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Educational Humanism in India: Ancient Knowledge Traditions as Foundations for Modern Value-Based Learning

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Abstract:

In the world of technological advancement, decaying moral ethics, and cut throat competition, we are on the cusp of reassessing the values that are being inculcated in the future generation through our modern education system. The need for value-based learning has emerged. India is stepping forward to this direction by incorporating ancient Indian knowledge traditions with the contemporary education system. This study aims to explore how the ancient education system embedded with philosophy, moral and spiritual development, and holistic growth provides the critical framework to the reformation of modern learning. India inherits the glorious past in the form of the ancient Indian knowledge system which represents one of the earliest and most influential learning models in the world. This study also examines the relevance of the pedagogies and features of ancient education system like personalized learning, spiritual development, oral transmission, and value-based teaching humanistic approach, character formation, social responsibility and integrated learning with the modern parameters like life-skill education, yoga, mindfulness practices, and mother-tongue instruction.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also emphasizes the importance of incorporating traditional knowledge into the mainstream curriculum to create a more inclusive and diversified educational model (Government of India, 2020). This paper stresses that integrating India's educational heritage with the modern learning pedagogies fosters holistic learning, critical thinking, and ethical development, ensuring a well-rounded educational model of learning. This amalgamation of tradition with modern puts forth Indian educational humanism to the global platform as an institute of nurturing responsible, empathetic and critically aware citizens.

Key Words:

Educational Humanism, Indian Knowledge Traditions (IKS), Ancient Indian Education, Value-Based Learning, Holistic learning

1. Introduction:

Mankind is characterized by change. The education systems across the world are also undergoing profound transitions. The rapid advancement of technology, global

interconnectedness and changing needs of society are the factors behind this transition. Even though this transition is essential and unavoidable, it presents numerous challenges which include erosion of traditional ethics, technological pressure, moral crisis, declining empathy, community disintegration, and fragmentation of identities etc. Believing that education is the cornerstone of progress and national strength, it is essential for a country to provide adequate as well as quality education that prepares globally competitive citizens with high human values. India, a country with the most diverse cultures in the world and a rich heritage of education, advances in striking a balance between traditional value-based education and modern learning.

Philosophical concepts of the Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism, educational institutes and systems like Gurukul, Takshashila and Nalanda in ancient India, laid a foundation of holistic, value-based learning. The education that was imparted in ancient India was not just meant for enhancing knowledge or particular skills but it was a life changing experience for students. The education traditions in ancient times were designed to foster character, self-awareness, and intellectual excellence of the students. It also gave lessons of harmonious coexistence in the society. In modern learning where these values are diminishing, there is a need to integrate such indigenous frameworks within modern curricula. The framework of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the attempt to incorporate ancient India's rich educational traditions with modern pedagogical tools and global perspectives by reintroducing the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems, value-based education, multilingualism, and holistic development.

This study is an attempt to explore the relevance of ancient Indian educational humanism in the modern educational framework. This study also highlights the crucial aspects of humanism, inclusiveness and a culturally rooted educational system that is thoughtfully curated by synthesising ancient and modern pedagogies. This is an attempt to adapt the time-tested principles in the modern educational framework to face the contemporary challenges.

2. Historical Foundations: Ancient Indian Education:

2.1 Gurukul System:

Gurukul system is one of the foundational education systems of India that played a vital role in imparting knowledge and preserving heritage. Based on the principles like personal mentorship, experiential learning, and discipline and values like respect, self-reliance, and community service, it encompassed every aspect of life. Trained in ethics, discipline, physical endurance, critical thinking, humility, and community responsibility, the students were prepared to face real world challenges and to become better human beings.

The entire Gurukul system was rooted in a humanistic approach. The students by residing with their Gurus in the Gurukuls learn numerous life lessons including cooperation, mutual respect and emotional maturity. Guru played a multifaceted role as a mentor, guide, and spiritual authority. The modern educational system aims to reinstate those humanistic values

which were being inculcated among students by the integration of intellectual instruction with moral training and practical skills

2.2. Universities of Takshashila and Nalanda:

India has been the hub of education and learning since ancient times, handed over generations to generations either oral or written form. In ancient times, numerous prestigious universities flourished in India like Vikramaśilā, Vallabhi, Odantapuri and world famous Takshashila and Nalanda Universities which attracted many scholars worldwide. These institutions offered advanced education in philosophy, medicine, logic, grammar, astronomy, and Buddhist/Hindu scriptures.

2.2.1 Takshashila: Multidisciplinary Inquiry and Global Exchange:

Takshashila was a prominent center of learning which was founded around the 5th century BCE. Students all over the continent came here to excel in the diverse subjects such as logic, political science, medicine, astronomy, economics, martial arts, and literature. The university offered a curriculum based on multidisciplinary learning long before a term popularized in modern education discourse.

