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## Diversity and Integration in Ancient Wisdom: NEP 2020's Vision through the Lens of Indian Knowledge System

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### Abstract:

The NEP, 2020 have built up some new insights to rethink the education system of India. After many debates and controversies, this fresh policy has turn out as having a wider reflection of Indian Knowledge System. The Indian Knowledge System includes a vast range of disciplines which includes, philosophy, mathematics, social sciences, physical sciences, engineering etc. and specifically the traditional knowledge which are too much relevant and still not have the importance as it should be. So, NEP, 2020 basically develops the idea of integration by giving the example of sixty-four *kalās* from the Vātsāyana's *Kāmasūtra*. This paper will discuss about the perspective of ancient Indian wisdom with a systematic review of. Gusome antique treasures which will surely justify if the concept diversity and integration was really there in ancient Indian education system and how this can be relatable at present.

**Key-words:** NEP2020, Puruṣavahuttva, Individuality, Multidisciplinary, Indian Knowledge System, Integration

### Introduction:

The national policy of education is a policy to promote and govern the education system in India, which is formulated by the Govt. of India. Including the both sectors of India i.e., rural and urban, this policy covers each and every direction related to the stages from elementary education to higher education altogether. If we look at the history, this National Education Policy, 2020 can be categorised as the third one chronologically. This policy was first promulgated by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1968, the second policy was implemented by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, which was later modified in 1992(1986/92). The present or the third education policy was developed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This 2020's New Education Policy mainly discusses on reducing the curriculum-based approach and focusses to integrate the learning method with holistic and experiential learning based on discussion-based and analysis-based methods. This policy also proposes to revamping and revisiting the earlier policies, in order to meet the need of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, including SDG4, building value system based on India's tradition and culture.

The National Education Policy, 2020also emphasizes on multidisciplinary approaches. The term discipline means an area of knowledge, a subject that people study or are taught, especially in a university<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary

concepts are integrated. Because, in order to involve different areas of knowledge in interdisciplinary approach, one must recognise the multiple areas of education which play different role in building the holistic personality development. Interdisciplinary method involves different areas of knowledge or study<sup>ii</sup>. Again, the word multi stands for many, hence multidisciplinary method means several different subjects of knowledge<sup>iii</sup>. Now, the question arises here on what ground the integration took place in such widely diverse country like India! Because before going to the concept of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, one must accept the individual existence of different disciplines and their varied outcomes. These approaches will definitely help to break the traditional colonial barriers between different fields, prevailing in Bharat (i.e., India) and also help the learners to look back the ancient wisdom which is the powerhouse of interdisciplinary knowledge. This NEP, 2020 encourages the integration of arts, science, humanities and vocational subjects. This policy also allowing students to explore diverse interests and to develop their understanding by cultivating critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills among them. This policy also aims to foster an education system, where the learners can enjoy adequate flexibilities by choosing their own learning trajectories and practicing more personalised educational experiences.

The integration of multi-dimensional knowledge area of NEP, 2020 is not a merely new concept, but this interdisciplinary approach was already there in the ancient Indian educational system through various literary and philosophical texts. Our paper will try to discuss a comparative analysis between the past and present and will try to emphasize the importance of multi-dimensional learning system through the lens of ancient wisdom.

### **Indian Knowledge System: diversity and integrity:**

The ancient Indian knowledge system is truly based on the concept of holistic and multidisciplinary integration. Most importantly, the *varṇāśramadharmā* or the four stages of life i.e., *brahmacarya*, *gārhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *sanyāsa* indicates that before entering into the household or holding the stage of *gārhasthya* one must complete the tasks of *brahmacarya* with a successful convocation or *samāvartan*<sup>iv</sup>. A student who has studied in due order of three Vedas, or two or even one only, without breaking the chronology (i.e., *samhitā*, *brāhmaṇa*, *āranyaka* and *upaniṣad*), shall enter the next step i.e., *gārhasthya* or householder<sup>v</sup>.

In Sanskrit, knowledge is termed as *jñāna*, this pursuit of knowledge is incomplete without the essence of wisdom i.e., *prajñā* and truth i.e., *satya*. The aim of ancient education system was not just the root learning and acquisition of knowledge, but to prepare the learners for the highest goal of life through ethics and values including *dharma*, *Artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. Self-realisation and liberation were the ultimate aim which can lead to become competent in a wider level. The Indian education system was comprised of diverse fields, such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science and surgery, architecture, engineering, ship-building and navigation, yoga, fine arts, archery and many more. But, the main objective of this ancient educational system was to make each and every student familiar to most of the skills and study-areas which were there in various texts. Some examples of the importance of interdisciplinary approach during ancient time can be discussed as follows:

In the Sāṃkhya philosophy, the concept of multiple selves i.e., *puruṣavahūttva* is considered. Which indicates that the inner self cannot be the same for all the living beings because of the different timing of birth, death and varied emotions enjoyed by different human being at the same time which can easily trace the multiplicity of the *puruṣa*. this acceptance of multiple selves can encourage the educational decorum to consider the individuality of each study area

without decorating the so-called mainstream with some of the subjects and also helps to break the barriers of stream.

