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6. Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education in India: From Ancient to Twenty First Century

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ABSTRACT

Multidisciplinary and holistic education is considered as beauty indigenous education system of India that should be focal point in twenty first century education and after the fourth industrial revolution to fulfil the requirements of the country. It necessitates a flexible curriculum that allows for imaginative amalgamations of all disciplines for study, as well as multiple entry and exit points, as well as the removal of currently common strict barriers, opening up all possibilities for lifetime and continuous learning. The flexible curriculum of multidisciplinary and holistic education would offer choice based subjects to get perfection and mastery as per their interest in the subject. National Education Policy 2020 focusses the philosophy of multidisciplinary and holistic education and highlights the needs of this approach to education in twenty first century for all round development of the child. NEP 2020 states that "India has a long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning, from universities such as Takshashila and Nalanda, to the extensive literatures of India combining subjects across fields" and "A holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings -intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner" (NEP, 2020).

Key Words: *Multidisciplinary Education, Holistic Education, Historical Perspective, National Education Policy 2020, Ancient History and Twenty First Century, Early Post-Independent Era.*

INTRODUCTION

Multidisciplinary and holistic education and as a method of learning is an ancient concept in India and some parts of the world that was advocated by many great scholars such as Kautilya, Banabhatta, Plato, Aristotle and many others. It paved the ways for choice based education in



the school to provide option across the discipline as Arts, Science, Commerce and vocational, professional and technical education for in-depth learning all round development of the learners. It created an opportunity for learners to develop basic skills as per its interest and deepen them by further pursuing them for mastery and perfection in the area. As per the philosophy of multidisciplinary and holistic education, an individual is educated beyond core academic subjects and facilitates learners to discover their identity and comprehend meaning of life (Shukla, et al., 2022). Miller suggested that education “nurture the development of the whole person and this includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual” (Miller, et al., 2005).

It is difficult to certainly define multidisciplinary and holistic education but some experts have defined differently. According to John Miller, Ron Miller, and Nava, holistic education fosters the development of an individual's entire identity in all its facets: social, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetical growth, among other things (Miller, 2005). There are four key notions in the spiritual concept of holistic education:

1. There is a divine essence that exists in the multidimensional world of things, lives, and minds.
2. All are connected and dependent on one another in this complicated life.
3. Each and every life in the universe serves a purpose.
4. All are in constant state of evolution (Rudge, 2008).

MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION

Multidisciplinary and holistic education equally focus on all dimensions and perspectives of human life including social, economic, emotional, intellectual, creative and intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship (Schreiner, 2005). Miller (2006) highlighted that holistic education perceives humans as a whole that comprises body, mind and spirit and encouraged humans to be at their fullest potential and to produce something great to the society. The characteristics of holistic education includes intuition and linear thinking, relationship between self and society, relationship between mind and body and relationship among all subjects. Majethiya and Patel (2015) said that a holistic education comprises life context of learners, raises the awareness of all existence, brings up open-mindedness and understanding the capabilities and talents of each individual (Zandroto, & Indriani, 2023).

National Education Policy (2020) asserts that “multidisciplinary and a holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities and sports for a multidisciplinary world in order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge”. UNESCO states that “multidisciplinary approach as an approach to curriculum integration which focuses primarily on the different disciplines and the diverse perspectives they bring to illustrate a topic, theme or issue. A multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline”. Multidisciplinary and holistic education is considered as the development of knowledge, skills and values and leads to the development of critical and logical thinking and problem solving but preparing individuals to twenty first century through all round development (Priyadarshini, & Dave, 2021).

