

A true tribute can be paid to Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati only by building a cultured, vibrant society filled with a sense of 'self'; and freeing society of untouchability, addiction and superstitions.

—SHRI DATTATREYA HOSABALE, Sarkaryavah, RSS

## Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati

REAWAKENING ARSHA  
BHARAT IN AMRIT KAAL



RSS Sarsanghchalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat called Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, the great saint 'who gave a clear and true vision of our national selfhood (Swa) through *Satyarth Prakash* to attain freedom from the British rule'. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi says National Education Policy 2020 was formulated in accordance with Swamiji's vision. In Amrit Kaal, when Bharat is poised to shed the remaining vestiges of colonialism from her physical and spiritual body, the vision of Dayanand Saraswati has become more relevant. Recontextualizing his vision to suit the demands of time is the need of the hour.

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## CHAPTER 5

# DAYANAND'S EDUCATIONAL VISION & NEP-2020

*Dayananda was the first leader in the field of theology who welcomed the advances of sciences and technology. To him, the Vedas as the source book contain the seed of science, and to him, the Vedas advocate the philosophy of dynamic realism.*

—Romain Rolland

### (PART I)

#### **Introduction**

In the 1940s, Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), a renowned historian, wrote extensively about Bharat and its potential as a global power. He predicted that Bharat would become the only hope for humanity in the face of the challenges posed by World War II and the stress of modernization. Toynbee believed that Bharat's spiritual depth, cultural richness, and historical continuity would enable it to survive and succeed in the long run. He saw India as an ideal of hope and inspiration for other nations, and his

writings continue to influence discussions about Bharat's role in the world today.

In contemporary times, a pervasive influence of detrimental ideologies permeates both Bharat and the global landscape, stemming from the flawed literature of the uneducated and impractical educational systems. The consequences of such misguided ideas have led to a stark misalignment between the convictions of the educated and the stark realities of existence.

Amid this ideological chaos, the visionary Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883) emerges as a beacon of wisdom, and we observe his 200<sup>th</sup> birth centennial in 2024–25 with year-long world-wide celebrations. His influence spans various facets of life, with a distinctive impact on education. Maharshi Dayanand ardently advocated for the Gurukul education system and the *Arsha* curriculum, believing it to be the sole path for holistic development—physical, mental, and spiritual. Maharshi sought to eradicate conflicts, disputes, injustices, and atrocities, fostering happiness, peace, and the removal of superstitions for the well-being of humanity, and he believed that this curriculum remains exceptionally useful and beneficial for the welfare of society.

The term *Arsha Pathavidhi* (further AP), coined by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati around 150 years ago, holds profound significance. The words 'Rishi,' signifying God or Vedic Seer, and *Arsha*, denoting God/Seer derived or God/Seer related. This implies a well-structured curriculum (*Pathavidhi*) dedicated to the study and teaching of the Vedas, bestowed by God and aimed at realizing the divine. Also, it refers to the study method employed by the mantra-seeking scholars or those discoursing on various sciences aligned with the Vedas. Maharshi envisioned this as universally beneficial, aiming for global unity through

the ideals of Vedamata (universal agreement), Vaidika Dharma (universal religion), and Samskritam (Sanskrit language) as the eternal medium.

During the epochs when Bharat embraced education aligned with the *Arsha* curriculum, the nation thrived, basking in glory and dignity on every front. Fast forward to the present day, and the educational landscape is marred by the shortcomings of unscientific methodologies, posing a threat to humanity. Educators disenchanted with the existing system are raising a clamor for significant change. The alternative, as outlined by Maharshi Dayanand in works like *Satyarth Prakash*, advocates for the 'Gurukula education system and *Arsha*-curriculum'. Delving into the characteristics of this educational approach reveals a meticulously structured system that prioritizes efficiency and depth. The imperative need for such change is underscored by the National Education Policy 2020 (further NEP), which comes as a long-awaited response to the Macaulay Minute of 1835. Maharshi's vision can be seen as a refined response, akin to a diamond cut, in contrast to the Macaulay model. The AP and its implementation, in some way through the nationwide network of Arsha Gurukuls and DAV institutions, would have positively impacted and helped the NEP draft, even though history had divided them for 150 years.

### **Objections Answered**

Maharshi Dayanand's *Arsha-Pathavidhi*, a curriculum designed around 150 years ago, has faced objections from some quarters that stem from a lack of understanding of its real nature and purpose. Similar objections are also encountered by NEP 2020 from various quarters. These objections can be summarized into four main points:

### 1. Psychological flaws of the method

Critics argue that Maharshi Dayanand's pedagogy is deemed less psychologically significant than the Western approach. They challenge the perceived efficacy and impact of AP on the mental development of individuals.

