

Integration of ‘Gurukul’ Values into the National Education Policy (Nep-2020)

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Abstract

The Gurukul system of education, rooted in ancient Indian traditions, emphasized holistic development through the Guru-Shishya Parampara, value-based learning, mentorship, and harmony with nature. The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) envisions a similar transformative framework with emphasis on experiential learning, character formation, cultural rootedness, and holistic growth. This paper explores the philosophical and pedagogical convergence between Gurukul principles and NEP-2020, examining shared values such as experiential pedagogy, spiritual and moral education, environmental awareness, and skill-based training. A comparative analysis highlights how Gurukul values can enrich policy implementation through mentorship-based teaching models, integration of yoga and meditation, sustainability practices, and community-oriented education. Drawing from historical traditions and contemporary experiments, the study argues that embedding Gurukul values into NEP-2020 can foster a more balanced, inclusive, and future-ready system of education. Such integration not only preserves India’s educational heritage but also addresses the need for value-based learning in a globalizing world.

Keywords: Gurukul System; National Education Policy (NEP-2020); Guru- Shishya Parampara; Value-based Education; Holistic Learning; Experiential Pedagogy; Educational Heritage of India

INTRODUCTION

Education in India has always been deeply intertwined with its cultural and philosophical traditions. The **Gurukul system**, one of the earliest models of organized learning, emphasized holistic development through the *Guru- Shishya Parampara* (teacher–disciple relationship). Learning in the Gurukul was not limited to intellectual training; it encompassed moral discipline, spiritual awareness, practical skills, and harmonious living with nature. This ancient model prepared students to be not only knowledgeable individuals but also responsible members of society, rooted in ethical and cultural values.

Education in India has historically been shaped by the Gurukul system, a model rooted in the Guru-Shishya Parampara, where students lived with their teacher and imbibed knowledge through oral transmission, practice, and moral discipline. This system emphasized holistic development—intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual—anchored in the philosophical framework of the Purusharthas: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. In contrast, modern education in India, particularly after colonial reforms, became largely examination-driven and utilitarian, often neglecting the value-based and experiential aspects of learning.

In contemporary times, the **National Education Policy (NEP-2020)** seeks to redefine India’s educational framework by promoting holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-based learning. It emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, environmental awareness, experiential learning, and the integration of India’s

cultural heritage into modern education. The vision of NEP resonates strongly with many of the foundational principles of the Gurukul system, such as personalized mentorship, community-based learning, and the nurturing of values alongside knowledge.

This paper explores the integration of Gurukul values into NEP-2020, examining the philosophical and pedagogical parallels between the two. It highlights how the wisdom of ancient education can enrich present-day policy implementation, particularly in areas such as character formation, sustainability, spiritual well-being, and inclusive growth. By drawing on historical traditions and aligning them with modern reforms, the study aims to show that the Gurukul model can provide valuable insights for achieving the holistic vision set forth by NEP-2020.

Aim of the Study: The aim of this research is to analyze the philosophical and pedagogical values of the ancient Gurukul system and explore their integration into the National Education Policy (NEP-2020) to promote holistic, value-based, and culturally rooted education in contemporary India.

Problem Statement

While the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) represents a significant shift towards holistic and multidisciplinary education, its implementation faces the challenge of balancing modern requirements with India's cultural and philosophical heritage. Current scholarship and policy discourse often highlight either the strengths of NEP or the historical significance of the Gurukul system, but few studies systematically analyze how core Gurukul values can be meaningfully integrated into NEP-2020. This gap limits the potential to draw from indigenous knowledge systems in shaping a future-ready yet culturally rooted education system.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses the intersection of tradition and modernity in Indian education. By comparing Gurukul values with NEP-2020 provisions, the paper demonstrates how ancient educational wisdom can enrich present reforms. The research contributes to educational philosophy, policy debates, and cultural studies, while also offering practical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and holistic student development. At a broader level, it helps reclaim indigenous educational practices within a globalized framework, ensuring that India's heritage informs its future.

Objectives: This study traces the historical and philosophical foundations of the Gurukul system, analyzes its core values, and examines the aims of NEP-2020 in that light. It conducts a comparative analysis to identify points of convergence and divergence and suggests practical ways to integrate Gurukul values into NEP for holistic and inclusive education.