Aims and Objectives



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To develop basic life and social as well as communication skills such as creativity, critical thinking, decision making skills, problem solving abilities by combining the arts and humanities with mathematics, science, technology, and engineering etc. and to enhance research and innovation through creating interest among students in this regard. All round and holistic development of children by giving maximum choices of stream, subject, duration and courses and flexibility in the curriculum at optimum level of possibility. According to Lemkow (1990) “holistic education aims to bridge the gaps in contemporary civilization that dichotomies mind and body, intellect and emotion, rationality and intuition, science and art, individual and society, humanity and nature.” Holistic and multidisciplinary education needs such curriculum that facilitates learners to acquire knowledge from different disciplines and develop all possible and necessary skills of social, emotional and education life (Roy, 2022).

A holistic and multidisciplinary education promotes the combined development of aesthetic, social, intellectual, physical, and moral skill. To carry and bring out the legacy of the ancient Indian educational culture to the world and prepare the country through young generations to lead world from front. Creation a well-educated human resource of the country for social, economic and scientific as well as technological development of the country at possible level to become world power and become one of the developed countries of the world (César, & Correia Castilho, 2021).

According to Nakagawa and Forbes “the main aim of holistic education is self-transformation; that is, it is to transform the self into higher self and to reach the ultimacy”, by which Forbes means “the highest state of being that a human can aspire to” (Rudge, 2008). Nakagawa put forwards six philosophies in regard to holistic education as Perennial Philosophy, Indigenous Philosophy, Life Philosophy, Ecological View, System Theory and Feminist Thought (Nakagawa, 2000).

Need and Significance

The multidisciplinary and holistic education as mentioned was backbone of ancient Indian education system and beautifully has been described. It is now necessary and important for Indian education to lead the country into the twenty-first century and the fourth industrial revolution. Engineering and other technical institutions, such as IITs and IISc, will make an effort to provide more holistic, multidisciplinary education and will offer courses of humanities and arts too. The students of humanities and arts will learn more science and technology and also will incorporate vocational courses and soft skills. The flexibility in curriculum will offer creative combination of discipline for study and will remove prevalent rigid boundaries to create environment of life-long learning (Sah, 2021).

Achieving Goal

To achieving goal of multidisciplinary and holistic education, there is need to set up an immense number of multidisciplinary universities, colleges and other academic institutions in the country. Higher education institutions should be given academic autonomy to adopt flexible curriculum and emphasis should be on inter-personal skills and cross- disciplinary as well as inter-disciplinary thinking. All department of higher education institutions such as fine art, music, performing art, language & literature, philosophy, education, pure & applied science,





kalas or arts (Roy, 2022). After long period of time but again in twenty first century, the world and subsequently India felt the need and realised the importance of multidisciplinary and holistic education for holistic development of students and preparation of capable future generation of the country to enable them to compete all over the world effectively and efficiently.

Holistic education seems a modern concept of education but it has a long history back in indigenous culture. In the modern history, the world observed a new educational movement known as 'Holistic Education' in mid 1990s. The word 'holism' has been derived from a Greek word 'holon' hence the word implies that the universe is composed of interconnected wholes. (Miller, 2003). Important figures in the history of holistic education are Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Montessori and Rudolf Steiner whose approach was humanistic. Montessori's educational concept is known as 'Cosmic Education,' and she thinks that individuals are components of the cosmos and should be nurtured to feel the universe's totality. (Gültekin, et al. 2013). In accordance with Steiner, human being or individual is "physical, emotional, and intellectual, as well as the distinctive characteristics and myriad interrelationships of these dimensions" (Steiner, 1996).

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education in Ancient India

In ancient India, education was woven in with the all-round development of the individual: a fusion of moral, intellectual, and physical development. Education in ancient India was pretty systematized before the coming of Buddhism, following the residential Gurukula system of learning whereby the students stay with the guru while studying. The system thus followed a multidisciplinary approach for nurturing various facets in both personality and knowledge building for a student.

