



# The Morung System Of Education As A Contributing Pillar To The Indian Knowledge System In Equivalence To The Gurukul System

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**Abstract:** The National Education Policy 2020 outlines the integration of the Indian Knowledge System in the contemporary curriculum. Indian Knowledge System or the *Bhartiya Gyan Parampara* aims towards the safeguarding of the ancient traditional aspects of India along with an amalgamation of the various aspects of Indian Knowledge into current learning, which includes the vast array of knowledge, traditional practices, and philosophies. The lush green territory of India's north-east is home to indigenous tribals, rooted in their rich traditional culture and practices. Many tribes of Nagaland used to transmit information from a dormitory-like structure called the *Morung* where the young men and women were informed about their history, ethnicities, customs, and cultural practices. The *Gurukul* system of communicating knowledge was the ancient method of education, which started during the time of the Vedas. At the Gurukul, the students (*shishya*) would live in proximity to the teacher (*guru*). The Morung and Gurukul systems focused on experiential learning, instilling values in the students, and generating a sense of communal belonging. This study will primarily analyse the similarities between the Gurukul system and the Morung system in the transmission of education to the students through a comparative angle. This study endeavours to understand the critical role played by both systems in determining the richness of knowledge and the cultural identity in India. The study will emphasise the importance of the Morung system of education from north-east India as one key element of the Indian Knowledge System's holistic developmental approach, as charted in the National Education Policy of 2020.

**Index Terms:** Indian Knowledge System, North-east India, Gurukul, Morung, NEP 2020.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dating back over a thousand years, India embodies an amalgamation of rich cultural heritage comprising the vastness of knowledge, beliefs, and traditional practices. This enigmatic amalgamation has its roots in the ancient texts of the Vedas, bringing forth the concept of the Indian Knowledge System (*Bhartiya Gyan Parampara*). It was around 1500 BCE that the Vedas were composed, paving the way to the storehouse of knowledge which was Indian in body and soul, the Indian Knowledge System. Vedas served as the fundamental pillar of the Indian Knowledge system, comprising of chants, hymns, rituals, along with the traditional customs and practices that were transmitted from one generation to the other. Rooted in the Vedas, the Indian Knowledge System thereby encompasses the various fields of arts, science, astronomy, medicine, literature, spirituality, astrology, religion, etc., enlightening the Indian society towards a holistic growth by living in harmony with one another thereby influencing the community at global level towards the concept of “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” or the whole world is one family” (Timane and Wandhe, e512). Indian Knowledge System functions as an all-inclusive storehouse of understanding, intricately exploring its three fundamental elements: “*Jnan* (knowledge), *Vigyan* (science), and *Jeevan Darshan* (philosophy of life)” (Khan and Sharma, 42). *Jnan* is the consolidation of realistic information and centuries-old wisdom obtained through philosophical inquiry and experiential learning. *Vigyan* encompasses the scientific principles and procedures that drive technological growth, giving prominence to the importance of empirical understanding, and *Jeevan Darshan* pictures the philosophies of life, instilling in mankind the moral and ethical principles that guide individuals in their life

selections and social interactions. These three essential core elements of the Indian Knowledge System play a crucial role in shaping the intellectual framework, cultural heritage, and value-based way of living within Indian society.

Tracing back the educational history of India to ancient times, knowledge was imparted to the students (*shishya*) by the teacher (*guru*) in the residence of the teacher, where the students used to live as a part of the teacher and his family members. This guru-shishya tradition was denoted as the Gurukul system of education, dating back to the revered Vedic times. The work “Progressive Supranuclear Palsy” by V. Padma, et.al. states that, “Gurukul served as the residence of the Acharya, or instructor, and a repository for students until their academic pursuits were concluded” (qtd. in Mandal and Saini, 358) rightly notions the proximity between the teacher and the student where the teacher took full responsibility of communicating an all-encompassing knowledge. A diverse range of subject matter was covered, ranging from religion to metaphysics, language and literature, traditional art forms like music, dance, etc, and meditation. Learning was through practical experience, where the teachers meticulously implanted the virtues of discipline, mindfulness, consideration, and fellow feeling in his young disciples.

