

# Transition for Ancient Indian Education System to National Education Policy

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## Abstract

This paper delineates the significance of education for the growth and development of human being. Indeed, educational attainment is associated with many diverse social outcomes. This paper highlights the transition in education system from ancient Indian knowledge system to National Education Policy introduced by Government of India in 2020. It explores as to how India produced erudite scholars not only in ancient times but in 21<sup>st</sup> century as well. We are living in a world which is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. If Indian students are still leading at the global level by heading some of the world's renowned organisations then it can be stated that we have stood the test of the times. This paper would also throw light on important components of National Educational Policy 2020 as well.

## 1. Introduction

"Books are the means by which we build bridges between us"- Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

Education is a lifelong process. Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and habits. It differentiates us from other living beings on earth. It makes man the most intelligent creature. Learning does not take place solely in the formal school system. A large part of human life is spent outside the school; thus, the individual learns many things informally while living at home, in the community, and the company of his fellow beings. Therefore, any act or experience that has a positive and worthwhile impact on an individual's mind, character, and ability can be called "Education." "Education" is also used to refer to both a process and a product. As a product, Education means the totality of knowledge, skills, ideals, and values that are acquired through learning.

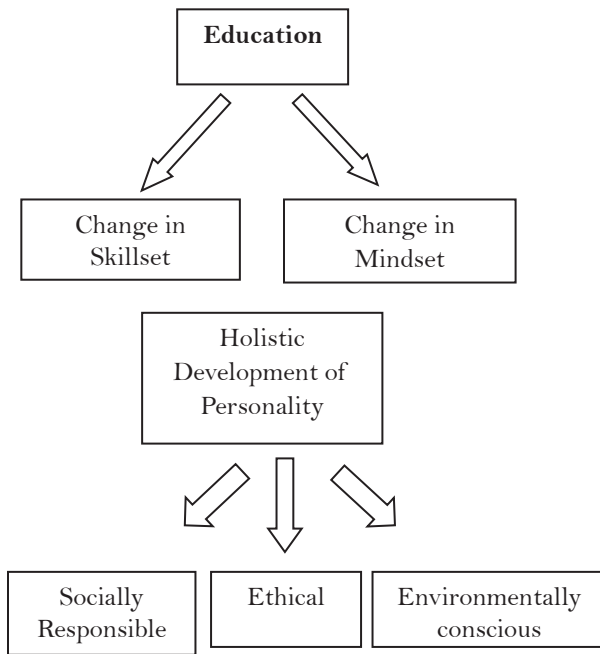
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Education is a process through which "the best" in any individual is drawn out, and his/ her hidden potentialities are unfolded. Indeed, education is a way of life.

Education provides stability in life, and it's something that no one can ever take away from you. Education is not just limited to knowledge from books but can also be obtained through practical experience outside the classroom. It facilitates quality learning among people of any age group, caste, creed, religion and region. Proper and good education is essential for all of us. Education is a great independent variable. The more educated are healthier; wealthier; and, in some ways, wiser-not to mention more participative in political and civic life, more cosmopolitan, more content, more supportive of civil liberties, and less inclined to traditional religious views. "Education is that which remains if one has forgotten everything he learned in school. " (quoted in Albert Einstein, Ideas and Opinions, p. 63).



**Figure1:** Significance of Education

## **2. Ancient Indian Education System**

India has been the centre of learning since ancient times. Ancient Indian scriptures, palm leaf records and inscriptions on stones and copper provide evidences of the historic origins of learning in India. Travelers from various regions having different cultures began to visit parts of India from early times. To them, India was a land of wonder. The fame of Indian culture, wealth, religions, philosophies, art, architecture, as well as its educational practices had spread far and wide. The education system of ancient times was regarded as a source for the knowledge, traditions and practices that guided the humanity. From the time of Rigveda onwards, our ancient education system has evolved over a period of time and focused on the holistic development of the individual. The system focused on the moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of life. It emphasised on values such as humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance and respect for all creations. Pupils were taught to appreciate the balance between human beings and nature. Teaching and learning followed the tenets of Vedas and Upanishads fulfilling duties towards self, family and society, thus encompassing all aspects of life. Education system focused both on learning and physical development. In other words, the emphasis was on healthy mind and healthy body.

## **3. Sources of Education in ancient India**

The ancient system of education was the education of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads and Dharmasutras. In ancient India scholars like Aryabhata, Patanjali, Charaka, Susruta, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, Chanakya, Chakrapani Datta, Madhava, Panini, Nagarjuna, Katyayana, Gautama, Pingala, Sankardev, Maitreyi, Gargi and Thiruvalluvar, amongst several others, made specific contributions to global expertise in various fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, clinical technological know-how and surgery, civil engineering, architecture, shipbuilding and navigation, yoga, exceptional arts, chess, and more. Indeed their contributions have immensely guided the humanity.

