



Novel Insights, *An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal

ISSN: 3048-6572 (Online) 3049-1991 (Print)

Impact Factor: 4.25(IIFS), 8.2(IJIN)

Volume-II, Special Issue, March 2026, Page No. 01-08

Published by Uttarsuri, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsights.vol.2.issue.specialW.083



Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) under NEP 2020 for Sustainable Development in Society

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Received: 23.03.2026; Accepted: 28.03.2026; Available online: 31.03.2026

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Abstract

Education is one of the most important and crucial determinants for social change, development and upliftment. Through education human mind can be molded in such a way that an effective standard of living can be attained. Keeping that in mind 'New Education Policy 2020' approved in Indian Cabinet on 29th July, 2020, aimed to bring holistic development in all aspects of the children. Children are the future of India and to ensure their better future the Indian Government emphasized on revival of good age-old practices along with sustainable development. The Government of India launched their mission 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' (Self-reliant India) to make India independent in all spheres of life. In the same tune NEP 2020 emphasized on IKS (Indian Knowledge System) for protecting and preserving cultural ethos, our rich heritage, traditional knowledge system etc. and thus to ensure the sustainable future of young generation. Presently as we can see the Govt. of India is focusing on the AYUSH Mantralaya, Yoga, Panchakarma, Art and Craft, Cottage industry, unsung heroes of freedom struggle, value education, mother tongue etc. to implement NEP 2020's mission and vision. The present paper is intended to discuss all these things. The paper is based on secondary sources.

Keywords: Atma Nirvar Bharat, Education, IKS, NEP 2020, Sustainable development

Introduction:

India is one of the oldest civilizations. It has been taking giant steps almost in all aspects because of her emphasis on education along with some good practices deeply rooted in Indian society from ancient time. Education is one of the crucial determinants for building a steady and elite society. In broader sense, education is an equipment for social change. Development, and upliftment can be brought about by imparting both formal and informal education. Proper Education can mold the minds for generations, ignite the young minds intellectually and help them in decision making. Therefore, right form of education is important for a balanced and sustainable society. For a greater change to bring in larger number of aspects, the focus should be on individual change and learning leading to the all-round development of the countrymen.

The growth and development of a country depends on hassle free systems and to eradicate problems in all systems, proper education is one of the major weapons. The process

lies on identification of the problems and obstacles in the path of progress. The major issues of Indian education started since the drastic shift from traditional learning system to modern learning system during the British rule. Due to colonization, many age-old significant practices, which were the essence of India, were lost in the name of modernization including the native languages which were seen as inferior at that time. But after threadbare logical and scientific analysis done by scholars, it appears that many age-old traditions like Yoga, Ayurveda, local handicrafts, metallurgy etc. actually can help to mitigate today's economic, psychological and social challenges. As it is the duty of every conscious citizen to pass our traditions to the next generation to ensure themselves to be culturally deep rooted, it becomes paramount need to preserve and protect those traditions by incorporating in curriculum. With this aim view, Government of India initiated and approved NEP 2020 in the cabinet. It was a much-needed change, a paradigm shifts from institutional education to a holistic development. It emphasized on obstacles of education and practical solution to it. To deal with the issues like drop out, lack of funding, lack of pedagogy training, outdated curriculum, neglecting traditional knowledge etc. NEP 2020 focuses on internationalization of education, promotion of Indian language and Indian Knowledge System, multidisciplinary and holistic education, digital empowerment and online education, skill development and employability, research Innovation and entrepreneurship etc. to prepare young minds for the challenges of the modern world.

Objectives:

The present paper intends –

- i. To bring the importance of IKS (Indian Knowledge System) into light so that age-old practices can be restored and protected and thereby ensured a sustainable life.
- ii. To highlight how NEP 2020 act as a powerful medium for fulfillment of Govt. of India's mission and vision of 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'.
- iii. To show the importance of paradigm shift in education policy to cope up with the challenges of modern world.

Methodology:

The current study employs descriptive method here. The paper is based on secondary sources like articles, research papers, journals, GOI policies and project reports etc.

