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RE-EMBEDDING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF NEP 2020 THROUGH INDIAN ENGLISH AND LITERARY TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of how the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to re-anchor India's educational framework within its indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and literary traditions. Historically, India stood as a global centre of learning, attracting scholars such as Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang to its universities, monasteries, and philosophical schools. Ancient India developed highly sophisticated intellectual traditions in literature, aesthetics, mathematics, linguistics, metaphysics, political theory, Ayurveda, architecture, and ecology. However, colonial intervention, coupled with the structural dominance of English education, alienated generations of Indians from these native epistemologies. NEP 2020 aims to reverse this trend by fostering multilingualism, cultural rootedness, and integration of classical texts, oral traditions, and local knowledge into mainstream curriculum. In parallel, Indian English literature serves as a channel through which indigenous philosophies, narrative modes, and aesthetic theories are transmitted to global audiences. This paper examines the reciprocal relationship between Indian English and Indian knowledge traditions, demonstrating how the linguistic hybridity of Indian English becomes a tool for cultural reclamation rather than cultural loss. The study engages with literary works, aesthetic theories, oral narratives, and educational principles to illustrate how NEP 2020's vision of holistic, inclusive, and culturally contextualized education aligns with India's civilizational ethos.

It concludes by asserting that revitalizing indigenous knowledge through literary and linguistic frameworks is essential not only for cultural continuity but also for shaping India's global intellectual identity. The paper argues that NEP 2020 represents a transformative moment in restoring India's position as a knowledge civilization.

KEYWORDS: Indian Knowledge Systems, Indian English, NEP 2020, Literature, Indigenous Pedagogy, Aesthetics, Oral Traditions.

INTRODUCTION:

“Educate and raise the masses, and thus alone a nation is possible.”

— Swami Vivekananda

India's intellectual heritage has been widely acknowledged across civilizations for millennia. The accounts of travellers such as Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, Al-Biruni, and Megasthenes reveal a landscape flourishing with universities, debate traditions, literary schools, and philosophical systems. Places like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, and Vallabhi stood as cosmopolitan centres of advanced learning, comparable to modern research universities. These institutions produced knowledge across linguistics, logic (nyaya), metaphysics, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, aesthetic theory, ecological management, and statecraft.

The paradox, however, lies in the contemporary Indian context wherein youth often migrate Westward for educational opportunities. This shift reflects the long-term impact of colonial educational structures introduced by Thomas Macaulay's 1835 Minute, which prioritized Western rationality over indigenous epistemology. As a result, Indian learners became gradually distanced from the vast reservoirs of native knowledge.

The emergence of National Education Policy 2020 marks a deliberate attempt to reintegrate indigenous knowledge systems into the formal learning framework. NEP 2020 recognizes language as a carrier of cultural memory and proposes multilingual pedagogy rooted in India's linguistic diversity. Literature—particularly Indian English literature—plays a crucial role in this transformation, functioning not only as a mode of creative expression but also as a vehicle for transmitting indigenous philosophies across global audiences.

This paper analyses the intersections between NEP 2020, Indian Knowledge Systems, and Indian English literature, highlighting the importance of re-embedding cultural epistemologies into modern education.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the historical and philosophical foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems and their global influence.
- To analyse the role of Indian English literature in transmitting indigenous narratives, aesthetic theories, and epistemologies.
- To critically evaluate the NEP 2020 and its efforts to restore, integrate, and promote Indian languages, classical texts, and oral traditions.
- To explore how Indian narrative and aesthetic traditions enrich modern pedagogy through literature, performance, and cultural studies.
- To establish the relevance of indigenous knowledge in shaping a holistic, multicultural, and multilingual educational paradigm.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and interpretative approach. The following methodological tools were applied:

- **Textual Analysis:** Primary and secondary literary texts such as Kanthapura, Samskara, The Argumentative Indian, and classical texts like Natyashastra and Panchatantra were examined.
- **Policy Analysis:** NEP 2020 documents were analysed to understand the educational reforms concerning IKS, multilingualism, and indigenous epistemology.
- **Historical Review:** Accounts of ancient universities, knowledge schools, oral traditions, and aesthetic practices were reviewed.
- **Comparative Cultural Method:** Comparisons were drawn between Western literary frameworks and Indian aesthetic traditions to highlight epistemological differences.
- **Critical Pedagogical Lens:** The study interprets NEP 2020 through postcolonial, decolonial, and indigenous knowledge frameworks.

Historical Foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems:

India's intellectual tradition is deeply rooted in interdisciplinary thinking, integrating philosophy, arts, metaphysics, and practical sciences. Key components include:

1. **Philosophical Thought:** The six darshanas (Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta) established schools of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and spiritual psychology.
2. **Scientific and Mathematical Knowledge:**
 - Aryabhata proposed heliocentric ideas and advanced trigonometry.
 - Sushruta Samhita detailed surgical techniques including rhinoplasty.
 - Panini's Ashtadhyayi laid the foundation of formal linguistics.
 - Kautilya's Arthashastra articulated political economy and governance.

These works illustrate India's interdisciplinary knowledge culture long before the rise of European Renaissance.

3. Literary and Aesthetic Foundations:

Classical texts such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchatantra*, *Jataka tales*, *Sangam literature*, and *Bhakti poetry* shaped moral imagination, cultural values, and literary theories.

Role of English in Disseminating Indian Knowledge:

Although English entered India as a colonial imposition, it eventually transformed into a medium of resistance and global communication. Indian English evolved as a hybrid linguistic form enriched by Indian syntactic, semantic, and cultural influences.

