



Reviving the gurukula tradition: Relevance of ancient Indian curriculum in the context of NEP 2020 and present educational practices

Dr. Devanandan K V¹, Dr. R Lakshmi²

¹ Professor & Principal, KPPM College of Teacher Education, Malappuram, Kerala, India

² Professor, Department of Hindi Education, IASE, Thrissur, Kerala, India

Abstract

The ancient Indian Gurukula system is a holistic, comprehensive educational approach. The education system emerged from the principles of self-discipline, experiential learning, and life-centric knowledge. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends a radical overhaul of India's existing educational system. The basis of this policy is indigenous knowledge systems. The Gurukula model of education inspires the recommendations. The relevance of the Gurukula curriculum in the modern education system is examined in this article. The article pays particular attention to how well it complies with NEP 2020 guidelines. The study also tries to analyse how it can be incorporated into the procedures that CBSE, Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVS), and ICSE schools currently practice. By investigating pedagogical trends and regulatory frameworks, this article seeks to revive the Gurukula ethos in order to support competency-driven, value-based, and holistic education in India.

Keywords: Gurukula, NEP 2020, holistic learning, Indian knowledge systems

Introduction

The Gurukula system of education is the most significant contribution of India. It is the traditional holistic system of education that prevailed in India. Gurushishya parampara is the foundation of this system. This is an example of a foundational educational approach that prioritised ethical behaviour, life skills, Vedic wisdom, and close teacher-student interactions ^[1]. Character development, discipline, spiritual insight, and experiential learning via everyday activities and communal living were all part of this tradition's holistic approach to education, which went beyond academics ^[15]. Gurus were the moral mentors and instructors, both practical and scholastic. They encourage lifetime ideals and one-on-one mentoring. India's indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and traditional pedagogical approaches are being reclaimed with the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The National Education Policy of 2020 encourages incorporating classical languages of India, ethical reasoning, and ancient educational philosophies into the current curriculum. NEP 2020 specifically states that "ancient Indian knowledge, including the Vedas and Sanskrit literature, will be incorporated engagingly and scientifically" ^[9]. This recommendation leads to the revival of Gurukula concepts in mainstream education. This attracted fresh intellectual and institutional attention all over India. The programs like the introduction of Sanskrit, value education modules, and experiential learning, competency-based learning models, are initiated by national boards like CBSE, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), and ICSE have started to reflect these developments (CBSE, 2020; KVS Annual Report, 2023; CISCE, 2022). This paper evaluates the enduring relevance of the Gurukula system in the contemporary context and critically analyses the extent to which NEP 2020's recommendations have been realised in practice through national curricular frameworks and pedagogical innovations.

The Ancient Gurukula Curriculum: A Holistic Pedagogical Model

The foundation of the traditional Gurukula system of education in India was mainly conducted in the home of the guru or in forest hermitages known as tapovanas. This concept, which had its roots in the Gurushishya parampara (teacher-disciple lineage), placed a strong emphasis on lifelong learning, value-based living, and individualised mentoring ^[1]. This system of education was intended to foster a harmonious integration of the learner's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects—what contemporary educational theorists call the development of the head, heart, and hand—rather than just imparting knowledge ^[15].

A value-oriented framework for educational curriculum ensured an inherent connection to the four goals of life: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (financial prosperity), Kama (desires), and Moksha (liberation) ^[14]. A multidisciplinary and integrated view of knowledge was reflected in the subjects covered, which encompassed Vedas, Sanskrit, Nyaya (logic), astronomy, music, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, and even martial arts ^[10]. Learning was experiential, as opposed to rote-based models; it was centred on service to the guru, observation, discussion (shravana, manana, nididhyasana), and involvement in daily tasks, which instilled responsibility, discipline, and humility ^[11].

This deeply immersive pedagogy resonates with modern constructivist approaches, which emphasise active learning, contextual understanding, and holistic growth ^[2]. This system, despite its age, promoted self-reflection, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking. These skills are now essential to education in the twenty-first century. A timeless approach for transformative education is the need of the hour. Its foundation in dialogic and inquiry-based learning contrasts with the standardisation found in colonial and post-colonial schooling systems.