Literature Review:

Scholars describe the Gurukul system as a model of holistic education that combined academics with discipline, ethics, and community service (Kumar & Mishra, 2024). While valuable for understanding character formation, much of this work tends to romanticize the system without critical or empirical comparison. Comparative studies highlight parallels with modern education, noting the enduring relevance of mentorship, experiential learning, and value-based training (Mehta, 2025; Sharma & Gupta, 2021). However, these remain largely descriptive. With the advent of NEP-2020, research has shifted to policy integration. Jadon et al. (2025) explore how Indian Knowledge Systems are embedded in NEP, while Kulal (2024) critiques implementation gaps. Empirical efforts, such as hybrid "neo-gurukuls," show promise in fostering well-rounded learners (Pandey, 2024; Singh, 2023), though studies are

localized and limited. Overall, literature affirms Gurukul values' relevance but reveals gaps in scalability, inclusivity, and evaluation frameworks within modern education.

Finally, several authors point out important gaps in the current literature. For example, although many works describe Gurukul values in lofty terms (character, discipline, spiritual learning), fewer studies offer rigorous evaluation frameworks or metrics for assessing values or holistic growth in students. Also, issues such as equity (gender, caste, and economic disadvantage), scalability, teacher training, and infrastructure are under-explored. The policy-studies of NEP 2020 often set aspirational goals but also note challenges: implementation capability, resource constraints, and potential disconnect between policy rhetoric and school reality.

Research Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and comparative design to examine how Gurukul values can be integrated into the National Education Policy (NEP-2020). It draws on three approaches: historical-textual analysis, using sources like the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmashastras, and epics to trace the evolution of the Gurukul and its Guru–Shishya Parampara; philosophical interpretation, applying the framework of the Purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha) to explore the relevance of holistic education, value formation, and self-realization, while also comparing Gurukul ideals with Western traditions such as the Platonic Academy; and policy analysis, involving a close reading of NEP-2020 to identify convergence and divergence with Gurukul principles, supported by secondary sources including academic studies, policy reviews, and case-based evidence. Together, these approaches provide a systematic framework to assess the potential for embedding Gurukul-inspired practices into contemporary Indian education. The study employs a comparative lens to systematically map Gurukul values (e.g., holistic learning, mentorship, sustainability, moral education) onto NEP-2020 provisions. Strengths and challenges of integration are highlighted, with special attention to inclusivity, scalability, and relevance in a modern democratic context.

Limitations: The study is primarily qualitative and conceptual, not empirical. It relies on textual and policy analysis rather than field data. Future research may complement this work through case studies of neo-Gurukul schools or empirical evaluation of NEP-2020 reforms in practice.

Analysis & Discussion

Historical & Philosophical Dimensions of the Gurukul System:

Evolution of the Gurukul System: From Vedic Times to Classical India

The Gurukul system of education, dating back to the Vedic period (c. 1500 BCE), is one of the earliest organized pedagogical models in human history. The term Gurukul—literally “the family of the teacher”—signified not just a place of instruction but a complete way of life centered on the guru's ashram. Students, or brahmacharis, left their homes to reside with the guru, receiving all-round training that combined intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. In the early Vedic period, the focus was on the oral transmission of the Vedas through memorization, chanting, and recitation. Special techniques (patha) ensured accuracy, as the Vedas were considered sacred. Education was aimed at clarity of thought, discipline, and inner strength rather than mere utility. With the Upanishadic and epic periods, the scope widened to include philosophical reflection on Brahman, Atman, and Moksha, shifting from ritual learning to reflective spirituality. By the classical age (500 BCE–1200 CE), Gurukuls coexisted with universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramashila. While these institutions offered structured, specialized study, the Gurukul retained its hallmark of close teacher–student bonds and

holistic formation. Its longevity and adaptability underscore its central role in shaping Indian civilization.

Philosophical Foundations of Gurukul Education: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha

The Gurukul system was designed for holistic human development, guided by the Purusharthas—the four aims of life in Indian philosophy. Dharma formed its ethical foundation, training students in discipline, truth, compassion, and social duty, ensuring knowledge was aligned with righteousness. Artha prepared learners for worldly responsibilities through study of polity, economics, and agriculture, but always under dharmic guidance. Kama recognized the role of arts, literature, music, and aesthetics, cultivating refined enjoyment regulated by moral living. The ultimate goal, Moksha, emphasized self-realization and liberation through inquiry, meditation, and spiritual discipline. Thus, Gurukul education promoted a balanced vision—integrating material and spiritual growth, training individuals to fulfill social duties while striving for inner freedom. Unlike modern systems that often stress career success, Gurukul pedagogy harmonized body, mind, and spirit. In this way, the Gurukul system offered a balanced vision of education—preparing individuals to live responsibly in society while aspiring for spiritual freedom. Unlike modern systems, which often prioritize career success, Gurukul pedagogy aimed at a harmonious integration of body, mind, and spirit.

