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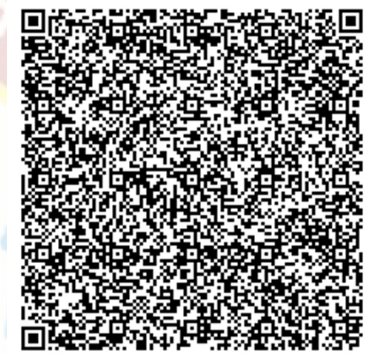
NEP 2020 And The Indian Philosophy of Holistic Education

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant transformation in the Indian education system by emphasizing holistic, multidisciplinary, and learner-centered education. The policy seeks to revive India's rich educational heritage while addressing contemporary educational challenges. The concept of holistic education, deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, focuses on the balanced development of the physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions of human personality. Ancient Indian educational systems, as reflected in the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhist traditions, and the educational thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo, emphasized the integral development of the individual. The policy's focus on character formation, critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility reflects the Indian view of education as a means for self-realization and societal well-being, rather than mere acquisition of information or vocational skills. Methodologically, this study employs documentary and philosophical analysis of NEP 2020 and related Indian Knowledge System (IKS) literature to explore their epistemological and pedagogical continuities. This paper examines NEP 2020 through the lens of Indian philosophical traditions that have long emphasized the integrated development of the individual—intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Rooted in the Indian Knowledge System, concepts such as Vidya (true knowledge), Panchakosha (fivefold development of the self), Dharma (ethical responsibility), and Sahajik Shiksha (natural and experiential learning) provide a philosophical foundation for the policy's holistic orientation. The study explores how NEP 2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary education, flexibility in learning pathways, experiential and competency-based pedagogy, and value-oriented education resonates with ancient Indian educational ideals evident in the Gurukul tradition and classical philosophical texts. By situating NEP 2020 within the broader framework of Indian philosophical thought, this study argues that the policy represents an effort to reclaim indigenous educational wisdom while addressing modern educational challenges. The paper concludes that NEP 2020's holistic vision, grounded in Indian philosophy, offers a culturally rooted yet globally relevant model for educational reform in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Holistic Education, Indian Philosophy, Indian Knowledge Systems, Experiential Education, Value-Based Education, Multidisciplinary Education, Educational Reform



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1. Introduction

Education in India has historically been regarded not merely as a means of acquiring information or vocational competence, but as a transformative process aimed at the complete development of the human personality. Ancient Indian educational traditions emphasized the cultivation of intellect, morality, spirituality, emotional balance, and social responsibility. The National Education Policy

(NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in the Indian educational landscape by reviving these indigenous educational ideals while responding to the demands of globalization, technological advancement, and twenty-first-century learning needs. The policy advocates multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, creativity, and flexibility in learning pathways. These objectives strongly resonate with the Indian philosophical tradition that views education as a process of self-realization and harmonious living. NEP 2020 recognizes that education should promote not only academic excellence but also character formation, constitutional values, environmental awareness, and social responsibility.

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The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), rooted in the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhist traditions, Jain philosophy, and classical educational practices, provides a philosophical foundation for this holistic approach. Concepts such as Vidya (true knowledge), Dharma (ethical duty), Panchakosha (five dimensions of human development), and Guru-Shishya Parampara (teacher-student tradition) continue to hold relevance in contemporary educational discourse.

This paper critically examines the philosophical relationship between NEP 2020 and the Indian concept of holistic education. It explores how the policy incorporates ancient educational ideals into modern educational reform and argues that NEP 2020 represents a synthesis of indigenous wisdom and contemporary pedagogical innovation

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this study are:

- 1) To analyze the philosophical foundations of holistic education in Indian thought.
- 2) To explore the major features of NEP 2020 related to holistic development and understand the implications of holistic education for the future of Indian society.
- 3) To explore the relationship between NEP 2020 and the Indian Knowledge System.
- 4) To analyze the relevance of Indian philosophical concepts in contemporary educational reform.

3. Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical research approach to examine the relationship between the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Indian philosophy of holistic education. The study is based on secondary sources of data, including the official NEP 2020 document and related policy papers, books on Indian philosophy, research articles, journals, government reports, and scholarly publications.

The study uses comparative analysis to interpret philosophical parallels between NEP 2020 and classical Indian epistemologies, identifying continuities and reinterpretations across traditions.

Using thematic analysis, the paper examines how NEP 2020 embodies the principles of holistic education, Indian Knowledge Systems, and educational reform in India. The method aims to reveal the philosophical continuity between India's ancient wisdom and the NEP's contemporary educational vision.

4. Review of Literature

Recent academic and policy-oriented literature on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights its attempt to align modern education with indigenous knowledge traditions while responding to global educational challenges. The policy has been widely interpreted as a shift toward holistic, interdisciplinary, and culturally rooted education.

