



From Interdisciplinarity To Transdisciplinarity: Attaining The Noble Aims Of NEP 2020 Through Swami Isa's Education For Total Consciousness

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The National Education Policy 2020 gives special emphasis to multidisciplinary, or interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity usually means the intentional overlapping or intermingling of different streams of knowledge or different skill sets into an integrated whole. Multidisciplinary traditionally refers to the cooperation between separate disciplines but not the intermixing or interactivity between them. However, nowadays these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

They are, to be sure, a vast improvement from the singular disciplinarity of most of today's education which divides and siloes knowledge, creates barriers to understanding, and pushes students into specialized streams of narrow knowledge resulting in narrow mindedness, rather than creating a full-fledged, well-rounded citizen prepared to meet the future. This is the promise of multidisciplinary, which, according to the NEP 2020, "aim[s] to develop all capacities of human beings—intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields." NEP 2020 is indirectly saying that a person cannot thrive in the 21st century world without all these capacities, skills and branches of knowledge.

A relevant question is why? Is the world of today more complex that it needs broader knowledge and more multi-skilled persons to be able to tackle it? Is it because we are now part of a globalized society where information is widely accessible, people are more mobile and less rooted, resulting in interactions, business and societies which are far more heterogeneous? That is the conclusion that many educationists have drawn in

the West / global North. The UNESCO (2021) has recently produced a report on the Futures of Education in which they do argue that the world is far more complex and requires every student to have new skill sets to meet it. The organization for economic Cooperation and Development has been working for many years on global citizenship education towards the same end.

Yet when we look at the ancient tradition of India, we note that the fundamental aims of the Gurukula form of education were always about creating exemplary human beings and never about merely training them for a particular vocation or to have a narrow field of knowledge. Education was the means towards liberating the human being from the misery of ignorance and giving him the means to realize the interconnection between himself and the entire universe. Knowledge was given liberally and scientifically about all aspects of life, society and the universe. Further, it was not only theoretical but also practical learning, starting from a very young age when the student went to live with his guru. The rigor and excellence of the Gurukula tradition is well known but unfortunately relegated to the past, and it has found difficulty in finding footing with the expectations and customs embedded in the present system of education practiced around the world.

Dr. K. Kasturirangan, chairman of the commission which produced the NEP 2020, pointed to the promise of multi-disciplinarity in returning to the noble ancient aims of education when he said that “multidisciplinarity sensitises students to the fundamentally interconnected nature of all human knowledge and enquiry.” The aim is indeed excellent, but the question is how will multidisciplinary achieve that aim? Multidisciplinary and inter disciplinarity both still work within the framework of disciplinarity—inviting collaborations and integrations but always from the perspective of different streams meeting to find common ground. This siloed approach to knowledge will never help educators to attain the totality of knowledge which real education needs to provide.

French philosopher Basarab Nicolescu (1994) noted that the goal of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity concern the transfer of methods from one discipline to another, allowing knowledge to spill over disciplinary boundaries, but they always remains within the disciplinary framework. As the prefix "trans" indicates, transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once *between* the disciplines, *across* the different disciplines, and *beyond each individual* discipline. Its goal is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the overarching unity of knowledge.

His Holiness Jagadguru Swami Isa recently published a book entitled *The Human Manifesto, Part 2: Global Education Policy for Total Consciousness* (2022) in which he called for the educational system “to gradually be replaced by a system which recognizes the overarching unity of knowledge, one of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity brings an integration of different disciplines in a harmonious manner to construct new

knowledge and uplift the learner to higher domains of knowledge and skill. Its goal is to understand the present world and enable students to uncover the unified knowledge that is beyond its individual parts.”

A central tenet of Swami Isa’s educational philosophy is that knowledge is unified, and education is complete only when the learner attains total knowledge. This earns the learner ultimate emancipation from ignorance and puts him or her on the path towards Total Consciousness.

Swami Isa’s system of education, ‘Education for Total Consciousness,’ identifies total knowledge as not only objective knowledge, or knowledge of what is in the world—as most modern schools offer—and not only subjective knowledge, or knowledge of the world inside of one’s self—as many religious or spiritual forms of education offer. But it must be both. A scientific awareness of the world around us and the world within us is essential, Swami Isa says. It is not enough to know about the molecules of water in a glass in front of us without understanding the nature of the water inside of us too; without knowledge of who we are as human beings, how can we create a whole human being, or a good society?

Educators today, and especially those who are going to be implementing NEP 2020 in their classrooms will do very well to have the tools and knowledge that Swami Isa has been equipping his teachers with for more than 20 years. He talks about the science of energy as the unifying knowledge that will help to bridge the gap between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge, and guide education into truly holistic and transdisciplinary methods.

In his book Swami Isa writes, “Every knowledge begins with vibrating energy. We can trace the course of energy, beginning from the causal, subtle, and gross quantum packets to quarks, fermions, bosons, subatomic particles, atoms, amino acids, nucleotides, DNA, chromosomes, nucleus, cell tissue, organ, organ system, organism, community, population, ecosystem, planet, solar system, galaxy, galaxy groups, super cluster, galaxy filament to the universe. The biotic as well as the abiotic world are created by energy.”The link between the objective energy and the subjective energy is the I-particle (Swami Isa, 2019), the fundamental unit of vibration, or energy, which forms everything else in the universe from elementary particles to superclusters. Swami Isa’s I-theory, a ground-breaking unified theory, paves the way to understanding the science of energy and the diverse applications in education.

This unified science is the foundation for transdisciplinary education in which all branches of knowledge find a meaningful arrangement. According to Swami Isa, the misery of the present-day world is due to the lack of knowledge about how to keep this energy in its natural state of balance. When it is off-balance, we suffer. Human beings are equipped with the ability to keep our own energy, and that of the world around us, in

balance. “Education is meant to forestall this event. The goal of studying language, maths and science for a human being is to attain the ability to recognize energy balance and apply it in the appropriate manner.”

Once the foundation of holistic and total knowledge is laid in the child, they will naturally choose a stream of focus based on their unique interests, skills and capacities. NEP 2020 has recognized this need too, for students to choose their own fields of studies. Swami Isa says that higher education is the best time to do this, when they have sufficiently explored and experienced various realms of knowledge and perceived the interconnections. Their natural tastes and inborn talents will be developed and nurtured, and at the time of higher education they will choose one stream which “becomes the lens through which total knowledge is enjoyed and assimilated.” Choosing a stream, however does not mean losing transdisciplinarity and holistic approach. “For example, a mechanical engineering student should understand cosmology and physics, and can understand the universe as a machine in its structure and functions. At the same time, they should learn anatomy, biology and chemistry, to likewise understand the body like a machine in its structure and functions. In this way, the mechanical engineering student will enjoy and deeply comprehend each topic.” The body is the subjective factor in this example, while machines and the universe are the objective factors.

Swami Isa has much to offer to India in realizing the noble goals of NEP 2020. This paper has only touched upon a few of the aspects relating to interdisciplinarity, holistic education, and unified science. A further investigation into his complete system of Education for Total Consciousness would be well deserved and beneficial to those who are seeking tried and tested ways and means of implementing NEP 2020, which emanate from an enlightened guru.

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