### 2. Incompleteness in addressing new topics

Another objection asserts that AP is incomplete when viewed in the context of emerging subjects post-Maharshi's time. Critics argue that the curriculum lacks adaptability to accommodate the introduction of new topics that have arisen since Maharshi's era.

### 3. Perceived uselessness in modern context

Some contend that AP is deemed useless and irrelevant in the contemporary physical and scientific milieu. Critics question its applicability in the face of advancements and changes in scientific knowledge and technology.

### 4. Lack of proper implementation by followers

Scepticism surrounds the effectiveness of AP due to its alleged inadequate implementation by Maharshi's followers and the Arya Samaj. Critics point to this perceived impracticality as evidence of the method's failure.

However, Maharshi's implementation of AP was not arbitrary; rather, it was a result of careful contemplation and consultation with his Guru, Swami Virajanand Saraswati (1778–1868), a Dandi *sanyasi* who belonged to Sri Sankara's Dasanami system and was renowned for strictly following the *Arsha* system. The curriculum's structure, including the duration of study and the selection of relevant texts, was determined through



meticulous consideration. Importantly, Maharshi was cognizant of the educational landscape during his time, marked by the coexistence of Western and traditional teaching methods. AP was a deliberate response to these contrasting systems, chosen after a comprehensive examination of their usefulness, relevance, and practicality.

### **The Core Vidyas**

The core Vidyas, or disciplines, enumerated in AP include:

**Vedavidya:** Maharshi emphasized the study of the Vedas and allied texts, considering them a source of true material knowledge and essential for all human beings.

**Vyakarana (Grammar):** The curriculum involved a thorough study of grammar, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of linguistic principles.

**Tarka (Logic):** The curriculum included logical reasoning, equipping students with the skills to analyze and comprehend complex concepts.

**Mimamsa (Vedic Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Ritual Studies):** A critical examination of various texts and scriptures, enabling students to engage with the teachings of revered sages.

**Yoga:** Maharshi incorporated the study of Yoga, emphasizing its significance for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

**Dharma Shastra:** A focus on ethical and moral principles as outlined in Dharma Shastra contributes to character development.

**Sanskrit Literature:** The curriculum encompassed the study of classical Sanskrit literature, connecting students with the rich cultural heritage.

Maharshi's deep conviction in the significance of these Vidyas is evident in his assertions. He emphasized that without their study, genuine knowledge is unattainable. Despite objections,

Maharshi's foresight and commitment to Vedic principles make AP a compelling model with enduring relevance in the pursuit of a comprehensive and culturally rooted education system. He held that the welfare and progress of Bharat could only happen through the study of sacred texts encompassed within the AP. Furthermore, he envisioned the propagation of celibacy, Vedic Dharma, and Vedic knowledge as crucial for the prosperity of the country. As we implement NEP with the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) framework, it becomes crucial to cross-reference it with the essentials of AP to ensure a harmonious integration of traditional wisdom with contemporary educational reforms.

### **Arsha Pathavidhi (AP)—A Thoughtful Response to the Educational Challenges**

Critics may argue against AP's alignment with 'modern' educational needs; however, Maharshi foresaw the detrimental impact of the Western education system imposed by the British Raj. He observed that this system aimed to diminish Indian culture, loyalty, and patriotism, sowing seeds of discord and promoting Christianity. Maharshi advocated for enduring Sanskrit education to counteract these influences, appealing to the British government to support such initiatives.

Maharshi's warnings about blind admiration for Western culture, rejection of indigenous symbols of education, and the potential dangers of abandoning traditional practices are echoed in his writings. He identified flaws in the Western system that led to moral decline, loss of identity, and detachment from Indian values. Maharshi's insights and the UN directives (UNDRIP 2007) converge in highlighting the significance of safeguarding indigenous practices and traditional wisdom to maintain cultural identity and foster a balanced approach to education.

Moreover, Maharshi recognized the shortcomings of mythological education systems prevalent in his time, emphasizing the negative consequences of deviating from Vedic scriptures. He criticized the adoption of foreign beliefs and languages, stressing the importance of upholding indigenous knowledge and traditions. It is imperative that this criticism be duly reflected in the NEP frameworks of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Traditional Knowledge (TK).

In essence, Maharshi Dayanand's *Arsha-Pathavidhi* aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the NEP, offering a thoughtful response to the educational challenges of both his era and ours. His emphasis on Vedic knowledge, cultural preservation, and moral values signifies a comprehensive vision for education that encompasses not only academic development but also societal well-being and national identity. Considering this alignment, a strategic approach involving cross-checking and contrasting the AP with the NEP can be instrumental in ensuring the successful and rapid implementation of the policy.