Comparative Study of Gurukul and Platonic Academy: East–West Perspectives

The Gurukul system of India and the Platonic Academy of Greece (c. 387 BCE) stand among the earliest educational traditions, both aiming to cultivate holistic human beings rather than narrow specialists. In the Gurukul, learning was spiritual and oral, guided by the guru as mentor and moral exemplar. Education emphasized intuition, meditation, discipline, and realization, with knowledge (vidya) seen as transformative for spiritual liberation. By contrast, the Platonic Academy functioned as a community of inquiry, teaching philosophy, mathematics, and science through dialogue and dialectics. Plato envisioned education as a path to virtue, truth, and just governance, culminating in the ideal of the philosopher-king. Despite differences, both traditions shared key values: virtue over technical skill, truth and wisdom as ultimate aims, and integration of philosophy with practical life. While the Gurukul leaned toward spiritual transcendence (moksha), the Academy emphasized rational truth and civic order (the Good).

Role of Guru- Shishya Parampara in Preservation of Vedic Knowledge

Central to the Gurukul system was the Guru–Shishya Parampara, a teacher–disciple lineage that preserved Vedic knowledge for millennia. The guru was more than an instructor; he embodied wisdom, guiding disciples through both study and daily life. Students (Shishyas) lived with the guru, performing service (seva), which fostered discipline, humility, and close transmission of values alongside knowledge. Since the Vedas were transmitted orally for centuries, accuracy depended on this intimate bond. Specialized recitation methods (ghanas, jatas, krama patha) safeguarded hymns against error. UNESCO’s recognition of Vedic chanting as Intangible Cultural Heritage affirms the success of this oral pedagogy. Beyond texts, gurus imparted ethics, spirituality, and life philosophy, ensuring not just intellectual mastery but personal transformation. This lineage preserved India’s spiritual and intellectual heritage, sustaining rituals, philosophy, and cultural continuity. Even today, mentorship models, ashram schools, and neo-gurukuls echo its relevance, showing its timeless role in Indian education. In modern times, this model continues to inspire Indian education—through mentorship programs, ashram schools, and neo-gurukuls—demonstrating its relevance as a timeless pedagogy.

Core Values of the Gurukul System: The Gurukul system emphasized holistic development of body, mind, and spirit. Students were trained in Vedas, philosophy, ethics, astronomy, medicine, and martial

arts, while living simply in the guru's ashram. This lifestyle cultivated discipline, humility, service, and harmony with nature. Central to the system was the Guru–Shishya Parampara, a relationship of mentorship and reverence, where the guru guided disciples in both worldly duties and spiritual realization. Education was grounded in the Purusharthas—Dharma (duty), Artha (prosperity), Kama (refined enjoyment), and Moksha (liberation)—ensuring a balance of material responsibility and spiritual growth. Gurukul values were thus inseparable from the larger goals of Indian civilization.

Core Values of NEP-2020: The National Education Policy 2020 echoes many Gurukul ideals while addressing modern challenges. It envisions holistic and multidisciplinary learning, integrating sciences, arts, vocational skills, and ethics. Like the Gurukul, it stresses value-based education, focusing on character, cultural rootedness, and environmental responsibility. NEP emphasizes experiential and competency-based learning, moving beyond rote memorization. A key distinction is its focus on equity and inclusivity, ensuring access for women and marginalized groups. By promoting Indian Knowledge Systems, yoga, and traditional arts, NEP seeks to reconnect learners with heritage while preparing them for global citizenship.

Thus, the Gurukul system and NEP-2020 share a vision of education as a process of shaping responsible, ethical, and holistic human beings rather than mere skill-acquirers. Gurukul's emphasis on the Guru–Shishya bond aligns with NEP's focus on mentorship and teacher development, while its blend of spiritual and practical learning resonates with NEP's call for interdisciplinary education. Both stress value-based, experiential learning rooted in cultural heritage. The key divergence lies in inclusivity: Gurukuls were historically limited by caste and gender, whereas NEP seeks universal access and equity. Despite this difference, the enduring spirit of Gurukul—mentorship, holistic growth, and cultural rootedness—finds renewed expression in NEP's vision of lifelong learners.

