

## **The Architect and The Gardener: The National Council for Teacher Education in India and its Quest to Humanise the Modern Classroom**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper examines the role of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in shaping India's contemporary education landscape. Moving beyond a purely regulatory analysis, it frames the NCTE's journey as a profound, albeit complex, endeavour to humanise the educational experience. Established to ensure standards and streamline teacher preparation, the NCTE's evolution reflects a shifting paradigm—from a mechanistic, input-focused model to one increasingly conscious of the need for teachers who are not merely instructors but facilitators, counsellors, and empathetic guides. The paper argues that the NCTE's policies, particularly post the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, have significant downstream effects on the human elements of education: teacher identity, student-teacher relationships, pedagogical creativity, and the socio-emotional climate of classrooms. Through an analysis of policy documents, curricular frameworks, and critical challenges, this study posits that while the NCTE has laid essential structural foundations for professionalising teaching, its ultimate success hinges on its ability to foster an ecosystem where teacher education cultivates not just competence, but also compassion, critical consciousness, and a deep respect for the human potential within every learner.

**Keywords:** NCTE, Teacher Education, Humanising Education, NEP 2020, Pedagogy, Teacher Identity, Indian Education System, Regulatory Bodies, Socio-Emotional Learning.

### **1. Introduction: The Human Crisis in the Machine of Education**

The Indian classroom, in the popular imagination and often in reality, has long been a site of contradiction. It is a space brimming with immense human potential—curious children from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds—yet frequently governed by rigid, transactional, and dehumanising processes. For decades, education was synonymous with rote memorisation, high-stakes examinations, and a unidirectional flow of information from an authoritative teacher to a passive student. This system, a legacy of colonial and industrial-era models, produced graduates but often failed to nurture critical thinkers, empathetic citizens, or well-rounded individuals.

At the heart of this ecosystem lies the teacher—the most potent humanising agent. Yet, the teacher's own preparation was, for a long time, fragmented, of uneven quality, and disconnected from the lived realities of children. The establishment of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in 1993 as a statutory body (coming into full force in 1995) was a watershed moment, a formal recognition that the transformation of education must begin with the transformation of teacher education.

This paper explores a central thesis: The NCTE's role, while fundamentally regulatory, is intrinsically linked to the project of humanising India's modern education system. Its norms, standards, and curricular directives shape the identity, capacity, and worldview of the teacher, who is the primary conduit for creating humane, inclusive, and effective learning environments. We will trace this role not just as a function of compliance, but as a narrative of an institution grappling with the monumental task of shifting a system's soul—from mechanistic delivery to human flourishing.

## **2. The NCTE: Genesis, Mandate, and Evolutionary Journey**

### **2.1 The Pre-Statutory Landscape: Anarchy and Ad-hocism**

Prior to 1993, teacher education in India was a patchwork. Over 2500 institutions, many privately run with minimal infrastructure and poorly qualified faculty, operated with little oversight. There was no national standard for curriculum, duration, or entry qualifications. This led to what has been termed a “mushrooming” of sub-standard Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), producing teachers ill-equipped to handle the complexities of the classroom. The system was less about educating teachers and more about certifying them, contributing directly to the dehumanising practices in schools.

### **2.2 The Statutory Birth: A Quest for Order and Quality**

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its 1992 revision explicitly called for a statutory body to plan and coordinate teacher development. Thus, the NCTE Act, 1993 was passed. Its initial mandate was clear:

- \* To achieve planned and coordinated development of teacher education.
- \* To regulate and properly maintain norms and standards for TEIs.
- \* To prevent the commercialization of teacher education.

This was a necessary, foundational step. Humanisation cannot occur in chaos; it requires a framework of dignity and professionalism. By seeking to eliminate malpractices and ensure basic quality, the NCTE aimed to instil a sense of professional dignity and purpose into teaching.