The essence of pre-Buddhist education revolved around the Vedas and Upanishads, which were the bedrock for intellectual and spiritual learning. Among these four Vedas-Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda-although these were religious texts involved in rituals, they also contained hymns, philosophies, and metaphysical insights which shaped the learners' understanding of the world. Apart from these, the knowledge of Sanskrit was also mandatory; linguistics with especial codification in grammar by Panini's Ashtadhyayi played an important role in refining linguistic precision and communicational skill (Rao, 2017). The system of education was wide-ranging, including mathematics, where the concepts of zero and infinity were introduced, astronomy, and Ayurveda, which is the ancient Indian system of medicine (Subbarayappa, 2001). This wide array of subjects demonstrated the commitment to multidisciplinary learning in which the acquisition of knowledge would exceed spiritual pursuits and involve practical sciences-essential in daily life.

Physical education and the arts were also equally important in the system of holistic education prevalent in ancient India. For that, education in music, dance, and martial arts was included in order to promote overall well-being and creativity in a student. This ensured that the student developed into a multi-skill personality, besides being intellectually sound, physically fit, and emotionally poised-a very holistic system of education indeed, typical of the era in which it



was practiced. Thus, the Gurukula system aimed at creating an all-rounded individual who was capable of many different uses to society.

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education during the Buddhist Period

The Indian educational structure began to take radical shifts with the emergence of Buddhism in the 6th century BCE. Buddhist education meanwhile became more inclusive and institutionalized, retaining many of the elements pre-existent, while the monastic universities at Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramshila presided over more formalization into a center of learning. These institutions retained much of the earlier emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary learning, but extended the range of the curriculum to encompass secular subjects. In addition to religious training in the doctrines of Buddha, students also learned medicine, astronomy, law, and architecture—things that do not seem to have any direct connection with religious training (Schumann 2004). This wider range was part of Buddhism's easier accessibility to education, for both monks and laity.

The mainstays of Buddhist learning were philosophy and logic, and the Buddhist system encouraged morality, contemplation, and thought. Dialectics and philosophical debates, known as samvāda in the original language, had the effect of whetting the reasoning powers and creating an atmosphere of critical thinking and debates. The educational system was infused with strong overtures of compassion and welfare for society in keeping with Buddhist ideals for service to humanity and character building. According to Thapar (1992), education was not merely the means of developing intellects but also the means of developing ethical characters with a commitment to social responsibility.

Besides, the holistic nature of personal development was reflected by the fact that meditation and self-discipline were included as an integral part of Buddhist education. Both of these practices were regarded as an indispensable means for developing emotional intelligence and personal peace, furthering the rounded nature of education during this period. The intellectual and ethical training provided by the Buddhist institutions shaped individuals who could rise up to both worldly and spiritual challenges.

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education in Medieval Period

In Medieval India, which includes a period from the 8th to the 18th century CE, a new dispensed cultural and educational order was established in the Indian subcontinent with the coming of Islamic rule. Although by this time, the traditional Hindu and Buddhist centers of learning, such as Nalanda and Vikramshila, were already in decline, new educational institutions emerged under Islamic rulers and largely took the form of madrasas. These madrasas impelled multidisciplinary education in which both religious and secular subjects were taught.

The Islamic system of education gave enough importance to Quran, Hadith (the sayings of Prophet Muhammad), and Fiqh or the Islamic jurisprudence. In addition to the respective religious education, the students were taught philosophy, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and literature, (Ahmed, 2007). For instance, during this era, there were two renowned scholars known as Al-Biruni and Ibn Sina, who worked for the betterment of Mathematics, Medicine, and Astronomy, studied in the Indian madrasas, (Rahman, 1984). In this respect,



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medieval Indian education maintained its multidisciplinary character with the inclusions of various branches of knowledge, amalgamating Islamic and pre-Islamic intellectual traditions. Sanskrit-based education also continued to prevail throughout most regions of India throughout the medieval age. Hindu scholars pursued their studies of the Vedas, Upanishads, and other classical works in pathshalas and gurukuls. There were Sanskrit schools teaching grammar, logic, philosophy, and ritualistic learning. These schools performed a very important function of preserving the classical knowledge systems of India and promoted intellectual, spiritual, and moral development of the learner in a holistically conceptualized manner. However, Islamic and Sanskritic learning systems largely remained insulated from each other and hardly influenced one another despite coexistence.

