



## Understanding the Importance of Spiritual Well-being Among Youth: Insights from the Framework of NEP 2020

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### Abstract

Spiritual well-being is a multi-dimensional concept related to a sense of completeness with self, nature and a power greater than self. It has been characterised as an inner sense of peace, meaning, belonging, and harmony in life. It is a state beyond physical well-being and mental wellness. Although NEP 2020 never uses the term "spiritual well-being" explicitly but it does envision education as a harmonious process, combining intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual elements. Drawing on several concepts of Bhartiya Gyan Parampara, such as yoga, meditation, and value education, this paper outlines how NEP 2020 provides opportunities to encourage the inner development of young students by promoting spiritual well-being. Thus, this study aims to investigate the meaning and concept of spiritual well-being under the NEP 2020 framework. The study also focuses on understanding the role of spiritual well-being in the overall development of youth. The study further tries to find out what tools and methods can be included in the education curriculum and promote spiritual well-being among youths, keeping a prime focus on the problems and challenges that higher educational institutions are most likely to face while incorporating spiritual well-being into their curriculum. The study concludes that adding spiritual well-being to curricula is not a discretionary option but an imperative need of the contemporary education system. Besides preparing students for academic and career excellence. The National Education Policy 2020 foresees developing individuals rooted in values, self-awareness, and inner strength. Spiritual well-being thus equips youth to face the stress, ambiguity, and ethical difficulties of the 21st century by creating a sense of resilience, empathy, and social responsibility.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Well-being, NEP 2020, Youth, Yoga, Mindfulness.

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## Introduction

In a world marked by rapid technological change, globalisation, and social complexity, there is increasing pressure on education systems to move beyond the transmission of knowledge to the nurturing of the all-round development of the human being. Education has always been a means for moulding the full human being—not only for gaining information or for career preparation, but also for the moral and spiritual development of the individual. Education was considered a moral and spiritual enterprise in many ancient cultures, including the Gurukula system in Bharata, Socratic philosophy in Greece, and Confucianism in China. However, the dominance of utilitarian, market-driven, and technocratic paradigms in modern times has often reduced education to quantifiable outcomes such as economic production, employability, and test scores (Nussbaum, 2011). While results are significant, they risk leaving students unprepared for the more profound challenges of life, mainly identifying the meaning and purpose of life, reducing hardship, making moral decisions and living harmoniously with others and the environment. Due to this disparity, the importance of talking about spiritual well-being in educational discourse has increased (Koenig, 2015; Moberg, 2002). Keeping all this in the centre, the National Education Policy 2020 places a strong emphasis on values, integration of Indian knowledge systems for the holistic development of the students (Government of India, 2020). Although there is no direct use of the term “spiritual well-being” in NEP 2020, its vision of education subtly strives to foster not only cognitive abilities but also emotional, ethical, and inner growth, which can only become possible by enhancing the spiritual well-being of the students, specifically in higher educational institutions.

Spiritual well-being refers to a sense of meaning, purpose, and connectedness to self, others, nature, and the transcendent, characterised by inner peace, belonging, and harmony (Moberg, 2002). It is also referred to as the connection of the individual with self, others, nature and transcendence, which goes beyond the physical development to overall development. According to Pargament (2007), spiritual well-being is frequently viewed as a universal human component that may be attained by activities like mindfulness, meditation, yoga, service, or introspection, in contrast to institutional religiosity, which is associated with particular religious traditions. Yoga, meditation, Vedanta, and other concepts covered in NEP 2020 from the Bhartiya Gyan Parampara focus on the development of values, self-realisation, and consciousness among students and including these components in the curriculum can aid in the development of students' inner balance, moral discernment, and resilience. Research has demonstrated a correlation between spirituality and prosocial behaviour, emotional regulation, stress reduction, and resilience, particularly in young people (Parkinson & Smith, 2023; Pazer, 2024). As a result, adding these elements to education is becoming more and more seen as crucial to the overall growth of the youth studying in higher educational institutions.

