

## Bridging Tradition and Progress: The Role of Education in Sustaining Indian Culture

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<https://doi.org/10.64882/ijrt.v14.iS1.964>

### Abstract

Few civilizations can match the age and diversity of India’s culture, which has been developing for millennia. Along with this rich heritage, the Indian education system has also grown, combining traditional values with modern goals. This paper looks at how education in India has developed from the past to the present, its guiding ideas, major changes over time, and the challenges it faces today. It also discusses how education helps protect and promote Indian culture in today’s changing world.

**Keywords:** Ancient Gurukul System, Nalanda and Taxila Universities, National Education Policy (NEP), Traditional values and modern goals, Primary to higher education.

### Introduction

India is known for its rich and diverse culture, shaped by thousands of years of history, traditions, and philosophies. From ancient civilizations like the Indus Valley to the modern democratic nation, Indian culture has always valued knowledge, learning, and moral development [1]. Education has played a central role in this journey, acting not just as a tool for acquiring skills but also as a vital means of transmitting values, beliefs, and traditions across generations. [2].

The Indian education system has evolved through various stages — from the ancient Gurukul tradition, where learning was closely linked to nature and moral teachings, to the colonial period that introduced Western models of education, and finally to the modern structure that blends global knowledge with local heritage [3],[4]. Today, it plays a dual role: preparing individuals for professional and social life while preserving the country’s cultural identity [5].

In a rapidly changing world, where globalization and technology are influencing every aspect of life, the Indian education system faces the challenge of balancing modernization with the preservation of cultural roots [6],[7]. This paper explores the historical background, key

philosophies, changes over time, present challenges, and the contribution of education to safeguarding and enriching Indian culture.

#### 1. Historical Perspective of Indian Education

The history of Indian education reflects the country’s cultural, social, and political journey. Over thousands of years, it has passed through several distinct phases, each shaped by different philosophies, social needs, and external influences [8].

### **Ancient Education System (Before 12th Century CE)**

#### Gurukul System:

In ancient India, education revolved around the Gurukul system, where students (shishya) lived with their guru in a forest ashram. Learning went far beyond academics—it aimed at the all-round development of the individual, encompassing the Vedas, Upanishads, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and ethical values. [9].

Example: *Acharya Chanakya* mentoring *Chandragupta Maurya*; Takshashila University teaching politics, economics, and warfare.

#### Ancient Universities:

Great universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila drew scholars from all over Asia. They provided advanced education in fields ranging from grammar, logic, and medicine to Buddhist philosophy, law, and the arts. [10].

Example: Nalanda University (established in the 5th century CE) had over 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers.

#### Medieval Period (12th to 18th Century CE)

With the arrival of Islamic rule, Madrasa system of education became prominent. These institutions emphasized religious studies, Arabic and Persian languages, along with subjects like mathematics, astronomy, and law.

Example: *The Madrasa at Delhi established by Sultan Iltutmish in the 13th century.*

Regional education systems also flourished, *especially in South India*, where temple schools taught *music, dance, Sanskrit, and literature.*

#### Colonial Period (18th to 20th Century CE)

Under British rule, the education system shifted towards Western-style formal schooling.

#### Key Changes:

Introduction of English as a medium of instruction (Macaulay’s Minute on Education, 1835).

Establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857.

Focus on producing clerks and administrators for colonial administration.

Example: The Wood’s Dispatch (1854) is often called the “Magna Carta of English Education in India” because it laid the foundation for modern school and university systems.

### **Post-Independence Period (1947 onwards)**

Education became a fundamental right and a key instrument for nation-building.

The government established important regulatory and academic organizations, including the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

Successive National Policies on Education (1968, 1986, and 2020) gave priority to cultivating scientific temperament, advancing social equity, and protecting India’s cultural legacy.

Example: The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) became global symbols of excellence [11],[12].

The Post-Independence Period of Indian Education (1947 onwards) with context, reforms, and examples:

After India gained independence in 1947, the leaders of the nation recognized education as a cornerstone for rebuilding the country, reducing poverty, and promoting equality. The vision was to create a system that combined *modern scientific knowledge with India’s cultural values*.

Early Reforms (1947–1960s)

Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49): Focused on improving higher education and suggested creating universities as centers of excellence and research.

Secondary Education Commission (1952–53): The 1952–53 Secondary Education Commission recommended broadening the curriculum, promoting vocational courses, and incorporating moral and ethical instruction.

