

# ‘Knowledge of India’ in NEP 2020 Key to Restore Pride in School Children

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## Abstract

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*The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) envisions an education system, which can instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, one who understands and appreciates India’s rich cultural heritage, the contribution of Indian civilisation to the world civilisation in different spheres of life such as science, art, architecture, heritage, philosophy, etc. Considering that the ancient knowledge in various fields have a great potential and relevance for the future also, NEP recommends ‘Knowledge of India’ to be taught as one of the core subjects, to be learned by all the students. At the same time, it proposes that these rich Indian legacies to the world heritage must not only be nurtured and preserved for posterity but also researched, enhanced, and put to new uses through our education system. The paper elaborates on the importance of this knowledge area in the school curriculum and suggests possible ways, methods and strategies to help our students have a proper perspective of India’s heritage and a legitimate pride in belonging to this civilisation based on objective knowledge.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The newly brought out National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) seeks to revisit the whole structure of education so as to align it with the aspirational goals of 21st century education and at the same time build it upon the rich heritage of ancient Indian knowledge and thought.

As mentioned in the NEP 2020, various developed countries of the world have already experienced students’ awareness and engagement with their language, culture, and traditions as beneficial to educational, social, and technological advancement. In this context, NEP 2020 considers ‘Knowledge of India’

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as one of the core subjects to be learned by all students to become, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings.

The NEP 2020 clearly defines knowledge of India as: “Knowledge of India will include knowledge from ancient India and its contributions to modern India and its successes and challenges, and a clear sense of India’s future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc.” (NEP 2020, p. 51).

### **WHY KNOWLEDGE OF INDIA IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR STUDENTS?**

It is important that Indian students should understand and appreciate India’s rich cultural heritage, which has highly contributed to the world’s civilisation in different spheres of life, such as science, art, architecture, heritage, philosophy, etc., along with some of the ancient civilisations. This has become necessary now, as many of the students are not aware of the progress and achievements of the country in various fields in the past and thus, are unable to recognise the great potential and relevance that this indigenous knowledge offers for the future.

There are many benefits of making India’s rich culture and traditions an important part of the school curriculum. First of all, it will help in making students aware of the rich knowledge systems and traditions of our country. A strong sense and knowledge of our cultural history, arts, languages, and traditions will

further help to build a positive cultural identity and self-esteem in students. This will in turn promote a more objective and informed appreciation of India as a creative civilisation and would enhance cognitive and creative abilities of individuals. This will also help in providing cross-disciplinary thinking; in fact, Indian approach has always been cross-disciplinary. Use of poetical or linguistic devices by Indian mathematicians is an example of this. Awareness of the rich knowledge and culture of one’s own country promotes national integration too. To strengthen the unity and integrity of the country, it is important that the cultural heritage, traditions and history of different groups and regions of the country and their contributions are reemphasised, understood and appreciated. This is the key to truly understand the nature of the country’s pluralistic society and rich culture. It will not only help in restoring a sense of aesthetics but will also restore an appreciation for our heritage and create a desire to know more, to cherish and to act in favour of preserving it. It will also, help in imparting time tested cultural values like respect for diversity, tolerance, mutual understanding, patience and peaceful co-existence. The ancient knowledge in the fields of governance, agriculture, water management, arts, spirituality, environmental protection, etc., can offer sustainable solutions to our present-day problems.

## **INDIA: A TREASURE TROVE OF CULTURE AND TRADITIONS**

As one of the oldest civilisations in the world, India has been a land of veritable treasures of culture, developed over thousands of years and manifested in the form of arts, works of literature, customs, traditions, linguistic expressions, artefacts, heritage sites, and more. India pioneered in the areas of shipping, metallurgy and textile production. It had flourishing agriculture and external trade; and its indigenous system of medicine is still practised today. It has a long list of innovations in several techniques varying from brick making, jewel making to water management. NEP 2020 acknowledges the contribution of some world-class institutions of ancient India, such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, which were famous for multidisciplinary teaching and research, and had scholars and students from different backgrounds and countries (NEP 2020, p. 38). NEP 2020 also refers to various great Indian scholars such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, Chanakya, Chakrapani Datta, Madhava, Panini, Patanjali, Nagarjuna, Gautama, Pingala, Sankardev, Maitreyi, Gargi and Thiruvalluvar, etc., who significantly contributed to world knowledge in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science and surgery, civil engineering, architecture, shipbuilding and navigation, yoga, fine arts, chess,

etc. Indian culture and philosophy have immensely influenced the world. Further, NEP states that, "These rich legacies to world heritage must not only be nurtured and preserved for posterity but also researched, enhanced, and put to new uses through our education system" (NEP 2020, p. 38).

## **KNOWLEDGE OF INDIA AND SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

The NEP envisions an education system which is able to, 'instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen' (NEP 2020, p. 40).