The need for comprehensive and interdisciplinary education in NEP 2020 signifies a move away from memorisation to the development of critical thinking, creativity, emotional equilibrium, and ethical foundation. This is in line with international educational discourses that support "social-emotional learning" or "holistic child development". However, the Indian strategy goes one step further by placing this type of

learning inside the cultural framework of value education, yoga, and meditation. For example, the incorporation of Indian knowledge systems offers a valid scholarly forum for presenting ancient texts like the Upanishads or Bhagavad Gita as sources of ethical reflection, yoga as a science of body-mind integration, and meditation as a tool for mental balance (Aithal & Ramanathan, 2024).

Therefore, this article presents the views on the spiritual well-being of youth within the framework of NEP 2020 to promote holistic well-being among youth in higher educational institutions. The study explores the following objectives based on secondary data sources:

- To investigate the meaning and concept of spiritual well-being in the framework of NEP 2020.
- To understand the role of spiritual well-being in the overall development of youth.
- To identify the tools and methods that can be incorporated into the education curriculum to promote spiritual well-being among youth.
- To list out the problems and challenges that higher educational institutions would most likely face when integrating spiritual well-being into their curriculum.

The study addresses the idea of spiritual well-being in the context of NEP 2020, looks at how it affects youth development, and looks at useful resources and approaches for incorporating it into the curriculum in higher education. It also highlights issues and makes suggestions for developing an educational system that fosters inner strength, purpose, and harmony in addition to information transfer. Including spiritual well-being in the curriculum is essential to equipping young people to face the challenges of the twenty-first century with resilience and wisdom.

### **Conceptualising Spiritual Well-being in the Framework of NEP 2020 and Its Importance and Role in the Overall Development of Youth**

#### **Meaning of Spiritual Well-being:**

According to the Australian National University (n.d.), “Spiritual well-being is often a misunderstood concept. It refers not to any particular religious or spiritual practice or ideology but to the human need for meaning, purpose and connection to something greater than ourselves. This aspect of well-being may be met through the practice of a religious faith, a deeply felt connection to nature, or a passion for our professional vocation. It is a very diverse and often individualised aspect of health, but some would argue that it is the most important, giving context and meaning to all other parts of ourselves and our life experiences.” Based on this, spiritual well-being covers some of the dimensions such as connection to self, others and the environment around us, engaging with spiritual or religious practices and communities and finding and maintaining purpose and meaning.

Spiritual well-being is a multifaceted concept that includes a sense of (a) a feeling of meaning and purpose, (b) a sense of connection or belonging (with oneself, others, nature, or transcendence), (c) inner peace or harmony, and (d) transcendental orientation or the perception of a higher power (Moberg, 2002; Pargament, 2007). These dimensions of spiritual well-being, the search for meaning, connection with others and nature, and inner peace, may strengthen one's capacity for empathy, resilience, and moral judgment. Some scholars distinguish spiritual health (or wellness) from religiousness, the former being a broader, inclusive construct that does not necessarily require institutional religion (Koenig, 2015). Empirical studies have linked spiritual practices (e.g. meditation, prayer) to mental well-being, emotional regulation, resilience, and life satisfaction (Pazer, 2024; Manjunath & Krishnamurthy, 2023). In the Indian context, the concept resonates with the Bhartiya Gyan Parampara, the indigenous wisdom traditions, including yoga, Vedanta, Upanishadic pedagogy, and contemplative practices. These traditions view human beings as multidimensional (physical, vital, mental, spiritual) and seek integration or harmony among those layers. Therefore, based on this, it can be concluded that spiritual well-being is a positive sense of an individual to find meaning and purpose in life, to look for inner peace, to find connection to self, others, nature and beyond, which can be enhanced by the practices such as yoga, meditation and mindfulness.

