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Importance of Indian Education and Culture

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Abstract:

India's educational and cultural traditions constitute a heritage that spans millennia. From the philosophical underpinnings of ancient Gurukul systems and the universities of Nalanda and Takshashila, to the colonial legacies and post-independence reforms culminating in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), the interplay between Indian culture and education has shaped identity, values, social cohesion, and knowledge systems. This paper examines the importance of Indian education and culture from historical, philosophical, pedagogical, and policy perspectives. It analyzes how indigenous knowledge systems, cultural values, languages, rituals, arts, and social institutions contribute to holistic learning, ethical development, and sustainable societal progress. Challenges such as colonial disruption, globalization, standardization pressures, language loss, resource inequality, and mismatch with modern demands are also addressed. The paper concludes with recommendations for integrating culture into curricula, strengthening teacher education, supporting multilingualism, and fostering community participation to sustain India's educational legacy while adapting to contemporary needs.

Keywords: Indian education, Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), Cultural identity, National Education Policy 2020, Language policy, Holistic learning, Pedagogy, Colonial legacy, Moral and ethical values, Community participation

Introduction:

Education and culture are inseparable in any society. In India, education has never simply meant the transmission of technical skills or factual knowledge; it has always been entwined with culture — beliefs, rituals, arts, social values, languages, and worldviews. As India develops in the 21st century, facing globalization, digitalization, and social change, there is renewed interest in how Indian education and culture can inform one another to preserve heritage, promote values, and foster holistic growth. This paper aims to explore the importance of Indian education and culture — what each contributes to the other, how they have co-evolved, and what the current realities and challenges are. Through sections on history, philosophy, modern policy, benefits, and limitations,

followed by recommendations, it argues that integrating culture into education enriches both learners and society.

Historical Background:

Ancient Education and Culture:

In ancient India, education was not just schooling but a way of life. The Gurukul system, where students lived with their teacher (guru), learning not only scriptures, philosophy, arithmetic, astronomy, but also manners, discipline, ethics, arts, and communal responsibilities, is foundational. Centers like Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramshila, and later institutions served not only as learning hubs but cultural melting pots receiving students from across Asia. These centres taught not only academic subjects but also philosophy, logic, languages (Sanskrit, Pali), medicine (Ayurveda), arts, and moral values. Culture, ritual, spiritual life, and community interaction were part of the educational experience.

Influence of Philosophy and Values:

Indian culture has embedded within it concepts like *dharmā* (duty, righteousness), *karma*, *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *seva* (service), etc. Education in many Indian traditions has not been merely the accumulation of knowledge, but formation of character: self-discipline, respect, humility, service to society, and moral conduct. These values governed interpersonal relationships, social order, and the link between the individual and the cosmos.

Colonial Impact and Transition:

With the arrival of British colonial rule, the Indian education system underwent profound changes. Colonial education introduced English, new curricula, examination systems, and new administrative and bureaucratic forms of schooling. Traditional institutions lost patronage; many indigenous knowledge systems were deemed irrelevant or backward. Cultural values, languages, and local practices were marginalized in favor of Western models. While there were benefits in terms of modernization, exposure to global science, literature, etc., the cost included erosion of local culture, language displacement, loss of traditional pedagogies, and social stratification.

Post-Independence Reforms and Policy:

After India's independence in 1947, various commissions and committees (e.g. Radhakrishnan, Mudaliar, Kothari) attempted to balance modernization with preservation of cultural identity. National policies tried to promote Indian languages, arts, culture, and values in education. In recent times, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark, explicitly emphasizing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), integrating them into mainstream curricula, promoting multilingualism, holistic development, ethical values, arts and vocational education, reducing rote learning, etc. Research shows that NEP 2020 envisages a transformation of education to be more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and value-based. (Granthaalayah Publication)

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Cultural Dimensions:

What are Indigenous Knowledge Systems:

IKS refers to the body of knowledge, practices, beliefs, values, and modes of learning developed by Indian communities over generations. This includes knowledge of medicinal plants, traditional ecological practices, agricultural methods, arts, crafts, rituals, languages, folklore, performing arts, architecture, etc. Such knowledge is often context-sensitive, place-based, sustainable, and holistic. (IJRP)

Cultural Values, Rituals, and Sanskars:

Indian culture places emphasis on rituals, myths, music, dance, festivals, storytelling, sanskars (cultural rites), which do not simply entertain but inculcate values: respect for elders, community bonding, harmony with nature, moral behavior, responsibility. The role of educational rituals and sanskars in shaping personality and character is discussed in recent studies. (Granthaalayah Publication)

Benefits of Integrating Culture in Education:

1. Identity and Cultural Continuity:

Culture provides a sense of identity. In a plural society like India's, respecting, preserving regional languages, local arts and history helps students feel rooted, builds self-esteem, reduces alienation, and fosters belonging.

2. Values and Ethics:

Moral and ethical values such as honesty, non-violence, duty, environmental responsibility are deeply embedded in Indian tradition. Education that engages with these promotes character development and social responsibility.

3. Holistic Learning:

Indian cultural and knowledge systems encourage holistic learning — cognitive, emotional, spiritual, physical. Practices like yoga, meditation, art, music, and rituals help in mental well-being, creativity, emotional regulation.

4. Cognitive & Pedagogical Advantages:

Many indigenous pedagogies are experiential, oral, context-based, and encourage observational, participatory learning. These can help students understand abstract concepts via concrete, local examples. They also foster critical thinking by showing multiple worldviews.