## (PART II)

### **Historical Significance of Arsha Pathavidhi**

AP, rooted in the *Mahabharata* era, was the sole education system, contributing to Bharat's prosperity and knowledge. This resulted in the birth of accomplished individuals across various fields, including Brahmarshis, Rajarishis, politicians, craftsmen, poets, archers, and philosophers, amongst the educated public.

### **Scientific and holistic education**

Maharshi emphasizes that *Arsha Shastras* were pivotal in moral, spiritual, physical, and scientific progress during ancient times. He warns that Bharat's present degradation is due to abandoning

these texts. Also, he counters the perceived non-scientific nature of *Arsha Pathavidhi*, stating that no comparable world-class contributions have been produced under the Western system.

### **Vedic wisdom and Vedas as a blueprint**

Maharshi urges contemplation on the advice given through the Vedas for human happiness. He highlights examples from Prajapati Brahma to Maharaja Yudhishtira, illustrating how adherence to the Vedas led to prosperity, knowledge, and joy. Maharshi attributes the current state of Aryans, i.e., Indians, to deviation from Vedic principles.

### **Regret over decline and urgent need for change**

Maharshi expresses regret over Aryavarta's deterioration and implores kings and people to abandon detrimental practices. He advocates adherence to the eternal scriptures to bring about positive change, emphasizing that this is the only way for constant improvement.

### **Historical evidence from the epics**

He describes examples from the *Ramayana*, where Dasharatha and his sons received Vedic education, showcasing the prevalence and success of *Arsha* education during that period. He also cites contrasting instances of characters like Ravana and Hanuman, who were scholars in formal education and Vedic scriptures.

### **Sustained progress through Vedic education**

Maharshi asserts that from the Vedic period to the *Mahabharata*, Bharat's progress in religion (Dharma), wealth (*Artha*), work (*Kaama*), and salvation (*Moksha*) was directly tied to the study and teaching of Vedic scriptures. He highlights the broad

spectrum of knowledge covered, encompassing spiritual, moral, and practical aspects.

### (PART III)

#### **Arsha-Pathavidhi (AP) Explained**

##### **A comprehensive education system**

AP is presented as a specialized and comprehensive education system that starts from the foundational level of individual and societal hygiene. Maharshi stresses the importance of specialized education, with a main subject studied sequentially for expertise.

##### **Flexibility and adaptability in education**

Maharshi emphasizes the necessity for coordination by acknowledging that, although offering a fundamental central framework, modifications can be made along the way.

##### **Language mediums and relevance of Sanskrit**

Maharshi promotes Sanskrit as the main medium of education, with mother tongues as supporting mediums. He recognizes the need to teach foreign languages based on their relevance.

##### **Inclusivity and equality in education**

Maharshi advocates for compulsory education for everyone, irrespective of caste or gender, with provisions for punishment if parents fail to comply. He asserts equal rights for all individuals, including Shudras, women, and Dasyus, to access Vedic education.

##### **Free education and financial management**

Maharshi advocates for free education with financial management handled by the government, the wealthy, and capable parents.

He encourages voluntary donations from parents who wish to contribute to the Gurukul.

#### (PART IV)

### **Key Principles of AP and NEP Goals**

Maharshi Dayanand's *Arsha-Pathavidhi* harmonizes seamlessly with the objectives outlined in the NEP. Here is a concise elaboration of how the key principles of AP align with NEP goals:

#### **Efficiency and depth in learning**

The *Arsha-Patha* method champions the acquisition of extensive knowledge with minimal effort, saving valuable time for students. This resonates with NEP's goal of promoting critical thinking and in-depth understanding.

#### **Language accessibility and freedom from verbosity**

The simplicity of language in the AP facilitates the comprehension of complex subjects, making education accessible. NEP's focus on making education accessible to all finds resonance in AP's freedom from verbosity, simplifying complex subjects for students.

#### **Sequential and specialized learning**

In contrast to the prevailing educational system's information overload, AP focuses on comprehending one subject thoroughly before moving on. The *Arsha* curriculum follows a structured sequence for studying the Vedas, Vedangas, Upangas, etc., ensuring a seamless flow of understanding without unnecessary complexities. This perfectly aligns with NEP's emphasis on a flexible and multidisciplinary education system, avoiding the *khichdi* of subjects.

