



Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge System: Strategies and Challenges under NEP 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a milestone in education reform, which aims to integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the mainstream. The revival of indigenous knowledge can improve educational practices, promote cultural diversity and foster sustainable development. However, these can be achieved by overcoming socio-economic disparities, linguistic challenges and institutional barriers. Furthermore, global best practices and theoretical concepts provide practical insights into the effective integration of indigenous knowledge. This paper examines the measures initiated by NEP 2020 in reviving and promoting indigenous knowledge, the challenges faced in preserving and disseminating it, and potential solutions. It highlights the imperative of an inclusive process involving community participation, policy support, and educational reform in ensuring the long-term viability of indigenous knowledge systems.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Cultural Preservation, Multilingual Education, Community-Based Learning

I. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark step towards the education system of India, with an emphasis on incorporating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and Indigenous Knowledge in formal education. While both the Indian Knowledge System and Indigenous Knowledge are based on traditional knowledge, they differ in scope and context. The Indian Knowledge System is a vast repository of knowledge that evolved over thousands of years in the Indian subcontinent and includes branches such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and arts, mostly documented in ancient scriptures and practices

(Ministry of Education, 2020). On the other hand, indigenous knowledge refers to the localized, community-based rituals and practices, skills, and knowledge that rural and tribal groups evolved and that are intricately intertwined with their ecological, spiritual, and cultural environment (Battiste, 2005).

Indigenous knowledge, also known as traditional or local knowledge, is a dynamic and continually evolving system that has been transmitted for many generations orally, through ceremonies, and through real-world applications. According to Berkes (2012), it is distinguished by its holistic approach, which integrates ecological, social and spiritual components to solve community needs and challenges. Indigenous groups in India, for example, have created complex water management systems, such as the "Ahars" and "Pynes" of Bihar and the "Zabo" system in Nagaland, reflecting their deep awareness of regional ecosystems and sustainable resource use (Singh et al., 2020). For generations, indigenous tribes have maintained biodiversity and food security through ecological knowledge reflected in traditional agricultural methods such as crop rotation, seed storage and organic farming (Altieri, 2004).

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges the significance of both the 'Indian Knowledge System' and Indigenous knowledge in developing an integrated and inclusive education system. It aims to address the historical marginalization of these knowledge systems, which has been perpetuated by colonial legacies and contemporary educational paradigms (Gupta, 2018). Through promoting the systematic integration of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, the policy seeks to preserve cultural identity, enhance environmental sustainability, and utilize traditional practices in areas such as agriculture, medicine, and community governance.



Indigenous knowledge is not only a repository of cultural heritage but also a vital tool for tackling modern global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity. For instance, indigenous peoples have utilized their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to regulate natural disasters, conserve forests and forecast weather patterns (Gadgil et al., 1993). Tribal communities in India, such as the Soliga of Karnataka and the Dongria Kondh of Odisha are examples of tribal groups who have been at the forefront of forest and biodiversity conservation through their indigenous practices and spiritual ties to nature (Bijoy, 2008).

Yet, despite being so valuable, indigenous knowledge has been marginalized in the past due to colonialism, modernization and globalization. The prevalence of Western scientific paradigms and the decline of traditional lifestyles have resulted in the devaluation and loss of indigenous knowledge systems (Smith, 1999). NEP 2020 offers a fresh chance to incorporate this knowledge into the mainstream while respecting and maintaining authenticity. This paper examines the significance of NEP 2020 in reviving indigenous knowledge, the challenges of this process, and possible solutions for its sustainability.

Strategies Proposed by NEP 2020 to Revive and Promote Indigenous Knowledge

1. Curriculum Reforms

The following are some of the ways that NEP 2020 promotes an inclusive, flexible, and integrated curriculum that incorporates indigenous knowledge. These are listed as:

- **Integration of Local Languages and Dialects:** The policy promotes mother tongues and local dialects to be used as a medium of instruction in primary education, making it easier for indigenous knowledge to be passed on (Government of India, 2020). Language diversity is essential for maintaining indigenous knowledge because ancient wisdom is frequently embedded within the structure of language, proverbs, and oral tradition (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). For instance, Odisha's multilingual educational initiatives have incorporated indigenous languages in primary education effectively.
- **Culturally Relevant Curriculum:** The policy (National Education Policy) suggests that traditional practices, local histories, and ecological knowledge be integrated into curriculum content to promote cultural appreciation (UNESCO, 2019). By doing so, students can better understand their heritage and develop skills that are relevant to their communities.

2. Teacher Training and Capacity Building

- **Professional Development Programs:** The policy emphasizes the need for teacher training programs that include workshops, seminars, and experiential learning opportunities focused on indigenous knowledge systems (Sharma & Das, 2021). Teachers must be equipped with pedagogical strategies that support community-based and experiential learning.
- **Community Involvement:** Direct interaction with community members enriches the learning process as indigenous knowledge is often passed down orally and via practical experiences rather than written textbooks. Furthermore, authenticity and cultural respect are ensured when indigenous elders and knowledge holders are involved in the educational process (Upreti, 2025). One notable program in Meghalaya is "Apprenticeship in Schools", where indigenous artists teach traditional crafts to students.

