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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE VEDIC PERIOD AND THE MODERN ERA: EXAMINING MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Garima Tandon

Assistant Professor in Computer Science, A.S. College For Women, Khanna

ABSTRACT

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping Indian society along with providing cultural identity and intellectual traditions leading to human development. It also enables an individual to widen their mental horizons and expand their skills by expressing their thoughts and emotions clearly in speech and in writing. The Indian education system has transformed considerably from Vedic Era, characterised by "Guru-Shishya Pratha", oral transmission of knowledge, moral commands and a close bond between teacher and learner, to Modern education system which strongly emphasises on institutional learning, scientific queries, technological advancement, professional exposure and inclusive educational opportunities. Despite the variation in their structure and historical context, both education systems offer important perspectives on multidisciplinary education and holistic development. This study not only aims to compare the educational philosophy but also teaching methodologies and the development objective of the vedic period and the Modern, the relationship between ethical values, intellectual development, and emotional well-being along with the practical skills. Social responsibility and multidisciplinary learning holds particular attention. It also discusses the relevance of vedic education in contemporary higher education, particularly in the light of national education policy NEP 2020, the national education policy 2020 emphasises Major on holistic and multidisciplinary education so that the intellectual emotional social and professional development can be promoted among learners as per NEP 2020. A liberal education with a multidisciplinary approach will shape and prepare students for a rapidly changing world. This will aid in understanding the interconnectedness of various fields of education. This conceptual paper will examine and compare the long history of multidisciplinary education from ancient Times of Takshashila and Nalanda imparting with Vedic education in various realms to the contemporary education system of vocational and professional subjects, encouraging holistic development of humans. It also discusses the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing multidisciplinary education in higher education institutions. The paper adopts a conceptual and descriptive approach based on policy documents and relevant educational literature

Keywords: Indian education system, Vedic education, modern education, multidisciplinary education, holistic development, Guru–Shishya tradition, National Education Policy 2020, undergraduate education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important instrument for social upgradation and individual development. It enables an individual to acquire knowledge, develop skills, form values, cultivate critical thinking and contribute to society. By way of responsible participation. Indian education traditions have evolved through various historical periods. Reflecting changes in the social set up, philosophical thinking, political structures, economic, requisite, and cultural values.

Vedic period symbolises an eternal phase in the historical development of Indian education. Education in this period was primary transmission of sacred knowledge along with disciplined, learning and intellectual development. It also emphasised on moral conduct and the relationship between teacher and the student learning was usually imported through oral instructions, recitation, memorisation("shruti and smriti"), discussion, reflection, and practical experience were part of formal learning. The Gurukul tradition was associated with close teachers, student interaction and integration of education with everyday life.

In contrast, modern Indian education functions through an organised network of schools, colleges, universities, open learning platforms, and digital and distance learning resources, its objectives not only include literacy and scientific understanding, but also professional preparation, democratic citizenship and social mobility.

A remarkable contemporary development in education is the national education policy. NEP 2020, which endorses a holistic and multidisciplinary approach. It not only encourages flexible curricular structures but also integrates vocational education and opportunities for students to learn across disciplinary boundaries. Similarly,

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the university grants commission has also introduced a curriculum and credit framework for undergraduate programs to support multidisciplinary learning and curricular flexibility.

This paper explores the relationship between vedic education and the modern educational reforms. It tries to answer how ideas associated with Vedic education may assist the modern multidisciplinary education system by way of a comparative examination, it identifies their distinctive contribution in the field of education along with their limitations and potential areas of integration.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

This study has the following objectives

1. To scrutinise the educational traditions of vedic education system.
2. To examine the structure and practices of modern Indian education.
3. To compare the dimensions of holistic and multidisciplinary growth in both systems.
4. To identify the relevance of vedic education principles with contemporary multidisciplinary and holistic education.
5. To figure out the challenges involved with the implementation of multidisciplinary and holistic education in contemporary India.

METHODOLOGY

This study is theoretical work based on secondary data such as books, Google, research papers, reports, websites and vedic literature. This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design. It does not attempt to measure educational outcomes statistically. Instead, it examines meanings, ideas, practices, institutional developments, and policy orientations across different historical periods.