### **Bhartiya Traditions and Spiritual Well-being:**

The Bhartiya spiritual tradition provides rich theoretical frames that complement modern constructs of spiritual well-being. These traditions are designed to attain higher spiritual well-being, which can be added to the higher educational institutions for the holistic development of the young students. Education (vidya) is defined in the Bharatiya philosophy as the development of the full individual rather than only the acquisition of technical information. According to the Taittiriya Upanisad, genuine education combines knowledge, moral obligation, and self-realisation, assisting pupils in developing into intelligent and compassionate human beings (Radhakrishnan, 1953). Thus, self-realisation (atma-jnana) and societal service are the ultimate goals of human life, which is viewed as a process of balancing the intellectual, spiritual, and physical aspects of life (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944). The Bhagavad Gītā also emphasises the need for unselfish action (niskāma karma), discernment (viveka), and discipline (yoga) as critical traits for young growth (Sharma, 1962). Thus, integrating these ideas into higher education today might help strike a balance between ethical duty and material advancement, resulting in graduates who are not just competent professionals but also kind leaders committed to the greater good. Some of the important theoretical and practical components that can be added to the higher educational institutions to promote the spiritual well-being of youth, which NEP 2020 also approves of, are:

- **Yoga and Meditation:**

These are techniques for self-observation, awareness, and control of the mind and emotions. Yoga, in its classical form, is not merely physical exercise but a system of inner transformation (Csala et al., 2021).

Meditation is core to many Indian spiritual paths (Manjunath & Krishnamurthy, 2023), which can help youth to develop focus and attention for longer durations.

- **Integrating Philosophies of Bhartiya Gyan Parampara:**

Higher education institutions can include some Bhartiya Gyan Parampara philosophies to enhance their theoretical comprehension of the notion of spiritual well-being. Even if there has already been a move in this direction, a thorough investigation is still necessary. To enhance the concept of spiritual well-being in their life, young people should be aware of the views of thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, and others. Philosophies such as Vedanta, Upanishads, etc., should be proposed in the classrooms. For example, a model of integral development of consciousness, including physical, vital, mental, and spiritual, prepared by Sri Aurobindo, can be taught in a classroom setting to facilitate education as a tool for self-realisation (Basu & Ammarul, 2024).

- **Value Education and Ethics:**

The core of Bhartiya traditions is values like Dharma, Satya, Ahimsa, Seva, etc. They can be internalised with the help of proper education in individuals. They may be incorporated into the spiritual orientation of individuals rather than being taught superficially. For the overall growth and development, students should be taught these principles and values.

- **Contemplative Pedagogy:**

Indian traditions often teach through stories, symbols, silence, reflection, and experiential practices (Sruti, shraddha, sadhana) rather than just didactic instruction. Thus, blending modern psychological frameworks of spiritual well-being with traditional Indian wisdom can yield a robust foundation for education.

## **NEP 2020 and Its Potential for Spiritual Growth**

Although NEP 2020 does not explicitly mention “spiritual well-being,” it contains several elements and principles that create space for inner development. There are several ideas incorporated in NEP 2020 that point towards the spiritual well-being of youth. Some of the key provisions given in NEP 2020 can help focus on the spiritual well-being of youth, along with other dimensions of well-being. These provisions are:

- **Holistic and Multidimensional Education:**

One guiding principle of NEP 2020 is that education should not be compartmentalised into narrow academic strata, but should integrate physical, emotional, cognitive, moral, and aesthetic development. The policy emphasises holistic, integrated, and multidisciplinary education (Government of India, 2020). This holistic and broad principle of education aligns with a worldview that includes inner growth, balance, critical thinking, innovation and creativity in learning pedagogy. These concepts are aligned in it, combined with contemplative and reflective practices, which can cultivate the sense of spiritual well-being among youth.