Tyagi (2021) examined the pedagogical commitments of NEP 2020 and highlighted the importance of meaningful, experiential, and learner-centered education. The study emphasized that the policy promotes critical thinking, creativity, conceptual understanding, and active learning, all of which are consistent with the holistic orientation of Indian educational thought.

Dey (2022) critically analyzed the recommendations of NEP 2020 and observed that the policy introduces significant pedagogical and structural reforms in school and higher education. The study highlighted the policy's focus on holistic learner development, flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, and educational transformation. The author argued that NEP 2020 marks a shift from rote learning to a more comprehensive and human-centered educational framework.

Institutional frameworks further reinforce this vision. Guidelines issued by University Grants Commission (2021) advocate the systematic inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education curricula, emphasizing interdisciplinary research and indigenous epistemologies. The curriculum framework proposed by NCERT (2023) operationalizes these ideas by promoting experiential learning, multilingual education, and ethical development at the school level.

Global educational discourse supports similar directions. UNESCO (2021) calls for education systems that integrate sustainability, ethics, and cultural diversity, echoing NEP's holistic orientation. National transformation reports from NITI Aayog (2022) indicate that India's reform trajectory increasingly prioritizes learner-centered and culturally responsive pedagogy.

5. Concept of Holistic Education in Indian Philosophy

Holistic education in Indian philosophy refers to the integrated development of the individual at physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, social, and spiritual levels. Unlike purely utilitarian models of education, Indian philosophy views education as a path toward self-realization, liberation (Moksha), and harmonious coexistence. The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills. Ultimately, knowledge is a deep-seated treasure and education helps in its manifestation as the perfection which is already within an individual. All aspects of curriculum and pedagogy will be



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reoriented and revamped to attain these critical goals. Specific sets of skills and values across domains will be identified for integration and incorporation at each stage of learning, from pre-school to higher education. Curriculum frameworks and transaction mechanisms will be developed for ensuring that these skills and values are imbibed through engaging processes of teaching and learning. NCERT will identify these required skill sets and include mechanisms for their transaction in the National Curriculum Framework for early childhood and school education.

5.1 Vedic and Upanishadic Tradition:

The Vedic educational system aimed at the complete development of personality. Education was regarded as a means of attaining knowledge, wisdom, self-discipline, and self-realization. The Upanishads emphasized the pursuit of truth and the realization of one's inner potential. The Vedic system focused on the balanced development of body, mind, intellect, character, and spirit. Education aimed at producing well-rounded individuals capable of leading a meaningful and virtuous life.

The Upanishads emphasized self-knowledge (Atma Vidya) as the highest form of education. Learning was intended to help individuals discover their true nature and achieve spiritual enlightenment.

Truthfulness (Satya), righteousness (Dharma), self-control, compassion, and respect for others were considered essential educational values. Character building was regarded as equally important as intellectual development.

The teacher-student relationship formed the core of the educational process. The *Guru* served as a guide, mentor, and role model, fostering the learner's intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth.

Learning involved observation, discussion, contemplation, meditation, and practical experience. Students were encouraged to question, reflect, and seek deeper understanding.

5.2 Vidya: Education as Liberation

Ancient Indian thinkers regarded Vidya as the means of enlightenment and liberation from ignorance. The Upanishadic statement "Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye" means "true knowledge is that which liberates." Education was therefore intended to awaken inner consciousness rather than merely prepare individuals for economic productivity.

NEP 2020 similarly emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, ethics, and life skills, moving beyond rote learning and examination-oriented education.

5.3 Panchakosha Theory

The Taittiriya Upanishad presents the concept of Panchakosha, which describes five layers of human existence: The Panchakosha Theory (Theory of the Five Sheaths) is an important concept in Indian philosophy, especially found in the Taittiriya Upanishad. It explains the nature of the human being as consisting of five layers or "sheaths" (koshas) that cover the true Self (Atman).

According to this theory, human existence is not limited to the physical body but includes mental, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. The five koshas are:

1) Annamaya Kosha – Physical dimension

Anna means food. This is the outermost layer, consisting of the physical body made from food and sustained by food. It includes bones, muscles, organs, and all bodily functions. It is subject to birth, growth, decay, and death.

2) Pranamaya Kosha – Vital and emotional dimension

Prana means life force or vital energy. This sheath regulates breathing, circulation, digestion, and other physiological processes. It energizes and sustains the physical body. Practices such as yoga and pranayama help strengthen this sheath.

3) Manomaya Kosha – Mental dimension

Manas means mind. It consists of thoughts, emotions, feelings, desires, and sensory perceptions. This sheath processes information received through the senses. Emotional well-being and mental balance are associated with this layer.

