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Perspectives

**Indian Knowledge Systems under NEP 2020:
Reclaiming Knowledge, Shaping the Future**

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century is witnessing a fundamental rethinking of knowledge as societies confront unprecedented challenges arising from climate change, technological transformation, biodiversity loss, cultural homogenisation and widening social inequalities. These complex issues demand educational approaches that extend beyond disciplinary boundaries and integrate scientific inquiry with ethical values, cultural understanding and sustainable practices. Against this backdrop, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational philosophy by recognising Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a dynamic intellectual tradition that enriches contemporary education, research and innovation. The Policy treats India's civilisational heritage as a continuing source of ideas that contributes to interdisciplinary learning, knowledge creation and national development. This article examines the philosophical foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems, the educational reforms initiated under NEP 2020 and India's emerging role in building a more collaborative and sustainable Global Knowledge Commons.

KEYWORDS: Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, Education Reform, Indigenous Knowledge, Knowledge Pluralism, Cognitive Justice, Global Knowledge Commons.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has always shaped the course of civilizations. It influences how societies understand nature, organise institutions, preserve cultural memory and respond to change. For much of the modern era, however, global academic discourse largely reflected a limited range of intellectual traditions, leaving many indigenous and civilizational systems outside the mainstream of education and research. In recent decades, this perspective has begun to change. As the world confronts increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, there is growing recognition that meaningful solutions emerge through dialogue among diverse knowledge traditions. Issues such as climate change, ecological degradation, public health, food security and sustainable development cannot be understood through a single disciplinary perspective. International scholarship increasingly acknowledges that Indigenous and traditional knowledge offers valuable insights developed through centuries of observation, experimentation and lived experience. The challenge before contemporary education is therefore to create meaningful engagement between different ways of knowing while preserving scientific rigour and critical inquiry.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reflects this evolving intellectual landscape. It presents a renewed vision of education that combines academic excellence with ethical responsibility, cultural rootedness and global citizenship. Learning is no longer viewed only as preparation for employment. It is recognised as a lifelong process that nurtures critical thinking, creativity, compassion and responsible participation in society. A defining feature of this vision is the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mainstream education. The Policy recognises that India possesses one of the world's oldest continuous traditions of knowledge creation. It seeks to reconnect learners with this intellectual heritage and demonstrate its continuing relevance for contemporary education, research and innovation. The philosophical foundations of this approach are rooted in the Indian ideals of Jñāna (knowledge), Prajñā (wisdom) and Satya (truth). In the Indian tradition, education was understood as a process of intellectual inquiry, ethical refinement and holistic human development. Knowledge was expected to cultivate competence, character and social responsibility while encouraging curiosity and lifelong learning.

India's intellectual history illustrates the depth and diversity of this tradition. Scholars such as Charaka and Suśruta advanced medical science through systematic observation and clinical practice. Āryabhaṭa and Brahmagupta transformed mathematics and astronomy through

original discoveries that influenced scientific thought beyond India. Pāṇini's analysis of Sanskrit grammar remains one of the most sophisticated linguistic systems ever developed, while philosophers including Nāgārjuna, Gārgī and Maitreyī enriched philosophical inquiry through reasoned debate and critical reflection. Collectively, these contributions demonstrate that Indian scholarship evolved through questioning, observation and intellectual exchange. Recognising this legacy does not imply accepting every traditional practice without examination.

NEP 2020 clearly affirms that Indian Knowledge Systems should be studied through rigorous scholarship, empirical validation and interdisciplinary research. The Policy encourages constructive engagement between classical knowledge traditions and contemporary disciplines so that each can enrich the other. Such an approach strengthens scientific temper while broadening the intellectual resources available for education and research. The significance of this transformation extends beyond India. Universities across the world increasingly emphasise interdisciplinarity, sustainability and cultural diversity. Within this changing environment, India's experience illustrates how civilisational knowledge can contribute meaningfully to contemporary scholarship without compromising academic standards. Reclaiming knowledge is therefore not an attempt to recreate the past. It is an effort to expand the intellectual foundations required for shaping the future.