- **English as a Global Gateway:** Indian thinkers such as: Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi etc used English to broadcast Indian philosophical ideals abroad.
- **Linguistic Exchange:** Indian words like pajama, shampoo, bungalow, veranda, guru, mantra, loot, curry etc, became part of global English. This demonstrates a long-standing two-way linguistic flow and India's cultural imprint on English vocabulary.

Thus, English did not erase Indian culture; instead, it became a conduit for cultural revival and global presence.

Aesthetics, Drama, and Literary Thought in Indian Civilization:

- **Natya as total Art:** While the West treats drama as a literary genre, India sees natya (drama) as the origin of all arts. Bharata Muni's Natyashastra (2nd century BCE) is the earliest comprehensive treatise on: dramaturgy, dance, music, acting, stage architecture, aesthetic psychology.

- **The Rasa Theory:** The theory of rasa (emotional essence) remains central to Indian art. Bharata outlines nine rasas—shringara, karuna, veera, adbhuta, hasya, raudra, bibhatsa, bhayanaka, and shanta. It explains how emotional experience is created, absorbed, and transcended by audiences.
- **Optimistic Aesthetic Worldview:** Unlike Greek tragedy's fatalism, Indian aesthetics emphasizes: cyclical time, continuity of consciousness, emotional elevation.

This unique worldview influenced medieval and modern Indian literature.

Oral Traditions, Epics, and Narrative Systems:

India's narrative culture is intensely oral, performative, and community-oriented.

- **Epics and Story Cycles:** *Mahabharata* (the world's longest epic) and *Ramayana* shaped ethical and political imagination. Story cycles like: Panchatantra, Kathasaritsagara, Hitopadesha, Jataka tales, served as pedagogical texts teaching governance, morality, and worldly wisdom.
- **Oral Performance Traditions:** Katha-Pravachana, Kathakali, Yakshagana, Dastangoi, Burra Katha, Bhavai, Pandavani, Tamasha, Baul singing, Baithaki bhajan. These traditions democratized knowledge by blending entertainment with philosophical reflection.
- **Global Influence:** Indian fables influenced Greek, Persian, and Arab stories, later entering Aesop's Fables and Arabian Nights.

Indian English Literature as a Medium of Indigenous Knowledge:

Indian English literature creatively merges Western forms with Indian philosophical and narrative structures.

- **Raja Rao's Kanthapura:** The novel adopts the style of sthal-purana—a mythic, oral storytelling method.

It establishes: a village chronicle, nationalist awakening, collective memory.

Rao famously wrote:

"Indian novels in English must be Indian in thought, culture, and narrative rhythm."

- **U.R. Ananthamurthy's Samskara:** The text interrogates: caste rigidity, ethical dilemmas, dharma vs. social obligations.

The protagonist Praneshacharya's moral crisis parallels universal themes, yet is deeply rooted in Kannada philosophical traditions.

- **Postcolonial Indian English writers such as:** Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Nissim Ezekiel, R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Mahasweta Devi (in translation) use English to

express: indigenous myths, oral rhythms, folk memory, ecological knowledge, subaltern voices. Hence, Indian English becomes a site of cultural negotiation, not submission.

NEP 2020 and the Re-Embedding of Indian Knowledge Systems:

NEP 2020 recognizes that language is the carrier of culture, cognition, and worldview.

- **Major Provisions Related to IKS:** Promotion of mother tongue/regional language as medium of instruction, Establishment of Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI), Curriculum reforms through: classical literature, oral narratives, traditional arts, yoga, Ayurveda, ecological wisdom and Integration of gurukula values with modern pedagogy.
- **Multilingualism as Epistemic Diversity:** India has 197 endangered languages (UNESCO). NEP advocates: language revitalization, community-based learning, multilingual proficiency.
- **Holistic and Liberal Education Model:** NEP encourages: experiential learning, values-based education, cross-disciplinary studies, integration of arts, sciences, and vocational skills. This mirrors India's ancient educational model embodied in: Taittiriya Upanishad, Gurukula traditions, Takshashila structure.
- **Cultural Pride and Identity Formation:** NEP emphasizes cultural self-confidence by: preserving heritage, promoting indigenous arts, sensitizing youth to India's civilizational continuity.

Discussion:

- **NEP 2020 as Decolonial Educational Reform:** The policy represents a shift from Eurocentric educational models to: culturally contextual learning, linguistic diversity, traditional epistemology.
- **Indian English Literature's Role:** Literature becomes a medium through which NEP's goals can be realized as: It provides accessible narratives to global audiences, It bridges vernacular traditions with modern discourse, It resists linguistic imperialism by reshaping English to express Indian sensibilities.
- **Relevance of IKS to Contemporary Knowledge-** Indigenous knowledge is crucial for: sustainable living, ecological ethics, mental health, community well-being, moral development.
- **Integrating Literature with Pedagogy:** NEP's emphasis on experiential, artistic, and narrative learning aligns with: storytelling traditions, performative pedagogy, literary humanism.

The Indian educational system stands to benefit from a curriculum that includes: Natyashastra for aesthetics and performance, Panchatantra for ethics and leadership, Modern Indian English novels for social critique.

CONCLUSION:

Reviving India's historic stature as a global knowledge civilization requires reclaiming the intellectual, cultural, and artistic reservoirs that have sustained the subcontinent for millennia. NEP 2020 marks an important step in realigning education with indigenous epistemologies, linguistic plurality, and cultural self-confidence. Indian English literature emerges as a crucial tool in this process—not as an extension of colonial power but as a global platform through which India reasserts its narrative, artistic, and philosophical identity.

As B.R. Ambedkar stated, "*An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering.*" Similarly, for India's knowledge systems to flourish, they must be actively embedded, taught, and celebrated through education, literature, and public discourse. NEP 2020 provides a robust framework for such revival, and Indian English literature provides the creative and intellectual medium through which indigenous knowledge can enter global consciousness.

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