Constitutional Provision: The Constitution of India, in Article 45, made it a fundamental goal of the state to provide free and compulsory schooling for all children up to 14 years.

Example: *Establishment of the first IIT at Kharagpur in 1951 to promote technical education.*

### **National Policy on Education – 1968**

*First major education policy of independent India.*

Emphasized:

Promoting national unity through a common school system.

Encouraging regional languages along with Hindi and English.

Strengthening science and technology education. Example: Expansion of Kendriya Vidyalayas to provide quality education for children of transferable central government employees.

Expansion and Quality Focus (1970s–1980s)

Growth of rural schools under schemes like *Operation Blackboard* to provide basic infrastructure (classrooms, blackboards, teachers).

National Policy on Education – 1986:

Introduced the concept of *Navodaya Vidyalayas* for talented rural students.

Emphasized adult literacy and women’s education.

Promoted vocational streams in secondary schools. Example: *Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas* established in rural districts for meritorious students.

### Liberalization Era (1990s–2000s)

*The 1990s saw private sector participation in higher education and professional courses.*

*Right to Education Act (2009)* made education a fundamental right for children aged 6–14 years.

*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001)* launched to achieve universal primary education.

Example: Huge rise in engineering and management institutions due to demand for skilled manpower.

Recent Reforms – National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Aims to transform India into a knowledge economy [11],[12].

Key changes:

5+3+3+4 school structure replacing the 10+2 system.

- Multidisciplinary universities and flexible curriculum.
- Mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction till Grade 5.
- Focus on digital learning and vocational skills from an early age.

Example: Integration of coding, artificial intelligence, and entrepreneurship into school syllabi.

Impact:

Post-independence reforms created a system that:

Expanded access to education at all levels.

Produced globally recognized institutions like IITs, IIMs, AIIMS.

Increased literacy rates from ~18% in 1951 to over 77% in 2023.

Still faces challenges like quality gaps, digital divide, and unequal access.

### National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 – A Detailed Overview

The National Education Policy 2020 is the third major education policy in independent India, following the ones in 1968 and 1986. Announced on 29 July 2020, it seeks to completely transform India’s education system to meet the needs of the 21st-century knowledge economy while preserving the country’s cultural heritage [12,13,14]. It covers school education, higher education, teacher training, vocational education, and the use of technology in learning.

#### Vision and Objectives

- Holistic and Multidisciplinary Learning: Education should not be limited to narrow specialization; students should develop multiple skills and perspectives.
- Equitable and Inclusive Education: Equal opportunities for all, including disadvantaged groups and rural areas.
- Flexibility: Students can choose subjects across arts, sciences, and vocational fields without rigid boundaries.
- Rooted in Culture, Oriented to Global Needs: Promotes Indian languages, arts, and values alongside modern technology and global skills.

#### School Education Reforms

New Structure – 5+3+3+4 System

- Foundational Stage (5 years): 3 years of pre- primary + Classes 1 and 2; focus on play-

based and activity-based learning.

- Preparatory Stage (3 years): Classes 3–5; focus on basic literacy, numeracy, and gradual introduction to subjects.
- Middle Stage (3 years): Classes 6–8; emphasis on experiential learning in science, mathematics, arts, and humanities.
- Secondary Stage (4 years): Classes 9–12; multidisciplinary study, flexibility to choose subjects, and skill training.

Mother Tongue/Regional Language as Medium: At least till Grade 5, preferably till Grade 8, to promote better comprehension and cultural connection.

Emphasis on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: Mission “NIPUN Bharat” to ensure all children achieve basic reading and math skills by Grade 3.

Vocational Education from Grade 6:

Includes internships and skill-based learning.

Board Exams: To be made easier, with testing spread across the year focusing on application of knowledge, not rote learning.

Higher Education Reforms Multidisciplinary Universities: All higher education institutions to offer diverse subject combinations (arts, science, vocational, professional).

Multiple Entry and Exit System:

Certificate after 1 year Diploma after 2 years

Bachelor’s degree after 3 years

Bachelors with Research after 4 years

National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC): Single regulator for all higher education except legal and medical.

Target Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER): Increase GER in higher education to 50% by 2035.

Internationalization: Top global universities allowed to set up campuses in India.

### **Teacher Education and Training**

- Four-Year Integrated B.Ed.: Mandatory qualification for school teachers by 2030. Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Regular training programs to upgrade teachers’ skills.
- Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotions: Transparent and performance-driven process.