Also, the āyurvedic physicians have placed equal emphasis on theoretical and clinical expertise. Prioritizing theoretical knowledge acquisition is essential, followed by focusing on practical knowledge and skill. A medical professional who has mastered both of them is worthy of royal honours<sup>vi</sup>. Because, when a patient approaches, the person who has just studied the theory becomes puzzled much as a coward would when they step across the battlefield. The one who is skilled in practice but is ignorant of the theoretical aspect of the science, does not receive approval of good men. Due to their little knowledge than that of the skilled one in both fields, they are considered as inexpert in the field of their respective duties<sup>vii</sup>. Thus, the integration was highly appreciated by the ancient scholars in every sphere of education. The integrated knowledge can help the specialised scholar in their general situation where they can apply those skills for the sake of preliminary solution.

Again, in the outlet of NEP, 2020 the mention about 64 *kalās* can be found throughout the topic of Higher Education. This fosters the needs towards more holistic and multidisciplinary approach, where we can find not only the areas like scientific studies, language, social science and art, but also different fields like ethics, professional and technical fields, vocational and soft skills, social engagement, discussion & debate etc. These 64 art forms can be found in various ancient Sanskrit texts of different time period such as, in the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāna, *Kādambarī* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa etc. Commonly these 64 art forms can be categorised as follows:

*gītām* (singing), *vādyam* (playing musical instruments), *nṛtyam* (dancing), *ālekhyam* (drawing), *viśeṣakacchedyam* (tattooing), *tanḍulakusumabalivikārāḥ* (adorning an idol with rice and flower), *puṣpāstaranam* (home decor with flowers), *daśanavasanāṅgarāga* (colouring garments, hair, nails and teeth), *mañibhūmikākarma* (designing and decorating with jewels), *śayanaracanam* (designing & making bed/ sleeping furnitures), *udakavādyam* (playing with water-filled vessels to generate musical sounds), *udakāghāṭaḥ* (striking water in different directions in order to store and accumulate), *citrāścayogāḥ* (the knowledge of applying *mantra* and *tantra*), *mālyagrathanavikalpāḥ* (designing garlands, necklaces, wreath), *śekharakāpīḍayojanam* (binding of turbans and chaplets), *nepathyaprayogāḥ* (scenic representation), *karnāpatrabhaṅgāḥ* (making ear-ornaments), *gandhayuktiḥ* (preparing perfumes and odours), *bhūṣaṇayojanam* (designing ornaments and jewels), *endrajālāḥ* (magic), *kaucumārāścayogāḥ* (treating weak person to become healthy), *hastalāghavam* (quickness of manual skills), *vicitrāśākayūṣabhakṣyavikārakriyā* (art of cooking and cookery), *pānakarasarāgāsavayojanam* (art of preparing varieties drinks and juices), *sūcī-vānakarmāṇi* (tailoring, fashion designing), *sūtrakriḍā* (preparing and playing puppets with thread), *vīṇādamarūkavādyāni* (playing *vīṇā*, *damarū*, *charmavādyā*), *prahelikā* (solving puzzles), *pratimālā* (*antākṣarī* play with verses), *dūrvācakayogāḥ* (playing with difficult words), *pustakavācanam* (reading including chanting), *nāṭakākhyāyikādarśanam* (the art of mimicry and imitation), *kāvyaśamyāpūraṇam* (making a meaningful poem with the given scattered words), *paṭṭikā-vāna-vetravikalpāḥ* (designing furniture using bamboo), *takṣakarmāṇi* (designing and carving on gold, iron, wood etc.), *takṣanam* (carpentry), *vāstuvidyā* (architecture), *rūpyaparīkṣā* (knowledge of examining gems, pearl, coins), *dhātuvadaḥ* (knowledge of chemistry and minerology), *mañirāgākarañānam* (knowledge of mines and quarries), *vṛkṣāyurvedayogāḥ* (knowledge of gardening, treating disease and identify the age of plants), *meṣakukkuṭalāvakayuddhavidhiḥ* (art of coaching cock, quail and ram for fighting), *śukasārikāpralāpanam* (art of teaching parrots and sparlings to speak), *utsādanesaṁvahanakeśamardane ca kauśalam* (knowledge of massaging body, hair and