IKS at a glance:

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast, organized spectrum of indigenous knowledge, developed over millennia. This includes foundational knowledge, sciences, engineering, technology, humanities and social sciences, philosophy and spirituality found across ancient texts and folklore in languages like Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, and various regional and tribal languages. Despite its richness in areas like astronomy, Ayurveda, mathematics, linguistics, metallurgy, public administration, and management science, much of this knowledge which has had a long-lasting effect for shaping 'Indianness' in true sense of the term, somehow has remained unexplored for decades. Hence, promotion of Indian languages and restoration of Indian Knowledge System is a game changing visionary step for giving India a strong identity through the 'Indian way' of doing things to the world. The Indian Knowledge System comprises of 'Jnan' (knowledge), 'Vignan' (Science), 'Jeevan

Darshan' (life philosophy) that have evolved out of experience, observation, experimentation, and rigorous analysis.¹

Ancient Indian education, including the Eighteen Vidya Sthanas or schools of learning, flourished in renowned centers like Nalanda and Takshashila, covering fields like art, architecture, science, technology, craft, engineering, and philosophy. This rich knowledge base brought both admiration and invasion, as it was India's source of power, wealth and identity. Today, this legacy is crucial for "knowledge diplomacy," which is set to shape global relations, showcasing India's enduring intellectual wealth that has enriched its civilization for millennia.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) guides inquiry by teaching us how, in what way, and to what extent to question, using fundamental sutras to reshape our thinking. Rooted in principles like "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world as one family) and "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" (may all be happy), IKS offers a worldview centered on unity and well-being. Integrating IKS involves introducing its nature, history, and concepts into modern education, building Indian thought models, and applying these to solve contemporary problems. IKS should not be taught in isolation for mere preservation purpose. Instead, it should be made part of larger missions of the country like 'Space Science', 'Svasta-Bharat', 'Atma-Nirbhar-Bharat', 'Skilled India', 'Make in India' missions. This Mission-mode IKS integrity will serve the purpose. Change of mode "from Preservation to Utilization" will accomplish our goal to create Bharat as hub of emerging knowledge.

Importance of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in NEP 2020:

NEP 2020 is designed to overhaul the existing education system in India, focusing on making education more inclusive, interdisciplinary, flexible, and relevant to real-life situations. It places a strong emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, vocational education, and critical thinking, while aiming to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills. The policy advocates for a curriculum that reflects India's rich cultural heritage and knowledge systems, fostering pride in the nation's intellectual history and traditions.

One of the policy's core tenets is to promote holistic education by breaking down the rigid silos between different streams of learning. By introducing interdisciplinary learning which is evident in advanced countries, it encourages students to develop knowledge and skills that are applicable across various fields. NEP 2020 envisions an education system that prepares individuals to adapt to global changes while staying rooted in their culture, values, and traditions.

Mere enacting education system to a more mechanical, artificial rather than avoiding interconnectedness with ancient traditions, ethos and values will lead to dehumanized individual. Hence, NEP 2020 focuses on incorporation of IKS including promotion of language, understanding diversity, honouring diverse religious philosophies, medicinal practices, techniques of agriculture, forest management etc. India is a linguistically diverse country. According to 2011 census report, there are 22 official languages, 270 mother tongue with at least 10,000 speakers and over 19,569 dialects. According to UNESCO several reports on educational psychology found that children learn and understand better in their mother tongue but due to lack of resources, teaching in most of the languages is not possible. It creates a language and literacy barrier. To solve this, NEP2020 focuses on effective use and

promotion of mother tongue which brings a ray of hope for minority language speaking communities and boost their confidence.

The diversity of India is a gift but also at the same time lack of understanding of it and not knowing how to utilize the diversity is a problem. But NEP 2020 envisions bridging the gap between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. Incorporating collaborative engagements, outreach programmes, cultural exchange programmes in NEP 2020 enables young minds to develop a sense of respect and brotherhood and thereby fostering a healthy and vibrant environment.

