



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Presented by



DR M. JAYARAM

2022, MYSURU

Shri Vikas Sheel, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, Dr. R Balasubramaniam, Founder, Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Dr Pushpavathi, Chairperson of the Organizing Committee of this conference and Director, AIISH, Dr Krishna, who was our president till this moment, my fellow office bearers at EC of ISHA, my colleagues, friends and students.

I am indeed happy to be the President of this association and I thank you for reposing your faith on me in electing me to this office. It is entirely a different issue that you had no choice last year than electing me as I was the only candidate in the fray. Please accept my greetings on this occasion, and be assured that I will be committed to ISHA work. I do hope to implement, with all your support, many programs that have been pending for a quite some time.

A task that is even more pleasant for me than my assuming office is to thank my friend Krishna who has had a distinguished record at ISHA. While we may differ in our perception of the correctness of anything, let it be recorded that Krishna's commitment to ISHA work was always exemplary and unquestionable. There is a special relevance to Krishna's and my association with ISHA. We both got elected to ISHA office, first time, in the same year 2012. He got elected as Secretary while I got elected to the office of the President. This year too we



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

have an association. While he is demitting office after 11 years of service, I am assuming chair once again. On behalf of all of us at ISHA, a big thank you Krishna.

ISHA is passing through a somewhat difficult period. The relevance and authority of ISHA has been questioned of late from within. Some members not happy with the ISHA position on certain issues, specifically the usage of the title 'Dr' by speech and hearing professionals are threatening to jolt the very foundations of ISHA. It is most welcome to have different aspirations and ideas, but the different perceptions should not lead to separation. I appeal to these more revolutionary members to come to the dialogue table. My dear friends, there is nothing that cannot be resolved through dialogue. I ask you to remember the wise saying - there is strength in unity. If we are divided, we will be grounded into dust. Together we will survive.

One of the most 'relevant' issues for all of us in the last two years has been Covid-19 and its sequel. It has affected almost all spheres of our life, but none more than the educational sector, speech and hearing training being no exception. Apart from hampering all that the students would gain in face-to-face interaction in a class room, Covid-19 has irrevocably damaged the training of students in the clinical sphere. Speech and hearing being a clinical field, this is particularly painful and a cause for worry. Students not being in the campus to do their clinical work, and the continuous drop in the attending clinical population almost to the point of vanishing, affected the clinical training of students. Some of us are engaged with the task of how best to salvage the situation, but we have not found any solution worth implementing. I do hope that all the training institutions in India will take up this issue and think of conducting intense clinical training programs of a short duration, in areas in which they have greater expertise, to help students. I expect the national institutions, particularly AIISH, to show leadership in this regard. Students affected should also make visible efforts to retrieve the situation.

A big challenge before all of us is the implementation of National Education Policy 2020. NEP 2020 is being projected as a sort of 'jewel in the crown' policy/proposal of the Government of India. There is no doubt that NEP 2020 is a very progressive policy and that it shakes the fundamental presumptions and practice that guided our education programs since independence.



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

We have been placing undue emphasis on content and volume in our training which has encouraged a sort of rote and/or exam-oriented learning. This should change by all means.

NEP 2020 aims to benefit from the rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought and thus, rejuvenate the present education system. Education should focus less on content, and should prepare the students to think critically and solve problems.

Some of the fundamental dictums of NEP 2020 are that a) the curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, humanities, sports and fitness, languages, literature, and culture, in addition to science and mathematics; b) students should be trained to be creative and multidisciplinary, and to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields; and c) that there should not be hard separation between arts and sciences. One can go on and on, and be eloquent on all these lofty and positive ideas.

It is easy to be enthusiastic about the policy statement. However, a problem arises when one uses a broad brush approach to paint everything the same. The NEP 2020 has rightly left out the field of medicine and law from its purview. One should also recognize that the disability domain is as different as medicine is different from the fields of arts, science, physics etc. The guiding principles and practices of training in disability areas cannot be the same as those appropriate for physics and chemistry, for example. Disability specializations are clinical fields and they are more akin to practice of medicine than arts. Higher education in the disability sector should have been left out like the medical sector.