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education in British Colonial Period

The Indian education scenario drastically changed during the British colonial period, starting from the 18th to the mid-20th century, as Western-style education was introduced by the British government, and the changes seen during this period were ingrained in the Indian education system. The British advocated an education system based on utilitarianism and pragmatism intended to produce an elite class of Indians who could administer the colonial government. This system, therefore, incorporated English language education while giving hardly any significance to indigenous knowledge systems of India.

It was the Minute of Lord Macaulay on Education in 1835 that defined for India, Western education, where the medium of instruction was in English and its core curriculum involving European literature and sciences. This meant Sanskrit, Persian, and classical Indian sciences made way for English literature, European history, and Western sciences. But in practice, this shift was part of the British agenda to establish intellectual and cultural dominance over India, and education became a tool of colonial control.

Despite Britain's emphasis on Western subjects, the holistic approach toward education that India had was not altogether lost. Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked in the direction of synthesizing traditional Indian education with Western knowledge and asserted the need for a more integrated system that would include both the sciences of the West and Indian philosophy. Mahatma Gandhi too advocated with much fervor this type of education known as Nai Talim-whereby the aim of education was met through the accomplishments of skills and craftsmanship, self-reliance, and good moral character in keeping with the ideals of ancient Indian education (Gandhi, 1937).

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education in Independent India Since independence in 1947, the country of India has been undertaking a journey of reforming its education system to focus on both multidisciplinary learning and holistic development. In this direction, India has aimed at bringing into being an education system that effectively integrates intellectual, emotional, physical, and social learning dimensions as an integral part of Indian culture, while at the same time meeting the demands of the modern world in a globalized environment. This idealistic vision of an inclusive education system has been further consolidated over the decades through various education policies and reforms.

Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education after Independent



After gaining independence in 1947, India has been on the path of improving its education system considering the interdisciplinary approach and the overall development thereof. They have been trying to establish an education system that provides learning opportunities for mind, body, and heart harmonizing it with the unique culture of India and the needs of a modern global society. Over the decades, several education policies and reforms have been implemented that aimed at enhancing this concept of an all-inclusive and well-rounded education system.

In Early Post-Independent Era

During the post-independent period, India retained the essence of an inherently colonial legacy education system with its overemphasis on examinations and curricula which bred narrow specialization. In light of this, the Indian government restructured education into a framework that could allow for a more panoramic and holistic approach to learning. The University Education Commission of 1948-49, under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, provided a filling-up dosage for multidisciplinary learning by insisting upon a broad-based curriculum encompassing liberal arts besides science. This report recommended a compromise between vocational education and theoretical training in response to the needs of both society and economic requirements (Ministry of Education, 1950).

The Secondary Education Commission of 1952-53 also advocated for an integrated system, citing the necessity for physical, moral, and vocational education in addition to academic subjects. In this age also, expansion of technical education was pursued through technological institutions such as the IITs, aiming to integrate specialized knowledge with practical applications to cater to the multidisciplinary objectives of the nation's development strategy (Bhatt, 1987).

National Education Commission (1964-1966) and NEP, 1968

Among the critical landmarks in the history of the development of the system of education in India, the report of the National Education Commission, 1964-66, occupies pride of place. The Kothari Commission recommended an integrated system of education in which children would receive exposure to a wide range of disciplines and subjects. The report of this commission was thus foundational to the framing of the National Policy on Education, NPE, 1968, wherein the concept of holistic, all-round education received official sanction, integrating science, technology, and human values (Kumar, 2005).

It dawned upon the NPE to equip the students not only with knowledge but also with the skills necessary for the development of a person socially and emotionally. There was the introduction of moral education, physical education, as well as work experience into the curriculum, which subjected it to the meeting of the criteria for comprehensive education systems. The policies went ahead to stress the need for professional training whereby the trainees would be equipped with the necessary capacities leading them to employment and hence the acquisition of practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge.