3. Promotion of Research and Documentation

- **Establishment of Research Centers:** Dedicated centers for the study of indigenous knowledge play a crucial role in documenting and preserving this vital information (Sen, 2020). These research centers can act as hubs for collaboration among universities, indigenous communities, and policymakers. For instance, the Zonal Cultural Centers in India facilitate research on tribal traditions.
- **Community-research partnerships:** Collaboration between researchers and Indigenous communities is essential for accurate representation and equitable benefits. It is important that ethical considerations guide these partnerships, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge holders are acknowledged as co-creators rather than simply subjects of study (Maheshkumar & Soundarapandian, 2024).

4. Policy Framework and Support

- **Incentives for Indigenous Education:** Financial support for academic institutions that emphasize indigenous knowledge promotes institutional participation and serves as an incentive for indigenous education (Mishra, 2022). In addition, governments and non-governmental organizations can offer fellowships and grants to promote the practice and acquisition of indigenous knowledge systems.
- **Recognition of Indigenous Rights:** Legal recognition and protection of Indigenous knowledge systems are essential to safeguard them from exploitation (Mishra, 2022; Singh, 2024).



Developing intellectual property rights frameworks is crucial to prevent unauthorized commercialization of Indigenous wisdom.

Challenges in Preserving and Disseminating Indigenous Knowledge

1. Marginalization of Indigenous Communities

- **Economic Disparities:** Indigenous people are largely poor and have limited access to essential resources such as education, health, and employment. Economic challenges hinder them from preserving and transmitting their knowledge systems (Gupta, 2018).

- **Political Disempowerment:** The indigenous people are typically underrepresented in policymaking structures, and their educational and cultural needs are subsequently neglected (Suman & Shanu, 2021). Strengthening their participation in governance and education policies can help address this challenge.

2. Cultural Erosion

- **Language Erosion:** Replacement of indigenous languages with dominant languages decreases the ability to pass traditional knowledge from one generation to the next (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Adoption of language conservation programs and bilingual school practices can minimize this issue.

- **Globalization and Modernization:** Urbanization and Westernization result in the eventual erosion of indigenous practices, rituals, and traditions (Gaur, 2024). These traditions can be preserved through encouraging cultural documentation and the integration of indigenous knowledge into contemporary development policies.

3. Institutional Challenges

- **Limited Financial Support:** According to Mengal (2024), there is still a lack of public and private funding for programs aimed at preserving indigenous knowledge. It is essential to increase funding for educational initiatives that emphasize indigenous learning.

- **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** There are not enough teachers in most schools who have been trained in the indigenous knowledge system (Amani, 2024). This gap can be filled in part by hiring instructors from indigenous communities and providing them with specialized training.

Proposed Solutions

1. Empowering Indigenous Communities

- **Community-based education programs:** Promoting self-governance in education enables indigenous communities to create and implement

their knowledge systems through community-based education programs (Maheshkumar & Soundarapandian, 2024).

- **Economic and Social Support:** Traditional knowledge can be preserved by bolstering indigenous economies with financial aid and vocational training.

2. Strengthening Educational Policies

- **Multilingual Education:** Linguistic heritage can be preserved by integrating native languages into formal education (Suman & Shanu, 2021).

- **Collaboration with Indigenous Researchers:** Involving indigenous researchers in curriculum development guarantees authenticity and efficacy (Upreti, 2025).

3. Improving Research and Documentation

- **Ethical Research Practice:** Making it certain that studies incorporating indigenous knowledge are carried out with the approval of the community and provide fair advantages (Singh, 2024).

- **Digital Repositories:** Establishing digital repositories of indigenous knowledge can improve preservation and accessibility (Gaur, 2024).

4. Financial Assistance and Policy Advocacy

- **Sustainable Funding Models:** Creating long-term financial sources for projects that promote indigenous education (Mengal, 2024).

- **Stronger Legal Protections:** Creating strong regulations to protect native knowledge and stop its exploitation (Mishra, 2022).

II. Conclusion

The promotion of indigenous knowledge through NEP 2020 presents both challenges and opportunities. While policy reforms open a window for incorporating traditional wisdom in formal education, there are strong challenges in dealing with economic, cultural, and institutional impediments. Educational reforms, empowering the community, research efforts, and policy advocacy in a multidisciplinary framework are needed to make indigenous knowledge sustainable. By promoting cooperation between teachers, researchers, policymakers, and indigenous peoples, India may develop an inclusive education system that not only honors but also draws strength from the extensive indigenous wisdom inherent in its culture. In so doing, indigenous knowledge may be able to contribute to global discourse on sustainability, climate resilience, and diversity of cultures, enhancing national as well as international educational environments.



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