making braids), *akṣaramuṣṭikākathanam* (art of understanding and writing words in peculiar way), *mlecchitavikalpāḥ* (art of delivering words by changing its actual format), *deśabhāṣāvijnanam* (knowledge of different language and regional dialects), *puṣpaśakaṭikā* (art of designing flower carriage), *nimittajñānam* (knowledge of time), *yantramātrikā* (knowledge of designing machines), *dhāraṇamātrikā* (the mantel art of memorising), *sampāthyam* (art of repeating the verse exactly same like the original), *mānasikāvyaḥ* (art of composing meaningful poems), *abhidhānakośaḥ* (knowledge of dictionaries), *chandojnānam* (knowledge of *chandaḥ*), *kriyākalpāḥ* (art of planning and managing events), *chalitakayogāḥ* (knowledge winning in gambling), *vastragopanāni* (art of changing appearance), *dyūtavīśeṣaḥ* (various ways of gambling), *ākaraṣakrīḍā* (art of obtaining possession of others property by means of incantation), *bālakrīḍanakāni* (skill in youthful sports), *vainayikīnāmvidyānāmjnānam* (knowledge of suitable behaviour or *ācārasāstra*), *vaijayikīnāmvidyānāmjnānam* (knowledge of winning over opposition in any situation), *vyāyamikīnāmvidyānāmjnānam* (knowledge of body-postures)<sup>viii</sup>. This varied knowledge can signify how varieties of skills and study areas were counted in the mainstream education system, so that the learner can build their own interest according to their choice and can establish themselves in diverse fields.

### **The multidisciplinary approach of NEP, 2020:**

The multidisciplinary vision discussed above can establish the end of categorical discrimination of professional, traditional and vocational education and enable the present policy to meet its integrated mission of holistic development. The NEP, 2020 specifically mentioned that, “the notion of a ‘knowledge of many arts’ or what in modern times is often called the ‘liberal arts’ (i.e., a liberal notion of the arts) must be brought back to Indian education, as it is exactly the kind of education that will be required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”<sup>ix</sup>.

Also, in the part of school education this 2020 policy emphasized more about the importance of experiential learning along with its exploration and relation among other subjects which can be integrated with a logical base. In the secondary stage, the development of depth and critical thinking through a minute attention towards life aspiration is given preferences. The aim of this policy is not only developing the cognitive domain of a learner, but also building character and shape the all-round development of learners according to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>x</sup>. This policy also holds the essence of art-integration and sports-integration in order to cross the barrier of monotonous classroom learning and to develop the integration between education and wellness. The flexible nature of this policy strengthens the concept of reducing the colonial hard separation among ‘curricular’, ‘extra-curricular’ and ‘co-curricular’, among different streams like, arts, science and commerce, or even between ‘vocational’ and ‘academics’<sup>xi</sup>. This idea of integration, equity and flexibility is highly influenced by the ancient wisdom of Indian Knowledge System.

### **Conclusion:**

From the very ancient time to the present society of greatest technology and global integrity, learning is always sprouts from the will to attain the knowledge or skill. In every step of knowledge gathering the learner must feel the push of his/her psychological intention behind their interest in the particular subject. Because it is said that even a fool does not undertake an action without having some prior intension<sup>xii</sup>. In the *anuvandhacatuṣṭayas* of Vedānta philosophy, the philosophical framework can be found about the four integral pillars of learning i.e., *adhikārī* or aspirants, *viśaya* or subject matter, *sambandha* or the relevance of the subject matter to the students, and lastly the *prayojana* or the purpose of learning. Each of the subject have their respective *anuvandhacatuṣṭayas*, which helps the learners to choose their

area respectively depending on their practical relevance. This 2020 policy aims not only in integrating the subjects in the classroom scenario, but it determines to foster the ancient wisdom according to the choice and needs of learners. Thus, NEP, 2020 will embrace its mission of revisiting the tradition, culture and wisdom which can foster a deeper connection of our students with *Bhāratīya* heritage roots and preparing them in a futuristic way while promoting innovation and global adaptability.

<sup>i</sup>*Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, p.435

<sup>ii</sup>ibid. 820

<sup>iii</sup>ibid., p. 1016

<sup>iv</sup>guruṇā'numataḥsnātvāsamāvṛttoyathāvidhi/

udvahetadvijobhāryāsavarṇāmlakṣaṇānvitān// *Manusmṛti*, III.4

<sup>v</sup>vedānadhītyavedauvāvedavā'piyathākramān/

aviplutabrahmacaryogrhassthāśramamāvasat// ibid., III.2

<sup>vi</sup>etadavaśyamadhyemadhītya ca karmāpyavaśyamupāsītavyamubhayajno hi bhiṣagrājārhhobhavati//

*Susrutasamhita, adhyanasampradānīyaadhyāya*, III.53

<sup>vii</sup>bhavantīcātrayastukevalasāstrajnyahkarmasvapariniṣṭah//

samuhyatāturaṃprāpyaprāpyabhīrurvāhavam// ibid., III.54

<sup>viii</sup>itīcatuḥṣaṣṭīraṅgavidyāḥ/ kāmāsūtrasyāvayavinyah//*Kāmasūtra*of Vatsayana, I.III.15

<sup>ix</sup>*National Education Policy 2020*, XI.1, p.36

<sup>x</sup>ibid. IV.2, p.11

<sup>xi</sup>ibid., IV.9, p.13

<sup>xii</sup>*Sarvavedāntasiddhāntasārasaṃgrahaḥ*, XI

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