Naga, an indigenous community residing in the hills of Nagaland of North-east India, has a cultural tradition deeply rooted in their way of living in consonance with their cultural practices. Occupying the hills, it was a practice followed by all the tribes of Nagaland to construct a communal dormitory, i.e., the Morung, the dormitory situated mainly in the village entrance or a location which was strategically advantageous in defence of the village against the neighbouring enemy tribes. This Morung served as “the bachelor dorm” (Zeliang, f201) for the young men and women of the village. Morungs were known by different names amongst the different tribes of Nagaland. The Ao’s called it *Areju*, it was known as *Champo* among the Lotha tribe, *Kichuki* for the Angamis, etc. Village Head, who was the guardian of tradition and knowledge, taught the inmates everything related to their culture, customs, belief systems, along with the practices of warfare and skills for daily life sustenance. Morung acted as the centre for discipline, art, and education, wherein the village boys and girls used to live and study until they were trained well to navigate through life, preserving the richness of their cultural heritage.

## II. HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL LAYOUT OF THE GURUKUL AND MORUNG SYSTEMS

The Sanskrit word *guru* refers to ‘teacher’ and *kulu* refers to ‘family.’ Combining the two was derived the word *Gurukul* where the essence of closeness between the teacher and the disciple was focused upon something equal to the concept of ‘kith and kin’ relationship. It was approximately during the Vedic period, i.e., 1500 BCE- 500 BCE, that the *Acharya* (teacher) started to instil life- transforming information which were stored in the Vedas not only building the cognitive calibre of the students but also developing the affective aptitude of the pupils because gurukul system aimed at the all- round development of the “mind, body and spirit” (Garg and Singhal, 122). Gurukul was usually located in a far-flung forested area, which would be a peaceful place away from the chaotic disturbance of the royal households and their serving social stratum of people. In the quiet, nature-connected environment, the *guru* would impart holistic growth by letting students critically understand the concepts and theories, developing their reasoning aptitude. They would let students be mindful of their physical health by teaching the students to practice yoga, along with instructing them about physical labour. *Gurus* used to let the disciples practice daily rituals, prayers, and meditations in order to determine sound spiritual awareness in the student. The origin of Gurukul brought the sacred notion of human connection, as was exemplified through the sacred relationship between the *guru* and the *shishya*. Originating in the Vedic times, the Gurukul system paved the way towards the complete growth of the students, not just focusing on academic learning but also on spiritual and ethical conduct fabricated by the *guru's* diligence in educational transmission.

Morung, the ‘bachelor’s dormitory,’ played and occupied a key position in the historical past of the Nagas. ‘Morung’ is an Assamese word used to refer to “a house or hall where bachelors of a clan sleep, and even used as a centre for important village ceremonies and therefore is the largest building in the village” (Yanthan, “The Early Morung System in Nagaland”). Every Naga village needed to have a Morung, and once the children attained puberty by 10 to 15 years of age, they had to leave their parents' house and shift to live in the Morung. The youth who entered the Morung were taught by the best headman of the village, who was elected based on his experience during warfare and his success in bringing a record number of enemy heads. The youth of the village had to stay in the dormitory together, learning skills of warfare and getting complete training in making and sharpening war equipment like the machete and the bow and the arrow. Not just training in warfare, they were also taught lessons of discipline, bravery, hospitality, mortality, etc. The youth had to live



in the Morung till the time they were ready with all the training and were all set to get married. A new student entering Morung had to remain at the junior level for 5 years, taught to run errands like collecting firewood to burn in the dormitory; the intermediate group looked after helping the poor and needy people in the community and to help the seniors in their administrative affairs related to the Morung; and then they moved up to the senior level, being trained as a full man, all set to run his own family, thereby terminating his membership with the Morung. Morung served as a base covering all the premises where the elders of the tribe would provide and pass on their learning and wisdom gained over the years to the young men who were fit enough to acquire all that was being tried to build inside them as V.K. Anand states in his 1968 book *Nagaland in Transition*, “The Morung plays vital role in preparing younger generations for posts in the village council. The Morung is the club, the public school, the military training centre, the hostel for boys and meeting place for village elders. It is as well the centre for social, religious and political activities. In short, it is the fulcrum of the village democracies” (qtd. in Zeliang, f203).