4) Vijnanamaya Kosha – Intellectual dimension

Vijnana means knowledge or wisdom. It includes intellect, reasoning, judgment, discrimination, and decision-making abilities. This sheath enables critical thinking and ethical understanding. It helps individuals distinguish right from wrong.

5) Anandamaya Kosha – Spiritual dimension

Ananda means bliss. This is the innermost sheath, closest to the Atman. It is associated with deep peace, joy, spiritual fulfillment, and transcendence. In deep meditation and self-realization, one experiences this state of bliss.

This theory represents one of the earliest frameworks of holistic human development. NEP 2020 reflects this multidimensional approach by emphasizing physical education, mental well-being, ethical education, artistic creativity, and intellectual inquiry.

5.4 Buddhist Philosophy:

Buddhist education stressed moral discipline, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom. The educational institutions of Nalanda and Takshashila promoted intellectual inquiry, ethical living, and holistic learning.

Buddhist education aims at the balanced development of physical, mental, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of life.



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Learning is considered meaningful only when it contributes to overall human flourishing.

Ethics (Sila) forms the foundation of Buddhist education. Students are encouraged to practice honesty, non-violence, compassion, kindness, and self-discipline. Moral development is regarded as essential for individual and societal harmony

Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of concentration (Samadhi) and mindfulness. Through meditation and self-reflection, learners develop emotional balance, self-control, and inner peace

Wisdom (Prajna) is the highest aim of Buddhist education. Learners are encouraged to question, reflect, and seek truth through personal experience rather than blind acceptance of authority.

Buddhist education promotes compassion (Karuna) and loving-kindness (Metta) toward all living beings. Education should develop responsible individuals who contribute to the welfare

5.5 Dharma and Ethical Education:

In Indian philosophy, Dharma refers to moral responsibility, righteous conduct, and social harmony. Education was expected to cultivate compassion, honesty, self-discipline, and social responsibility. NEP 2020 emphasizes constitutional values, empathy, respect for diversity, environmental awareness, and ethical reasoning, thereby aligning with the traditional Indian emphasis on moral education. Ethics (Dharma) forms the cornerstone of Indian education (Gandhi, 1953; Radhakrishnan, 1952). NEP 2020 calls for value-based education emphasizing empathy, honesty, responsibility, and respect for diversity. This reflects the Dharmic tradition of aligning individual conduct with universal moral order. Texts like the Bhagavad Gita articulate the integration of knowledge and duty: “Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam” (Excellence in action is yoga). Similarly, Buddhist and Jain traditions advocate compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence (Ahimsa)—values directly incorporated into NEP’s frameworks for character development and citizenship education (Vasudevan, 2021).

6. Gurukul Tradition and Experiential Learning

The ancient Gurukul system represented an educational model based on close interaction between teacher and student. Learning occurred through observation, dialogue, practice, reflection, and participation in daily life activities. The policy emphasizes experiential, inquiry-based, and project-based modes of learning — shifting from rote memorization to active engagement with content, problem-solving, and application. The policy emphasizes experiential and inquiry-based learning, reflecting both modern educational psychology (Piaget, Dewey) and ancient Indian methods of Anubhava (experience) (Kumar, 2022; Mishra, 2021). The Upanishadic tradition of learning through dialogue (śravaṇa–manana–nididhyāsana) demonstrates early forms of constructivist pedagogy (Balasubramanian, 2000).

In the Gurukul system, students learned through observation, practice, and lived experience under the guidance of a teacher (Guru). NEP’s recommendation of experiential learning, vocational education, and internship-based learning continues this tradition in modern contexts (Mishra, 2021; Kumar, 2022).

Key characteristics of the Gurukul system included:

- * Personalized learning
- * Character development
- * Practical and experiential education
- * Integration of knowledge and life
- * Spiritual discipline
- * Respect for nature and community living

NEP 2020 promotes similar principles through:

- * Experiential learning
- * Competency-based education
- * Internship opportunities
- * Skill development
- * Inquiry-based pedagogy
- * Flexible curriculum structures

The policy’s shift from memorization to conceptual understanding reflects the Indian educational tradition of reflective and dialogic learning.

7. Mother Tongue and Indian Linguistic Philosophy

NEP 2020 strongly recommends mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction at the foundational stage. This recommendation reflects Indian linguistic philosophy, particularly the ideas of Sanskrit grammarian Panini and the oral pedagogical traditions of ancient India.

Indian educational traditions recognized language as deeply connected to cognition, culture, identity, and consciousness.