EMBEDDING IKS IN EDUCATION

The vision articulated in NEP 2020 is being translated into practice through comprehensive reforms across the educational ecosystem. Indian Knowledge Systems are not introduced as a separate discipline. Instead, they are integrated across curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, research and institutional development. This approach enables learners to engage with India's intellectual heritage throughout their educational journey while acquiring the competencies needed in a rapidly changing world. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022 recognises early childhood as the most formative period for developing curiosity, creativity and cultural identity. Learning experiences are designed around stories, folk traditions, indigenous games, music, crafts and interactions with nature. These activities help children appreciate their cultural environment while strengthening observation, imagination, empathy and collaborative learning.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 extends this philosophy by identifying 'Rootedness in India' as one of the guiding principles of curriculum design. Indian Knowledge Systems are integrated across languages, mathematics, science, environmental studies, social sciences, arts and vocational education. Students are encouraged to understand how knowledge evolves, appreciate India's intellectual contributions and relate traditional insights to contemporary issues. Higher education has become an important driver of this transformation. The University Grants Commission's Guidelines for Incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems in Higher Education Curricula (2023) provide a comprehensive framework for curriculum redesign, interdisciplinary teaching, faculty development and research. Universities are encouraged to establish dedicated IKS Centres, strengthen engagement with primary sources, promote scholarship in Indian languages and develop interdisciplinary programmes connecting classical knowledge with modern academic disciplines. The Guidelines emphasise that the study of Indian Knowledge Systems must remain grounded in critical inquiry, evidence-based research and academic rigour.

Institutional support has expanded through the establishment of the Indian Knowledge Systems Division under the Ministry of Education. The Division serves as the national coordinating body for curriculum innovation, research, faculty development, publications and collaborative academic networks. By promoting partnerships among universities and research institutions, it has strengthened the institutional foundations needed to mainstream Indian Knowledge Systems within higher education. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems extends beyond curriculum reform to the creation of a supportive educational ecosystem. The Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division, established under the Ministry of Education, has emerged as the principal institution for coordinating research, curriculum development, faculty capacity building and academic collaboration. By supporting IKS Centres in universities and higher educational institutions, the Division has encouraged interdisciplinary scholarship across diverse fields, including philosophy, linguistics, engineering, architecture, health sciences, agriculture, management and the performing arts. These centres are fostering new research that connects India's intellectual heritage with contemporary academic inquiry and national development priorities.

School education has witnessed a similar transformation through several flagship initiatives aligned with the vision of NEP 2020. PM SHRI Schools seek to establish model institutions that integrate multidisciplinary learning with Indian values, environmental awareness,

experiential pedagogy and digital innovation. The emphasis is on creating learning environments where students develop academic competence alongside creativity, ethical responsibility and social consciousness. The Vidya Pravesh programme supports children entering Grade I by providing a structured school preparation module based on play, storytelling, local culture and community participation. This approach enables children to transition smoothly into formal education while strengthening their emotional, linguistic and cognitive development. Similarly, NIPUN Bharat focuses on achieving foundational literacy and numeracy through contextualised teaching practices that recognise children's linguistic backgrounds and cultural experiences. Together, these initiatives demonstrate that meaningful learning begins when education reflects the social and cultural realities of learners.

Language occupies a central place in this educational transformation. NEP 2020 recognises that languages are not merely instruments of communication but also carriers of culture, philosophy and intellectual traditions. The promotion of Bharatiya Bhashas therefore becomes essential for preserving and transmitting India's diverse knowledge traditions. Expanding textbooks, digital resources and scholarly publications in Indian languages enables learners to engage directly with classical texts and regional intellectual traditions while making higher education more accessible and inclusive. Digital technology has further strengthened the implementation of Indian Knowledge Systems. Platforms such as DIKSHA and SWAYAM provide multilingual educational resources, online courses, teacher training programmes and curriculum support across geographical boundaries.

These platforms have significantly expanded access to learning materials related to Indian philosophy, Yoga, Sanskrit, Indian languages and other knowledge traditions. By combining technology with culturally relevant content, they promote equitable access to quality education while supporting lifelong learning. Teachers remain the cornerstone of educational transformation. Recognising this, the Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme (MMTTP) equips educators with the disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical skills and interdisciplinary perspective required to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems into classroom teaching and curriculum design. Well-prepared teachers are essential for translating policy aspirations into meaningful educational experiences that encourage inquiry, critical thinking and contextual learning.