The education was imparted through various methods like dialogues, intellectual debates which was the outstanding example of humanistic tradition. Educators from various philosophical backgrounds encouraged students to ask questions, analyses, and put forward their ideas. These practices were the part of the institute's cosmopolitan character which ingrained the culture of tolerance and global-mindedness. Contemporary educational goals definitely resonate with these ideas.

2.2.2 Nalanda: A Model of Holistic, Universal Learning:

Nalanda was established in the 5th century CE and it became the global center of education in ancient times. Rooted in Buddhist philosophy, Nalanda's multidisciplinary academic curriculum was a blend of intellectual rigor and compassion. A wide range of subjects such as logic, astronomy, medicine, and Vedas were taught using different pedagogical methods including oral transmission, memorization, questioning, observation, and contemplative practices. Such integrated system of learning enhanced intellectual excellence along with moral discipline and spiritual depth of the students. Nalanda, where learning and character formation take place simultaneously, is the perfect example of an ideal education system empowering intellectual progress, moral and emotional growth.

2.3. Philosophical Traditions:

Indian educational humanism is highly inspired by the philosophical traditions which were the bedrock of the ancient Indian education system.

- Upanishadic tradition focused on self-knowledge, introspection and unity of self with ultimate reality. These ideas of interconnection of all life forms reflects a deep ecological and social ethics.

- Buddhist tradition is the source of values such as compassion, mindfulness, and ethical conduct. Buddhist educational models aimed to cultivate inner balance, rational thought, and empathy—qualities central to modern value education.
- Jain philosophy is the propounded of traditions like tolerance, dialogue, and non-violence. The ethics of Jainism embraced peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity, aligning closely with contemporary ideals of multicultural and inclusive education.

These philosophical systems showed the path of comprehensive learning that comprises intellectual growth, moral reasoning, emotional balance, and social responsibility.

3. Core Ethical Values in Ancient Indian Knowledge Traditions and Contemporary Value Crises:

3.1. Foundational Ethical Principles in Indian Knowledge Systems:

The structure of the ancient Indian education system was not only built on the framework of intellectual development but also on moral and ethical values. The ethical values such as dharma, truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), discipline (Brahmacharya), humility, and service (Seva) are rooted in the ancient Indian education system which provided a guiding path to the people over the years. These values are essential for harmonious living in modern society apart from gaining knowledge.

3.1.1 Dharma as Social and Ethical Duty:

Dharma is a central ethical value which defines duty, righteousness, and cosmic law. In the context of ancient education, dharma has been defined as one's responsibilities to the self, society, and the world. The ethic of living in accordance with righteousness was an integral part of education and also connected to Buddhist monastic learning where ethical conduct goes along with intellectual training.

3.1.2 Ahimsa and Compassion as Civilizational Virtues:

The virtues like ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion (Karuna or Daya) are ingrained deeply in ancient knowledge systems including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The practice of gentleness, restraint, and compassion was the part of ancient pedagogy which shaped student's lives with relation to the natural world, community, and knowledge itself. Ahimsa was not taught as the absence of violence but it was implied as a holistic way of living that minimized harm and promoted ecological harmony. These principles are also considered civilizational virtues as they played a pivotal role in shaping individual conduct, social institutions, and political philosophy throughout Indian history.

3.1.3 Samāna-bhāva and Social Equality:

The ancient educational teachings of Upanishads, the Dhammapada, and vernacular Bhakti literature always emphasized the vision of human solidarity. The Bhagavad Gita also preaches to treat all human beings with an equal eye (Sama-bhava) by focusing on inner qualities and duty over birth. The ideals of Upanishad stressed on the presence of divinity and dignity in all human beings (tat tvam asi) whereas Bhakti movements promoted spiritual and

literary expression. Social equality, justice and coexistence were the ethos of ancient knowledge traditions.

3.2. Contemporary Value Crises in Indian Society:

In the contemporary world, a huge conflict between inherited moral framework and the modern ideology has emerged due to human advancement. The value crisis- as it has been described- is the problem from which the present education system of India is suffering. The students are losing ground in ideals that our country once stood for in the past. There is erosion of social, moral, cultural, economic and political values at all levels of education.

3.2.1 Materialism and Competitive Individualism:

Globalization and neoliberal educational reforms are the key forces that fueled competitiveness, career driven approach and consumerism. In this contemporary world, the education systems are mainly concerned with imparting an increasing number of skills in view of job readiness rather than inculcating ethical, empathetic values in students to make them good human beings. The purpose of Indian knowledge systems which was character-building is undermined by this change which are now more concerned with personal gratification, consumerism, and materialism-oriented success.