Sources of learning were drawn from various disciplines such as Itihas (history), Anviksiki (logic), Mimamsa (interpretation) Shilpashastra (architecture), Arthashastra (polity), Varta (agriculture, trade, commerce, animal husbandry) and Dhanurvedya (archery). Physical education too was an important curricular area and pupils participated in krida (games,

recreational activities), vyayamaprakara (exercises), dhanurvedya (archery) for acquiring martial skills, and yogasadhana (training the mind and body) among others. The Gurus used to guide and handhold their pupils to make them proficient in all aspects of learning. In order to assess pupils' learning, shastrartha (learned debates) were organised. Pupils at an advanced stage of learning guided younger pupils.

#### **4. Gurukuls and Ashrams: a place of Learning**

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. Temples were also the centres of learning and took interest in the promotion of knowledge of our ancient system. Teaching was largely oral and students remembered and meditated upon what was taught in the class. Gurukuls, also known as ashrams, were the residential places of learning. Many of these were named after the sages. Situated in forests, in serene and peaceful surroundings, hundreds of students used to learn together in gurukuls. Women too had access to education during the early Vedic period. Among the prominent women Vedic scholars, we find references to Maitreyi, Viswambhara, Apala, Gargi and Lopamudra, to name a few. During that period, the gurus and their shishyas lived together helping each other in day-to-day life. The main objective was to have complete learning, leading a disciplined life and realising one's inner potential. Students lived away from their homes for years together till they achieved their goals. The gurukul was also the place where the relationship of the guru and shishya strengthened with time. Many monasteries/aashrams were set up for monks and nuns to meditate, debate and have discussion on important subjects.

#### **5. Notable Universities of ancient times**

Among the most notable universities that evolved during this period were situated at Takshashila, Nalanda, Valabhi, Vikramshila, Odantapuri and Jagaddala. These institutions catered to the needs of advanced level students. Such students joined the centres of higher learning and developed their knowledge by mutual discussions and debates with renowned scholars. Not only this, there was also occasional summoning by a king to a gathering in which the scholars of the country of various

viharas and universities would meet, debate and exchange their views. Two universities of the ancient period i.e Takshashila and Nalanda were considered among the best centres of learning in the world. These have been recently declared heritage sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In ancient times, Takshashila was a noted centre of learning, including religious teachings of Buddhism, for several centuries. It used to attract students from around the world. It was known for its higher education and the curriculum comprised the study of ancient scriptures, law, medicine, astronomy, military science and the eighteen silpas or arts. Takshashila became famous as a place of learning due to its teachers' expertise. Among its noted pupils were the legendary Indian grammarian, Panini. He was an expert in language and grammar and authored one of the greatest works on grammar called Ashtadhyayi. Jivaka, one of the most renowned physicians in ancient India, and Chanakya (also known as Kautilya), a skilled exponent of statecraft, both studied here. Students came to Takshashila from Kashi, Kosala, Magadha and also from other countries in spite of the long and arduous journey they had to undertake.

Nalanda University was also a prominent centre of learning during ancient times located in present day Rajgir, Bihar, India. Nalanda was one of the oldest universities of the world and UNESCO declared the ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara, a world heritage site. The University attracted scholars from the different parts of the country as well as world. Chancellor of Nalanda, Shilabhadra, was the highest living authority in yoga. The courses of study offered by Nalanda University covered a wide range, almost the entire circle of knowledge then available. Students at Nalanda studied the Vedas and were also trained in fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, politics and the art of warfare. The new Nalanda University is envisaged as a centre of inter-civilisational dialogue.

## **6. Education in Modern India**

Education is important for awareness of almost everything and is a fundamental human right. There is a positive correlation between a person's Education and his earnings. Education is a powerful tool for the poor and the disadvantaged to raise their earnings and come to parity with their counterparts. The literacy rate in India at the time of independence was around 12%. However, in 2022, the literacy rate has jumped to a whopping 74.04%. The Indian Education system is one of the largest in the

World, with more than 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million teachers, and 250 million children. The Government has adopted several policies and recommendations for the development of Education. In 1968, the Government of India adopted the recommendations of the Kothari Commission. National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address many growing developmental imperatives of our country. Today we follow an education system in which learning takes place through syllabus, curricula, textbooks and assessment practices. India will have a unique population of the younger generation in the world during the next two decades and our capability to provide high-quality employable students will determine our country's future. Education has the potential to change the behaviour and mindset of an individual. The education system is very advanced in urban areas for people with good income sources, but it still needs to be improved in rural areas and for people below the poverty line.

