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Reintegrating Indian Knowledge Systems in Modern Education: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The great Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda once described education as the manifestation of perfection that already exists in oneself. Westernization in India is often regarded as a benchmark, leading to the reclamation and rebranding of India's lost educational treasures. This paper delves into the historical context of Indian education and examines the similarities between the ancient Indian education system and the objectives of modern education. The primary focus of major educational institutions worldwide is preparing students for global citizenship. However, India proposed the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world as one family) centuries ago. Western countries and India's NEP 2020 now emphasize interdisciplinary education, practical learning, innovation, and spiritual and moral values, which were integral to the ancient Indian education system through well-established Gurukuls. The Guru-Shishya Parampara (teacher-student tradition) laid the foundation of trust and belief, enhancing the teaching-learning experience. This paper analyzes the overlap between modern educational objectives and the characteristics of the ancient Indian education system, thus reaffirming the significance of integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into modern education.

Keywords: Indian Education System, Indian Knowledge Systems, Modern Education System, NEP 2020, Gurukuls

Introduction

Indian Culture and Philosophy have had an important effect globally (Bhardwaj, 2021). India, the land that carries a legacy of vibrant Culture, and beauty of Nature, has given various philosophers and Saints, to the world. Many experts in respective domains are acknowledged globally for their foundation and contribution to respective fields of knowledge. In the well-known Ancient Indian Scientists and Scholars, we have Brahmagupta, Aryabhatta, Charak, Nagarjuna, Kanad, Varahmihira, Sandipani, Bhaskaracharya, Mahaviracharya, Sushruta. They have contributed immensely in fields like Mathematics, Astronomy, War Science, Economics, Political Science, Civics, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Science, Ayurveda, Yoga, Religion, etc.

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One of the 17 mega bio-diverse countries, India, is rich in biodiversity and its related traditional knowledge; whereas its history is full of cultural, traditional, and artistic wisdom that not only includes Indian medicinal knowledge, but important linguistic and philosophical advanced principles and methodologies (Sharma). To emphasize this further, Indians discovered the value of 'Pi', well before the Western world could think of it, and 'Zero', was one of the significant contributions to the field of mathematics made by India. Even the Pythagorean theorem was already explained in the 'Sulva Sutra' by Baudhayan centuries before it was discovered by the Western world.

Considering change is the only constant, the world has progressed ever since and has developed an understanding of multiple things including the functioning of the universe and the integration of technology into various fields.

The 21st century has brought a lot of advantages to humans with technological advancements in various fields. However, it has its own disadvantages. Various nations are dealing with internal issues, but as a whole, the world is dealing with a range of problems. Economic Crises, Changing Weather Patterns, Mental Illness, Violence, etc. are taking a toll on global leaders. While strengthening the defense sector, countries are missing out on primary health care, education, minimum wages, and jobs for all. The world is finding it difficult to address these challenges due to limitations of their knowledge and experience that come from the way they perceive the world and social sectors.

There are a few grand challenges the 21st century has presented us with, including - Changing economic powers, Migration and mobility, Conflict and war, Civic disaffection, Identities and changing norms in society, Living in a global society, Technological disruption, Mitigating environmental and ecological damage, Increasing inequality of wealth and income (Ten Grand Challenges, n.d.).

Amid technological advancements, there are very few fields remaining which are not yet touched by technology. There are still some aspects of human life, which need in-person intervention and human touch or a social connection in a real sense, which seems missing in the technical era. In this scenario, where there is a saturation experienced in society, the world is looking at India to learn spiritual values.

Spirituality needs to be understood in a very scientific manner, which is distant from being religious. Religiosity and spirituality significantly impact the lifestyle of students; while the scientific literature highlights the relationship between these dimensions, a reduction of problems is noticed such as depression and suicide (Aleixandre Brian Duche-Pérez).

Actively open-minded thinking and spirituality have a positive impact on most dimensions of psychological well-being, and in some instances, spirituality acts as a moderator highlighting the importance of spirituality in the psychological well-being of college students (Sarath A. Nonis).

Artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to appear in everything from writing, social media, and business to wartime or intelligence strategy & with so many applications in our everyday lives and in the systems that run them, many are demanding that ethical implications are considered before any one application of AI goes too far and causes irreparable damage to the personal data or operations of individuals, governments, and organizations (Chakraborty, 2023).

AI's growth introduces benefits and ethical queries & amid rapid technological advancement, maintaining mindfulness and ethics is crucial (Yogita Yashveer Raghay, 2023).

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Regulatory groups may identify the bias in AI but not the source of the bias, making it difficult to determine whom to hold accountable (Chakraborty, 2023).

The Indian knowledge system aims to support and facilitate further research to solve contemporary societal issues (Mandavkar, 2023) in several fields such as Holistic health, Psychology, Neuroscience, Nature, Environment & Sustainable development.

Westernized Benchmark for India

Despite being a global leader in various fields, unfortunately, we still look for Western approval for our achievements and for what is our own. In India, the standards are compared with Western countries. Even the smallest of topics, like attire or eating habits, have comparisons. Gen Z is more likely to eat Chinese, pizza, burgers, and sandwiches than Indian cuisine. In a similar vein, girls favour wearing loose t-shirts and lowers at home and Western formals for the workplace over Indian clothing like sarees or salwar suits, unless there's a special occasion. Before, prior to getting married, women used to wear sarees at home and, from a very young age, salwar suits. However, in order to maintain our customs and Indian traditional attire, universities, and colleges now have to hold traditional or cultural days on which students are required to dress traditionally. Unlike in the past, when our fathers or grandfathers wore cotton kurta pyjamas at home, we no longer see men wearing kurtas in their daily lives.

When Generation X was growing up, Bollywood films and music were the preferred forms of entertainment. As English became more widely used, Millennials were the first to develop an obsession with English songs and a Hollywood movie fetish. These days, Gen Z and Gen Alpha would much rather watch movies or listen to music from Hollywood than Bollywood. The lyrics to the current Hindi song are far harder for them to remember than the songs of Taylor Swift. It has now become a benchmark to know all the Hollywood songs and movies to be 'Classy'.

We want the next generation to be technologically literate, aware of the world around them, and educated about AI and machine learning, but we also don't want them to become so "Westernized" that they become outsiders in their own society. And for that to happen we still criticize their eating habits and clothing choices, though we ourselves have evolved in comparison to our older generation.

The Ancient Indian education system did not restrict its exposure to Classroom teaching. Unlike modern times, it focused on the Guru-Shishya Parampara. Teachers and students used to perform some of the daily chores together. The learning experience was not limited to the classroom, but education took place in the surroundings too. There were many assignments given to the students which they had to complete and get on-field experiences. The Guru-Shishya relationship contributed significantly to the overall teaching-learning experience. This changed the dynamics of education eventually.

Vedic education is not a religious form of education. Students were taught free of cost and used to be accommodated at Gurukul with their teachers. Following are some features of Vedic education that make it relevant even in the 21st century- Personality Development, Practical Education, Spiritual & Religious Values, Civic Responsibilities & Social Values, and Enlightenment (BORDIA, 2022). Guru-shishya Parampara (GSP), a longstanding tradition in the Indian education system, emphasizes a spiritual teacher-disciple relationship for knowledge transmission (Rima Namhata, 2023). Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The World is one family. India already believed in and promoted this ideology.

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Swami Vivekananda propagated the concept of "Man making" by instilling the ideals of "spiritualism" and "natural learning"; which has gradually developed to be one of the essential prerequisites inculcated by the educational system (Soumita Mitra, 2023).

Education System in India

The colonial education system's influence led to drastic changes in the colonized nations' curriculum and teaching methodologies (Sharma). Before 1947, the role of educational administrators in India was simply to carry out the restricted educational program developed by the British (Education Administration and Management in School Education). Imperatively English became a medium of instruction which eventually vanished the need to explore knowledge in local languages. It is a matter of concern that due to the need to study a particular language, many scholars face limitations. Fulfilling the need to do research and publishing in an international journal was not easy for them as most of such journals were in English and native language researchers and experts couldn't express the essence of the local art and knowledge to match its requirements.