CONCEPT OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION

It is difficult to certainly define multidisciplinary and holistic education but some experts have defined it differently as per their ability and understanding. According to John Miller, Ron Miller and Nova, holistic education fosters the development of an individual's entire identity in all its facets, social, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic growth among other things (Miller 2005). The main name of holistic education is the transformation of an individual to counter the real time threats of the society, using his intellect and skills. Multidisciplinary and holistic education equally focus on all the dimensions and perspectives of human life, including social, economic, emotional, intellectual, creative, and interpersonal and interpersonal relationships (Schreiver, 2005). Majethiya and Patel(2015) said that a holistic education comprising the life context of learners, raises the awareness of all existence.

National education policy 2020 asserts that “Multidisciplinary and holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities and sports for multidisciplinary world in order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge”.

INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN VEDIC ERA

What Education Really Meant

During the Vedic age, learning was not separate from life. It was woven into religion, philosophy, culture and everyday thought. The purpose was not just to gather facts. Students were expected to grasp the meaning of sacred literature, train their behaviour, and acquire wisdom that was useful for both personal growth and social living.

Many Indian schools of thought saw education as a bridge between four things - knowledge, right action, self-awareness, and duty towards other people. Because of this, learning was seen as a way of shaping a complete human being, not just as training for a particular livelihood.

The Bond Between Guru and Shishya

A central part of this system was the close relationship between the teacher and the student.

The Guru was more than an instructor. He was responsible for the student's thinking, character, and overall progress. In a Gurukula, learners stayed with the Guru, in his household. This day-to-day closeness allowed for constant conversation and personal attention.

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Teaching was mostly oral, listening and repeating, learning verses by heart, detailed explanations, raising doubts, and discussing them openly.

This created a strong mentorship culture and helped build focus and discipline. It also shows how powerful direct human interaction can be in learning.

Areas of Knowledge

In the early phase, the main focus was learning, preserving and interpreting the Vedas and the ideas linked to them. Over centuries, Indian learning traditions spread into many other centers and movements. That is when we see growth in a wide range of fields - study of language and grammar, logic and reasoning, mathematics, healing systems, study of stars and planets, ideas of governance, poetry and literature, and various crafts and practical skills.

This variety shows how far intellectual curiosity expanded in the subcontinent.

However, these subjects did not all belong to one fixed Vedic syllabus. What was taught changed with the era, the place of learning, and the specific intellectual tradition.

Even so, the overall history makes it clear that knowledge in ancient India was not narrow. That breadth is a helpful reference when we discuss multidisciplinary learning today, as long as we keep the different periods and traditions distinct.

Ways of Teaching and Learning

The core techniques were oral in nature - transmitting knowledge by speech, committing it to memory through chanting, holding dialogues, reflecting deeply, and practising under supervision. Each practice had a practical role. Memorization was essential for protecting texts that existed only in spoken form. Dialogue and contemplation helped learners move from remembering to truly understanding and questioning. For skill-based knowledge, learning by working with a master was common, though the method varied from one field to another.

Focus on Character and Values

Ideas of good conduct were central. Discipline, respect for the teacher, self-restraint, and a sense of responsibility were emphasized repeatedly.

Education was understood as the formation of character, not only as a route to employment.

That concern is still relevant. Educational institutions now also aim to nurture honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for others.

INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MODERN ERA

Structure and Objectives

The structure and objectives of modern Indian education involve formal educational institutions at school, undergraduate, postgraduate and professional levels. In addition there is open, distance education, online education, vocational education and other educational pathways. The objectives are literacy, subject knowledge, scientific knowledge, critical thinking, technical skills, professional skills and development of democratic citizenship. There are also opportunities for formal qualifications and social mobility within the structure of modern education. Access to learning has been broadened by public educational institutions, scholarships, inclusive policies and digital resources. But there are also large inequalities.

Curriculum and Specialization

Modern education provides a very large range of subjects for academic and professional education. Specialization gives the opportunities to have advanced knowledge in specific fields of study. On the other hand, very specialized curricula may sometimes narrow down the opportunity to understand the relations between different areas of study. For example, to deal with contemporary environmental problems you need to understand science, economics, public policy, social behaviour, and technology. For entrepreneurship you need to understand finance, communication, digital skills and knowledge about markets. These are some examples of why there is increasingly a need for inter-disciplinary interaction in education.