IKS reflects an ancient, holistic worldview and includes practices like Ayurveda, yoga, traditional crafts, sustainable agricultural techniques, and the philosophical teachings of unity and compassion. Ancient literatures of India are replete with innumerable examples of such ethical and philosophical teachings regarding environment which is now very much discussed in environmental ethics. In ancient India, earth was regarded as mother and it can be found in Prithvisukta of the Atharvaveda when it says- '*mata bhumiḥ putruḥ Prithivyā*' i.e 'Earth is my mother, and I am her son'. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad also says- '*Iyam Prithivī Sarvesam bhutanam madhu*' i.e 'This earth is the honey of all beings. It is the essence and milk of all beings'. [Br. Upa. 2.5]

The Rishis sang song for the glory of water, forest, medicines etc. In fact, all Rishis taught the values of having good relationship with the natural world. The great Rishis like Vyasa, Valmiki and others also wrote scriptures of eternal values under the trees and beautiful surroundings. Actually, the Vedic Rishis saw harmonious movement everywhere. They interpreted the harmony of nature as the law and order of the universe i.e Rta (the cosmic order). The concept of Rta was a governing or regulating principle and the whole of nature and the cosmos worked according to this principle. This principle which has been continuing since time immemorial stood for all regular phenomena. According to the ancient Rishis, a little disturbance in one sector would result in disturbance in the whole system. So, human beings must follow the eternal principles for the sake of their own welfare and to avoid destruction, misery and poor life. Moreover, a kind of holistic world-view is also found in ancient Indian ethics in which concept of **R̥na** (debt) to Gods, ancestors, fellow human beings was formulated. Thus, according to Hindus, we are born with certain debts which we are supposed to owe. These are – debts to nature (Devaṛṇa), to parents and forefathers (pitriṛṇa), to the great teachers (rishiṛṇa), to humanity at large (nriṛṇa) and to all living beings (bhutaṛṇa). Of these five debts of the Hindus, Devaṛṇa and bhutaṛṇa have ecological implications. Accordingly, we are indebted to the Sun, the air, the trees, and the mother earth and so on. Every bit of nature is responsible for our sustenance. Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Kautilya's Arthashastra etc. have propounded sermons and methodology to keep environment pure and soothing. Bhagavad Gita also propounded mutual cooperation and interdependence as the key to preserve environment in its pure form.

The Jaina aphorism found in Tattvarthasutra '*Parasparagrahajivanam*' also explains this very concept of mutual cooperation and interdependence. In ancient times, there was a close relation between human beings and nature. They preferred harmonious living with nature. They believed in the existence of divine spirits in all the elements of nature. So, even for religious purpose, trees were not uprooted, only the leaves and branches were used. Many things and beings of Nature are worshipped as deities. Further, Indian people advocate the idea of oneness that is all beings and things of this universe as members of one family

(*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*). Ancient Indian scriptures prohibited men from disturbing biodiversity and ecosystem as it is against the tenets of religion. Isha Upanishad, one of the shortest Upanishads says, "Let no one species encroach over the rights and privileges of other species."² So, man has no right to encroach over other's rights and privileges. Everything is the property of God; and we have no right to destroy it.

In Ṛg Veda, tree worship was very popular and common. The tree worship is still popular today. It is believed that every tree has *Vrikṣa devata* 'tree deity' who is worshipped with prayers and offerings of water, flowers, and sweets and encircled by threads. The *Vṛkṣāyurveda* says that planting a tree is just as useful as having ten sons – "*dasakūpa sama vāpi dasa vāpi sama hradaḥ dasahrada samah putro dasaputra sama drumah*" [*Vṛkṣāyurvedah-5*] In our culture, *Tulshi*, *Pippala* and *Vataṛkṣa* are very significant. Throughout the *Vedic* literature, there are numerous *slokas* that discuss the importance and significance of *Tulashi*, *Vataṛkṣa*. Some of them are- "*jābadināni tulashi rūpitāpi jad grīhe. tābadoarṣha sahasrāni vaikunthe samahīyate*" [*Vṛkṣāyurveda-9*]

(i.e 'He will stay in Heaven for so many years as long as the *Tulsi* Plant will be in his home.') Similarly, plants and vegetables are addressed as mother in the *Oṣodhisukta* of *Ṛgveda*, -- 'O mother! Hundreds are your birth places and thousand are your shoots'.