### **2.3 The Evolutionary Shift: From Regulation to Reformation**

The NCTE's journey has not been linear. The early years were consumed by the Herculean task of bringing order—granting recognition, setting infrastructure norms (land, buildings, libraries), and standardising programmes like the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.). Critics argued this led to a “checklist approach,” where institutions focused on tangible inputs rather than the intangible process of nurturing great teachers.

However, a significant shift began in the 21st century, influenced by national and global discourses on child-centered learning, inclusive education, and constructivism. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 was a landmark document that re-imagined the child as an active constructor of knowledge and positioned the teacher as a facilitator. This forced a re-evaluation of what teacher education must entail. The NCTE responded with revised “Norms and Standards” in 2014, which, while retaining regulatory components, began integrating the philosophical spirit of NCF 2005. It emphasized:

- \* Longer duration programmes (e.g., 2-year B.Ed.) for deeper engagement.

- \* Integration of theory and practice.
- \* Inclusion of components on gender, disability, and peace education.

This evolution marks the Council's tentative steps from being merely an 'architect' of structures to becoming a 'gardener' interested in the quality of the pedagogical soil.

### **3. The Mechanics of Humanisation: NCTE's Key Levers of Influence**

The NCTE attempts to shape a humanised education system through several key levers, each with direct implications for the human actors in the educational drama.

#### **3.1 Curriculum Design: Shifting the Pedagogical Soul**

The NCTE's model curricula provide the blueprint for what future teachers learn. The move from a syllabus heavy on textbook-oriented teaching methods to one that includes:

- Foundations of Education: Incorporating philosophical, sociological, and psychological perspectives that help teachers understand the child in context.
- Pedagogy of School Subjects: Moving beyond "how to teach a chapter" to "how to foster understanding and critical thinking in a subject."
- Creating an Inclusive School: Mandatory components on teaching children with disabilities and from diverse backgrounds, directly combatting exclusion.
- Gender & Peace Education: Addressing deep-seated social biases and fostering democratic values.
- ICT Integration: Not as a mere tool, but as a means to create accessible, interactive, and creative learning experiences.

This curricular shift aims to produce a teacher who is a reflective practitioner, not a technician.

#### **3.2 Practicum and School Internship: From Abstraction to Empathy**

Earlier, 'practice teaching' was often a brief, ritualistic exercise. Modern NCTE guidelines mandate sustained, intensive school internships embedded throughout the programme. This is a critical humanising lever. It forces student-teachers out of the insulated college environment and into the vibrant, messy reality of schools. They must:

- Engage with individual learners, understanding their unique strengths and struggles.
- Develop lesson plans that cater to varied learning styles.
- Manage a classroom not through authority alone, but through relationship-building.
- Experience the community context of the school.

This immersion is the primary site where theory transforms into empathetic practice.

#### **3.3 Entry and Qualification Norms: Professionalising the Identity**

By mandating minimum qualifications (like a graduation degree plus B.Ed. for secondary teachers) and attempting to regulate entry through examinations (like the Central Teacher Eligibility Test - CTET, though not directly conducted by NCTE, it is based on its guidelines), the Council seeks to raise the professional bar. The underlying premise is that a profession with clearer, more rigorous entry pathways attracts more serious candidates and commands greater societal respect. A teacher who sees themselves as a professional is more likely to invest in the ongoing, relational work that humanisation demands.

#### **3.4 In-Service Professional Development: The Lifelong Learner Teacher**

The NCTE's 2014 norms made it mandatory for teachers to undergo at least 50 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) annually. This recognizes that humanisation is

not a one-time training but a lifelong orientation. Effective CPD, when done well, moves beyond subject-updates to focus on classroom climate, adolescent counselling, experiential learning techniques, and social-emotional learning—all core to a humane classroom.

#### **4. The NEP 2020 as an Accelerant: NCTE's New Mandate for Human-Centric Education**

The National Education Policy 2020 has given the NCTE's humanisation agenda unprecedented momentum and clarity. The NEP's vision is explicitly holistic and learner-centric, and it tasks the NCTE with being a primary driver of this transformation.