### **Equity and inclusivity**

Treating all students equally and fostering asceticism establishes a harmonious and egalitarian environment. The ideal communism in AP, treating all students equally, reflects NEP's commitment to inclusivity and ensuring equal opportunities for all learners.

### **Dharma first and wealth second**

Prioritizing Dharma, AP integrates the study of Veda-Vedangas with Arthakari (wealth generating) Vidyas, e.g., Upavedas like *Ayurveda*. This echoes NEP's vision of integrating traditional and modern knowledge systems.

### **Guru-Sishya tradition**

The relationship between teacher and disciple mirrors the nurturing bond between a mother and a child, a departure from the discordant *Anarsha* system. The Guru-Disciple tradition in the *Arsha* education system mirrors NEP's emphasis on a supportive teacher-student relationship, essential for effective learning.

### **Celibacy and virtue**

AP's focus on celibacy and good conduct aligns with NEP's emphasis on instilling 'soft skills' (moral and ethical values) in education. Celibacy and good conduct are core tenets, countering the moral pitfalls seen in modern education systems.

### **Cultural integration**

The *Arsha* education system instills a deep sense of patriotism and devotion to Bharatiya civilization and culture, guarding

against the seeds of treachery, aligning with NEP's objective of promoting Indian values, heritage, and traditions.

## (PART V)

### **The Vision of AP and its Alignment with NEP**

#### **Holistic learning**

Dayanand's vision advocates for physical, mental, and spiritual development, echoing NEP's emphasis on holistic education.

#### *(a) Choice and variety of subjects in the attainment of education*

Maharshi emphasized that individuals should study based on their 'Varna', acknowledging that different individuals have different aptitudes. This resonates with NEP's call for flexibility and a choice-based credit system. The recognition that not everyone needs to become a scholar but can contribute in their chosen field aligns with NEP's focus on individualized learning paths.

#### *(b) Education through practical, machine, etc.*

Maharshi emphasized learning through practical application, instruments, and artistic skills. This aligns with NEP's emphasis on experiential learning, practical knowledge, and integrating hands-on experiences into the curriculum.

#### *(c) Readable books by other authors in AP*

Maharshi Dayanand, in his pursuit of knowledge, emphasized the importance of understanding texts beyond the Vedas. He stated that all scriptures, amounting to around three thousand, written by Mahatmas, from Sage Brahma to Sage Jaimini, should



be accepted as witnesses. This inclusive approach aligns with the spirit of the NEP, which encourages holistic education by embracing a diverse range of knowledge.

(d) *Mention various disciplines like science, commerce, medicine, craftsmanship, etc.*

Maharshi's vision encompassed a wide range of subjects, from astronomy and geography to mathematics, medicine, and craftsmanship. This holistic approach mirrors NEP's goal of promoting a multidisciplinary education system. The emphasis on practical skills and varied disciplines is in harmony with NEP's aim to foster creativity, critical thinking, and a well-rounded education.

(e) *Maharshi's craftsmanship-school plan*

Maharshi not only recognized the importance of craftsmanship but also had plans for practical education. His proposal for art-skill schools aligns with NEP's emphasis on vocational education and skill development. The NEP envisions a system where students can choose from a variety of vocational courses, integrating practical skills into mainstream education.

(f) *Maharshi's plan for open public schools*

Maharshi's plan to establish *Kshatrashalas* for political and military education, alongside the study of *Arshashastras*, highlights the comprehensive nature of his education system. While the specific idea might need adaptation, the underlying principle of providing a well-rounded education aligns with NEP's vision of holistic development.

(g) *Variety of subjects related to language study*

Maharshi advocated for the study of various languages, including

Sanskrit, Aryan languages, and other indigenous languages. This aligns with NEP's promotion of multilingualism and the importance of preserving and promoting regional languages.

## (PART VI)

### **The Mission of Arsha Pathavidhi and its Alignment with NEP**

Continuing the conversation about AP and its conformity with the objectives of NEP, let's consider certain aspects related to the mission component.

#### **Training in the arts, skills, and crafts**

The AP stresses the importance of training in arts, skills, and crafts, aligning with NEP's focus on a multidisciplinary approach to attaining its holistic vision.

#### **Examinations and scholarly oversight**

AP advocates periodic examinations by scholars other than teachers to ensure the quality of education. This aligns with NEP's emphasis on continuous evaluation and periodic assessments.

#### **Righteous citizenship and global unity**

AP proposes that even if individuals don't become scholars, they must become righteous (dharmic) citizens. It envisions the spread of Vedamata, Vedic Dharma, and Sanskrit language globally for the establishment of happiness, peace, morality, and civilization.

