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## Research Article




## The Intersection of Traditional Wisdom and Modern Education: Unpacking the Potential of Folk Pedagogy in the Context of India's National Education Policy 2020

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### Abstract

This article explores the critical interface of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the potential of folk pedagogy in enhancing India's educational landscape. The NEP 2020, with its emphasis on local, indigenous knowledge systems and a transformative vision for India's education system, provides an unprecedented opportunity for mainstreaming folk pedagogy into contemporary teaching-learning practices. Approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020 National Education Policy ushered in avant-garde reforms to the education policy of India. Folk pedagogy, a term used to describe traditional modes of education practiced by various indigenous and local communities, carries immense value in terms of cultural preservation,

community engagement, and learner-centric methodologies. It promotes experiential learning, critical thinking, and creativity by organically integrating local culture, resources, and traditional wisdom into education. Its salient features and key recommendations exceptionally call for flexibility, multi-disciplinarity, critical thinking and ethical values, multilingualism and the three-language formula. An exceptional emphasis on the power of language and the inclusion of mother/regional under the larger context of Indian ethos has been witnessed for the time. NEP 2020 with such emphasis ushers a pedagogical paradigm shift that seeks to reestablish lost Indian pedagogical heritages and their folk orientation, where education is experiential, diverse, holistic, creative, critical, multidisciplinary and multilingual. By intertwining the principles of NEP 2020 with the rich, culturally diverse practices of folk pedagogy, the article envisages a dynamic, inclusive, and effective education system. It underscores the significant role folk pedagogy can play in achieving NEP's objectives of creating an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by leveraging local knowledge systems and fostering a deep sense of respect towards the rich cultural heritage of India. The article critically reviews the extent to which NEP 2020 allows for the incorporation of folk pedagogy in its framework, and analyzes how this can be made more effective. It addresses challenges and potential strategies for incorporating folk pedagogy into the mainstream educational practices and curriculum development. The article argues for an extensive dialogue and collaboration among educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to facilitate this integration, ultimately nurturing a pedagogical system that is grounded in the culture, context, and aspirations of learners. This strategic amalgamation could empower India's education system to meet the future challenges of the rapidly evolving global knowledge economy, while staying true to its unique cultural roots.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Folk Pedagogy, Language, Knowledge, Experience, Regional pedagogical system, Education, Inclusive education, Culture, Tradition

A child is so nurtured in the mother's womb that its body and cognition are well-tuned to the world outside. Consequently, it also develops an a priori disposition towards intimate assessments of all that is manifested outside and finds productivity and creativity accordingly. Quite similarly, Indian ethos provides a child with social-cultural maps to find a semblance of values that makes learning a noble adventure to give back to society and the nation. His immediate social-cultural ecosystem bears idiosyncrasies, ranging from the fabric of the local environment engulfing his senses to that of the distinct language that feeds his cognitive hunger. Way before we estimate the cognitive stage to kick its process, a cultural being has already come into existence. Later on, the Child in his apparently apt age is then planted in a system of strategic knowledge stages to grow into a well-cultivated individual that can perform creatively and positively respond to the pressing demands of the times.

For decades the strategic knowledge systems have failed to achieve what it desires. When the Child is not able to perform, it is not a matter of inability or incompetence but rather unresponsiveness to the scale of cognitive measurements. The reason for that unresponsiveness

can only be found in the incoherencies of the knowledge system employed with regard to the lack or total absence of ethos that shaped that mind in the first place. A child's crisis is a crisis of irrelevance and alienation. It is a crisis of logical loopholes that he has to bear across school stages. And most importantly, whenever considered, ethos is only thought of as sociocultural attitudes and values, and not in terms of their pedagogical significance.

Pedagogy at present feels like giving a picture of an incomplete idea with instruments that are bound to be insufficient. It has become difficult to talk about it and not realize the impossibility of attending to a myriad of crucial perspectives, that have mirrored the incomplete picture and the insufficiency of the instruments. However, there are certain definitions that try to capture the essential. An often-used one is, Pedagogy is the profession, art and science of teaching (Bishop and Starkey 119). We observe that such a definition resonates more with institutional bodies and spaces, and less with the question of what is knowledge, how it is reproduced and what are the socio-cultural presets and objectives. Such take hardly orbits around language for its gravity which sustains knowledge systems.

This has been the case for decades with the Indian education system that in order to live up to externally conceived global standards, lost track of its traditional pedagogies, that for ages maintained an equilibrium between learning, language and its implications. A simple factor that proves so is the pedagogical homogeneity across educational spaces. This blackout of the ethos, the social-cultural bearing and the relational significance result into incoherencies and alienation which eventually drive revisions in a nation's education policy to seek equilibriums on the multifaceted educational objectives.

