



RELEVANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SAVITRIBAI PHULE'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN SHAPING THE VISION OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

Dr. Nisha Changra

Assistant Professor, Shanti Alya Education and Training Institute

Rampur Keonthal, Shimla-11

Abstract: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift towards holistic, inclusive, equitable, value-based and learner-centred education in India. The educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule hold considerable relevance in shaping and understanding this vision. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the manifestation of the inherent potential of the individual, character formation, self-reliance, moral values and the harmonious development of body, mind and spirit. In contrast, Savitribai Phule advocated education as a powerful instrument for social transformation, particularly for women, marginalized communities and other disadvantaged sections of society. This paper examines the relevance of their educational philosophies in relation to the major vision and provisions of NEP 2020. It highlights the convergence between Vivekananda's ideas of holistic personality development, value-based education and empowerment and Savitribai Phule's emphasis on equality, inclusion, women's education and social justice. The study adopts an analytical and interpretative approach based on secondary sources, including the writings and educational ideas of both reformers and the policy framework of NEP 2020. The analysis revealed that the principles of holistic development, character building, equitable access, gender inclusion, social justice and empowerment embedded in NEP 2020 strongly resonate with the educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule. The paper concludes that their educational thought continues to provide an important philosophical foundation for realizing the transformative and inclusive vision of NEP 2020 and for building an equitable, enlightened and empowered society.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Savitribai Phule, Educational Philosophy, National Education Policy 2020, Holistic Education, Inclusive Education, Social Justice, Value-Based Education.

Introduction

Education in India has always been regarded as a powerful instrument for individual transformation, social development, and national progress. It is not merely a means of acquiring knowledge and skills but also a process of developing character, values, social responsibility, equality,

and human potential. The Indian educational tradition has historically emphasized the holistic development of individuals and the use of education as a means of social transformation. In this context, the educational ideas of eminent Indian thinkers and reformers continue to hold considerable relevance for contemporary education.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced after a gap of more than three decades, represents a significant transformation in the Indian education system. The policy seeks to address the changing educational, social, economic, technological and cultural needs of the twenty-first century. It emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary education, conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, ethical values, experiential learning, equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning. The vision of NEP 2020 is rooted not only in contemporary educational requirements but also in the rich Indian knowledge tradition and the educational ideals of Indian thinkers and reformers.

Among the prominent contributors to Indian educational thought, Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule occupy an important place. Although they worked in different social contexts and emphasized different dimensions of education, both viewed education as a powerful means of human and social transformation. Their educational philosophies provide important perspectives for understanding several principles reflected in NEP 2020.

Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda regarded education as a process of bringing out the inherent potential and perfection within an individual. According to him, education should not be confined to the accumulation of information; rather, it should develop the body, mind, intellect, and spirit in an integrated manner. He emphasized character formation, self-confidence, moral strength, discipline, fearlessness, and the development of a strong and responsible personality. His educational philosophy placed the learner at the centre and viewed education as a means of empowering individuals to realize their inner potential and contribute positively to society.

Vivekananda's emphasis on holistic development, character building, experiential learning, self-confidence, values, and the development of human potential finds significant relevance in NEP 2020. The policy similarly emphasizes the holistic development of learners by integrating intellectual, emotional, social, physical, ethical, and creative dimensions of education. Its focus on critical thinking, creativity, ethical and constitutional values, life skills, and the development of well-rounded individuals reflects several ideals associated with Vivekananda's educational thought.

Educational Philosophy of Savitribai Phule

Savitribai Phule occupies a pioneering position in the history of women's education and social reform in India. She regarded education as a powerful instrument for liberation, empowerment, equality, and social transformation. At a time when access to education was severely restricted for women and marginalized communities, she worked actively to promote education for girls and socially disadvantaged sections. Her educational philosophy was deeply connected with the principles of equality, social justice, women's empowerment, universal access to education, and the removal of social discrimination.

Savitribai Phule believed that education could challenge social inequalities and enable oppressed and marginalized groups to participate more fully in society. Her efforts therefore extended beyond the expansion of literacy and focused on creating an equitable society through education. These principles have strong relevance to NEP 2020, particularly its emphasis on equitable and inclusive education, gender equality, access and participation, inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and reduction of disparities in educational opportunities.