NEP 2020 and Ancient Indian Educational Ideals

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates a radical shift in India's educational philosophy,

promoting a return to traditional Indian pedagogies. This shift to traditional foundations of education will enable us to tackle today's pressing global issues. One of its key focus areas is the revival of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), recognizing the value of ancient traditions, philosophical thought, and indigenous pedagogies like the Gurukula system [9]. The policy promotes a multidisciplinary and holistic education model, integrating physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development—core attributes of the Gurukula tradition (MHRD, 2020; Kumar, 2021) [7]. NEP 2020 strongly recommends the promotion of Indian classical languages like Sanskrit and other classical languages. These languages are vital tools for accessing ancient texts and wisdom. The knowledge of classical languages supports proper understanding of the experiential and competency-based learning, shifting away from rote memorisation toward understanding, application, and higher-order thinking—principles central to the dialogue- and experience-driven Gurukula pedagogy (Mookerji, 1951; Mukherjee & Bhattacharya, 2005) [10, 11]. Moreover, the policy underscores value-based education, including the cultivation of ethical reasoning, empathy, and self-awareness, aligning with the moral and spiritual foundation of ancient Indian education. Section 4.27 of NEP states: “Knowledge from ancient India and its contributions to modern India and the world will be incorporated into the curriculum at all levels [9].” NEP 2020 directives reiterate the significant necessity of reintroducing individualised mentoring and local cultural knowledge into the curriculum. A philosophical and practical framework for putting the vision of NEP 2020 is transformative in education into practice to provide the Gurukula system's values of teacher-guided inquiry, community learning, and care for the environment.

Reflections in Present Practices: CBSE, KVS, and ICSE

The vision of NEP 2020 emphasises on ancient Indian educational ideals are gradually being reflected in the curricular and pedagogical practices of major school boards in India, particularly CBSE, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), and ICSE.

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)

CBSE has initiated several reforms that resonate with the Gurukula model. Its inclusion of Value Education and Life Skills programs supports holistic development beyond academics [3]. Sanskrit and Yoga, both integral to the ancient curriculum, are introduced at the primary level, reflecting NEP's call to promote classical languages and physical well-being. Art-Integrated Learning, a CBSE mandate, encourages interdisciplinary exploration through aesthetic forms, mirroring the multidisciplinary and experiential nature of the Gurukula system. Moreover, skill-based subjects such as coding, artificial intelligence, and

vocational education encourage hands-on, competency-driven learning, aligning with constructivist pedagogy [4].

Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS)

Kendriya Vidyalaya Schools have initiated and pioneered heritage-based such as the Bharatiya Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha, Sanskrit Week celebrations, and heritage quizzes that promote cultural literacy. Programs encouraging Vedic mathematics, traditional storytelling, and community service instill moral values and civic responsibility, echoing Gurukula traditions [8]. The integration of social service and ethical instruction strengthens the value-based learning ecosystem.

Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE)

The ICSE board encourages classical knowledge and an ethical foundation by offering Sanskrit. The curriculum also encourages moral Science and Yoga as elective or required disciplines. The board places strong emphasis on the humanities and liberal arts, reminiscent of the philosophical and literary focus of ancient curricula [5]. Application-based questions and comprehension are given priority in recent assessment reforms, which discourage memorisation and promote critical thinking.

Integrating Gurukula Values into the Modern Classroom

Deliberately crafted instructional practices can effectively incorporate the eternal ideas of the Gurukula system into present classroom contexts. A fundamental suggestion is the restoration of the guru-shishya relationship through academic advice, life coaching, or organised mentorship programs, which provide individualised direction and emotional support. Including regular moral thoughts, Sanskrit shlokas, or meditation techniques might help pupils develop their inner discipline and ethical awareness.

Encouraging nature-based education, which draws inspiration from the natural environments of the Gurukulas, increases students' awareness of environmental issues and links what they are learning to actual sustainability issues. Furthermore, integrating character development and value education into all subject areas may foster empathy, accountability, and respect—qualities that are essential to ancient Indian educational philosophy.