Teaching Methodologies

Modern educational institutions use the methodologies of lectures, seminars, lab work, project work, internship, presentation, group discussion, digital platforms and experiential learning.

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The impact of these strategies will depend on how they are applied. The digital revolution can still be characterized by rote learning in a classroom and a traditional lecture can facilitate critical thinking with discussion and inquiry. The contrast between the traditional and modern education should not be merely expressed in terms of verbal teaching versus technology. More importantly, the focus should be on whether teaching methods facilitate meaningful understanding, independent thinking and practical application.

Assessment and Academic achievement

Written examinations, assignments, practical assessments, presentations, projects, and continuous assessment are the common forms of assessment in modern education. Assessment is a way of measuring learning outcomes and maintaining the standards of education. However, over-reliance on high stake examinations may promote memorisation and limit experiments. In a balanced system of assessment, not only factual knowledge, but also problem solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, practical skills, and ethical thinking should be assessed.

Holistic development in modern education

Holistic development is the development of multiple dimensions of an individual including, intellectual, physical, emotional, social, ethical, creative and professional capabilities. Increasingly, the policy makers in the modern education recognise that mere academic achievement is not sufficient to prepare the learners for effective participation in the society.

NEP 2020 advocates for holistic and multidisciplinary approaches to education, offering flexibility in subject combinations and integration of vocational learning. Similarly, the undergraduate curriculum framework of UGC offers curricular flexibility and multidisciplinary prospects.

Comparative Analysis of Vedic and Modern Education

The two educational systems of education were born in very different times and contexts, so it wouldn't be fair to judge them by the exact same standards.

Vedic and modern education have different historical foundations and educational priorities, yet both offer valuable insights into human development. Modern education provides scientific knowledge and professional skills, while the value-oriented aspects of traditional education highlight the importance of ethics, discipline, and character. A balanced educational approach that combines contemporary knowledge with relevant cultural and ethical values can contribute to the intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development of students.

The Vedic tradition shows us the value of long-term guidance from a teacher, disciplined learning, deep reflection, and connecting what we know with how we live. Modern education, on the other hand, brings in clear degrees and qualifications, a much wider range of subjects, scientific thinking, systematic evaluation, and the chance to educate people at a much larger scale.

The real task is to bring the best of both together, keeping their strengths while working on their shortcomings.

MAJOR CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL INSIGHTS INTO MODERN EDUCATION

The Risk of Oversimplifying History

It’s easy to talk about the "Vedic education system" as if it was one single, perfect system that everyone had access to. The reality was much more complicated.

Education practices changed across time, region, and community, and not everything we call "traditional" actually comes from the Vedic period. If we want to bring traditional insights into today’s classrooms, we need to be historically honest and careful about what belongs where.

The Reality of Unequal Access

Modern education has opened doors for many more learners, but access is still not equal. A student's economic background, where they live, their social identity, a disability, or simply not having internet access can still decide what kind of education they get.

We can’t just bring back old models of learning without asking: Who will it actually reach? Any integration has to keep these modern inequalities in mind.

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Too Much Pressure on Exams

When marks become the only measure of success, learning changes. Students start focusing on how to memorize and score, rather than truly understanding, being creative, or applying what they learn. If we want holistic and traditional forms of learning to work, our assessment system has to change too, with space for different kinds of talent and feedback that actually helps students grow.

Problem of Limited Resources

On paper, multidisciplinary learning sounds great — students choosing across subjects, exploring different interests. On the ground, it needs a lot: well-trained teachers, good infrastructure, coordination between departments, and flexible timetables. For many colleges and schools that are already stretched for staff and funds, offering real, meaningful choices becomes very difficult.

Finding the Balance Between Tradition and Science

Respecting traditional knowledge does not mean accepting everything without question. And being scientific does not mean rejecting tradition outright.

We need academic openness. Some traditional ideas are historically valuable, some are philosophical worldviews, some are cultural practices, and some are knowledge claims that need to be scientifically tested. The job of education is to respect our heritage while still holding on to evidence and critical thinking.

What Does "Holistic Development" Really Mean?

We all talk about holistic development, but it's a very big term, it includes emotional, social, moral, physical, and intellectual growth. Feeling that you have grown is important, but it's not the same as actually measuring growth. To know if an educational approach really helps students develop holistically, we need clear definitions, better tools, and research that goes beyond just student opinions.