### **Use of Technology in Education**

- National Educational Technology Forum (NETF): Platform for free exchange of ideas on technology use in learning.
- Digital content in regional languages through DIKSHA and SWAYAM platforms.
- Virtual labs for science and engineering subjects.
- Vocational Education and Skill Development
- Aim to provide vocational exposure to at least 50% of students by 2025.
- Includes training in local arts, crafts, and entrepreneurship.

### **Assessment and Examination Changes**

- Shift from rote memorization to competency-based assessment.
- Introduction of PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) as a national body to set exam standards.
- Promoting Indian Culture and Languages
- Strengthening Sanskrit and other classical languages.
- Documentation and digital preservation of Indian arts, heritage, and literature.
- Encouragement for schools to celebrate local festivals, music, and traditions.

### **Key Goals for 2040**

- Universal access to quality education from preschool to Grade 12.
- Lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Integration of cultural values with global competencies.
- Impact and Significance: The NEP 2020 is transformative because it:
  - Breaks down rigid subject boundaries.
  - Brings flexibility, creativity, and critical thinking into the classroom.
  - Balances modern skills with traditional values.
  - Positions India as a global knowledge hub.

A detailed discussion on how education helps protect and promote Indian culture in today’s changing world. Education as a Guardian and Promoter of Indian Culture in the Modern Era: In the 21st century, globalization, rapid technological growth, and cultural exchanges have created a highly interconnected world. While this brings opportunities for innovation and collaboration, it also poses a challenge — the risk of cultural dilution. In such a context, the Indian education system plays a vital role in both preserving and promoting India’s cultural identity [15].

### **Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

**Inclusion of Cultural Content in Curriculum:** Schools and universities integrate Indian history, literature, music, and art into their syllabi. This ensures that students understand the roots of their heritage.

Example: NCERT history books covering the Vedic age, Mughal architecture, and freedom movement.

**Language Education:** Promoting regional languages alongside Hindi and English helps preserve linguistic diversity.

Example: Three-language formula encouraging study of mother tongue, Hindi, and English.

**Traditional Knowledge Systems:** Reviving ancient sciences like Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vastu Shastra in academic programs protects indigenous wisdom from fading away.

Example: International Yoga Day awareness campaigns in schools and colleges.

### **Ethics and Moral Education**

Courses in moral science, philosophy, and value education promote empathy, respect for elders, and community harmony. Festivals and Cultural Activities in Schools Celebrating

Diwali, Eid, Pongal, and Christmas in educational institutions promotes inclusivity and respect for diversity.

### **Arts and Performing Traditions**

- Training in classical music, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and folk dances keeps artistic traditions alive.
- Example: Sangeet Natak Akademi collaborations with universities.
- Adapting Culture to Modern Context
- Digital Platforms for Cultural Learning
- Online archives, virtual museum tours, and e-learning modules make cultural knowledge accessible worldwide [16]. Example: Digital Bharat portal showcasing Indian manuscripts and artifacts.

### **Entrepreneurship in Cultural Industries**

Education in design, film, tourism, and handicrafts merges culture with economic opportunities.

Example: NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) promoting traditional textile designs globally.

Global Representation of Indian Culture

### **International Exchange Programs**

Students studying abroad or in foreign exchange programs become cultural ambassadors, sharing Indian values and traditions. Promotion of Yoga, Ayurveda, and Cuisine Academic institutions and NGOs conduct workshops globally to promote these cultural elements.

### **Conclusion**

The Indian education system has evolved through a remarkable journey from the holistic and value-driven Gurukul system of the ancient period, through the scholarly excellence of universities like Nalanda and Takshashila, the madrasa and temple education traditions of the medieval era, and the structural changes introduced during the colonial period, to the modern reforms of independent India. Each stage has left an imprint, shaping a system that reflects both India’s cultural richness and its adaptability to change. In today’s globalized world, education serves as both a preserver of heritage and a bridge to modernity. It safeguards ancient wisdom, moral values, languages, and arts, while also integrating scientific knowledge, technology, and global skills. Policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aim to strengthen this dual role by promoting inclusive, flexible, and skill-oriented learning rooted in Indian culture. The true strength of the Indian education system lies in its ability to balance tradition and innovation — ensuring that while students are prepared to excel in a competitive, interconnected world, they also carry forward the timeless values, philosophies, and identity that define India. By nurturing this balance, education can continue to be the driving force in preserving the soul of the nation while empowering its citizens for the future.

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