3.2.2 Erosion of Community Values:

Community involvement has become a rare sight in today's world of Urbanization and digitalization. The erosion of community values in the Indian education system weakened interpersonal relationships. Non-integrated modules within curriculum structures like materialistic approach, rampant technology without moral grounding, exam centric system instead of character development have replaced value education and social experience. This is the time to return to holistic value education since the community values like respect for elders, cooperation, and social responsibilities have been replaced by greed, indiscipline, and self-centeredness.

3.2.3 Emotional and Psychological Alienation:

One of the major drawbacks of the value crisis is emotional and psychological alienation that the modern youth is experiencing. With the rapid expansion of urban centers and the growing dominance of neoliberal economic models, they are struggling with increased levels of stress, loneliness, anxiety, and academic pressure and often feel disconnected from community, culture, and self. This fragmentation with self is the result of the absence of inner foundation. Indian knowledge systems addressed this aspect very well through contemplative practices, self-reflection, and experiential learning.

4. NEP-2020 and Revival of Indian Knowledge Traditions:

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is marked as an evolutionary change in the Indian education system which aims to revitalize and modernize its educational landscape. It is an attempt to recognize and reclaim India's rich intellectual heritage, its indigenous knowledge systems by integrating them into contemporary curricula. It comprises the study of classical texts, indigenous sciences, environmental ethics, and traditional art forms.

The NEP 2020 opens the path for rebalancing the current education system by drawing the core principles of the Indian knowledge system while adapting the best of modern innovation. These principles include multilingualism, experiential learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The policy incorporates ethical, holistic and interdisciplinary approaches combining with modern pedagogical tools and global perspectives. By recognizing the importance of mental and emotional balance, NEP 2020 strongly backs the yoga, meditation, and wellbeing practices and has made it an integral part of the education system.

5. Mother-Tongue Learning and Cultural Sustainability:

Language is the soul of society. Its role in cognitive development, social interaction, and cultural expression cannot be overlooked. In the ancient knowledge system, language was the main source to impart knowledge and regional languages were preferred for it while Sanskrit was used as a language of scholars. This tradition strengthened both community identity and intellectual exchange.

The effectiveness of regional language in the learning process is proven through much research and its significance in this current educational environment cannot be denied. NEP 2020 strongly recommends the use of mother tongue or regional languages as a medium of instruction in the early years of education. The knowledge imparted in the mother tongue makes a strong foundation for literacy and numeracy skills. It also helps students with quick concept learning and its retention. The usage of mother tongue in the learning process enhances critical thinking, improves comprehension skills, protects cultural identity as well as self-esteem.

India is the land of multi culture and multi languages and to preserve this linguistic diversity is equally important. NEP 2020 advocates inclusivity and democratic access to knowledge which promote cross-cultural understanding. Most of the sources of knowledge in the ancient times whether it is in oral or written form, can be found in different regional languages. It is imperative to carry forward these linguistic traditions in the education system to make a fine balance between past perspectives, future pioneering.

6. Holistic Education: Yoga, Spirituality, and Life Skills:

A comprehensive approach is an essential feature of the Indian Knowledge system which comprises different dimensions of life like mind, body and soul. Yoga, meditation, and introspection were inseparable parts of it as these practices bring physical endurance, emotional strength and self-discipline in a student. Such practices are boon for mental health and well-being in today's time when the world is dealing with many mental health issues.

The inclusion of yoga and mindfulness in the education system is backed by modern scholars and NEP 2020. Research supports regular yoga practice for better concentration, resilience, memory retention and emotional well-being which enhances overall academic performance of the learners. Not only this, it also makes learners more patient, empathetic and self-aware- the qualities essential for a good human being to live in a harmonious society.

A healthy mind lives in a healthy body and both a healthy mind and body makes a healthy soul. Yoga makes the body healthy, skills like critical thinking and resilience to help students navigate life's challenges, and spirituality is the food for a happy soul. Spirituality

connects mind, body and soul which leads to meaningful living. Learners get motivated to make ethical choices and fulfil social responsibilities. This holistic approach helps students navigate life's challenges, aligning with India's rich tradition of integrated learning.

7. Conclusion:

Education is not only an academic journey of a student but it is also a transformative and ethical journey. The ancient Indian knowledge system was rooted on this idea. This study has shown that India's ancient education system, institutes like Nalanda and Takshashila, and humanistic pedagogies were the models of holistic, value-based learning that integrated intellectual training with ethical development and spiritual insight.

NEP 2020 is an attempt to revive and reintroduce the philosophies and principles of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern educational frameworks. It synthesizes traditional wisdom with modern pedagogy by promoting holistic development, mother tongue learning and value-focused curricula.

The execution of the new education policy is not an easy process yet it promises a very bright future. The integration of India's rich educational traditions will be proven as an important contribution where the modern education will not be merely a source of imparting knowledge but it will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of skilled, smart and sensitive generations.

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