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National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Indian Knowledge System (IKS): Conceptual Integration and Pragmatic Prospects in Contemporary School Education

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks an epochal paradigm shift in the history of the Indian education ecosystem. Its core objective is to dismantle the residual hegemony of colonial Macaulay and pedagogy and anchor contemporary learning within indigenous epistemological and cultural matrices. The cornerstone of this policy design is the systemic integration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the mainstream school curriculum. Characterized by a strictly qualitative-theoretical framework, this conceptual paper deliberately bypasses empirical-statistical metrics to undertake a critical-analytical examination of foundational indigenous paradigms such as Upanishad epistemology, the Panchakosha model of holistic personality development, and classical axiological principles in alignment with the mandates of NEP 2020. Adopting a rigorous methodology of documentary analysis and textual hermeneutics, the study evaluates the official policy text alongside authentic commentaries on classical texts and contemporary pedagogical critiques. The conceptual synthesis reveals that the Indian Knowledge System transcends mere antiquarian romanticism, rather, it provides highly logical, viable frameworks for fostering core 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, ecological sensitivity, cross-disciplinary flexibility, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, this paper delineates a structured strategy to embed IKS into the contemporary three-tier school matrix without imposing cognitive overload on learners. Finally, it outlines pragmatic recommendations for the conceptual sensitization of teacher educators and macro-level curricular restructuring, asserting that education must evolve from a mere instrument of livelihood into a vehicle for total human emancipation.

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1. Introduction

Modern educational models of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been predominantly steered by Western utilitarian, technocratic, and materialistic imperatives. This systemic framework was designed primarily to engineer a specialized workforce tailored to meet industrial and technological demands. In this highly mechanistic process, education devolved into a rigid apparatus for informational accumulation and economic transactionalism, severely marginalizing the ethical, affective, and psychological equilibrium of learners. Conversely, the foundational axiom of the classical Indian educational tradition states: "*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*" (That which

liberates is knowledge). This paradigm demands a harmonious reconciliation between material progress and spiritual-consciousness elevation.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes this historical void and systemic disconnect. It forcefully advocates for the democratization of education, cultural decolonization, and the cultivation of enlightened global citizenship rooted in local heritage. The policy explicitly mandates that India's vast repository of indigenous knowledge spanning Vedic mathematics, astronomy, Ayurveda, yogic science, and sustainable ecological lifeways must be structurally woven into contemporary school education. As a conceptual and theoretical inquiry, this study

deliberately eschews quantitative metrics, such as implementation percentages. Instead, it addresses a fundamental question: "How does the theoretical architecture of NEP 2020 align epistemologically with the foundational pillars of the Indian Knowledge System, and what is its conceptual relevance within contemporary school systems?" This introduction sets the stage for analyzing how classical constructs like *Panchakosha* (five sheaths of self) and *Chautshasti Kala* (sixty-four arts) can enrich modern ideals of holistic development and multidisciplinary learning.

2. Review of Literature

The academic discourse surrounding the interface between the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and contemporary pedagogy evolved through distinct thematic phases between 2000 and 2023. In the initial phase (2000-2005), scholarship focused heavily on addressing the acute crisis of values and social alienation triggered by rapid, uncritical Westernization. It was during this period that the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2000) introduced the concept of an indigenous model of education, advocating for the integration of traditional social ethics. Scholars like Rajput (2002) posited that classical pedagogical methodologies specifically *Shravana* (attentive listening), *Manana* (reflection), and *Nididhyasana* (internalization/application)-were far more sustainable and effective in awakening intrinsic student potential than the mechanical, external reinforcement matrices of Western behaviorism.

Subsequently, between 2005 and 2014, the literature experienced a progressive shift toward contextualizing knowledge within the child's immediate local ecosystem, mother tongue, and folk traditions. While the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) operated primarily on a constructivist blueprint, it strongly defended the inclusion of localized agrarian knowledge and tribal socio-ecological practices within textbooks. During this window, critical historical analyses by scholars like Kapil (2011) demonstrated that India's monumental contributions to mathematics (such as the Kerala School of Mathematics), metallurgy, and astronomy were not merely matters of historical pride, but vital cognitive tools capable of fostering advanced analytical and scientific temperaments in modern students.

The period from 2015 to 2019 served as a highly intensive period of policy formulation, directly laying the theoretical groundwork for NEP 2020. The seminal Draft National Education Policy by the Kasturirangan Committee (2019) generated extensive academic debate on how India could re-emerge as a "Global Knowledge Superpower." The consensus in the literature argued that this could only be achieved by synthetically merging traditional sciences, such as Ayurveda and holistic ecology, with contemporary technological domains. Contemporary critics categorized this policy shift as an existential necessity for the decolonization of the Indian subcontinental psyche.

