



Indian Education System: From Gurukula to Modern Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

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Abstract:

The Indian education system has evolved through a long historical trajectory, beginning with the Gurukula tradition and culminating in contemporary frameworks integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with modern education. Rooted in philosophical, spiritual, and experiential learning, ancient Indian education emphasized holistic development, ethical conduct, and societal responsibility. Colonial interventions introduced formal schooling and Western epistemologies, leading to structural transformation but also epistemic displacement. In post-independence India, constitutional ideals, policy reforms, and recent initiatives such as NEP 2020 have sought to harmonize indigenous knowledge with global educational demands. This paper critically examines the philosophical foundations, historical evolution, pedagogical practices, and contemporary challenges of the Indian education system, highlighting the relevance of IKS in modern education..

Keywords: Indian Education System, Gurukula, Indian Knowledge Systems, Nep 2020, Educational Philosophy.

Introduction

The Indian education system represents one of the oldest continuous traditions of organized learning in the world. From the Gurukula system of ancient India to contemporary institutional frameworks emphasizing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), education has remained central to cultural continuity and social transformation. Ancient Indian education was not merely the transmission of information but a comprehensive process aimed at character formation, intellectual discipline, spiritual growth, and social responsibility (Altekar, 1965; Radhakrishnan, 1951). Knowledge was considered sacred, experiential, and inseparable from ethical living. Colonial rule significantly altered this indigenous framework by introducing Western curricula, formal schooling, and bureaucratic administration, often marginalizing traditional knowledge systems (Macaulay, 1835; Kumar, 2005). Post-independence India sought to democratize education through constitutional guarantees while addressing social inequalities. In recent years, initiatives such as NEP 2020 have emphasized the revival and integration of IKS within modern education to foster holistic, multidisciplinary learning (Government of India, 2020). Understanding this evolutionary journey is essential for contextualizing contemporary educational reforms.

Review of Literature

Scholarly studies have examined various phases of Indian education. Altekhar (1965) documented ancient educational institutions. Radhakrishnan (1951) highlighted philosophical foundations of Indian learning. Mukherjee (1974) analyzed historical development of education in India. Macaulay (1835) influenced colonial education policy. Kumar (2005) critiqued colonial legacies. Aggarwal (2010) discussed post-independence reforms. Nussbaum (2007) emphasized education for democratic citizenship. NCERT (2019) examined curriculum reform. Government of India (2020) articulated NEP 2020 vision. Bhattacharya (2021) analyzed IKS integration. Collectively, these works establish the continuity and transformation of Indian education.

Rationale of the Study

Despite extensive reforms, Indian education often faces criticism for fragmentation, rote learning, and disconnection from indigenous knowledge. Understanding education through the Gurukula-to-IKS continuum provides a holistic framework for addressing these issues. This study is necessary to critically analyze how traditional educational values can inform modern pedagogical practices. It contributes to academic discourse by situating contemporary reforms within India's civilizational knowledge traditions.

Research Questions

- What were the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of the Gurukula system?
- How did colonial and post-colonial reforms transform Indian education?
- How can Indian Knowledge Systems be integrated into modern education?
- What challenges and opportunities shape the future of Indian education?

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the philosophical foundations of ancient Indian education.
2. To examine the historical evolution of the Indian education system.
3. To study the role of Indian Knowledge Systems in contemporary education.
4. To evaluate challenges and prospects of integrating IKS with modern education.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative study employs historical, philosophical, and analytical methods. Primary sources include classical texts, education commission reports, and policy documents such as NEP 2020. Secondary sources include scholarly books and peer-reviewed journals. Thematic analysis was used to interpret educational philosophies, institutional changes, and pedagogical practices. APA guidelines were followed throughout.

Discussion and Analysis

Objective 1: Philosophical Foundations of the Gurukula System

The Gurukula system was grounded in a holistic philosophy of education that viewed knowledge as a means for self-realization and social harmony. Education was learner-centered, experiential, and value-oriented, emphasizing śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana as core learning processes (Radhakrishnan, 1951). The

teacher (guru) played a central role as a moral guide and intellectual mentor. Curriculum encompassed Vedic studies, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, ethics, and vocational skills, reflecting an integrated knowledge framework (Altekar, 1965). Education aimed at developing physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of personality. This philosophical orientation contrasts sharply with later examination-centric models, underscoring the relevance of Gurukula principles for holistic education today.

Objective 2: Historical Evolution from Ancient to Modern Education

The transition from Gurukula to modern schooling involved significant structural changes. Buddhist monastic universities such as Nalanda institutionalized higher learning, promoting debate and international scholarship (Mukherjee, 1974). Medieval institutions continued indigenous traditions while adapting to changing socio-political contexts. Colonial education policies introduced Western curricula and English education, prioritizing administrative efficiency over holistic learning (Macaulay, 1835). Post-independence reforms expanded access and equity through constitutional mandates and commissions, yet struggled with quality and relevance (Aggarwal, 2010). This historical analysis reveals both gains and losses, emphasizing the need for integrative educational models.

Objective 3: Indian Knowledge Systems in Contemporary Education

Indian Knowledge Systems encompass traditional sciences, philosophies, arts, and ecological wisdom. Integrating IKS into modern education promotes contextual learning, cultural identity, and sustainability (Bhattacharya, 2021). NEP 2020 explicitly advocates multidisciplinary education, mother-tongue instruction, and inclusion of indigenous knowledge (Government of India, 2020). Pedagogically, IKS encourages inquiry-based learning, ethical reasoning, and experiential engagement. Incorporating yoga, Ayurveda, mathematics, linguistics, and environmental ethics fosters holistic competence. However, effective integration requires curricular innovation, teacher training, and rigorous academic standards to avoid superficial inclusion.

Objective 4: Contemporary Challenges and Future Prospects

Indian education faces challenges such as unequal access, rote learning, teacher shortages, and digital divides. Integrating IKS within modern frameworks demands balancing tradition with innovation. Globalization necessitates skills such as critical thinking and creativity while preserving cultural rootedness (Nussbaum, 2007).

Future prospects lie in curriculum flexibility, technology-enabled learning, and interdisciplinary approaches. Education policies must align philosophical depth with practical relevance. Revitalizing the Indian education system through IKS can foster ethical citizenship, innovation, and sustainable development.

Limitations

The study is theoretical and relies on secondary sources. Regional variations and empirical classroom practices were not examined. Rapid policy changes may affect long-term interpretations. Quantitative impact analysis was beyond scope.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should empirically evaluate IKS-based pedagogy, teacher preparation models, and learner outcomes. Comparative studies with global indigenous education systems are recommended. Policy implementation research at grassroots levels is essential.

Concluding Remarks

The Indian education system's journey from Gurukula to modern IKS reflects a dynamic interplay of tradition and transformation. Reintegrating indigenous knowledge within contemporary frameworks offers a pathway for holistic, ethical, and inclusive education. A philosophically grounded, context-sensitive approach is essential for addressing present challenges and shaping the future of Indian education.

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