Educational Implications and Recommendations

Based on the comparative analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen Teacher-Student Mentoring

Colleges and universities should create well-structured mentoring systems where students receive regular academic guidance, honest feedback, and support for their personal growth. Effective mentoring should encourage students to think independently and speak openly, while maintaining mutual respect and professional boundaries.

Promote Meaningful Multidisciplinary Learning

Multidisciplinary learning should not just be an option on paper. Institutions should offer purposeful opportunities for students to explore subjects across disciplines, with clear learning goals and links to real-world issues. Interdisciplinary projects, collaborative assignments, and problem-based learning can help students connect theoretical ideas with practical challenges.

Integrate Indian Knowledge Systems Critically

Indian philosophical traditions, literature, arts, mathematics, history of science and other knowledge systems can enrich the curriculum. But their inclusion must be done carefully, using reliable sources, providing proper historical context, encouraging critical discussion, and maintaining disciplinary standards.

Reform Assessment Practices

Assessment needs to go beyond testing how much students remember. It should also evaluate conceptual understanding, communication, creativity, problem-solving, practical skills, and ethical reasoning. Along with written examinations, methods like projects, presentations, portfolios, lab work, and reflective assignments should be used.

Support Emotional and Social Development

Academic growth alone is not enough. Institutions should provide mentoring, counselling wherever possible, peer-learning opportunities, group activities, and an inclusive learning environment. Such support helps students build communication skills, resilience, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

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Expand Experiential and Vocational Learning

Wherever appropriate, academic programmes should include practical training, internships, fieldwork, community engagement, and project-based learning. These experiences help students connect what they learn in the classroom with professional and social realities.

Ensure Equity and Inclusion

Opportunities for multidisciplinary learning must be accessible to all students, irrespective of their economic background, gender, social background, disability, or geographical location. Institutions should make a conscious effort to identify barriers to participation and provide necessary academic guidance and support.

Evaluate Educational Outcomes Through Research

Finally, colleges should regularly examine how students are actually experiencing multidisciplinary learning and holistic development. This can be done through questionnaires, interviews, academic performance data, project assessments, and long-term studies. Research findings should be used to guide real institutional improvement, rather than assuming that simply adopting a policy will automatically produce the desired results.

CONCLUSION

Comparing education in the Vedic period with education in modern India highlights both the distance between the two eras and some concerns that have continued over time. The Vedic tradition offers valuable insights, the importance of a close teacher-student relationship, disciplined study, time for reflection, and the idea that knowledge should be linked to ethical conduct. Modern Indian education, on the other hand, brings its own strengths: well-structured academic pathways, a spirit of scientific inquiry, opportunities for specialisation, access to technology, and a much wider reach in terms of who can get an education. Both systems, however, need to be looked at critically in their own context. We cannot ignore the fact that access to education in traditional times was deeply unequal. Similarly, we cannot overlook the present-day problems, such as intense pressure from examinations and the lack of adequate focus on practical skills and personal development, which need continuous attention. In this regard, multidisciplinary education offers a real opportunity. It helps students connect ideas across different fields and prepares them to deal with complex, real-world challenges. The National Education Policy 2020 and the UGC's undergraduate framework move in this direction by promoting flexibility in the curriculum and an emphasis on holistic learning.

Yet, holistic development does not happen through curriculum change alone. It depends on good teaching, supportive mentoring, assessment that is meaningful, opportunities for hands-on experience, engagement with ethical questions, and an institutional culture that is truly inclusive. Therefore, this study concludes that the way forward for Indian education is not to romanticise the past nor to rely solely on contemporary institutional models. A more thoughtful path lies in between, integrating the most valuable insights from our educational heritage with modern scientific knowledge, inclusive values, multidisciplinary curricula, and teaching practices that are backed by evidence. An approach of this kind can help build an education system that fosters not just intellectual excellence, but also practical competence, ethical responsibility, creativity, social awareness, and a commitment to lifelong learning. The proposed empirical study among undergraduate students is intended to add to this understanding. By exploring how students actually experience multidisciplinary education in colleges today, its findings can help institutions recognise what is working well and where improvement is needed.

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