Finally, the post-policy era (2020-2023) focused sharply on the micro-level logistics of structural implementation. Academic researchers like Mishra and Joshi (2021) executed comparative analyses mapping the *Panchakosha* theory of the Taittiriya Upanishad onto modern developmental psychology and the newly conceptualized Holistic Progress Card (HPC). Their findings demonstrated that the contemporary pedagogical triad of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains is structurally congruent with, yet anticipated by, the ancient layers of *Annamaya*, *Pranamaya*, *Manomaya*, *Vijnanamaya*, and *Anandamaya koshas*. This evolutionary

trajectory of literature establishes that IKS is no longer viewed as a peripheral, nostalgic elective, but rather as an overarching pedagogical lens that makes science, mathematics, and humanities deeply humane and contextually alive.

3. Research Objectives

Given the qualitative-theoretical paradigm of this inquiry, the objectives are framed around conceptual clarity, logical synthesis, and systemic alignment rather than empirical measurement:

- i). **To Analyze Conceptual Alignment:** To critically evaluate the epistemological correspondence and structural harmony between the foundational mandates of NEP 2020 and the core tenets of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS).
- ii). **To Investigate the Holistic Development Framework:** To examine the ancient *Panchakosha* paradigm and establish its relevance to the "360-degree holistic assessment" goals of modern schooling.
- iii). **To Map Curricular Integration:** To identify viable, non-intrusive pathways for integrating indigenous disciplines (e.g., Vedic mathematics, ethno-ecology, and axiological ethics) across different tiers of contemporary school education.
- iv). **To Critique Ideological and Pragmatic Barriers:** To execute a critical evaluation of the systemic challenges, teacher-sensitization deficits, and structural contradictions encountered when implementing an indigenous paradigm within an entrenched Westernized school architecture.

4. Research Methodology

This research operates strictly within a Qualitative-Theoretical Paradigm. No field surveys, psychometric testing, or statistical data-gathering techniques were deployed.

- **Nature of Research:** The inquiry is purely conceptual, analytical, and interpretative, prioritizing the logical deconstruction of policy architecture and philosophical texts.
- **Data and Literary Sources:** Primary source material comprises the official policy text of *NEP 2020* (Ministry of Education, Government of India), current national curriculum frameworks, and institutional IKS mandates issued by UGC and AICTE. Secondary sources include authentic English and Hindi commentaries on classical Indian texts (Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita), peer-reviewed educational journals, and historical commission reports.
- **Analytical Framework:** The study utilizes *Conceptual Mapping* and *Thematic Hermeneutics*. Key provisions of NEP 2020 (such as multidisciplinary flexibility, experiential learning, and ethical development) are systematically cross-referenced with classical axioms (*Rta*, *Dharma*, and *Kalatmak Shiksha*) to synthesize an integrated educational roadmap.

5. Conceptual Analysis and Core Pillars

The theoretical edifice of NEP 2020 is predicated on the recognition that India's classical intellectual tradition offers a unique view of knowledge that treats material advancement and consciousness-elevation as an undivided continuum. The primary pillar of this integration is 'Holistic Education,' which finds its oldest systemic articulation in the *Panchakosha* theory of the Taittiriya Upanishad. Classical psychology asserts that the human personality is not merely an isolated

neurological or somatic construct, but a beautifully calibrated network of five distinct dimensions: *Annamaya Kosha* (the anatomical-physical dimension), *Pranamaya Kosha* (the physiological-energy dimension), *Manomaya Kosha* (the psycho-emotional dimension), *Vijnanamaya Kosha* (the intellectual-discernment dimension), and *Anandamaya Kosha* (the aesthetic-spiritual dimension). The radical mandates of NEP 2020—such as completely dissolving the artificial silos separating 'extra-curricular' activities from 'core academics,' and elevating physical culture, yoga, and classical arts to the status of major credit subjects represent a highly sophisticated, modern attempt to systematically cultivate these five sheaths.

The second core pillar of this conceptual synthesis is 'Multidisciplinarity' and the 'Oneness of Knowledge.' In ancient Indian academic institutions like Takshashila and Nalanda, sciences, humanities, and technology were never segregated into hermetically sealed departments. The classical framework of *Chautshasti Kala* (sixty-four arts) stands as definitive proof of this fluid approach: it elegantly integrated expressive arts like dance and sculpture with advanced technical disciplines such as mathematics, metallurgy, astronomy, architecture, and naval engineering. NEP 2020's introduction of radical academic flexibility allowing a student of physics or mathematics to formally study classical history, music, or indigenous philosophy is a direct structural resurrection of this unified knowledge tradition.