Linkage with the Vision of NEP 2020

The educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule provide two complementary dimensions for understanding the vision of NEP 2020. Vivekananda's emphasis on holistic human development, character formation, values, self-realization and intellectual and moral development complement the policy's focus on developing well-rounded individuals equipped with knowledge, skills, values and competencies. Similarly, Savitribai Phule's emphasis on education as a means of emancipation, equality, women's empowerment, social justice and inclusion resonates with NEP 2020's commitment to equitable and inclusive education. Thus, the vision of NEP 2020 can be examined not only from the perspective of contemporary educational reforms but also through the philosophical contributions of Indian thinkers who envisioned education as a means of individual development and social transformation. The convergence of their ideas with the major principles of NEP 2020 demonstrates the continuing relevance of India's indigenous educational thought in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

The present paper, therefore, attempts to examine the relevance of the educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule in shaping and understanding the vision of the National Education Policy 2020. It particularly focuses on the convergence between their educational principles and the major provisions of NEP 2020 concerning holistic development, value-based education, equity, inclusion, women's empowerment, social justice and the development of responsible and empowered citizens.

Background of the study

Studies Related to Swami Vivekananda

Several studies have examined the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy to contemporary Indian education and NEP 2020. Singh and Saxena (2024) highlighted the relevance of his ideas of holistic development, character formation, self-reliance, and practical learning to the objectives of NEP 2020. Singh and Devi (2024) similarly emphasized self-realization, character building, social responsibility, and the integration of moral and practical education. Collectively, these studies indicate that Vivekananda's educational thought provides a strong philosophical basis for understanding the policy's emphasis on holistic personality development, value-based education, experiential learning, character formation, and socially responsible citizenship.

Studies Related to Savitribai Phule

Research on Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy emphasizes education as a means of equality, empowerment, social justice, and emancipation from caste and gender-based discrimination. Thilakom (2023) specifically examined Phule's contributions with reference to NEP 2020 and found strong parallels between her advocacy for girls and disadvantaged communities and the policy's commitments to inclusive education, equal access, gender equality and social justice. Santra and Madhu (2023) also emphasized Phule's commitment to universal education, women's empowerment, and opposition to caste- and gender-based exclusion. Together, these studies establish that Phule's educational philosophy has strong relevance to the equity, inclusion, gender equality, social justice, and empowerment dimensions of NEP 2020.

This reviewed literature revealed two complementary dimensions of educational transformation. Vivekananda's philosophy primarily emphasizes the transformation of the individual through holistic development, character, values, self-realization, and practical learning, whereas Savitribai Phule's philosophy emphasizes the transformation of society through equality, women's education, social justice, and the removal of caste and gender barriers. These two dimensions closely correspond with the major goals of NEP 2020. However, most existing studies examine Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule separately, with limited research bringing their philosophies together in a comparative framework. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which examines how their complementary educational visions can contribute to understanding the philosophical foundations and contemporary relevance of NEP 2020.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the core educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule with special reference to holistic development, values, equality, social justice and empowerment.
2. To critically analyse the relevance and convergence of their educational philosophies with the vision and major provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative, conceptual and documentary research approach to examine the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's and Savitribai Phule's educational philosophies to the vision of NEP 2020. Data were collected from secondary sources, including the original writings of the two thinkers, scholarly books, peer-reviewed research articles and official documents of the Government of India, particularly NEP 2020. The selected literature was analysed through thematic and comparative analysis, focusing on themes such as holistic development, values, character building, equality, women's education, social justice, empowerment, equity and inclusion. The study then compared these themes with the major provisions of NEP 2020 to identify areas of convergence, complementarity and contemporary relevance.