Core Values: Gurukul vs. NEP-2020

Dimension	Gurukul System (Ancient India)	NEP-2020 (Modern Policy)
Aim of Education	Holistic development of body, mind, and spirit; pursuit of Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha	Holistic and multidisciplinary learning; development of 21st-century skills and values
Pedagogy	Oral tradition, experiential learning, close interaction with guru	Experiential, competency-based, flexible pedagogy with focus on critical thinking
Teacher–Student Relationship	<i>Guru- Shishya Parampara</i> — mentorship, reverence, character building	Mentorship models, continuous teacher training, fostering respect and collaboration
Curriculum	Vedas, philosophy, ethics, astronomy, medicine, martial arts, arts	Integration of arts, sciences, vocational skills, technology, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)
Value Orientation	Discipline, humility, simplicity, selfless service, spiritual awakening	Ethics, constitutional values, environmental responsibility, cultural rootedness
Inclusivity	Traditionally restricted by caste, class, and gender (though with some exceptions)	Explicit emphasis on equity, access, and inclusion for all, including marginalized groups
Connection to	Learning in ashrams/forests;	Environmental awareness, sustainability,

Nature	sustainable living with nature	climate education
End Goal	Self-realization, liberation (Moksha), balanced worldly life	Global citizenship, employability, personal growth, and value-based living

Few Case Studies – Modern “Neo-Gurukuls” and Educational Experiments

Dayalbagh Educational Model (Agra, Uttar Pradesh): The Dayalbagh Educational Institute (DEI) represents a unique adaptation of Gurukul ideals in modern higher education. Rooted in the *ashram* tradition, DEI emphasizes value-based education, selfless service, and holistic personality development alongside modern disciplines such as engineering, management, and sciences. Community living, agricultural work, environmental stewardship, and spiritual practice are integrated into the daily routine, echoing the Gurukul’s vision of learning as a way of life. Its focus on simplicity, discipline, and character formation demonstrates how ancient values can guide sustainable modern education.

Gurukul Kangri University (Haridwar, Uttarakhand): Founded in 1902 by Swami Shraddhanand as part of the Arya Samaj movement, Gurukul Kangri was one of the earliest experiments to revive the ancient system in a modern format. The institution was designed as a residential school imparting Vedic learning, Sanskrit, and moral education, alongside modern sciences. Today, it functions as a deemed university recognized by the UGC, offering diverse programs but retaining its cultural and spiritual ethos. This experiment illustrates the possibility of blending traditional Gurukul pedagogy with formal, accredited higher education.

Swami Rama Himalayan University & Himalayan Institute (Dehradun, Uttarakhand): Inspired by yogic traditions, Swami Rama’s institutions integrate spiritual education, yoga, and meditation into professional training in medicine, nursing, and sciences. Students are encouraged to balance modern career preparation with value-based and contemplative practices. In this way, the model combines the *guru-disciple* ethos with contemporary institutional structures.

Neo-Gurukul Schools in Pune and Bengaluru: In several urban centers, experimental schools inspired by the Gurukul system have emerged. These schools emphasize experiential learning, yoga, music, nature education, and community service. One such example is the *Gurukul School in Pune*, which blends the CBSE curriculum with Gurukul-inspired practices like chanting, meditation, and ecological awareness. Another example is *The Green Gurukul* in Bengaluru, which uses sustainable living, organic farming, and eco-friendly practices to cultivate environmental consciousness among children.

Rishi Valley School (Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh): Founded by the philosopher J. Krishnamurti, Rishi Valley School is not called a Gurukul but embodies many of its principles. It emphasizes simple living, close teacher-student interaction, self-awareness, and education in harmony with nature. The curriculum integrates academics with arts, crafts, farming, and environmental conservation. The school’s “Rural Education Centre” also works with village children, demonstrating inclusivity that was often lacking in ancient Gurukuls.

Analysis of Neo-Gurukul Models: These experiments reveal that while structural replication of the traditional Gurukul is not always possible, its core values—holistic learning, moral training, mentorship, and environmental harmony—are being reinterpreted in innovative ways. Some models, like Gurukul Kangri, directly revive Vedic learning, while others, like Rishi Valley and Dayalbagh, reinterpret Gurukul values for modern and inclusive contexts. Collectively, these examples show that the Gurukul spirit is not confined to history; it remains relevant as a guiding principle for designing sustainable and value-based education under NEP-2020.

