

Indian Knowledge Systems and Religious Traditions in The Context of National Education Policy 2020

Vishal N. Chauhan ^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational framework by emphasizing the integration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into modern education. The policy aims to reconnect learners with India's cultural, philosophical, and intellectual heritage while simultaneously preparing them for global challenges. Indian Knowledge Systems are deeply intertwined with the country's religious and philosophical traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, which historically contributed to disciplines like philosophy, ethics, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and art. This research paper examines the relationship between Indian Knowledge Systems and religious traditions in the context of NEP 2020. It explores the historical roots of knowledge in Indian civilization, the role of religious traditions in shaping educational practices, and the efforts made by NEP 2020 to integrate these traditions into contemporary curricula. The paper also highlights the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing IKS-based education in modern institutions.

Keywords: *Education Policy 2020, Science System, Indian Culture, Value Based Education, Education Reform*

Education has always played a crucial role in shaping societies and civilizations. In India, the education system has historically been deeply connected with philosophical and spiritual traditions that form the foundation of Indian culture. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) refers to the vast body of knowledge developed in India over centuries, encompassing disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, ethics, arts, and spirituality. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Government of India, aims to reform the education system by incorporating traditional Indian knowledge with modern scientific and technological advancements. One of the key objectives of the policy is to ensure that students develop a strong sense of cultural identity and pride in India's heritage while gaining the skills necessary for the global knowledge economy. Indian religious traditions have historically contributed significantly to knowledge production and dissemination. Ancient educational institutions like gurukuls, monasteries, and universities such as Nalanda and Takshashila were centers of learning where religious philosophy and scientific knowledge coexisted. In this context, NEP 2020 emphasizes reconnecting education with India's intellectual heritage and cultural traditions.

¹ Ph. D. (Research Scholar) L.R.Valiya Arts and P.R. Mehta Commerce College Bhavnagar

*Corresponding Author: Mail id: cv261822@gmail.com

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This research paper examines the role of Indian Knowledge Systems and religious traditions within the framework of NEP 2020 and analyzes how these traditions can contribute to building a holistic and culturally grounded education system.

CONCEPT OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM (IKS)

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) refers to the rich and diverse body of knowledge that has been developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years. It includes ideas, practices, philosophies, sciences, arts, and cultural traditions that were created and preserved by ancient Indian scholars. The roots of IKS can be traced back to ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. These texts contain knowledge related to philosophy, ethics, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, governance, and spirituality. The main concept of IKS is based on the idea that knowledge should contribute to the overall well-being of individuals, society, and nature. Unlike many modern systems that focus mainly on material development, IKS emphasizes a holistic approach to life. It integrates physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual development. Ancient Indian thinkers believed that knowledge should guide people toward a balanced and harmonious life.

IKS also contributed significantly to scientific and mathematical advancements. Ancient Indian scholars made remarkable discoveries in mathematics, astronomy, and metallurgy. For instance, the concept of zero and the decimal number system were developed in India by mathematicians such as Aryabhata and Brahmagupta. These contributions later influenced the development of modern mathematics and science across the world. Education in the Indian Knowledge System was traditionally imparted through the Gurukul system, where students lived with their teachers and learned not only academic subjects but also discipline, moral values, and life skills. Knowledge was passed down through both oral traditions and written texts, ensuring its preservation across generations. Another important principle of IKS is respect for nature and sustainable living. Ancient Indian texts often highlight the importance of maintaining harmony with the environment. Many traditional practices in agriculture, water management, and architecture were designed to work with natural systems rather than against them.

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

Religious traditions have played a significant role in the development of knowledge throughout human history. Long before the rise of modern universities and scientific institutions, religious communities preserved, produced, and transmitted knowledge. Many early civilizations relied on religious institutions as centers of learning, where scholars studied philosophy, science, medicine, mathematics, and literature. In this way, religion contributed not only to spiritual guidance but also to intellectual growth and the preservation of cultural knowledge. One important role of religious traditions in knowledge development is the preservation of ancient texts and wisdom. Monasteries, temples, and religious schools often served as libraries where sacred and scholarly texts were copied and protected. For example, Christian monasteries in medieval Europe preserved classical Greek and Roman knowledge, while Islamic scholars translated and expanded works of philosophy, medicine, and mathematics during the Islamic Golden Age. Similarly, Hindu and Buddhist traditions preserved philosophical and scientific ideas in ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Buddhist scriptures. Religious traditions have also influenced ethical and moral knowledge. Many religions provide teachings about human behavior, justice, compassion, and responsibility.

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Another important contribution is the encouragement of philosophical inquiry. Religious thinkers often explored deep questions about existence, reality, and the nature of knowledge. These discussions led to the development of philosophical traditions that later influenced science and rational thought. Scholars in religious settings debated topics such as the origin of the universe, the nature of the soul, and the relationship between faith and reason. These intellectual debates helped build foundations for critical thinking and academic learning. Religious institutions also helped establish early systems of education. Many of the world's first schools and universities were founded by religious communities. These institutions provided structured learning environments where students could study a wide range of subjects. Over time, these educational traditions evolved into modern systems of higher education. However, the relationship between religion and knowledge has not always been harmonious. At times, religious beliefs have resisted new scientific ideas, leading to conflicts between faith and scientific discovery. Despite this, religion has still played a major role in shaping intellectual history.

EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

Education in ancient India was highly valued and considered essential for personal development and social responsibility. The system of education during this time was mainly based on the Gurukul system, where students lived with their teacher (guru) in a residential school. The aim of education was not only to gain knowledge but also to develop moral values, discipline, and spiritual understanding. In the Gurukul system, students left their homes at an early age and stayed in the ashram of the guru. They lived a simple life and helped the guru with daily tasks such as collecting firewood, cooking, and cleaning. This method helped students learn humility, self-discipline, and respect for elders. Education was mainly imparted orally. Students memorized texts and repeated them until they mastered the knowledge. The subjects taught in ancient Indian education were diverse. Students studied the Vedas, Upanishads, grammar, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and political science. Skills such as archery, warfare, and physical training were also taught, especially to the Kshatriya class. The language of instruction was mainly Sanskrit, which was considered the language of knowledge and learning. Ancient India was also home to some of the world's earliest universities. Famous centers of learning included Nalanda University, Takshashila University, and Vikramashila University. These institutions attracted students from different parts of India and even from foreign countries such as China, Korea, and Tibet. They had large libraries and offered advanced studies in religion, philosophy, medicine, and other sciences.

INTEGRATION OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN NEP 2020

National Education Policy 2020. The policy emphasizes incorporating India's rich intellectual, cultural, and scientific traditions into the modern education system. This approach aims to reconnect students with the country's historical knowledge while promoting innovation and critical thinking. Indian Knowledge Systems include ancient and traditional knowledge developed in fields such as philosophy, mathematics, medicine, agriculture, architecture, arts, and environmental science. For example, disciplines like Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedic Mathematics, and classical literature provide valuable insights into holistic living and scientific thinking. NEP 2020 encourages universities and schools to introduce courses, research programs, and activities that explore these knowledge traditions. One major objective of integrating IKS is to create a strong sense of cultural identity and pride among students. By learning about India's intellectual heritage, learners can better appreciate the contributions of ancient scholars such

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as Aryabhata and Sushruta. This helps students understand that India has long been a center of scientific and philosophical advancement. NEP 2020 also promotes interdisciplinary learning by connecting traditional knowledge with modern science and technology. For instance, concepts from Ayurveda can be studied alongside modern medical research, while ancient architectural principles can contribute to sustainable development and environmental conservation. The policy encourages research institutions to establish centers dedicated to studying Indian knowledge traditions. Another important step under NEP 2020 is the translation and preservation of ancient texts written in languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit. This allows scholars and students from diverse linguistic backgrounds to access these works. Additionally, teacher training programs are being developed to equip educators with the skills needed to effectively teach IKS-related subjects.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) aims to transform India's education system by integrating knowledge, values, and cultural heritage into learning. One important aspect of this policy is the recognition of India's rich religious and philosophical traditions as sources of ethical values, cultural understanding, and holistic development. While NEP 2020 promotes a secular and inclusive education system, it acknowledges that religious traditions have historically played a significant role in shaping India's intellectual and moral heritage. Religious traditions in India—such as those rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity—have contributed significantly to India's cultural and philosophical foundations. NEP 2020 encourages students to learn about these traditions as part of India's knowledge systems, literature, philosophy, and ethics. The goal is not to promote any particular religion but to foster respect for diversity, tolerance, and mutual understanding among students.

The policy emphasizes value-based education inspired by universal ethical principles found in many religious traditions, such as compassion, truthfulness, non-violence, and respect for others. These values are closely linked to the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, who emphasized moral education and non-violence. By incorporating such principles into school curricula, NEP 2020 seeks to nurture responsible citizens with strong moral character. Another important role of religious traditions in NEP 2020 is in preserving and promoting India's cultural heritage. The policy encourages the study of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit, which are closely associated with religious and philosophical texts. Learning these languages allows students to access ancient scriptures, literature, and philosophical works that form a crucial part of India's intellectual history.

BENEFITS OF INTEGRATING IKS AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) with religious traditions offers numerous cultural, social, and ecological benefits. IKS encompasses the collective wisdom, practices, and beliefs developed by local communities over generations, often grounded in close relationships with nature and community life. Religious traditions, on the other hand, provide moral frameworks, ethical guidance, and spiritual meaning to human existence. Combining these two knowledge systems creates a holistic approach to addressing contemporary challenges while preserving cultural heritage. One significant benefit of this integration is the preservation of cultural identity. Many indigenous communities view their traditional knowledge as inseparable from their spiritual and religious practices. By acknowledging and incorporating religious values, IKS can be maintained and passed on to younger generations in a way that reinforces community cohesion and pride. This cultural continuity strengthens the social fabric

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and ensures that local customs, rituals, and storytelling traditions survive amidst modernization. Another key advantage is the promotion of sustainable environmental practices. Indigenous knowledge often includes detailed understanding of ecosystems, biodiversity, and resource management. Religious teachings frequently emphasize stewardship of the Earth and respect for life. When combined, these systems encourage environmentally responsible behavior, such as sustainable agriculture, forest conservation, and water management, grounded in both practical experience and moral obligation.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into education offers significant opportunities for the future. Universities and research institutions can establish dedicated centers for the study of IKS. Interdisciplinary research can explore connections between traditional knowledge and modern science. Digital technologies can also help preserve and disseminate ancient texts, manuscripts, and oral traditions. By combining traditional wisdom with modern innovation, India can create a unique education model that contributes to global knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative vision for India's education system. By integrating Indian Knowledge Systems and religious traditions into the curriculum, the policy aims to reconnect education with the country's cultural and intellectual heritage. Indian religious traditions have historically played a crucial role in shaping knowledge, philosophy, ethics, and social values. These traditions contributed significantly to the development of disciplines such as mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and philosophy. NEP 2020 seeks to revive this rich intellectual legacy while adapting it to the needs of the modern world. The policy encourages holistic education, interdisciplinary learning, and value-based education rooted in Indian culture. However, the successful implementation of this vision requires careful curriculum design, teacher training, and academic research.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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