1. Analysis of the Core Educational Philosophies of Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule

➤ Swami Vivekananda's Educational Philosophy

Swami Vivekananda conceived education as a process of human development and the realization of one's inherent potential. His educational philosophy was rooted in the idea that education should bring out the best within an individual rather than merely impart information. He emphasized the development of the whole personality through the harmonious growth of the physical, mental, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human life. Consequently, education, for Vivekananda, was closely associated with self-confidence, self-reliance, character formation, and the development of inner strength. Contemporary analyses similarly identify holistic development, character building, self-reliance and practical learning as central features of his educational thought (Singh & Saxena, 2024). A central concept in Vivekananda's philosophy is "*man-making education*." Education should develop strong, fearless, morally responsible and socially conscious individuals capable of contributing to the welfare of society. Thus, intellectual development alone is insufficient; education must cultivate character and ethical conduct. His emphasis on moral and value education also connects individual development with social responsibility. Bhat (2016) notes that Vivekananda's educational aims extend from the individual to the social and universal levels, while recent scholarship identifies

character formation, moral development, self-reliance and social responsibility as continuing dimensions of his philosophy.

Vivekananda also attached considerable importance to practical and life-oriented education. Education should equip learners to face real-life challenges, develop confidence, acquire useful skills, and become self-dependent. This perspective moves education beyond bookish knowledge towards practical competence and purposeful living. Singh and Devi (2024) and Singh and Saxena (2024) similarly identify practical learning, vocational orientation, self-reliance, and holistic development among the significant dimensions of Vivekananda's educational thought.

Another important dimension is education for social and national development. Vivekananda regarded the development of individuals as inseparable from the development of society and the nation. Education should therefore create individuals who possess not only personal strength but also a sense of service and responsibility towards others. His educational philosophy consequently combines individual self-realization with social responsibility, making education both a means of personal transformation and an instrument of collective progress. Recent research on his philosophy similarly emphasizes the relationship between education, empowerment, social development and national advancement.

➤ **Savitribai Phule's Educational Philosophy**

Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy emerged from the nineteenth-century Indian social context in which access to education was highly unequal, particularly for women and oppressed communities. She viewed education as a powerful instrument of liberation, equality, empowerment, and social transformation. Her educational work challenged the prevailing caste- and gender-based restrictions on knowledge and educational participation.

Women's education constituted a particularly important dimension of Phule's educational vision. She challenged the assumption that women were intellectually or socially inferior to men and worked to create educational opportunities for girls at a time when female education faced strong social opposition. Her educational activities therefore represented not simply an expansion of schooling but a challenge to patriarchal structures that restricted women's autonomy and participation in public life. Scholarship on her educational contribution highlights her commitment to girls' education, women's empowerment and the transformation of unequal social relations (Santra & Madhu, 2023).

Another major feature of Phule's philosophy is education for social justice and equality. Education, in her social vision, could challenge the reproduction of caste-based exclusion by providing marginalized communities with access to knowledge and opportunities for self-

development. Her educational activism therefore connected knowledge with dignity, equality, and social emancipation. Recent scholarship on the Phule tradition describes this approach as an egalitarian and emancipatory conception of education in which knowledge develops critical consciousness and challenges structures of social domination.

Phule's approach also emphasized accessibility and social relevance of education. Education was intended for all sections of society, particularly those historically excluded from formal educational institutions. The educational initiatives associated with Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule included efforts to educate girls and children from oppressed communities, making universal access an important feature of their educational vision. The INFLIBNET educational resource similarly identifies universal availability, child sensitivity, critical thinking and social reform as important features associated with Savitribai Phule's educational work.

Thus, Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy can be understood through four closely interconnected principles: education as liberation, women's empowerment, social equality and education for marginalized communities. Unlike an understanding of education limited to individual advancement, her approach placed education within the larger struggle for social transformation. Her philosophy therefore gives particular importance to the relationship between knowledge, power, equality, and social justice.

➤ **Comparative Interpretation**

The analysis demonstrates that Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule approached education from different but complementary philosophical positions. Vivekananda primarily emphasized the transformation of the individual through holistic development, character, values, self-realization, self-reliance, and social responsibility. Savitribai Phule, in contrast, placed greater emphasis on the transformation of society through equal access to education, women's empowerment, social justice, and the removal of caste- and gender-based barriers. Their philosophies therefore represent two interconnected dimensions of educational transformation: inner/individual development and social/structural emancipation. This distinction provides an important conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis of their relevance to NEP 2020.