Colonial rule valorized particular institutional forms of education, some imported from the "home" country, some from other domains, as part of the uneven process of empire-building (Allender, 2009). In reaction to this the nationalist struggle did not construct its own educational idiom, it adapted the one already shaped by experimentation and imposition mostly created by the Empire at Home/Empire Abroad relationship of the colonial era (Allender, 2009). This new education system had Science and Technology as a priority while sidelining the knowledge and traditional art forms completely.

University Education Commission (1948-49) led by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan focused on Higher Education. Kothari Commission (1964-66) led by Dr. D. S. Kothari suggested comprehensive educational reforms and proposed free and compulsory education for all, vocational education, teacher training, etc. (EDUCATION COMMISSIONS AND POLICIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE).

NEP 2020

National Education Policy 2020, the 3rd education policy post-independence, promises a revamp of the Indian education structure by formalizing pre-primary schooling, promoting multidisciplinary learning, and academic freedom, and creating a more comprehensive, liberal, choice-friendly, and job-oriented education system that aligns with global standards (Singh & Narayanan, 2023).

The philosophy of the NEP claims inspiration from ancient knowledge systems which is a departure from the existing secular consensus of scientific temper in education (Gopalkrishnan, 2023).

Indian Knowledge Systems

Indian Knowledge encompasses the Foundational Knowledge, Science, Engineering, Technology, Humanities, and Social Sciences through a structured classification (Varakhedi). It has evolved over millennia. It has a wide range of beaches such as Astronomy, Ayurveda, Yoga, Health and Wellbeing, Mathematics, Computing Languages and Linguistics, Metallurgy, Rasa, Shastra, Public Administration, War, Technology, Management, Science and many more (Varakhedi).

The Indian knowledge system, which is based on Vedic literature, the Vedas, and the Upanishad, aims to support and facilitate further research to solve contemporary societal issues referenced along with existing ones (Mandavkar, 2023).

According to Kautilya Education shall aim at three outcomes as characteristics in graduates: विद्या-Creation of New Knowledge, विवेक- Wisdom to use the right knowledge at the right time and place for the right purpose, and विचक्षणता- the skillsets to get the proper results of knowledge in real life (Varakhedi). This can be achieved only with an efficient education system that integrates existing knowledge with required skill sets.

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The prime focus of IKS was giving attention to 'how' instead of 'what'. To deal with the concern of Human existence in the technological dominance era, the student needs to be trained to develop a new skill set, unlearn, and re-learn. Integration of IKS brings such a balance in Indian Education for life (Varakhedi).

Innovation will be encouraged through National-level Challenges, Competitions, Hackathons, etc. which aim to capture 10% of the world's tourism and provide massive employment opportunities to our youth (Mandavkar, 2023).

The Indigenous Knowledge System of India, also identified as the Indian Knowledge System, primarily deals with various ways to gain knowledge of ourselves, our surroundings, the universe, and eternity. Individuals used to investigate climate through perceptions and documentation. Farming used to be done in the view of that. A variety of similar examples can be discussed in this context. The idea of bringing this here is that the IKS helped them to fulfill their daily needs, without disturbing the laws of nature, rather they preserved nature and nurtured humanity. We need that aspect of IKS to be imbibed into the students, so that the GenZ and Gen Alpha who are not so closely related to the social values and ethos, can learn to protect while progressing.

Objectives of the Indian knowledge system:

- To support and facilitate further research to solve contemporary societal issues (Mandavkar, 2023) in several fields- Holistic health, Psychology, Neuroscience, Nature, Environment & Sustainable development, etc.
- To solve the contemporary and emerging problems of India and the world by using our ancient knowledge systems represented by an uninterrupted tradition of knowledge transfer and unique point of view. (Mandavkar, 2023).

It helps us connect with our inner self, surroundings, and the Divine. While aspiring to be a superpower, a nation needs a strong foundation. We need an education system that is very well grounded, and that is where Indian Knowledge Systems comes to the rescue.