Waldorf Schools (Global, founded by Rudolf Steiner, 1919): The Waldorf system of education, now spread across more than 60 countries, shares several philosophical similarities with the ancient Gurukul model. Developed by Rudolf Steiner, Waldorf schools emphasize holistic development of the child—integrating academics with arts, crafts, music, drama, and nature-based activities. Like the Gurukul, Waldorf pedagogy prioritizes character formation, creativity, and moral development over standardized testing. Teacher-student relationships are central, with a focus on mentorship and long-term guidance. Education in Waldorf schools also integrates spiritual and cultural dimensions, though framed within a universal humanistic perspective rather than a specific religious tradition.

The parallel between Waldorf schools and the Gurukul system demonstrates that the quest for holistic, value-based, and experiential education is global. While Gurukuls were rooted in Vedic cosmology and spiritual liberation, and Waldorf schools in anthroposophy, both share a commitment to education as character-building and life-preparation rather than narrow vocational training. This comparison also suggests that NEP-2020's call for experiential, multidisciplinary, and value-oriented education resonates with international movements in alternative schooling.

Comparative Analysis – Points of Convergence & Divergence

Though separated by millennia and distinct socio-political contexts, the Gurukul system and the National Education Policy (NEP-2020) share several common educational ideals, while also reflecting important differences.

Points of Convergence: Gurukul integrated body, mind, and spirit through the Purusharthas, while NEP advocates holistic, multidisciplinary growth—cognitive, ethical, and physical. It emphasized hands-on practice and daily responsibilities; NEP stresses experiential, competency-based learning over rote memorization. Both promote moral and ethical development—discipline, humility, and service in Gurukul; ethics, constitutional values, and environmental awareness in NEP. The Guru-Shishya Parampara finds a modern parallel in NEP's emphasis on teacher training, mentorship, and personalized guidance. Gurukul system has balanced sacred learning with sciences and arts; NEP encourages inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems alongside modern disciplines.

Points of Divergence: Gurukuls were limited by caste and gender barriers, while NEP explicitly promotes universal access and equity. Gurukul sought moksha and moral duty; NEP emphasizes employability, global citizenship, and lifelong learning. Oral tradition defined Gurukul; NEP incorporates technology, digital tools, and modern assessments. Gurukul was small, intimate, and residential; NEP envisions nationwide systemic reform. Gurukul was rooted in Vedic cosmology, while NEP is grounded in constitutional and democratic values.

Despite divergences, both models converge on holistic, experiential, and value-based education. Integrating Gurukul's timeless strengths—mentorship, moral formation, harmony with nature—into NEP's inclusive framework can help India build an education system that is culturally rooted yet globally relevant.

Conclusion & Recommendations:

The convergence of Gurukul ideals with the vision of NEP-2020 presents a unique opportunity to reshape Indian education into a system that is both culturally rooted and globally relevant. Gurukul traditions—mentorship, value-based learning, experiential pedagogy, and harmony with nature—resonate strongly with NEP's emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary, and ethical education. However,

integration requires more than rhetorical acknowledgment; it demands concrete initiatives such as strengthening teacher mentorship programs, embedding value-education within all subjects, integrating yoga and mindfulness into daily routines, and expanding community engagement and nature-based learning. Crucially, Gurukul-inspired practices must be reinterpreted within a democratic framework, ensuring inclusivity for women, marginalized groups, and learners from all socio-economic backgrounds. Policies should also support the systematic inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), through language access, interdisciplinary electives, and dedicated research initiatives.

The Gurukul system, with its roots in the Purusharthas and the Guru–Shishya Parampara, represents one of the most enduring educational traditions in human history. Its goal was not merely livelihood but the cultivation of character, ethical responsibility, and spiritual realization. Gurukul is balanced development of body, mind, spirit. NEP-2020, while modern in scope, aspires to similar goals—holistic learning, value orientation, and cultural rootedness—yet places them within an inclusive, democratic, and future-ready framework. Case studies from neo-gurukuls and innovative institutions such as Dayalbagh, Gurukul Kangri, and Rishi Valley demonstrate that these values can be effectively adapted for contemporary needs. The task, therefore, is not to replicate the Gurukul in its historical form but to revive its spirit—mentorship, simplicity, service, and inner growth—within modern structures. By doing so, India can create an educational model that balances ancient wisdom with global aspirations, preparing citizens who are both responsible and enlightened.

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