In essence, Maharshi Dayanand's *Arsba-Pathavidhi* encapsulates a comprehensive and inclusive educational framework that aligns seamlessly with the goals and principles outlined in the National Education Policy.

### **Some Doubts and Solutions Related to the Arsha Curriculum**

(1) **Lack of recognition for AP:** The lack of recognition for AP primarily stems from historical neglect of the indigenous education system, persisting even in independent Bharat, where preference is often given to the Macaulay model. To address this challenge, adapting AP within the existing recognition framework or establishing alternative systems that integrate its principles is crucial. Recognition is essential in the modern context for broader acceptance. Notably, the NEP, with its IKS framework, serves as a significant recognition of Maharshi Dayanand's pedagogy, providing a platform for its acknowledgment and incorporation.

(2) **Classification of subjects at class level:** Maharshi Dayanand, following ancient traditions, proposed a study sequence over class-level classification. Adapting the *Arsha* curriculum to accommodate both approaches needs to address concerns, particularly regarding the flexibility allowed in NEP.

While classifying subjects at class levels might be convenient for examination boards or universities, it hinders the progress of talented students. Maharshi's approach allows each student to advance according to their individual talents, preventing a one-size-fits-all model that hampers the pace of progress. The duration of study is tailored to the intelligence level, with shorter periods for brighter students and longer periods for those with average intelligence.

Maharshi's notion here aligns with NEP's encouragement of a multidimensional education system. First, Maharshi's rejection of class-level classification in favor of a sequence

resonates with NEP's emphasis on flexibility and individualized learning paths. Second, Maharshi's insistence on a tailored duration of study based on intelligence corresponds to NEP's call for personalized and adaptive approaches to education. Third, Maharshi's support for a diverse range of supporting texts, subjects, languages, and sciences mirrors NEP's promotion of a multidisciplinary curriculum. Fourth, Maharshi's establishment of schools using both sequential and class methods aligns with NEP's vision of a flexible and inclusive education system. Fifth, the overall emphasis on preventing talented individuals from progressing in Maharshi's notion echoes NEP's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all learners.

**(3) Continuity from summary to detail:** Maharshi's focus on specialization does not negate the importance of having a foundational understanding of various subjects. Balancing both depth and breadth in the curriculum and ensuring foundational knowledge before specialization can address this concern.

**(4) Compulsory nature of all subjects:** Maharshi's emphasis on compulsory subjects aligns with NEP's call for a broad-based education. However, flexibility and choice within the curriculum should be allowed to cater to diverse student interests and aptitudes.

**(5) Discrimination or favoritism in Varna education:** Understanding Varna as a choice based on interest and aptitude rather than birth can help dispel concerns of discrimination or favoritism. This aligns with NEP's vision of an inclusive and flexible

education system that caters to individual capabilities.

(6) **Distinction in education based on caste:** Clarifying that Varna is based on individual choice and not birth can address concerns about caste-based education, opportunities, and jobs. Emphasizing equality and inclusion aligns with NEP's principles of providing equitable opportunities to all.

(7) **Teaching subjects like politics, military science, and Ayurveda in their traditional flavor:** While these subjects may not be part of mainstream education today, recognizing the significance of these subjects and integrating them as supplementary or vocational courses aligns with NEP's emphasis on multidisciplinary learning. This approach is in harmony with the evolving landscape of education, and notable progress can be observed in initiatives like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library.

(8) **Practical implementation:** The practical implementation of AP requires a collective effort from Gurukuls and modern educational institutions. Adapting the curriculum to modern contexts while preserving its essence is key to its successful implementation. E.g., the long chain of Bharatheeya Vidya Nikethan schools in Kerala have recently adopted the daily Agnihotra ritual initiated by Maharshi Dayanand.

To conclude, Maharshi Dayanand's foresight, encapsulated in the AP, not only addresses the current educational crisis but also aligns seamlessly with the core principles and objectives outlined in the National Education Policy 2020. The age gap of 150 years between Dayanand and NEP 2020 fades away, showcasing the timeless relevance of his educational vision in shaping a progressive and inclusive educational framework

for Bharat. As scholars like Dr Surendra Kumar Acharya (Haryana), Acharya Ananda Prakash (Andhra Pradesh), and Muni Satyajith (Ajmer) expound upon its relevance, there is hope that understanding and adopting *Arsba-Pathavidhi* as NEP-compliant will pave the way for a better India and, consequently, a better world, echoing the sentiment: वही वृद्धभारत गुरु है हमारा—That Vriddha Bharat is our Guru.

—Dr Anandaraj G  
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