As far as India is concerned, during the British era, the education system focused on creating a workforce of various kinds, especially to create a labor force. At current times, institutions want their graduates to be 'job ready'. Hardly there is any difference in these two scenarios. With the proposed NEP 2020 and the inclusion of IKS, the gap needs to be bridged. The Mahabharata says, "A student learns one-fourth from his teacher, one-fourth from his own intelligence, one-fourth with the passage of time, and one-fourth from his peers". These students find themselves helpless, when life presents challenges in front of them, as they are not trained to use their conscience to deal with various situations in life. We need to create an education system that is based on this (Bhardwaj, 2021). Indianized education would be helpful for students to develop a positive approach towards life. It also would help students to improve upon their spiritual skills, helping them analyze the situation and go ahead using various feasible solutions and a confident mindset.

The University Grant Commission is planning to train over 15 lakh teachers in IKS over the next two years (A. M. JIGEESH, 2023). These faculty members will be assisting the students with an overview of Indian Traditions and Culture. This helps us understand the gravity of integrating the Indian Knowledge System in the Degree level education. To globalize the knowledge, we have in ancient Indian literature, it is imperative to offer the Sanskrit Language basic and advanced courses and offer research opportunities so that the available knowledge can be made available to the world.

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India, with its rich tapestry of culture, history, and diversity, has always placed a deep value on education (Indus University, n.d.). It cannot be simply a coincidence that the Indian Education System had a dedicated segment, "Tantra Yukti", which is now trending across all institutions under the name of Research Methodology. This makes us understand that the Ancient Indian Education system was not just based on the tradition of oral knowledge transfer, but was very well structured and ensured understanding, learning, and implementation of the knowledge through research.

We should focus on multilingualism and multicultural approaches to promote the inclusivity of diversity (Sharma).

Conclusion

India has been the center of learning since ancient times (Ancient Education System of India). Involvement of IKS coming in the 21st century seems more than late, but surely a most awaited and welcoming move. Thanks to NEP 2020, we are able to go back and present the indigenous knowledge of God's Own Country to the newer generations, which will eventually make them understand the world in a better sense.

The IKS has the potential to complement and enrich contemporary higher education by providing a more comprehensive understanding of human knowledge, civilization, and cultural heritage and bringing benefits to students, academia, and society at large (Kumar, 2023).

By integrating ethical teachings available in IKS into higher education, institutions can aid students in developing a sense of social accountability, compassion, and ethical decision-making (Kumar, 2023).

It will be a challenge to modernize education with the inclusion of IKS. What is more challenging is to integrate the knowledge from multiple streams and help students to understand, interpret, and implement the same. This will mark the actual success of the foundations of IKS in the Modern Education System.

Other problems and challenges include the lack of awareness among scholars until about two decades ago of what IKS is all about; the romanticization of IKS at the expense of overall achievement; the binary divide between science and IKS and associated tension between the systems of thought; the lack of clear-cut policy on IKS; the poor attempts to integrate IKS into the school curriculum; the generally poor and incomprehensive documentation of IKS (Ogunniyi).

Prof. Shrinivasa Varakhedi beautifully suggests the right way we can make IKS a part of mainstream education. He suggests a revival or reinforcement of IKS in education will simply create an additional segment of learning, therefore it is desired to be integrated into the contemporary knowledge, which requires a lot of effort and clarity. (Varakhedi).

The amalgamation of IKS into the Modern Education system expects the development of Indian Thought Models applied to Modern-day problems.

The paper strongly recommends the Indianization of the Modern Education System to avail the benefits of the Indian Knowledge System for the rest of the world. It goes without saying that community participation will be the key to formulating and implementing education policies effectively (Sharma).

The study strongly recommends preserving IKS from being isolated, and ensuring it is well-integrated into our education system for "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat". The study doesn't state that IKS-based

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electives to be removed from the curriculum, but instead of putting IKS in a separate division, its integration into existing syllabi. Eventually, every discipline of IKS should find a home in the regular disciplines (Ghosh, 2022).

Not to forget, it is to be done gradually but rigorously. Reversing what is neglected, and giving IKS the due recognition would surely need more than a few years. Having said that India is now prepared in a real sense to be the World Leader and 'Vishwa Guru'.

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