### III. COMPARATIVE SCRUTINY

#### i. Pedagogical Parallels

Both the ancient and traditional systems of education, the Gurukul and Morung systems, had a prominent similarity concerning the mentoring of the disciples. In “A Study on Gurukul Education System,” Santosh Madanlal and Babu Lal Saini state, “... guru (instructor), and shishya (student) were all regarded as equals, and they resided in close proximity or in the same dwelling. Because this guru-shishya relationship was so sacrosanct, no fee was charged by the instructors” (358). Likewise, Motsuthung Yanthan in his blogpost titled, “The Early Morung System in Nagaland” mentions, “The morungs are guided and all authority is under one leader who is chosen based on his experience of warfare and has been successful in bringing home a record number of enemy heads. He is the most capable person in the village to run the institution, which is filled with students to become future warriors” (Yanthan). This brings to focus the divine relation between the teacher and the pupils, whereby the teacher or the mentor had the full responsibility to diligently impart information and education to the students, who, on the other hand, lived in reverence toward the teacher. The students in both systems left their parental homes and lived as a community with a communal feeling in the dwelling of the guru and the dormitory, respectively.

Another pedagogical similarity between the two systems appears in terms of the learning that was prominently value-based. In the Gurukul system, students were taught by the *guru* the ethical conduct of being punctual and disciplined in all the walks of life, to nurture affection and humanism, and also to showcase respect for the fellow being. One shining example of this is the respect they had for the teacher, whereby as a mark of their gratitude, the shishyas would pay back to the guru a “gurudakshina as a token of appreciation” (Madanlal and Saini, 358) and respect. Morung too was serving as an essential institution of community living in the village. As stated, “...numerous activities centres on the Morung, including education and discipline of the young; the inculcation of tribal morals and values; ...” (Kahmei, 572). Morung imparted to the young men the various norms and customs of the society, imparting the traditional values.

Thus, this mentor-mentee relationship played a crucial role in shaping the personality of the student, giving them the power to nurture their moral values, character, life-skills and decision-making, mindfully making the students better humans with the required capabilities to face life’s challenges with bravery and compassion. Personal connection was of deeper significance, which allowed the teacher to mentor the students for academic as well as personal development.

#### ii. Course Content

The Vedas, ethics, and spiritual wisdom, along with other branches of study, were the key components of the Gurukul curriculum. The *guru* taught the philosophical truths, rituals, hymns, and cosmic knowledge, which were the chief components of the ancient sacred texts of ancient India. The Vedas were taught in length and breadth to the *shishyas*. This enriched the spiritual wisdom of the students. Ethical value- teaching included instructions about honesty, discipline, respect, compassion, etc, which heightened the moral foundation of the students. In the Gurukul, students lived close to nature and so were taught the natural sciences in the form of Ayurveda, medicine, mathematics, architecture and also astronomy. Along with these, the guru imparted cultural, artistic, and creative cognisance amongst the students by teaching them art forms like music, dance, and literature.

Morung was an institution which was for educating the young men and women of the village. The juniors, intermediates, and the seniors, though they had their particular roles to play, they were all, by the end of their term in the dormitory, well educated with curricula that covered training in warfare, learning the tactics of challenging the enemy village. The acclaimed and experienced mentor would teach them in handling the war equipment like the machete, bow and arrow, etc. They would be taught the life skills of hunting and fishing, and the cropping and planting for agricultural sustenance. Handicraft training, like making of baskets, wood works, carvings, weaving, etc, was taught. The elders would also impart values, knowledge and wisdom by recreating the old tales of the village and clan in the form of narrations like folktales narration, singing of folksongs and they were even made accustomed to the folk dances. The history, culture and traditions of the natives were being transmitted to the younger generations through the institution of Morung.

### **iii. Transmission Modes**

One chief similarity between the Gurukul and Morung systems was the oral transmission method of transmitting information and knowledge to the students. The guru/ village head would, through the word of mouth, deliver moral lessons that were embedded in the ancient texts and epics and the folklores of the village, tribe, and clan. The oral storytelling was an important activity practised, and because of the close relation, more often a one-to-one communication encouraged the students to have discussions and critical thoughts.