Table 1: *Core Dimensions of the Educational Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule*

Dimension	Swami Vivekananda	Savitribai Phule
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Primary focus	Holistic development of the individual	Social transformation through education
Purpose of education	Self-realization and development of human potential	Liberation, equality, and empowerment
Holistic development	Physical, mental, intellectual, moral and spiritual growth	Intellectual and social empowerment of the learner
Values	Character, morality, self-confidence, self-reliance and service	Equality, dignity, justice, freedom and social responsibility
Equality	Education as a means of human upliftment	Direct challenge to caste- and gender-based inequality
Women	Education and empowerment as part of social development	Strong emphasis on girls' and women's education
Marginalized groups	Mass education and social upliftment	Education for oppressed and excluded communities
Pedagogical orientation	Practical, life-oriented and character-building education	Accessible, socially relevant and child-sensitive education
Social objective	Responsible individuals and national development	Social justice and emancipation
Central concept	<i>Man-making education</i>	<i>Education as liberation and empowerment</i>

2. Analysis of the Relevance and Convergence of the Educational Philosophies of Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule with NEP 2020

Rather than assuming direct historical influence, this analysis considers the extent to which the philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule provide useful philosophical lenses for interpreting the policy. NEP 2020 itself describes education as fundamental to realizing human potential, developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development. It also seeks to build an education system that combines holistic development, values, skills, equity and Indian traditions.

1) Vivekananda's Holistic Conception and NEP 2020

A major point of convergence is the emphasis on holistic development. Vivekananda viewed education as the development of the complete human personality, encompassing physical, mental, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions. This corresponds closely with NEP 2020's

emphasis on the holistic development of learners through the integration of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, ethical and creative capacities. The policy also seeks to remove rigid divisions between curricular and co-curricular areas and between academic and vocational education, thereby promoting a more comprehensive conception of learning. Recent thematic analysis similarly identifies strong correspondence between Vivekananda's *man-making education* and NEP 2020's holistic, multidisciplinary, value-oriented and vocational orientation.

2) Character, Values and Ethical Development

Vivekananda placed character formation and moral development at the centre of education. For him, education should cultivate strength, self-confidence, discipline, compassion and a sense of responsibility rather than merely increase intellectual knowledge. NEP 2020 similarly emphasizes ethical and constitutional values, empathy, compassion, responsible citizenship, and character development. The policy states that education should help learners become ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring individuals. Thus, the relationship between Vivekananda's value-oriented conception of education and NEP 2020 can be understood as a significant philosophical convergence, particularly in their shared concern with developing morally responsible and socially conscious individuals.

3. Practical Learning, Skills and Self-Reliance

Another important convergence is found in the emphasis on practical and life-oriented education. Vivekananda criticized education that remained disconnected from practical life and emphasized self-reliance and the development of capacities that enable individuals to face real-life challenges. NEP 2020 similarly promotes experiential learning, vocational exposure, skill development, and learning by doing. It explicitly provides greater flexibility for students to study vocational skills alongside academic disciplines and seeks to eliminate rigid distinctions between vocational and academic streams. Therefore, Vivekananda's emphasis on practical competence and self-reliance complements the policy's attempt to make education more experiential, flexible and relevant to life and work.

4. Savitribai Phule's Educational Vision and Equity

The strongest convergence between Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy and NEP 2020 occurs in the areas of equality, inclusion and social justice. Phule's educational activism challenged the exclusion of girls and oppressed communities from educational opportunities. Her work treated education as an instrument for overcoming social barriers and enabling marginalized groups to claim dignity and participation. Contemporary scholarship identifies girls' education, social justice and education of oppressed communities as central aspects of her

educational legacy. NEP 2020 similarly identifies education as a major instrument for achieving social justice and equality and explicitly states that no child should lose educational opportunities because of circumstances of birth or social background.

5. Women's Education and Gender Equality

Savitribai Phule's pioneering work in women's education has particular relevance to NEP 2020's gender-equity agenda. Her educational practice challenged patriarchal restrictions on women's access to knowledge and created opportunities for girls at a time when female education was strongly constrained. Recent scholarship continues to identify her contribution to girls' education and women's empowerment as a significant aspect of her educational legacy. NEP 2020, meanwhile, recognizes gender disparities as a continuing educational concern and places particular emphasis on improving participation and opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Research specifically examining Savitribai Phule in relation to NEP 2020 has likewise identified parallels between her advocacy for girls and disadvantaged communities and the policy's commitments to gender equality, universal access and inclusive education (Thilakom, 2023).