- **Introduction to Bhartiya Gyan Parampara:** NEP 2020 explicitly focus on the inclusion of Bhartiya Gyan Parampara and indigenous traditions in its discourse to promote a Bhartiya-centric curriculum design (Government of India, 2020). And it is already clear that the Gyan Parampara of Bharat has always been rich and sensitive towards the concept of understanding the self. Therefore, the proper application of several concepts and philosophies, such as the Bhagavad Gita, Vedanta, Upanishadic ideas, yoga, and meditative practices, can help understand the concept of spiritual well-being among youth.
- **Emphasis on Well-Being, Mental Health, and Value Education:** NEP 2020 gives significant importance to student well-being and mental health as foundational to education. The policy acknowledges emotional and psychological dimensions of learning. Further, NEP 2020 supports ethical and value education, promoting values such as compassion, empathy, respect for diversity, and social responsibility. Hence, though not directly mentioning the term “spiritual well-being,” NEP 2020’s ethos offers pathways to incorporate concepts and ideas into the education institutions to focus on the spiritual well-being of youth.
- **Role of Teachers, Educator Training, and Institutional Culture:** NEP focuses on teacher capacity building, professional development, and orientation toward holistic pedagogy. It also envisages that educational institutions would embrace a nurturing climate. Thus, teacher formation could include training in mindfulness, contemplative pedagogy and spiritual intelligence. In fact, one study on spiritual intelligence and classroom management proposes that teachers' spiritual capacities are essential for fostering inner growth among students (Singh & Narayan, 2024).

### **Importance and Role of Spiritual Well-Being in Youth Development**

- **Psychological Benefits:** Empirical findings establish that spiritual practices strengthen mental well-being, resilience and emotional regulation. Cross-sectional studies conducted among yoga practitioners present that the long-term practitioners scored higher on mindfulness, self-awareness, internal body awareness and spiritual intelligence tests when compared to non-practitioners (Parkinson & Smith, 2023). Meditation has also been found to help reduce stress levels, promote balance and enhance general well-being (Manjunath & Krishnamurthy, 2023). A connection was discovered between spiritual practices and better stress response, emotional balance and a greater sense of purpose among students (Pazer, 2024). Therefore, the practice of spiritual well-being can contribute to overcoming the psychological issues adolescents and youth face.
- **Moral, Ethical and Social Dimensions:** A spiritual approach would facilitate empathy, compassion, moral reasoning, and social responsibility. Value exploration through questions of meaning and human connectedness might be enriched at a deeper level. The system of education needs to go beyond superficial “values lessons” in order to inculcate change from within. Similarly, spiritually grounded youth would navigate moral dilemmas better at personal and professional levels by marrying ethical acumen with competence.

- **Self-Realisation and Purpose:** It is normal for teenagers and young adults to contemplate life and ask themselves questions such as "Who am I?" or "What is my purpose?" It is the spiritual practice that can lead the individual towards meanings in life and a sense of life purpose, while existential psychology informs the thought that searching for meaning and purpose in life is central to human existence. Education should, therefore, target not only academic and career success but also deeper self-realisation and purpose.
- **Physical and Cognitive Growth:** The practice of achieving spiritual well-being does not function in isolation. It is the achievement of physical health through the practice of yoga, emotional intelligence through mindfulness, and cognitive development through reflective inquiry that all together contribute to attaining the overall spiritual well-being. Therefore, focusing on this integrated growth as its whole will be crucial for the holistic development of youth.

### Tools and Methods to Promote the Spiritual Well-being of Youth in Higher Educational Institutions

In addition to institutional approaches that can put ideas into reality for holistic youth development, the integration of spiritual well-being practice into higher education calls for organised techniques, resources and pedagogical methods. Based on traditional Bhartiya concepts and keeping the approach inclusive, adopting a systematic approach would aid the higher education institutions greatly in integrating the practice of spiritual well-being in their academic pursuits. While developing any framework for the integration of spiritual well-being in the curriculum of higher educational institutions, some guiding principles should be kept in mind, such as:

- Students should never feel pressured to engage in these activities; instead, activities should be framed in such a manner that they can be voluntarily accessible for both religious and non-religious students.
- These tools and practices should honour and respect the religious and cultural diversity of the students, making a rule for multiple interpretations and personal choice.
- Activities should progress from simple to deeper forms, such as starting from simple techniques of mindful breathing to deeper states of reflection or meditation.
- Higher educational institutions must weave spiritual well-being into the curriculum, campus life, and assessment processes, rather than simply treating it as an optional subject.