As was done in the old system, modern schools should likewise embrace transdisciplinary learning, dismantling strict topic silos and promoting integrative thinking across the humanities, sciences, and arts. These modifications guarantee that the essence of the Gurukula tradition endures in India's changing educational environment in addition to being in line with NEP 2020's holistic vision. A model of the proposal explains the integration at different curriculums in India which is followed:

Table 1: Integration of Gurukula Values in Nep 2020 Framework

Component	Gurukula System	NEP 2020 Emphasis	Reflections in Modern Boards
Pedagogy	Experiential, Mentor-Guided (Guru-Shishya)	Competency & Experiential Learning	CBSE: Art Integration, Skill Subjects
Values	Ethical Living, Discipline, Dharma	Value-Based Education, Ethics, Empathy	KVS: Community Service, Storytelling
Subjects	Vedas, Arts, Logic, Nature Studies	Multidisciplinary Curriculum	ICSE: Humanities, Classical Languages
Language	Sanskrit, Oral Tradition	Promotion of Classical Languages	All Boards: Sanskrit, Heritage Promotion

Transdisciplinary learning that breaks down conventional topic barriers and encourages integrative thinking across the

humanities, sciences, and arts subjects. This is a global perspective that should be embraced by modern schools just

as it was in the previous system. In addition to being consistent with the holistic educational goal of NEP 2020, these changes ensure that the spirit of the Gurukula legacy remains in India's evolving educational landscape.

Challenges and Cautions

Though the integration of Gurukula concepts into the contemporary educational system is encouraging, there are several issues and warnings that need to be carefully treated. The conflict between personalisation and standardisation is one of the major issues. On the other hand, the standard curricula, evaluation techniques, and grading schemes used in modern education, the Gurukula model placed an emphasis on personalised mentoring and self-paced learning.

Integrating spiritual themes into a secular curriculum is sensitive is another important concern. However, in the present multicultural society, such content must be introduced with cultural sensitivity and tolerance. It should be with a precaution of avoiding any sort of ideological bias. It should be especially noted that spiritual and philosophical teachings were frequently included in ancient Indian education.

Additionally, thorough teacher training is necessary for the effective use of Gurukula-inspired methods. The majority of teachers require continual professional development because they are not familiar with Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and conventional teaching techniques. Lastly, the universal implementation of such innovations may be limited by resource gaps, particularly between urban and rural schools, which may impact access to space, materials, or qualified mentors.

Conclusion

The Gurukula system provides everlasting insights into education as a transformative and sacred process. The Gurukula system emphasises ethical living, holistic development, and strong teacher-student bonds. NEP 2020 emphasises this and represents a progressive return to the educational legacy of India. This also recommends meeting the needs of a technologically sophisticated, international society. By promoting Sanskrit, value education, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary approaches, the current curriculum revisions by CBSE, KVS, and ICSE show an increasing congruence with these ideals.

The genuine promise of these resurgences is found in the careful adaptation of Gurukula values to modern educational frameworks rather than in their merely symbolic inclusion. Ancient Indian educational wisdom can be incorporated into a system of present education that is learner-centred, value-driven, and contextually relevant if done so with caution, inclusion, and pedagogical rigour. Students in such a system would be anchored in cultural rootedness, ethical clarity, and lifelong learning in addition to being prepared for the modern world.

References

1. Altekar AS. Education in Ancient India. Banaras: Banaras Hindu University, 1944.
2. Bruner JS. The act of discovery. Harvard Educational Review, 1961:31(1):21–32.
3. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Value Education Framework Internet, 2020 [cited 2025 Jul 26]. Available from: <https://cbseacademic.nic.in>

4. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Circular No Acad-05/2023 Introduction of Skill Subjects and Art-Integrated Learning Internet, 2023 [cited 2025 Jul 26]. Available from: <https://cbseacademic.nic.in>
5. Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). ICSE and ISC Syllabus Documents 2022–2023 Internet, 2022 [cited 2025 Jul 26]. Available from: <https://cisce.org>
6. Kapur M. Reviving the Gurukul System in the NEP Era. Journal of Indian Education, 2021:47(1):35–47.
7. Kumar K. Indian Education Retrospect and Prospect. New Delhi: NCERT, 2021.
8. Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS). Annual Report 2022–23 Internet, 2023 [cited 2025 Jul 26]. Available from: <https://kvsangathan.nic.in>
9. Ministry of Education. National Education Policy 2020 Internet. Government of India, 2020 [cited 2025 Jul 26]. Available from: <https://www.education.gov.in>
10. Mookerji RK. Ancient Indian Education Brahmanical and Buddhist. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1951.
11. Mukherjee SN, Bhattacharya AK. Education in Ancient and Medieval India. Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 2005.
12. Ministry of Human Resource Development MHRD. Position Paper on Indian Knowledge Systems. Government of India, 2020.
13. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration NIEPA. Position Paper on Indian Knowledge Systems. New Delhi: NIEPA, 2021.
14. Radhakrishnan S. The Bhagavadgita. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 1948.
15. Sharma RN. History of Education in India. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2006.