Achieving this vision is possible by including this knowledge area in the school curriculum. Established goals and subjects (history, geography, economics, political science, sociology, etc.) in the social sciences provide numerous points of entry for teaching and learning our culture and traditions. And the content of the knowledge of India provides opportunities to connect social sciences with other subjects as well in the curriculum, such as languages, literature and fine arts. The best way to include this knowledge area in the school curriculum is by infusing or integrating it with the existing curriculum rather than creating

new courses or stand-alone units of study. Thus, infusing the knowledge of India with all the disciplines at all stages through various content materials and activities following integrated teaching approach will facilitate the learning of our heritage and culture by the students. It needs to be incorporated in an accurate and scientific manner, wherever relevant. Along with this, the events related to freedom struggle and the sacrifices made by people in different parts of the country should also become a part of this knowledge area.

The knowledge of India should be interwoven with the main content of the topic and not to be put into a box merely as information, which is many times skipped by teachers and students. Before discussing any topic, if there is any achievement made by Indians in that field, it is suggested that it should be presented before initiating the discussion. This could be exemplified by a discussion on democracy in modern times. Before we discuss democracy in modern times, it is always useful to start with highlighting and discussing the democratic traditions in ancient India. These traditions may be different from the present ones, but a discussion on this will help students to easily correlate with the topic.

Similarly, a lively and stimulating pedagogy highlighting the areas of relevance including field visits, mini-projects, videos, debates, etc., may be adopted to generate and sustain interest among students

towards 'Knowledge of India' and its various facets. The ultimate goal of these activities will be to inspire and reinforce young people's commitment to preserve our heritage, and to help close the gap between school and society by offering stimulating activities which promote involvement in the community. The policy recognises that the knowledge of the rich culture of India should be experienced first-hand by learners. For this, students may be encouraged to visit different parts of the country to study the history, scientific contributions, traditions, indigenous literature and knowledge of these areas, which will not only enhance their knowledge about these areas but will also help them in appreciating the diversity, culture and traditional practices of different parts of India. Sufficient funds should be allocated for such excursions. Such visits need to be made compulsory, and questions relating to these visits may be incorporated into student assessment to test their knowledge and learning.

To promote the first-hand experience of our culture, craftspersons may also be invited to school, and students may be given an opportunity to observe and partake, and to make them understand how the traditional crafts, which they have seen in museums or craft *melas*, are still being made today. This will not only make them aware of India's extraordinary and rich craft traditions and skilled and talented,

craftspersons, but will also help in learning the dignity of labour and understand the linkages between our identity, heritage and local crafts. Though there is a provision for vocational education as a subject at the secondary stage, students and parents often do not opt for vocational education. This is because students are not able to identify their interest towards any vocation right from the beginning and there is an apparent disconnect between the mainstream and vocational education. This kind of interaction with various craftspersons will help students understand the productive aspect of hand work, develop vocational readiness among them and provide opportunities to the students to orient themselves with the skills required for various occupations. This is in line with one of the important recommendations of NEP to integrate vocational education programmes into mainstream education from middle stage itself.

Students may be suggested to take up projects on topics related to ancient Indian knowledge, e.g., extensive water management system in ancient times in an arid area like Dholavira. This would not only help students to understand the technological advancement of our ancestors but will also help them to understand how people at that time resolved their local problems with the local solutions. Similarly, they could be suggested to research on the themes of the Indian concept of nature. Today everyone talks

about the value of tree plantation and conservation practices, but very few people are aware of India's contribution to this field right from the ancient times. Fascinating examples of such concerns can be found in the ancient literary treasures. Similarly, illustrations depicting the importance of nature in art and architecture are available in abundance, for example, images of various trees (especially peepal) found on various Harappan artefacts indicate its importance and sacredness during the period. The tradition of yoga is another example, which can be studied and researched by students. India has massively impacted the world in this area. Yoga is not just a physical exercise but it is a system of self-exploration, which has been practiced in one or the other forms since Harappan times. Many Indus seals depict deities seated in a specific *asana* and various figurines of people in different postures. We get anthropological evidence of people buried in *padmasana* position from Balathal in Rajasthan (1000 BCE). One can still observe this tradition of burying sadhus in this position. This suggests that this ancient tradition is still continuing.

Competitions or exhibitions may be organised in schools for learning various topics and subjects related to Indian knowledge. Similarly, video documentaries on inspirational personalities and achievements of India in Science and other areas, may be created and shown at

appropriate time throughout the school curriculum.

Anyone concerned with education will agree that successful implementation of the above mentioned things depend to a large extent on teachers. Unfortunately, teachers are hardly qualified to teach the various subjects related to Indian knowledge today. They cannot be blamed for this. Had the Indian knowledge tradition been given importance from the beginning in our education system, then this situation would not have arisen. The need of the hour is that in teacher education courses, student teachers should also be made aware of the knowledge of India and its values, ethos, arts and traditions been along with other subjects. Along with this, extensive training programmes should be organised to familiarise and provide

expertise to the in-service teachers in this field of knowledge.

India's education system needs to reemphasise the rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought. There is an urgent need to encourage students to research, document and explore further the achievements of their country and its contribution to the world civilisation in diverse fields. There is also a need to forge partnerships among curriculum developers, school functionaries, parents, Archaeological Survey of India, museums, heritage professionals and other stakeholders in this regard as concerted efforts are required at all levels to bring the desired results. This would help in building a sense of proper perspective of India's heritage and would induce pride and happiness in belonging to this civilisation.

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