Tools and Methods to be added enhance the spiritual well-being of students in higher education institutions:

Sr. No.	Tools and Methods	Purpose
1	Mindfulness and Meditation Modules	HEIs can make structured modules on mindfulness and meditation practices. Mindfulness-based stress reduction programmes, and meditation practices like Vipassana and any other form of meditation practice can be adopted. 5-10 minutes

		of daily mindfulness activities can be incorporated into the classrooms to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and enhance emotional balance.
2	Yoga Practice Courses	NEP 2020 encourage the Indian Knowledge System to be incorporated in the educational institutions, thus, combining Asanas (postures), Pranayama (breathwork), and Dhyana (meditation) can be introduced to all departments and courses to support resilience, emotional regulation, and spiritual well-being among youth.
3	Reflective Journaling and Contemplative Writings	External knowledge with inner experience can be deepened by connecting them to reflection-based practices. Reflective journaling and creative writing can help students articulate their spiritual journey.
4	Value Education, Ethics and Moral Reflections	Value and ethical education must be integrated into all disciplines and should not necessarily remain confined to one course. Satya (truth), Ahimsa (non-violence), Seva or service-all these principles need to be instilled through dialogic pedagogy, case studies, and ethical discussions.
5	Integrative Seminars on Spirituality	The seminar could allow students to explore spiritual philosophy, meditative practices, and their relevance in the modern world within a disciplinary forum. In such sessions, spiritual learning could be explored from philosophical, comparative mystic, psychological, and literary perspectives by integrating intellectual inquiry with life experience.
6	Campus Environments and Culture	Higher education institutions can create a supportive campus culture that promotes spiritual well-being in practice. Meditation rooms, prayer spaces, and a contemplative garden offer students a space to find refuge and a space for introspection and self-reflection.
7	Peer Groups and Community Activities	Spiritual growth blossoms among peers in a community. It offers a safe space to share discussions, practices, and mutual reflections. Seva turns out to be more meaningful when combined with empathy and social responsibility, thus allowing the student to link outer action with inner transformation.

8	Assessment Feedback	and	Assessment of spiritual well-being requires sensitive and multi-dimensional methods. Spiritual well-being scales can be used periodically for self-assessment. Besides, qualitative reflections, portfolios, and journals that combine experiential, reflective, and project-based elements will provide a more holistic evaluation to assess spiritual development in youths.
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The methods mentioned above and tools such as mindfulness, yoga, reflective writing, ethics, peer learning, etc., in higher educational institutions can collectively attain an environment and culture that promotes internal growth and spiritual development. Spiritual well-being, inclusively and thoughtfully, not only enriches the lives of students but also prepares graduates to live with resilience, compassion and deeper purpose in all pursuits of life.

### **Spiritual Well-Being and Higher Educational Institutions: Problems and Challenges**

Integration of spiritual well-being in educational pursuits for the holistic and overall development of youth can be difficult and present some problems and challenges, which are given as follows:

