

## **“From Fragmentation to Integration: Holistic and Multidisciplinary Vision of Higher Education in NEP 2020”**

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### **Abstract**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform in the Indian education system, aiming to transform higher education through the integration of holistic and multidisciplinary learning approaches. Rooted in the philosophical foundations of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), the policy seeks to revive India's traditional educational ethos that emphasized the comprehensive development of an individual's intellectual, ethical, emotional, and practical capacities. Unlike the conventional compartmentalized model of education, NEP 2020 promotes flexibility in curriculum design, interdisciplinary research, skill-based learning, and value-oriented education, thereby fostering critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning.

This paper examines the conceptual framework of holistic and multidisciplinary education within the context of NEP 2020 and explores its alignment with indigenous knowledge traditions such as the Gurukul system and ancient Indian universities like Nalanda and Takshashila, which exemplified integrated knowledge systems. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical methodology through policy analysis and review of relevant scholarly literature to evaluate the transformative potential of NEP 2020 in reshaping higher education in India.

Furthermore, the paper highlights the opportunities presented by this educational paradigm, including enhanced innovation, cultural preservation, and global academic competitiveness, while also addressing the practical challenges associated with implementation, such as institutional preparedness, curriculum restructuring, and faculty training. The study argues that the successful integration of holistic and multidisciplinary education requires a balanced synthesis of traditional wisdom and contemporary pedagogical practices. By situating NEP 2020 within the broader framework of the Indian Knowledge System, this paper contributes to understanding how educational reforms can promote inclusive, sustainable, and culturally rooted higher education in India.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy 2020; Holistic Education; Multidisciplinary Learning; Indian Knowledge System (IKS); Higher Education Reform

The concept of holistic education is deeply rooted in the philosophical and pedagogical traditions of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Unlike modern educational models that often divide knowledge into rigid disciplines, traditional Indian education understood learning as an interconnected and unified process. It extended beyond intellectual instruction to include moral discipline, spiritual reflection, social responsibility, and practical skills. Education was therefore conceived as a transformative journey aimed at the development of the whole person.

Ancient centers of learning such as Nalanda and Takshashila embodied this integrative vision. They offered diverse fields of study—including philosophy, logic, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and the arts—within a unified academic framework (Altekar 112). Through debate, dialogue, and critical inquiry, students

were encouraged to recognize the interrelatedness of various branches of knowledge rather than viewing them in isolation.

The Gurukul system emphasized close teacher–student interaction, nurturing not only intellectual development but also ethical and emotional maturity. Education was experiential and value-centered, training learners in self-discipline, humility, and social responsibility alongside scholarly study (Sharma 58). Knowledge was closely linked with *dharma*, reflecting the belief that learning should contribute to both personal growth and social harmony.

Philosophically, Indian thinkers viewed true knowledge as an integration of material and spiritual dimensions. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan notes that Indian thought consistently united learning with moral and spiritual development, stressing the inseparability of knowledge and character (Radhakrishnan 21). This underscores the fundamentally holistic orientation of Indian education.

The Indian Knowledge System acknowledged multiple modes of knowing—reason, intuition, experience, and reflection—thereby fostering intellectual openness and flexibility. Education was directed not merely toward professional achievement but toward self-realization and social responsibility. In this sense, the holistic model sought to harmonize the individual with society and the broader cosmic order.

In contemporary discourse, the renewed emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary learning under NEP 2020 reflects a return to foundational principles of the Indian Knowledge System. By drawing upon India’s intellectual heritage, the policy seeks to reestablish education as an integrated, value-based, and transformative process rather than a narrowly utilitarian pursuit.

Historically, the Indian Knowledge System advanced an integrative epistemology that resisted disciplinary fragmentation. Knowledge was understood as interconnected, linking intellectual inquiry with ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions of life. Ancient institutions such as Nalanda and Takshashila embodied this vision by offering diverse fields of study within a unified academic framework and encouraging dialogue and cross-disciplinary engagement (Altekar 112).

The Gurukul system further reinforced this holistic orientation through close mentorship and experiential learning. Education encompassed moral discipline and character formation alongside scholarly study (Sharma 58), affirming that knowledge (vidya) was inseparable from ethical conduct (dharma).

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan emphasizes that Indian philosophical thought does not separate knowledge from ethical awareness but understands learning as inherently transformative and value-oriented (Radhakrishnan 21). This integrative vision challenges purely utilitarian models of education and highlights the unity of intellectual and moral development, positioning the Indian Knowledge System as a civilizational foundation for holistic education. Drawing upon similar principles, the National Education Policy 2020 proposes structural reforms to operationalize holistic and multidisciplinary learning in higher education. It promotes flexible curricula that allow movement across disciplines (Government of India 49), facilitates academic mobility through the Academic Bank of Credits (University Grants Commission 7), and seeks to transform single-discipline institutions into comprehensive multidisciplinary universities (Government of India 52). While these reforms align with global educational trends, they also resonate deeply with the integrative ethos of

the Indian Knowledge System, seeking to revive and reinterpret India's longstanding tradition of interconnected, value-based learning.

Contemporary scholars argue that higher education must move beyond narrow specialization to address the complexities of modern society. Martha Nussbaum highlights the importance of humanities and interdisciplinary learning in fostering critical and democratic citizenship, while Krishna Kumar critiques the utilitarian orientation of education and advocates value-based, meaningful learning (Nussbaum 7; Kumar 15). In this light, NEP 2020 promotes holistic development and multidisciplinary engagement, grounding these reforms in the integrative ethos of the Indian Knowledge System. However, its implementation faces practical challenges, including infrastructural limitations, faculty preparedness, and governance constraints, which often create gaps between policy vision and execution (Tilak 16). Nevertheless, NEP 2020 represents a decisive shift from fragmented higher education toward an integrated and transformative model aimed at nurturing intellectually capable and ethically responsible individuals.

Although significant institutional and structural challenges persist, the integrative vision of NEP 2020 offers a strong foundation for meaningful reform. With sustained commitment and effective implementation, the policy can harmonize India's educational heritage with contemporary global demands, positioning the nation as a model of innovative and culturally grounded higher education in the twenty-first century.

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