The third foundational pillar centers on 'Character Formation' and 'Value-Based Pedagogy.' Within the IKS paradigm, knowledge is validated not by the volume of information stored, but by the transformation of conduct (*Vidya Dadata Vinayam*). Classical cosmic constructs such as *Rta* (the immutable natural order) and *Dharma* (cosmic responsibility and righteousness) compel the individual to live in active harmony with society and the ecology. Furthermore, the psychological mechanics of the Bhagavad Gita's *Karma Yoga* (the philosophy of detached, dedicated action) can serve as powerful therapeutic and pedagogical tools to counter the acute mental stress, anxiety, and cutthroat hyper-competitiveness plaguing contemporary school environments. This conceptual analysis demonstrates that the structural principles of ancient Indian education are profoundly equipped to nurture crucial 21st-century skills: sustainability, critical resilience, and emotional stability.

6. Critical Evaluation and Challenges

i). Critical Evaluation

A objective evaluation of the integration of NEP 2020 and IKS indicates that this policy represents an essential, overdue step toward decolonizing the subcontinental educational psyche. Philosophically, it challenges the reductive, transactional view of learning that has dominated the system since the colonial era. By asserting that true creativity requires a deep connection to one's linguistic and cultural roots, the policy aligns with international constructivist paradigms that prioritize 'learning how to learn' over rote memorization. Merging ancient interdisciplinary insights with modern curricula creates a robust framework for developing a balanced, socially conscious student identity.

However, a rigorous critique also reveals an inherent risk of uncritical antiquarian romanticism. The primary challenge for curriculum designers lies in carefully separating the authentic scientific, logical, and universal insights of ancient Indian thought from later regressive, dogmatic, or highly stratified socio-political accretions. Historical Indian education suffered

from structural exclusions, where access to formal knowledge was deeply unequal across different social strata. If modern textbooks present ancient systems without filtering them through contemporary values of egalitarianism, secularism, and human rights, they risk alienating diverse student populations. Therefore, ancient ideas must not be introduced simply because they are 'ancient' or 'indigenous,' but because they remain logically sound and highly relevant when tested against modern scientific criteria.

ii). Challenges in Implementation

Translating these lofty policy ideals into daily classroom realities faces formidable institutional and conceptual hurdles. The foremost challenge lies in the existing architecture of teacher training and faculty development. The current cohort of schoolteachers and teacher educators has been trained almost exclusively within Western psychological frameworks specifically behaviorism, Skinnerian reinforcement, Piagetian cognitivism, and Bloom's Taxonomy. Expecting them to seamlessly adopt Upanishadic frameworks, facilitate the complex equilibrium of the *Panchakosha* model, or employ classical dialectical methods like *Vada-Paddhati* (disputation and dialogue) represents an immense cognitive shift. Without long-term, structurally funded, and conceptually rigorous professional retraining, the introduction of IKS risks becoming a superficial, tokenistic box-checking exercise.

The second systemic hurdle is the deeply entrenched, examination-driven culture of school education. The current system remains hyper-focused on summative grading and rote learning, evaluating a student's worth through high-stakes, three-hour written tests. Conversely, the core pursuits of IKS such as character building, mindfulness, emotional self-regulation, and ethical responsibility are qualitative, internal transformations. These traits defy measurement by standardized multiple-choice or essay questions. Until national evaluation bodies, such as PARAKH, design standardized, objective, and multi-dimensional assessment metrics that reward ethical behavior, emotional maturity, and practical life skills alongside cognitive performance, adding IKS to the curriculum will simply increase the academic burden on students without achieving real transformation.

7. Conclusion and Educational Implications

The theoretical and conceptual analysis confirms that there is no inherent contradiction between the scientific mandates of modern education and the core tenets of the Indian Knowledge System; rather, they share a deep ontological and epistemological harmony. NEP 2020 should not be misinterpreted as a regressive attempt to return to a romanticized past. Instead, it serves as a sophisticated framework that integrates timeless, universal human values with 21st-century technological and scientific needs. Implemented correctly, this policy will help students cultivate a healthy sense of identity while preparing them to participate meaningfully as globally minded citizens.

Based on these theoretical insights, the following practical implications are crucial for reforming school systems:

- **Curricular Synthesis:** National bodies like NCERT and state-level SCERTs must move away from segregating IKS into separate, isolated chapters. Instead, the profound contributions of Indian thinkers such as Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Nagarjuna, and Charaka should be seamlessly woven into standard science and mathematics units as contextual case studies and logical proofs.

- **Overhauling Teacher Preparation:** Professional teacher-training degree programs, including B.Ed. and D.El.Ed., must systematically revise their core courses in educational philosophy and pedagogy. They should explicitly introduce indigenous cognitive psychology, experiential learning models, and alternative dialectical teaching methods to ensure future teachers are thoroughly prepared for this shift.
- **360-Degree Assessment Matrices:** To move beyond traditional, exam-heavy evaluation, schools must adopt the Holistic Progress Card (HPC). This model evaluates and weights a child's socio-emotional behavior, ethical commitments, physical health, artistic sensibilities, and practical life skills alongside standard academic test scores.

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