- **Lack of Trained Faculty/Instructors, Resistance, and Motivation:** As the spiritual well-being is a sensitive issue, there might not be enough qualified teachers or instructors to adequately address students' spiritual needs. Lack of motivation and enthusiasm, and resistance on the part of both teachers and students, might result in feeling unprepared or hesitant when inculcating spirituality into their teachings. Also, courses in spiritual intelligence, mindfulness, contemplative pedagogy, and reflective practices provided for faculty development are highly essential. Offering exemplars, peer support, and institutional recognition will help in building the confidence and motivation of faculty members.
- **Curriculum overload and lack of time:** There is already pressure on faculty and students to fulfil the academic requirements, and higher education curricula are often packed. Spiritual well-being activities may therefore be viewed as an added burden that takes away from the necessary curriculum. The yoga and mindfulness classes can be integrated into daily teaching strategies to avoid this problem. For example, classes that use two-minute reflections or activities instead of longer required sessions are easier and more sustainable.
- **Assorted Beliefs and Questions from Students:** Students at the university level come from different spiritual, agnostic, and atheistic backgrounds. Those practices that seem to favour traditions may make some individuals resist contemplation activities, suspect religious intentions or feel left out. Diversity must be respected, and participation encouraged. Religious alternatives such as journaling, creative reflection, mindfulness, and outdoor activities can engage students with disparate preferences. Spiritual wellness should be framed, for the sake of diversity, as an inquiry rather than a required set of beliefs.

- **Constraints in Measurement, Evaluation and Research:** Spiritual well-being is harder to measure and requires judgments with a subjective element. It is not easy to attribute outcomes to practices, especially over long periods. There are also questions about the measurement instruments. Organisations may want to use mixed-method approaches, which will involve stories and testimonials supported by some quantitative data. The use of control groups, before-and-after designs and collaborations across departments can make research more robust, build stronger evidence and allow findings to be transferred more easily.
- **Participation and Institutional Culture:** Efforts will continue to be under-resourced and underfunded if institutional leaders perceive spiritual well-being as "non-academic." Academic settings have often neglected reflective growth and have favoured measurable outcomes such as grades and research output. Small pilot programs can help demonstrate worth by showcasing student testimonials and linking outcomes to existing institutional objectives such as retention, employability, and student wellbeing.
- **Boundaries and Secularism:** Efforts to foster spirituality in secular or multifaith organisations, many will be perceived to show bias toward certain traditions, if not theorise religious indoctrination. These perceptions may result in push-back from educators, students, and even constituents in the external context. In countering this push-back, schools need to intentionally add spiritual well-being as part of holistic education. Moreover, higher educational institutions must highlight normative values of community, empathy, purpose, and reflection. Increasing transparency about the voluntary participation may also mitigate boundary issues for those in non-religious contexts.
- **Resource Constraints:** Implementing new spiritual initiatives requires resources, financial, space, and/or qualified facilitators. Educational institutions already have constraints; they will be even less likely to prioritise spiritual well-being within the bounds of other priorities supported by existing resources. The key to starting is to prioritise low-cost and resource-intensive options that match spiritual initiatives, such as short guided meditations or self-reflective writing. In the long term, the application of spiritual well-being may be more feasible if they work as neighbours, utilising alumni experience, and take baby steps.
- **Sustainability and Student Engagement:** Although there may be an inclusion of spiritual practices, there is always a concern about student engagement over time. Students may initially come out of interest, but fall away because of cynicism, competing obligations, and/or homework pressure. Therefore, teachers, institutions and students must co-develop several projects and approaches to enhance the spiritual well-being of students, ensuring flexibility and proper engagement.

Higher education institutions may overcome the difficulties and issues that arise while addressing the spiritual well-being of young people by transforming them into many opportunities to improve students' overall growth. By viewing spirituality as an integral aspect of human life, universities may foster an environment that promotes students' spiritual achievement while also fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and resilience.

## Conclusion

Youth of the 21<sup>st</sup> century experience several challenges, such as the search for identity, moral dilemmas, and existential crises. Excellence in academia alone will not prepare young people for living in complexity. While NEP 2020 does not discuss "spiritual well-being", it provides significant opportunities for holistic education, the Indian Knowledge Systems, well-being in the education system, and building capacities of teachers to help children engage the inner dimension of growth. Educational organisations can support young people in becoming not only capable professionals, but also morally responsible, bright, compassionate, and resilient citizens by enhancing their spiritual well-being. Therefore, Spiritual well-being is essential to life and is not an option but a necessity, which can help youth to be prepared to deal with all the challenges of life.

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