"*śatan bu ambā dhāmoni sahashramuttu tu ruhaḥ*" [*Ṛgveda 10/97/2*]

Similarly, Ayurveda and yoga emphasize harmony with nature and physical and mental well-being. Ayurveda and yoga are now being internationally recognized and strengthening the economic wealth of the country and identity as well. During the time of Covid period also, many people were seen opting for traditional health practices like panchakarma (detoxification mechanism as per Ayurveda), Siddha therapy and naturopathy.

IKS and Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development calls for a balanced approach to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the need to develop societies in ways that are economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. IKS, with its long-standing principles of sustainability and harmony, aligns naturally with these goals. As per UNDP report, India's HDI (Human Development Index) rank is 134 out of 193 countries³ and territories which is a major setback for us and there is lots of scope for improvement provided that SDGs are met properly. Here, IKS can act as milestone for improving India's HDI value.

Environmental Sustainability: Many aspects of IKS promote environmental sustainability by encouraging harmony with nature. For example, traditional agricultural practices, which are less resource-intensive and more bio diverse, can help reduce the environmental impact of modern agriculture. Concepts like "ahimsa" (non-violence) and "prakriti" (nature) reinforce a sense of responsibility toward protecting natural resources. Classical texts are replete with innumerable examples for environmental sustainability which is already discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Health and Well-being: The traditional Indian medical system, Ayurveda, emphasizes preventive healthcare and holistic well-being. It includes practices such as balanced diets, herbal remedies, and lifestyle adjustments that can alleviate the burden on modern healthcare systems while promoting a culture of wellness. By incorporating Ayurvedic principles, NEP 2020 can support the SDG of "Good Health and Well-being." Govt. of India

took initiative to promote Ayurveda under the banner of Ministry of AYUSH with a significant theme 'Har Din Har Ghar Ayurveda' and launched it on 23rd October, 2022 along with the celebration of 'Ayurveda Day'. The principal aim of this mission was to popularize and regenerate the Ayurveda among the masses.

Cultural Sustainability: Embracing IKS helps preserve India's diverse cultural heritage, which is a form of sustainable development in its own right. The NEP's focus on language preservation, traditional art forms, ancient architecture and cultural history ensures that future generations retain a connection to their roots, fostering a society that values cultural diversity and continuity. Collaborative engagements, outreach programmes, different cultural exchange programmes etc. can help not only developing a sense of belongingness and pride but also boosting avenues for tourism sector.

Resource Conservation and Innovation: Indigenous knowledge includes time-tested approaches to water conservation, sustainable architecture, and resource management. Practices like rainwater harvesting, traditional irrigation methods, and architectural techniques for climate-responsive buildings are examples of how IKS can offer sustainable alternatives to modern practices. India is a host of diverse indigenous communities and they have deep ecological understanding, local bio-diversity, medicinal, nutritional and species' knowledge. This knowledge can be utilized through research and innovation to preserve endangered species and bio-diversity and to bring the people back to healthy lifestyle. Traditional irrigation methods of Bodos, Ahoms and weather forecast of tribal people can play a vital role for sustainable agriculture and resource management. It also results in less use of pesticides in the farming land and increase soil fertility without diminishing the land quality.