6. Caste, Social Exclusion and Inclusion

Savitribai Phule's educational thought goes beyond gender equality to address caste-based exclusion and social discrimination. Her educational work sought to extend learning opportunities to communities historically denied access to education. This makes her philosophy particularly relevant to the social-justice dimension of NEP 2020. The policy explicitly identifies disparities associated with social categories and socio-economic disadvantage and calls for measures to bridge gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes. Recent scholars similarly describes Phule's educational legacy in terms of challenging caste and gender discrimination and promoting inclusive education (Das & Banerjee, 2025).

7. Empowerment Through Education

Both thinkers ultimately regarded education as a means of empowerment, although they approached empowerment differently. Vivekananda emphasized the internal empowerment of individuals through self-realization, character, confidence, strength and self-reliance. Savitribai Phule emphasized social empowerment through access to knowledge, particularly for women and marginalized communities. NEP 2020 brings these dimensions together by seeking to develop capable and responsible individuals while simultaneously promoting equitable access to quality education. The policy's emphasis on flexibility, learner choice, skills, equity and inclusion therefore provides a broad framework within which both forms of empowerment can be interpreted.

8. Overall Comparative Interpretation

The analysis indicates that the relationship between the two thinkers and NEP 2020 is best understood through complementarity rather than identical philosophical correspondence. Vivekananda primarily provides an individual-centred dimension of educational transformation holistic development, character, values, self-realization and self-reliance whereas Savitribai Phule provides a socially transformative dimension centred on equality, women's education, caste inclusion, social justice and empowerment. NEP 2020 incorporates important elements of both orientations through its simultaneous emphasis on holistic development and equitable, inclusive education. Therefore, their philosophies can be read together as representing two interconnected objectives of educational transformation: developing the capabilities and character of the individual while removing social barriers to educational participation.

Table 2: *Convergence of Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule's Educational Philosophies with NEP 2020*

Educational Dimension	Vivekananda	Savitribai Phule	Corresponding Orientation in NEP 2020
Holistic development	Development of the complete personality	Empowerment through education	Holistic development of learners
Values	Character, morality, self-discipline	Equality, dignity and justice	Ethical and constitutional values
Purpose of education	Self-realization and human development	Liberation and social transformation	Human potential and national development
Practical learning	Self-reliance and life-oriented education	Socially relevant education	Experiential and vocational learning
Equality	Human upliftment through education	Challenge to caste and gender inequality	Equity and inclusion
Women's education	Education as empowerment	Central concern of educational activism	Gender inclusion and equal opportunity
Marginalized groups	Mass education and social upliftment	Education for oppressed communities	Focus on socio-economically disadvantaged groups
Empowerment	Self-confidence and self-reliance	Social and educational emancipation	Learner empowerment and equitable participation

Social responsibility	Service and responsible citizenship	Social reform and justice	Responsible and ethical citizenship
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Major Findings of the Study

- i. Vivekananda's educational philosophy emphasizes holistic development, character formation, values, self-realization, self-reliance and social responsibility.
- ii. Savitribai Phule's educational philosophy emphasizes equality, women's education, social justice, empowerment and the removal of caste- and gender-based barriers.
- iii. NEP 2020 demonstrates strong conceptual convergence with Vivekananda's emphasis on holistic, value-based, practical and character-oriented education.
- iv. Savitribai Phule's educational vision closely corresponds with NEP 2020's commitments to equity, inclusion, gender equality, social justice and educational empowerment.
- v. Vivekananda and Savitribai Phule represent complementary dimensions of educational transformation individual development and social emancipation which together provide a broader philosophical lens for understanding NEP 2020.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 represents a culturally rooted and progressive vision that combines holistic human development with equity and social inclusion. The educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda finds relevance in the policy's emphasis on holistic development, character formation, values, self-reliance and experiential learning, while Savitribai Phule's philosophy resonates with its commitments to equality, women's education, social justice, inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups. Although their educational philosophies emerged in different historical contexts, they offer complementary perspectives Vivekananda focusing on the transformation of the individual and Phule on the transformation of unequal social structures. Their combined philosophical relevance provides a meaningful framework for understanding the vision of NEP 2020 and strengthening an educational system that is holistic, ethical, inclusive, equitable and socially transformative.

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