##### **4.1 The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST):**

The NEP mandates the development of a robust NPST by the NCTE. This will define the competencies of a teacher at different career stages (beginner, proficient, expert). Crucially, these standards are expected to go beyond subject knowledge to include:

- Competencies for Learner-Centeredness: Facilitating critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative learning.
- Social-Emotional and Ethical Capacities: Nurturing students' emotional well-being, moral reasoning, and empathy.
- Inclusivity and Equity: Customising teaching for diverse needs and ensuring no child is left behind.
- Community Engagement: Connecting learning to the local environment and societal needs.

The NPST reframes the teacher's role from "covering the syllabus" to "nurturing the whole child."

##### **4.2 Integrated Teacher Education and Multidisciplinary Approach:**

The NEP's push for 4-year integrated B.Ed. programmes in multidisciplinary universities is revolutionary. It aims to break the isolation of teacher education colleges. When future teachers learn alongside students of sciences, humanities, and arts, their own education becomes broader and more humanistic. They develop a wider worldview, which is essential for teaching in a diverse, interconnected world.

##### **4.3 Focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):**

By bringing ECCE teacher preparation under its purview, the NCTE now directly influences the most formative years of a child's life. NEP emphasizes play-based, discovery-based learning for ages 3-8. Training teachers for this stage requires a deep emphasis on child psychology, playful pedagogy, and nurturing care—the very bedrock of a humanised educational foundation.

##### **4.4 Technology as a Humanising Tool, Not a Replacement:**

The NEP's emphasis on blended learning, with the NCTE tasked to formulate guidelines, positions technology as a means to personalize learning, bridge resource gaps, and free up teachers' time for more high-touch, interactive, and mentoring roles. The challenge is to ensure tech augments humanity in the classroom, not replaces it.

#### **5. The Chasm Between Intent and Reality: Critical Challenges and Contradictions**

Despite its evolving mandate, the NCTE's journey towards humanising education is fraught with systemic challenges that create a chasm between policy intent and classroom reality.

### **5.1 The Persistent Spectre of Bureaucratization and Corruption:**

The NCTE's regulatory function often overshadows its reformative vision. The process of obtaining and maintaining recognition can be mired in red tape. More damagingly, instances of corruption, where norms are circumvented through bribes, have plagued the system. This allows "diploma mills" to persist, fundamentally undermining the project of creating reflective, humane educators.

### **5.2 Quality vs. Quantity: The Dilemma of Scale:**

India needs millions of teachers. The pressure to produce large numbers often conflicts with the need for deep, intensive, quality training. Many TEIs, especially in remote areas, still lack the faculty, mentorship capacity, or philosophical commitment to implement the humanistic components of the NCTE curriculum. The internship becomes a formality; gender studies is reduced to a textbook chapter.

### **5.3 The Examination-Centered Ecosystem:**

The NCTE can reform teacher education, but it operates within a larger school system still dominated by board exams and rote learning. Schools often pressure teachers to "complete the syllabus" rather than foster understanding. This creates a conflict for the freshly trained, idealistic teacher, who may be forced to abandon humanistic methods for drill-and-practice to ensure student performance on tests.

### **5.4 Faculty Development in TEIs: The Weak Link:**

The educators of educators are perhaps the most critical link. Many Teacher Educators in colleges are themselves products of the old system and may lack training or belief in constructivist, humanistic methods. Without transformative faculty development, the new curricula are taught in old, un-inspiring ways.

### **5.5 Socio-Economic Disparities:**

NCTE norms on infrastructure (like land area) are well-intentioned but can be exclusionary. They make it difficult to set up TEIs in dense urban areas or for smaller, community-based organizations with a strong philosophical grounding but limited land. This can inadvertently centralise teacher education and limit diversity in perspectives.

## **6. Case in Point: Effects on the Modern Education System – A Human Audit**

What have been the tangible effects of the NCTE's work on the modern Indian classroom? The results are mixed but point towards a slow, generational shift.