## **7. National Education Policy**

The National Education Policy 2020 aims to bring transformational reforms in school and higher education and thus shape India into a global knowledge superpower. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved the National Education Policy 2020 on July 29, 2020. This policy replaced the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), in 1986.

Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, this policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Policy proposes revising and revamping all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century Education while building upon India's traditions and value systems. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The new education policy must provide to all students, irrespective of their place of residence, a quality education system with a particular focus on historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups. The NEP also targeted marginalized groups such as disabled children and provided special incentives targeting the parents within scheduled castes.

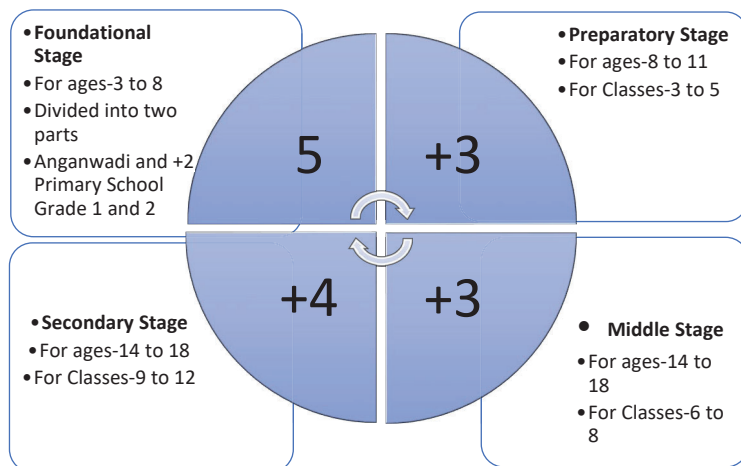
The ancient education system of India focused on the holistic development of the students, both inner and outer self, thus preparing them for life.

Similarly now focus is more on teaching 'Life skills' which are useful for an individual to lead a balanced life. National Education Policy is also based on rich cultural traditions of India thereby helping in the development of the physical, intellectual, spiritual and artistic aspects of life holistically. Our present day education system has drawn insights from the ancient education system of India. Therefore, the stress is being laid on connecting learning to the world outside the school. Today educationists recognise the role and importance of multilingual and multicultural education, thereby connecting the ancient and the traditional knowledge with contemporary learning. Some of the important components of NEP, 2020 are given below:

- New Policy aims for Universalization of Education from preschool to secondary level with 100 % GER in school education by 2030.
- NEP 2020 will bring 2 crore out-of-school children back into the mainstream.
- New 5+3+3+4 school curriculum with 12 years of schooling and 3 years of Anganwadi/ Pre-schooling.
- Emphasis on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, no rigid separation between academic streams, extracurricular, and vocational streams in schools; Vocational Education to start from Class 6 with Internships.
- Teaching up to at least Grade 5 to be in mother tongue/ regional language.
- Assessment reforms with a 360-degree Holistic Progress Card, tracking Student Progress for achieving Learning Outcomes.
- GER in higher education to be raised to 50 % by 2035; 3.5 crore seats to be added in higher education.
- Higher Education curriculum to have Flexibility of Subjects.
- Multiple Entries / Exit to be allowed with appropriate certification.
- Academic Bank of Credits to be established to facilitate the Transfer of Credits.
- National Research Foundation to be established to foster a strong research culture.
- Light but Tight Regulation of Higher Education, single regulator with

four separate verticals for different functions.

- Affiliation System to be phased out in 15 years with graded autonomy to colleges.
- NEP 2020 advocates increased use of technology with equity; National Educational Technology Forum to be created.
- NEP 2020 emphasizes setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.
- New Policy promotes Multilingualism in both schools and HEs; the National Institute for Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation to be set up.



**Figure.2:** Framework of the National Education Policy 2020

## 8. Concluding remarks

Since ancient times, Indian lifestyle and philosophy have had a strong impact at the global level. The Indian schooling machine produced terrific students not only in ancient India but in modern times as well. Some of the global CEOs are of Indian origin. The future of any country depends on its youth. Creating a good education and learning ecosystem would go a long way in making a nation a progressive and prosperous. The purpose of acknowledging the significance of Education for the nation is to develop and strengthen the areas which require growth and stability. Education is



the only key to the progress of the nation. Indeed, the National Education Policy would sustainably transform India, or Bharat, into a knowledge society. The National Education Policy envisions a system of Education based on Indian values that contribute in making India a global knowledge superpower by providing outstanding Education to everyone. We are living in a world which is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. If Indian students are still leading at the global level by heading some of the world's renowned organisations then it can be stated that we have stood the test of the times.

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

— Nelson Mandela

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