Some of the principles enunciated in NEP 2020 like the inclusion of basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics in the curriculum as well as the absence of a hard separation between arts and science streams will apply to education from foundational to secondary levels. Students will be given increased flexibility and choice of subjects to study, particularly in secondary school. Holistic development and a wide choice of subjects and courses from year to year will be the new distinguishing feature of secondary school education. The implication is that the future system will not have the rigid division into arts, science or commerce streams in higher



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

secondary system and this may pose a challenge for university education in the disability sector. We are getting students from the science stream now, and when NEP is implemented fully, we are likely to get students who have accumulated a certain level of knowledge and competencies in a wide variety of fields, but not necessarily in the science stream. We may get students who have studied physics, economics, psychology or a combination of other subjects. It would be a challenge for us - teachers and planners – to tune such students to a predominantly behavioral and medically-oriented field like speech-language pathology and audiology. It is possible, but it is a challenge.

Undergraduate education will be more multidisciplinary meaning a student will have to study many subjects across disciplines of arts, science, humanities, fine arts, languages etc. The policy states that a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study must be avoided. It would be a challenge for educationists and academic policy planners on how to accommodate all these fields along with the core subjects of speech and hearing and its allied subjects in our training programs. At the simplest level, we will not have enough time to teach both speech pathology and audiology, and their allied subjects if we accommodate other subjects. We may have to restrict it to one of the subjects of speech pathology or audiology and their allied subjects along with multidisciplinary subjects that the NEP talks of. Even if the students can study one of the subjects of speech pathology or audiology, it is still a moot point whether they would be able to study the chosen subject to the depth required to be able to function as an independent clinician at the end of 4 years.

The next point I am talking about is related to this. One of the main thrusts of NEP regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges within universities and autonomous degree-granting colleges. Single-stream higher education institutions will be phased out over time, and all will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or parts of higher education institution clusters. It means that there would be only three types of institutions, but more important they would be all be multidisciplinary in scope and have 3000 students or more. The entrepreneurs and administrators in our profession have a lot to think on



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

a) how to achieve multidisciplinary nature and b) what would happen to their individual colleges/identities.

Perhaps, a most controversial aspect of NEP for university education in the disability sector is its proposal for multiple exits in the undergraduate program. NEP proposes that students will get a certificate at the end of 1 year of study, a diploma after two years, a Bachelor's degree after a 3-year program, and a Bachelor's degree 'with research' (or Honors) after 4-years of study. This would be disastrous if implemented. The first and the second year of the undergraduate program in speech and hearing is essentially a foundation program. The field of speech and hearing being a highly interdisciplinary science, the students are being exposed, in the first and second year of the program, to knowledge in a number of fields that are important to understand the mechanisms and processes of speech-language and hearing. More importantly, the core clinical competencies and skills are acquired and refined in the last two years. The clinical internship (4th year) is too critical for the student to be a skillful clinician. This being the case, we wonder what a student will do in the society with just 1 or 2 years or even 3 years of training. Conceptually too, a student with one year or 2 year's training addressing the needs of the clinical population is demeaning. I am sure the situation will be similar in other disability areas too like physiotherapy or clinical/rehabilitation psychology. We should say a big 'no' to multiple exits and insist that there is no alternative to the 4-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's program.

NEP 2020 makes another important provision. Selected international Universities, those in the top 100 bracket, will be facilitated to operate in India. This is welcome as it opens up greater opportunities for our students, but at the same time challenges us. NEP also proposes credit transfer between international and Indian institutions for award of degrees. Both these proposals challenge us. Our institutions and professionals have to gear up to face this international competition. In addition, we have to ensure that if international universities are allowed to establish their campus here and run programs, then they should offer programs relevant to us. Unfortunately, we did not have a comfortable experience when an American University wanted to offer one of their academic programs in Audiology to Indian students in the



Indian Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ISHA)

Regd. Under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, Karnataka Act No. 17 Registration No. 25/67-68

recent past and the statutory body was more than willing to listen to Americans than us. While welcoming the proposal on foreign universities, let us be vigilant.

There are many other proposals in the NEP that challenge our imagination and intellect, and which are clearly unacceptable. For example, having an all-encompassing Higher Education Commission of India on the lines of National Medical Commission for regulating higher education, proposal to allow registration for Ph.D after 4-years Bachelor's degree, and proposal to abolish statutory bodies like RCI, to name a few, are retrograde. But, I am not going into the details of all these for want of time.

I have exceeded the time allotted to me. My apologies to all you, more particularly to our honorable guests. Let me stop here welcoming the NEP 2020, but asking all of you to be vigilant in its implementation.

Thank you all.