### **Positive Shifts Towards Humanisation:**

- Language of Change is Mainstreamed: Terms like "child-centered," "inclusive education," "activity-based learning," and "continuous and comprehensive evaluation" (CCE), though imperfectly implemented, are now part of the educational lexicon, thanks to NCTE-mandated curricula. This creates a common vision to aspire to.
- The Reflective Teacher is Emerging: There is a growing cohort of young teachers who see their role as facilitators. They use group work, projects, and attempt to connect lessons to real life, moving beyond chalk-and-talk.
- Inclusion is on the Agenda: Teachers are now at least aware of legal mandates like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. While infrastructure and support lag, the mindset shift towards accommodating differences has begun in many schools.

- Professional Identity is Stronger: The B.Ed. is now a non-negotiable qualification, lending a base level of professional identity and theoretical grounding.

#### **Persistent Dehumanising Forces:**

- Overcrowded Classrooms: NCTE cannot solve the pupil-teacher ratio problem in government schools. A teacher with 50-60 students finds it physically impossible to give individual attention, a core tenet of humanised learning.
- Administrative Burdens: Teachers are burdened with non-teaching duties (election work, surveys), leaving them with little energy for pedagogical innovation or deep student connection.
- The Tyranny of the Textbook: In many states, the textbook remains the ultimate curriculum, stifling teacher creativity and student curiosity that NCTE frameworks aim to promote.

#### **7. The Road Ahead: Reimagining the NCTE as an Ecosystem Nurturer**

For the NCTE to fully realize its potential as a humanising force, it must transcend its primary identity as a regulator. It must become a \*\*curator of a national culture of teaching excellence. This requires:

1. From Compliance Officer to Coach and Connector: Develop a robust support system for TEIs, offering mentoring, sharing best practices, and creating communities of practice rather than just conducting inspections.
2. Embrace Authentic Assessment: Move beyond judging TEIs by land and buildings to developing mechanisms to assess the quality of the teaching practice of their graduates and their impact on school climate.
3. Empower the Teacher Educator: Launch a massive, mission-mode Faculty Development Programme for teacher educators, using immersive, experiential methods that they are expected to replicate.
4. Forge Stronger School-University Links: Mandate and resource deep, collaborative partnerships between TEIs and diverse schools (government, private, alternative) so that theory and practice are in constant dialogue.
5. Advocate for Systemic Change: Use its position to advocate for policies that reduce class size, limit non-teaching duties, and reform board examinations—creating an enabling environment for the teachers it trains.

#### **8. Conclusion: The Unfinished Symphony of Human Potential**

The National Council for Teacher Education stands at a critical juncture in India's educational history. Its journey from a regulator of brick-and-mortar institutions to a shaper of minds and hearts is emblematic of the nation's own struggle to redefine education's purpose. The NCTE's regulations, norms, and curricula are not mere administrative documents; they are, in essence, a statement of hope—a blueprint for the kind of teacher India dreams of. The effects of its work are visible not in dramatic revolutions, but in subtle shifts: in a teacher who designs a group activity instead of a lecture, in a lesson plan that includes a local folk tale, in a classroom where a child with dyslexia is given extra time without stigma. These are the incremental victories of humanization.

The modern education system, with its pressures of technology, globalization, and inequality, needs humanity more than ever. It needs teachers who can teach algorithms and empathy, grammar and grief, history and hope. The NCTE's ultimate success will not be measured by the number of institutions it recognizes, but by the quality of human connections it enables in a million classrooms across the country. Its role is to ensure that every teacher who enters a classroom carries not just a lesson plan, but a deep-seated belief in the infinite potential and inherent dignity of every child they teach. That is the unfinished, and most important, symphony it must help conduct. The garden of education, after all, does not need more efficient machines; it needs skilled, compassionate, and thoughtful gardeners. The NCTE's mandate is to cultivate them.

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