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Learning in one's mother tongue enhances comprehension, creativity, and emotional connection. Indian linguistic philosophy regards language (*Sabda*) as a primary source of knowledge. Similarly, NEP 2020 recognizes that children learn concepts most effectively through their mother tongue. Therefore, the policy recommends using the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction in the early years of education. Ancient Indian thinkers such as Bhartrhari emphasized the close relationship between language and thought. NEP 2020 reflects this idea by promoting mother tongue-based education, which enhances comprehension, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding.

Indian linguistic philosophy views language as the carrier of cultural traditions, values, and collective wisdom. NEP 2020 seeks to preserve India's rich linguistic diversity by encouraging the study and use of regional and indigenous languages.

The Indian philosophical tradition considers language essential for intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual growth. NEP 2020 adopts a holistic approach to education and recognizes the role of the mother tongue in nurturing the overall personality of the learner.

The policy envisions education as a means to promote respect for all cultures, traditions, and religions, thereby fostering social harmony and national unity.

The policy's emphasis on multilingualism also reflects India's long-standing tradition of linguistic diversity and cultural pluralism.

8. Value-Based Education and Character Formation

Indian philosophy has consistently emphasized character formation as the central aim of education. Thinkers such as:

- **Swami Vivekananda:** Swami Vivekananda defined education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man." He emphasized character formation, self-confidence, moral values, and spiritual growth.
- **Rabindranath Tagore:** Tagore advocated education in harmony with nature. He believed that education should foster creativity, freedom, aesthetic appreciation, and international understanding.
- **Mahatma Gandhi:** Gandhi's concept of Nai Talim emphasized learning through productive work, self-reliance, moral values, and community engagement.
- **Sri Aurobindo:** Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education focused on the development of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual aspects of human personality.

9. Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Inquiry:

Ancient Indian philosophical traditions encouraged debate, questioning, and intellectual inquiry. The Upanishadic dialogues, Buddhist discussions, and Nyaya logic tradition promoted rational inquiry and critical reflection.

NEP 2020 emphasizes:

- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Scientific temper
- Creativity
- Innovation
- Research orientation

This reflects continuity with Indian traditions that valued intellectual freedom and philosophical debate. The policy's focus on reducing rote learning and promoting conceptual understanding marks a major shift toward learner-centered education.

10. Environmental Consciousness in Indian Philosophy and NEP 2020

Indian philosophy traditionally emphasized harmony between humans and nature. Concepts such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("the world is one family") and reverence for natural elements encouraged ecological sensitivity.

Ancient educational traditions taught students to live close to nature and develop sustainable lifestyles.

NEP 2020 integrates environmental education by promoting:

Sustainable development, Ecological awareness, Conservation ethics, Responsible citizenship. This reflects the Indian philosophical view that education should nurture balance between human progress and environmental responsibility.

11. Challenges in Implementing Holistic Education

Despite its transformative vision, NEP 2020 faces several challenges:

11.1 Examination-Oriented System: The existing education system remains heavily dependent on rote learning and standardized examinations.

11.2 Teacher Preparation: Teachers require extensive training to implement experiential and multidisciplinary pedagogy effectively.

11.3 Infrastructure Limitations: Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack adequate infrastructure and technological



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resources.

11.4 Language Challenges: Implementing mother-tongue education in multilingual contexts may pose practical difficulties.

11.5 Balancing Tradition and Modernity: Integrating Indian philosophical values with global educational standards requires careful balance.

12. Discussion:

NEP 2020 represents an important attempt to reconnect Indian education with its philosophical roots while addressing contemporary educational needs. The policy's holistic orientation reflects the Indian understanding that education should nurture the entire human personality rather than focus solely on economic productivity.

The emphasis on multidisciplinary learning, experiential pedagogy, ethical values, creativity, and emotional well-being demonstrates continuity with ancient Indian educational thought. At the same time, the policy adapts these principles to contemporary realities such as globalization, technological advancement, and employability.

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into mainstream education also contributes to cultural self-confidence and intellectual decolonization. It encourages learners to appreciate indigenous traditions while engaging critically with global knowledge systems.

However, successful implementation depends on institutional support, curriculum reform, teacher training, policy coordination, and social awareness.

13. Conclusion:

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant philosophical and educational shift in India by placing holistic human development at the center of educational reform. Rooted in the Indian Knowledge System, the policy revives ancient educational ideals that emphasize intellectual growth, ethical responsibility, creativity, spiritual awareness, and social harmony.

By incorporating concepts such as experiential learning, multidisciplinary education, value-based pedagogy, mother-tongue instruction, and critical inquiry, NEP 2020 reflects the enduring relevance of Indian philosophical traditions in contemporary education.

The policy demonstrates that indigenous educational wisdom can provide meaningful solutions to modern educational challenges. Its holistic vision offers a culturally grounded yet globally relevant framework for building an inclusive, ethical, and knowledge-based society in the twenty-first century.

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