Govt. Initiative for Integration of IKS in Education:

Incorporating IKS into education encourages students to draw on traditional knowledge while exploring innovative solutions for current challenges. NEP 2020 aims to introduce IKS in a structured way across different levels of education:

Curriculum Content: Including Indian history, literature, philosophy, and scientific achievements in school curricula will deepen students' understanding of IKS and develop pride in Indian intellectual traditions. This integration also encourages critical thinking and promotes sustainable practices inspired by indigenous wisdom. In order to realize these goals of NEP 2020, a number of activities have been undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Regulatory Bodies (UGC & AICTE) and HEIs. Some of the initiatives are-

- guidelines for Incorporating Indian Knowledge in Higher Education Curricula has been issued on 13.06.2023 - It emphasizes on the promotion of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture, and tries to remove the discontinuity in the flow of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) by integrating IKS into curriculums at all levels of education. It prescribes that every student enrolled in a UG or PG programme should be encouraged to take credit courses in IKS amounting in all too at least 5% of the total mandated credits (interested students may be allowed to take a larger fraction of the total mandated credits).
- Guidelines for the introduction of courses based on Indian heritage and culture have been issued on 08.05.2023 - to make people familiar with the rich cultural and intellectual heritage of India and offer short term multi-tier credit based modular programme with multiple entry and exit based on Indian heritage and culture. It

includes dissemination and imparting of knowledge of various dimensions of learning in the spheres of Universal human values, Vedic Maths, Yoga, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Indian Languages, sacrosanct religious regions located in the Indian subcontinent, Archaeological sites and monuments, Heritage of India, Indian Literature, Indian Sculpture, Indian Music and dance forms, Drama, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Crafts and Craftsmanship etc.

- Around 5200 internships on IKS have been offered.⁴

Research and Development: NEP 2020 envisions the establishment of research centers focused on IKS to validate, document, and promote traditional knowledge. These centers can foster innovation by blending traditional wisdom with modern science, creating sustainable technologies and practices applicable to contemporary life. GOI has already established 32 IKS Centres to catalyse original research, education, and dissemination of IKS.

Teacher Training: Training educators to understand and teach IKS is essential for its successful integration. Teachers can then communicate its relevance to sustainability and guide students in applying traditional knowledge to modern challenges. Guidelines for Training/Orientation of Faculty on Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has been issued on 13.04.2023 – it enables the faculties to generate a positive attitude towards IKS and promote interest in knowing and exploring more through induction programs and refresher courses. Conducted 50 faculty development programs, workshops, and National/International conference. 8000+ HEIs have started adopting IKS in their curriculum and worked on digitization of 1.5 Lakhs book.⁵

Community-Based Learning: Collaborating with local communities for experiential learning opportunities allows students to learn directly from practitioners of traditional knowledge. This approach not only strengthens the learning experience but also supports the preservation and dissemination of IKS. The HEI and universities may consider multidisciplinary course designing keeping in mind the international relationship and goodwill exist between different countries. For example, NCERT is undertaking inclusion of text highlighting historical ties between India and Indonesia at school level. Existing IKS courses may be linked to digital learning platforms (SWAYAM, NPTEL) and via ODL for learners across geographies.

Conclusion:

Thus, NEP 2020's focus on integrating the Indian Knowledge System into education marks a forward-thinking approach to sustainable development. By promoting an appreciation for India's indigenous knowledge, the policy empowers students to think globally while remaining rooted in their culture. The incorporation of IKS in education encourages sustainable living practices, environmental responsibility and a holistic worldview, which are essential for building a resilient and sustainable future.

India is a young country. According to the ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) 2023 more than 86.8 % of young people aged 14-18 years are enrolled in educational institutions. To bring long lasting generational development and change into the society these young minds are to be handled very carefully. Proper training and learning should be imparted to make them fully aware of their potentialities so that their contributions and innovative works can ensure the restoration of 'essence of India' to hold a peculiar identity in the global map of knowledge. By integrating IKS in NEP 2020 an attempt is made to arrive at 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) making India independent in all aspects.

Thus, NEP 2020 is a very methodical, thorough, forward-thinking, and sustainable strategy that, if properly executed, will undoubtedly pave the way for Atma Nirbhar Bharat. The NEP2020 strives to link academic and moral excellence with the welfare of humanity as a whole while fostering trust, compassion, and support. The NEP2020 is fully equipped to meet national objectives. Enshrined revolutionary changes will create young people who are Bharat Centric, capable of restoring the ancient educational system's lost glory and reestablishing Bharat as the Vishwa Guru.

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