5. Sustainability and Local Relevance:

IKS often include sustainable practices (in agriculture, environment, ecology) which are relevant in the context of climate change. Using local knowledge can make education directly useful to students' lives.

6. Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

The richness of Indian culture (yoga, philosophy, arts, literature) is globally admired. Educating youth in these areas enhances cultural diplomacy and helps preserve India's soft power.

Challenges and Constraints:

While the integration of culture and education has many advantages, there are several challenges:

- **Standardization vs Localization:** Modern education often demands standardized testing, uniform curricula, and global benchmarks which may not allow for regional/local variation in culture or knowledge.
- **Language Barriers:** Many Indian children speak vernacular languages at home; instruction in non-mother-tongue limits comprehension and cultural engagement. Conversely, lack of instructional materials in many regional/local languages hinders integrating culture.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers often lack training in indigenous knowledge systems or cultural pedagogies. Their own education might be disconnected from local culture.
- **Resource Constraints:** Rural and marginalised regions may have limited access to materials, infrastructure, or cultural resources to implement cultural programs (arts, music, crafts, etc.).
- **Perceived Relevance:** There is often a perception among policymakers, parents, and students that traditional or cultural knowledge is less relevant to modern jobs and careers. This leads to undervaluing culture in curricula.
- **Colonial Legacies and Biases:** Colonial-era biases regarding what constitutes “modern” or “scientific” knowledge persist. Some IKS are still dismissed as superstition or obsolete.
- **Globalisation and Media Influence:** Exposure to global cultures via media/internet leads young people to prefer global over local culture. Cultural homogenization undermines unique practices.

Empirical Studies and Evidence:

- A study among the Paniya tribe in Kerala shows that neglect of indigenous knowledge in schools creates learning conflicts and exclusion; also that indigenous knowledge helps in contextualizing education for tribal children. (JSWEP)
- Research on teacher education in India indicates that integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teacher training enhances cultural responsiveness and inclusivity. (IJSR Humanities & Social Sciences)
- The paper *Traditional Indian Education Values and New National Education Policy Adopted by India* (Patil & Patil, 2023) shows how NEP 2020 is pushing for Bharat-centric, value-based education, promoting Indian value-based education and holistic, eco-

developmental education. (SAGE Journals)

- Studies have examined the role of educational rituals and sanskars: in *Role and Impact of Educational Rituals in Indian Education System*, it's argued that rituals help inculcate social values, character building, discipline, tolerance. (Granthaalayah Publication)
- The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems in secondary education has been studied (e.g. Jacob & Gaur) under NEP 2020, showing potential for benefits in emotional, ethical, intellectual development, but also noting practical obstacles. (Veterinaria)

The Role of NEP 2020 and Current Policy Trends:

NEP 2020 is possibly the most explicit Indian education policy in recent decades to foreground culture, value systems, IKS, and multilingualism. It recommends introduction of local knowledge systems, more use of regional and mother tongue languages, experiential learning, more holistic education, less rote learning, inclusion of arts, ethics, values in curricula. (Granthaalayah Publication)

Policy trends also include increasing community participation, recognizing that schools are not isolated; involvement of local communities in decisions and identity. (j.vidhyayanaejournal.org) There are efforts to revitalize traditional knowledge systems, integration of wisdom from Ayurveda, yoga, traditional ecology; also inclusion of Sanskrit and regional languages as knowledge languages. (TKM International Journal)

Recommendations:

To fully realise the importance of Indian education and culture, the following steps are recommended:

1. Curriculum Design:

Design curricula that integrate indigenous knowledge systems, local culture, arts, rituals, stories, traditional ecology. Ensure regional diversity so that local culture is honored.

2. Teacher Education and Professional Development:

Teachers should be trained in cultural pedagogy, in understanding IKS, in integrating it with modern methodologies, and in being sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity.

3. Multilingual Education:

Promote mother tongue/regional language instruction in early schooling, provide materials in local languages, encourage students to learn regional arts, literature, folklore.

4. Infrastructure and Resource Support:

Invest in facilities for arts, music, crafts; libraries with local cultural materials; funding for programs involving communities, festivals, rituals, storytelling.

5. Community Participation:

Local communities, elders, practitioners of traditional arts and knowledge should be partners

in education. Schools can organize programs with them, oral histories, local ecology, etc.

6. Assessments and Examinations Reform:

Move away from purely rote/exam-oriented systems; include assessments of cultural knowledge, arts, values, personality development.

7. Policy Support and Funding:

Government must ensure that policies like NEP 2020 are implemented well; budgetary allocations for culture-in-education, IKS research; monitoring & evaluation to see outcomes.

8. Balancing Modernity and Tradition:

Encourage science, technology, modern skills, but not at the cost of cultural roots. Harmonize them: for example, teaching environmental science alongside traditional ecological practices.

Conclusion:

India stands at a crossroads. On one side are the challenges of globalization, economic pressures, and demands of modern education; on the other are its ancient cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, and value traditions that for centuries provided not only knowledge but holistic growth, identity, moral grounding, social cohesion. The importance of Indian education and culture is immense: culture enriches education, brings relevance and meaning, fosters identity, ethics, and sustainable practices, while education gives culture the means to survive, adapt, and flourish in changing times.

To ensure the preservation and constructive integration of culture in education, policy, teacher education, curricula, assessments, and community involvement must all play their parts. India's NEP 2020 is a promising framework, but the real work lies in implementation, resource allocation, and sustained commitment. In doing so, India has the opportunity not only to educate its youth but to nurture rooted, responsible individuals who can carry forward both knowledge and culture into the future.

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