The New National Education Policies and Reforms

In this respect, over the last decades, India has been underlining the policy of multidisciplinary and holistic education through various policies and reforms. The National Policy on Education,



NPE 1986, modified in 1992, re-affirmed the policy of providing an education that stimulates creativity and innovativeness and brings out problem-solving skills in learners. It also recognized the importance of fostering scientific temper and social responsibility, thus integrating a range of disciplines and ethical values into the curriculum (National Policy on Education, 1986).

The policy envisioned a paradigm shift in both school and higher education from traditional approaches to holistic and multidisciplinary and comprehensive approaches and its reflection can also be seen school education too such as flexibility of stream and subjects etc. The policy advocates about the carrying the legacy of the past of the country in terms of multidisciplinary and holistic education in the twenty first century education of the country. It focusses on the innovative curriculum and flexibility in the subjects as well emphasizes the flexibility of degree course duration by providing students with several entry-exit choices (Government of India, 2020).

National Education Policy 2020 has signaled the change in approach towards education in India, as it has articulated multiple disciplines and holistic learning at all levels of education. Flexibility in choice and range of subjects from various disciplines-sciences, arts, humanities, and vocational training-are embedded in the envisioned system. Also, the policy advocates for the breaking down of rigid walls of subject boundaries, allows students to pursue interdisciplinary research in an approach for liberal education with a broad-based curriculum (Government of India, 2020).

In NEP 2020 too, there has been an emphasis on holistic development in which the goals would involve the development of intellectual capacities, emotional, moral, and physical. This also includes life skills, ethical reasoning, communication skills, and collaborative learning. Other learning areas within this curriculum include physical education, art, music, and culture. These are meant to ensure that learners achieve a level playing field between academic disciplines and extra-curricular activities. The policy further gives room for critical thinking and creativity; these are vital ingredients in all-rounded development for 21st-century learners.

Higher Education and Multidisciplinary Institutions

The trend of becoming multidisciplinary universities has been very marked in the field of higher education. NEP 2020 has proposed the setting up of multidisciplinary universities which shall offer a variety of courses across streams, discarding the single-discipline approach. The policy has given students the freedom to pick and choose a combination of subjects, thereby breaking decade-old silos between arts, sciences, and vocational education. The policy also gives immense importance to research and innovations in order to provide more holistic approaches solving different kinds of problems through collaboration or interdisciplinary work (Government of India, 2020). Some important Indian institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were established that would promote interdisciplinarity: the integration of physics with biological sciences, mathematics, or even humanities. Such institutions encourage innovation and creativity whereby students will have the necessary skills to work across disciplinary boundaries.

CONCLUSION



Studies and researches have proven that multidisciplinary and comprehensive education would foster a creative and curious intellect as well as critical and analytical thinking abilities in future generations. If you were to track the education within India from the ancient Gurukul system to the current NEP 2020, it would rather be inclined towards multidisciplinary and a system approach. As noted among the 64 kalas in Banbhata's Kadambari, the old Gurukul Tradition intended the Wholistic development of a person encompassing body, mind and spirit. This type of education encouraged learners to be critical, inventive and inquisitive. Right from the period of the Buddha and extending up to the medieval and colonial period, continuous endeavors were made to retain the integrative aspects of education despite westernization of education around the period. As India proceeds towards the twenty first century, many tend to rediscover the relationships between knowledge, society and the environment. Leaders in education development and policy making state the importance of peace, justice and equity in society with due respect to all causes. The current scenario gives a sense of reforming the time-honored educative tradition of Indian civilization which is aimed at development of inner energies for humanistic purposes and preparing the young people for existence in the era of globalization. In ideal conditions of a multi-disciplinary system delivery, India seeks to honor its rich heritage of the past and, more importantly, encourage the youth in the decades to come to be the wielders of creativity, intellect and moral responsibility.

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