Another learning methodology employed was experiential learning, where the *guru* would let the students perform agricultural activities or experiments similar to the Morung system, where the student would be given hands-on training by taking them to farms for sowing and cultivation, fishing and hunting and also performing household duties while living in the Morung. The experiential learning through participating practically aligned the students to daily sustenance by considering the real-world consequences of their actions on society.

### **iv. Academic Intentions**

Holistic development was one key goal of both systems of education. The personal one-to-one attention given by the teacher and the diverse range of topics covered with the suitable pedagogical methodology helped to meet the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual requirements of the students. An all-round growth of the students was focused upon during their stay in the institution, preparing them to face the world after their stay and learning was completed with the teacher.

Morung, serving as an educational institution, helped nurture discipline, manners, self-reliance, and responsibility amongst the young men and women. The transmission of the tribal history, customs, cultural practices, folklore, dances and songs made the students rooted in their culture. Education in warfare, handicrafts, cultivation, hunting, etc, helped prepare the young of the village to perform their adult responsibilities and their participation in the community. Morung, as a centre of education, recreation, defence and community hub of the village, made an all-around individual.

The Gurukul system of education looked beyond academic excellence by laying its focus on the emotional, psychological, and spiritual development of the pupils. Trained in skills, the students were able to have personal and professional success as they could scale all challenges with emotional stability. The hands-on experience made the students look into the practical implications of their actions, keeping in mind the effects on society staying close to the principles of moral and spiritual ethics being taught. Students were holistically developed to fit in the society, performing their societal roles with moral diligence.

## **IV. RELEVANCE TO THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM**

As stated earlier Indian Knowledge System focuses on the three fundamental elements of *Jnan*, *Vigyan*, and *Jeevan Darshan*. The *Gurus* in the Gurukul system of education since the Vedic times and the village headman in the Morung system had been imparting education to the students which had played a tremendous role in the growth of the mind, body, and spirit of the students thereby contributing towards “*Jnan* (knowledge), *Vigyan* (science), and *Jeevan Darshan* (philosophy of life)” (Khan and Sharma, 42). Through the dialogic and experiential methods of teaching literature, art, folklore, etc the students residing in the Gurukul and Morung enhanced their *Jnan* (knowledge) about diverse fields and subjects of learning, likewise, the information that was passed down to the students about the herbs that could bring healing, mathematical and astronomical calculations about seasonal changes to help in cropping, the science behind the making of equipment either for agriculture, farming, or warfare, etc developed the scientific (*Vigyan*) aptitude of the students. Teachings about the moral and the ethical code of conduct, as were written in the Vedas and the narration of stories about the

village, tribe, and clan, which were full of morality and wisdom, led the students to understand the philosophies of life (*Jeevan darshan*), giving them a purpose to fulfil through the humanitarian path. Gurukul and Morung systems had been contributing to the Indian Knowledge System by keeping intact the indigenous knowledge, which always aimed toward the holistic development of the community and society.

Highlighting the contribution of Morung to the Indian Knowledge System, it clearly appears that the Morung system shares the same relevance as the Gurukul system despite of it belonging to the small region of North-east India, far away from the mainland and with its own unique cultural bearings. Morung serves as a crucial component of the Indigenous Knowledge System in India, exemplifying how tribal communities preserve education, cultural practices, and survival skills through non-formal, collective, and contextually relevant learning methodologies. As a key aspect of the Indian Knowledge, Morung paved the way to community feeling and communal living where the students lived together, fostering fellow-feeling, learning, and preserving their traditional practices and customs. The way students were taught to go out in the natural setting and learn various skills aligned with the experiential learning approach of the Indian Knowledge System. Morung system of education also aligned with the Indian Knowledge System's holistic approach whereby young men had full rounded development learning values, ethics, morals, intellectual knowledge as well as skills to foster the concept of “‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ or the whole world is one family” (e512) as mentioned by Rajesh Timane and Priyanka Wandhe in their work "Indian Knowledge System.”

It can be surmised that these traditional modes of imparting education align perfectly with the Indian Knowledge system, which emphasises, through practical experiences and critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Ethical and moral understanding, which is another chief look out of IKS, in the students, was inculcated by the mentors along with emotional intelligence, leading to the development of meaningful relationships.