What has led to current pedagogical inertia and drawbacks had brought many scholars with a broad range of perspectives. One strong argument on the state of current pedagogical failure has ascribed it to "Textbook Culture" which, never a case in the Indian traditional pedagogies, makes education a space of corporate interest creating a textbook business on one hand and bringing counter-measures from the state on control of school textbooks on the other (Kumar 452). Other criticisms have demanded indigenous methodologies for an in-depth understanding of education in countries with colonial histories. Scholars have found decades of cultural and language amnesia, a legacy of the colonial establishment, that demands the rejuvenation of relational accountability and indigenous paradigm to make education community-specific (Wilson, 2008). Giving the Indian context Kumar emphasizes in *Politics of Education in Colonial India* that in the transition towards a new education system during the colonial phase knowledge was appropriated and conflictive curriculums were established where community-oriented education was replaced by a "bureaucratic centralized system of education" (Chacko 935). There are also others who have centred pedagogical issues against the lack of indigenous sovereignty, the land and the relationships (Linda Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2019).

If we look at the vision of NEP 2020, we come across similar resonances that demand education in the Indian context with a strong emphasis on the Indian ethos and an integrative spirit across the pedagogical spectrum.

Approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020 National Education Policy ushered in avant-garde reforms to the education policy of India. Of many of its salient features and key

recommendations there are certain that exceptionally call for flexibility, multi-disciplinarity, critical thinking and ethical values, multilingualism and the three-language formula. These highlights of NEP 2020 stand out in its formulation of aims of learning and its recognition of traditional modes. It has put forward a case for Indian education that, unlike modern pedagogical apparatuses and the national education policy from 1986, finds its soul in the reinvigoration of Indian ethos and recentering its objectives in accord with the diversity of social-cultural backgrounds.

NEP 2020 foremost delineates what is education or how it should be envisioned by outlining its aims:

The purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings, capable of rational thoughts and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive and plural society as envisaged by our constitution. (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020, p. 4)

This distinctive emphasis has an essential implication for the prospects of pedagogy. Previous policies solely focused on absorbing the global standards and the constitutional character in terms of the democratic spirit. But nowhere in previous policies do we find the need or speculation on setting the education in the Indian context. The constitutional spirit demands a pedagogy that should align and also serve the sovereignty of the land and the state. India needs a pedagogy of the people, by the people and for the people.

The Indian context is precisely what is distinctive about NEP 2020. It is delineation on education instead of implementation of some standard presets. It aims at the holistic development of learners, critical thinking, experiential learning, language and multilingualism, and requires a pedagogical shift in the current education system. Issues pertaining to language and inquiries on what makes language powerful, in curriculums responding to language, multilingualism along with critical thinking, may lead to the ‘why’ of the drawbacks in modern education systems. And perhaps the pedagogical tools of the most powerful practitioners of language i.e., folk communities, may navigate us in achieving the aforementioned objectives of NEP 2020.

Centring on folk communities, recent developments in pedagogical considerations have caused a huge shift in social justice pedagogy, critical pedagogy and curriculum studies. Based upon folk-oriented methodologies, they suggest a desperate need for pedagogical theories that bring the ethos of the land closer to its implications in education and vice-versa. The most pertinent resonances on pedagogical recollections have come from critical pedagogy centred on the idea of folk school.

In *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* McLaren puts out key objectives of critical pedagogy emphasizing that “Education must be linked to social change if it is to be relevant to the social struggles of exploited and the oppressed” (McLaren 42) for classrooms have already been noticed as microcosms of the hegemonic equations and acts in the outside world (Nicholls 25). Indexes for revolutionary pedagogies can be found in Folk Schools of Denmark which were aimed at finding literacy in

the orality and knowledge of the community for emancipation and empowerment of the students. N.F.S Grundtvig's theory of "school for life" held the key concerns for such a vision. Culture, language, music and poetry held an important place in Grundtvig's conception of education. Here, community correlation formed the central index in the worth of knowledge creation. Considering how ideas and cultural rituals are constantly on the move, and taking 'creation' as man's noblest potential, Grundtvig emphasized education to have sensitivity towards what is in the making. Focalizing on the creative potential he suggested education to be "historic poetic", which psychologist Jerome Bruner has linked to the "narrative method" in *The Culture of Education* (Jonas and Warren 26).

Reflecting on the sonority of narrative education Freire reflects in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to fill his students with the content of the narration -content which is detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are empty of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity" (Freire, 2000, p. 71). Westerman drawing on pedagogical revolutions takes it up in *Folk Schools, Popular Education, and a Pedagogy of Community Action*, proposes a synthesis of approaches where language is the essential tool as opposed to limitations in Literacy, where the necessary skills of reading and writing are completely undeveloped, for those skills are not connected to one's native language, thinking critically about social realities (Westerman 555).