An important addition to this institutional framework is the Gyan Bharatam Mission, announced in the Union Budget 2025–26. The Mission seeks to survey, conserve, digitise, translate and disseminate India's vast manuscript heritage through advanced digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Its objective extends beyond preservation. By creating accessible digital repositories and encouraging scholarly engagement with manuscripts, inscriptions and archival records, the Mission seeks to transform centuries of accumulated knowledge into an active resource for education, research and innovation. It also offers new opportunities for international collaboration by making India's documentary heritage more accessible to scholars across the world. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems is not confined to curriculum development. It represents the creation of an educational ecosystem in which curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, digital infrastructure, multilingual learning and research reinforce one another. Through this integrated approach, NEP 2020 seeks to nurture learners who are culturally rooted, intellectually confident and globally engaged.

INDIA IN A PLURAL KNOWLEDGE WORLD

The renewed emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems under NEP 2020 reflects a broader international movement that recognises the value of Indigenous and traditional knowledge in addressing global challenges. Climate change, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, public health and disaster resilience increasingly require collaboration among different knowledge traditions. This emerging perspective acknowledges that scientific research and community-based knowledge can complement one another in generating context-sensitive and sustainable solutions.

International organisations have played an important role in advancing this dialogue. UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Programme has promoted the recognition of Indigenous knowledge as a valuable intellectual resource for sustainable development, environmental conservation and cultural preservation. UNESCO's Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (2018) and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) further reinforce the importance of protecting linguistic diversity and strengthening traditional knowledge systems. Similarly, global scientific bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) increasingly advocate integrating scientific evidence with Indigenous and local knowledge to improve environmental policy and

climate resilience. Several countries have incorporated these ideas into their education systems. New Zealand has integrated Mātauranga Māori into curriculum and environmental education, recognising Māori knowledge as an important component of national identity and sustainability. Canada has expanded the inclusion of First Nations, Inuit and Métis knowledge traditions within curriculum design, teacher education and research. Australia has similarly embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and ecological knowledge across disciplines. These experiences demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge is now regarded as an important contributor to educational innovation, environmental stewardship and social inclusion.

India's approach shares this global commitment while reflecting its own civilisational context. Unlike many countries where Indigenous knowledge reforms focus primarily on specific communities, India seeks to revitalise one of the world's oldest continuous traditions of scholarship across philosophy, mathematics, medicine, linguistics, astronomy, governance, agriculture and the arts. The objective is not simply to preserve historical achievements but to stimulate fresh research, innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. This vision is closely associated with the ideas of knowledge pluralism, epistemic diversity and cognitive justice. Knowledge pluralism recognises that different civilisations have developed distinct yet valuable ways of understanding the world. Epistemic diversity encourages dialogue among these traditions, while cognitive justice, a concept advanced by the Indian Scholar Shiv Visvanathan, argues that diverse knowledge systems deserve equal opportunities to contribute to scholarship and public policy through rigorous academic engagement. Together, these perspectives encourage a more inclusive understanding of knowledge without compromising scientific integrity.

Within this broader framework, the idea of a Global Knowledge Commons assumes particular significance. It envisages an intellectual ecosystem in which knowledge is strengthened through collaboration across cultures, disciplines and nations. NEP 2020 reflects this aspiration by positioning Indian Knowledge Systems as active participants in global scholarship rather than as isolated expressions of cultural heritage. The Policy encourages constructive dialogue between India's civilisational wisdom and contemporary scientific inquiry, thereby expanding the possibilities for collaborative research and innovation.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems under NEP 2020 represents far more than the inclusion of traditional content within modern curricula. It reflects a renewed understanding of education as a process that connects knowledge with values, innovation with heritage and national development with global responsibility. By embedding Indian intellectual traditions across curriculum, research, teacher education, multilingual learning and digital infrastructure, the Policy seeks to create an educational ecosystem that is both culturally grounded and internationally relevant.

The true significance of this transformation lies in its future potential. Indian Knowledge Systems are not being revived simply to celebrate the past. They are being reinterpreted to address contemporary challenges, stimulate interdisciplinary research and contribute to sustainable development. As the world moves towards more inclusive models of knowledge creation, India's experience demonstrates that tradition and modernity can reinforce one another through critical inquiry, scientific temper and academic excellence. The timeless Vedic ideal, *let noble thoughts come to us from every side*, captures the spirit of this vision. It reflects an enduring commitment to openness, dialogue and intellectual humility. Guided by these values, India has the opportunity not only to strengthen its own educational foundations but also to make a meaningful contribution to a more inclusive, collaborative and sustainable future.

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