## V. REVIVAL AND INTEGRATION POSSIBILITIES IN MODERN EDUCATION

However, one of the serious concerns in the holistic growth of an individual brought by the ancient educational modes was the decline in these traditional age-old educational systems, demanding students to study in modern institutions with a broader and highly standardized curriculum, which had a lot of limitations limiting the all-round development of the students. The decline in the Morung system was due to the coming of the Christian Missionaries who restricted the students to study in Morungs as they feared that Morung would go against the beliefs and teachings as spread by Christianity and also because of the ban in the traditional practices amongst the Nagas like the banning of head hunting, villages were no more required to maintain a guardhouse and so declined the Morung system. Thus, Morung, which served in preserving the history, morality, values, cultural practices, customs, and skills of the villagers, saw a downfall. Similarly, with the coming of modern schooling in India, when during the colonial period, schools with restricted curriculum were established by the British, the Gurukul system started to end with no *Acharya* transmitting knowledge to the students, rather the students began to be sent to British established schools which had a restricted curriculum with no close relationship seen between the teacher and the student. Thus, the preservation and transmission of the indigenous knowledge, with the appreciation of holistic growth, witnessed a setback.

This calls for a revival of the past and to let the past be integrated into the minds of the present-day students. Though it is also very clear that with the modern age of high-speed internet and technological advancement, it is not possible and logical to go back and start the Gurukul and the Morung systems of education, it is not impossible even to incorporate these traditional approaches to the modern education system, as also highlighted in the National Education Policy, 2020. Some measures can be taken for the revival, preservation, and fostering of the traditional knowledge, which can be the following:

In today's world, the speed of life is making people forget all their ethics and morality and the fellow-feeling. Every individual is so busy in his or her progress that they forget to take the other human along. A thoughtful revamping of the curriculum is essential. The Gurukul and Morung system, with the curriculum focused on moral education, led to the growth of emotional intelligence in the students. The modern-day curriculum should be integrated with moral and spiritual lessons, which will help the students learn the virtues of respect, empathy, honesty, etc. Mindful activities like meditation should be incorporated to help students learn self-discipline and clarity in thinking.

The Morung and Gurukul system prioritised experiential learning, giving the students hands-on practical experiences. The modern-day education, with its curricula fixed to the intense learning of certain major subjects, students are hardly given opportunities to put their hands in and learn by doing. Memorisation to pass



the examination and secure a higher percentage has diluted the critical approach in the students, failing them in life lessons. Thus, the experiential learning approach is to be incorporated where students are exposed to practical situations, helping them in decision-making and problem-solving. Project-based education should be encouraged, which will help the students personally and actively participate in the community, thereby enhancing their understanding.

The age we are living in is a technology-driven age, which was near zero in the Gurukul or the Morung systems of education. Students these days are more inclined to technology as it gives them a better picture of everything around. Though Morung and Gurukul cannot be recreated, they can be incorporated through the use of technology. Educational applications providing the students with three-dimensional virtual tours of the essential aspects of the Indian Knowledge System like Morungs, Gurukuls, etc, designing online resources akin to the teachings in the Vedas and the folktales, virtually giving access to the customary and cultural practices of the tribes, etc, will help in the dissemination of the past virtues and knowledge to the present generation. Traditional methods and up-to-date informative resources are to be merged to develop an individual who is holistically sound. Alongside, courses on learning vernaculars should be introduced along with the inculcation of traditional arts and crafts.

## V. CONCLUSION

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not possible to shift back to the traditional Gurukul and Morung systems of education, yet it cannot be denied that these two were the foundational pillars of the Indian Knowledge System creating individuals who were not only intellectually sound but were morally, emotionally, and spiritually developed being only because of the pedagogical approaches employed by the two. Despite their differing origins, both Gurukul and Morung serve as pillars of education in India. They converge on key aspects such as their teaching methodologies, curricula, and overarching educational aspirations. Together, they produced individuals who excelled academically and thrived as ethical citizens, equipped not only with knowledge but also with empathy and the skills necessary to foster harmony within society, contributing to the greater good while honouring their cultural legacies.

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