These developments have led us to key areas of rising educational concerns across countries. The relational accountability, the indigenous sovereignty, the folk school objectives and the power of language to do so, have become the new locus of pedagogy worldwide. But how do these pedagogical concerns concern NEP 2020?

These pivotal shifts in pedagogy from static classroom towards folk paradigm, when juxtaposed with NEP 2020's fundamental principles, such as recognizing student's unique capabilities in both academic and nonacademic spheres, eliminating hierarchies of knowledge systems, multidisciplinary and holistic knowledge to ensure unity and integrity of all knowledge, creativity and critical thinking, ethic and human values, promoting multilingualism and power of knowledge, life skills, respect for diversity and respect for the local context are evident in their push towards going back to the Indian roots for comprehensive pedagogy. Also on page 15, regarding multilingualism and language, the document puts pertinent emphasis on efforts that need to be made "for all Indian languages having rich oral and written literature, cultural traditions and knowledge" making a clear case for the folk pedagogies that sustain them.

NEP 2020 in Goal 4 SDG4 of 2030 agenda for sustainable development adopted in 2015 delineates the objectives of education. It mentions clearly that thinking critically, solving problems, and being able to absorb the material in the changing field are key areas in which education must move forward to. Having cleared the direction, it further focuses on the idea of Pedagogy and seeks its evolution to achieve NEP objectives by making education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred,



discussion-based and enjoyable. Also on curriculum, it highlights basic arts, crafts, humanities, language, literature, culture and values as must-included areas. It has explicitly stated the revision and revamping of the education structure including SDG4 “while building upon Indian traditions and value systems” (p.3.).

Furthermore, quite contrastingly, on page 4 of the document, NEP 2020 links creative potential to the development of social, ethical and emotional capacities and dispositions. To this, it holds cognitive capacities as secondary and subsisting. On the same page, we find concrete resonances of the aforementioned pedagogical developments in the emphasis that “The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this policy.” Also, the terminological shift from Knowledge to ‘Jnan’, wisdom to ‘Pragyaa’ and truth to ‘Satya’ has a significant bearing on the indigenization of education in India when put along attention towards historically marginalized, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and the respect for and deference to its rich diversity and culture.

The most conclusive index that associates policy’s vision as a case for folk pedagogy is its unique and recurring emphasis on experiential learning and experiential methods. The explicit association between the teaching of languages and the requirement of experiential methods to achieve so is not a vision into the future but an emphasis on the revival of the past. Only traditional living practices i.e., units of folk pedagogies carry resonances of experiential approaches to such learning.

NEP 2020’s crucial emphasis on multidisciplinary, holistic education, multilingualism and the power of knowledge converges towards a demand for a paradigm shift where in order to create education as envisioned in NEP 2020, these aspects need to be considered as foundational principles. It is here that we get to envision the new pedagogical paradigm. NEP 2020 seeks a meta-pedagogy that assimilates the vibrant dimensions of education as they are outside the classrooms amid the communities in forms of indigenous educational genres. And we may say without going too far that perhaps this could be a historical juncture where traditional pedagogical genres across states and regions of India in forms of folk genres such as folk art, folk narratives, folk music, theatre and games can for the first time be absorbed into Indian education as Indian pedagogies.

Recent scholarship has also found resonances towards community-centred pedagogy taking tools of folklore, folk music, folk performances and practices, and narratives to be hotspots of language, learning and creativity. Starnes argues how folklore is inclusive of critical thinking on the ‘who’ and ‘how’ in pedagogical processes of knowledge recreation. Emphasizing how folklore reveals knowledge recreation, he further adds that “Exploring the ‘folk’ who do the producing alongside the ‘lore’ they produce allows us to interrogate how knowledge is created and by whom, but more importantly, the relationship between the how and the who as a creative practice” (Starnes 3). Taking it further on what essentially would form the curriculum of such pedagogy that would liberate learners and engage them in creative assessments of their surroundings, the subfields of folk traditions such as folk poetry, folk music, folk art, folk games and folk customs in educational activities are aptly conceivable in folklore education (Sándor 107).

The vision of NEP 2020 hence is a vision towards a paradigm shift in India's current pedagogical state. It clearly unfolds its concern between modernity and globalization on one hand, and tradition and cultures on the other. This condition flows parallel to the pedagogical concerns where the minimal presence of India's diverse pedagogical units, the folk pedagogies across Indian states, is an alarming situation pointing towards language and cultural extinctions. Reclaiming Jnan, Pragya, Satya and Smriti in the respective knowledge systems of the Indian ethos is the way ahead from current pedagogical inertia and a way beyond the retaining Western concepts of Knowledge, cognition and memory. At last, we may agree that NEP 2020 does put forth a case for pedagogical revival where experiential learning methods towards creativity, human values, Indian ethos, power of language and regional tongues is a call for folk pedagogical frameworks for their experiential paradigm.

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