumerism, and Digital world) affecting their social and mental health. There are certain pre requisites on behalf of Social Work Profession as well as social work community to revise the course structure of School social work considering suggested activities at school complexes and other components like adult education and community engagement. Those social work educational institutions (SWEIs) who have not included school social work n their courses, must go ahead to include so that social work students can be equipped with requisite techniques and skills. NAPSWI and other professional associations must develop Certificate and Diploma courses in school social work, training module for school social workers, experimental field action projects, and research in this area. There is need to proactively initiate field-based placements / action projects close to the concept of school complex operations in different settings like urban, rural, or tribal areas. It should develop model school social work centres functioning in different type of schools- government, private, missionaries, single gender, co educational, and with resources and without resources schools. These efforts should be oriented to provide quality education across all stages of school education. The quality education is not only a life-changing, but also a mind-crafting and character-building experience, that positively impacts on citizenship. Empowered learners not only contribute to many growing developmental imperatives of the country but also participate in creating a just and equitable society. School Social workers can think, design and act for generating the positive impact on the education system. During Amrit Kal, school social workers through school complexes can lead India as Viksit Bharat by 2047 with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Students are the future citizens of tomorrow, draped in Indian culture and robed with modern thoughts and education, NEP can bring about a beautiful blend of conscious citizens and global leaders of tomorrow.

****

References

Ahmad, Mirza. R (1980), *Social Work in educational setting*, Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India, New Delhi: Publication division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India

Bhatt, Sanjai and Digvijoy Phukan (2016), Social Work Educational Institutions in India: An Analysis, *Journal of Social Work Education, Research and Action*, Volume 2 Number 1 January-April, 2016 pp 46-66.

Draft National Education Policy (2019), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, pages 484

Friedlander, W.A (1963), *Introduction to Social Welfare.* New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India private Limited

Gandhi. A (2012) *School Social Work* in Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India edited by Surendra Singh, New Royal Book Company, Lucknow

Gore, M. S (2015), Social Work and Social work Education, New Delhi: Rawat publications

Government of India, (2023), Overview, Department of School Education and Literacy, https://dsel.education.gov.in/rte

NAPSWI (2020), Frequently Asked questions (FAQ) on School complex to be established under NEP, National Association of Professional Social Workers in India, www.napswi.org

National Education Policy (2020), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 66 pages

NCERT (2022-23), Ancient Education System of India- It so happened, New Delhi, NCERT Text books, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ncert.nic.in/textbook/pdf/heih111.pdf

Sagar, Pragya (2023), 3 Years of NEP: From Vision To Reality, Danik Jagran josh,29.07.2023, https://www.jagranjosh.com/articles/nep-3rd-anniversary-vision-to-reality-1690549547-1

UDISE (2022), *Report on Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+), 2021-22, FLASH STATISTICS*, Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, https://udiseplus.gov.in/#/page/publications

UNICEF (2021), *Action to End Violence against Children in Schools.* Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence against Children in and around Schools, 2021, *https://www.unicef.org/ documents/action-end-violence-against-children-schools*

UNICEF and GSSWA (2021) *"Social Service Workers in Schools: Their Role in Addressing Violence and other Child Protection Concerns"* developed by UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance https://www.unicef.org/documents/social-service-workers-schools

Ziauddin, Sharmeen (2023), *Social work in schools: an opportunity to change perceptions,* Children, Workforce, March 9, 2023