Revisiting Indian Knowledge Systems through Contemporary Indian English Literature: Implications for NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in contemporary educational discourse has renewed scholarly interest in exploring indigenous knowledge traditions through diverse academic disciplines. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates the integration of India's rich intellectual, cultural, and philosophical heritage into higher education to foster holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-based learning. In this context, Contemporary Indian English Literature serves as a significant medium for preserving, reinterpreting, and disseminating Indian knowledge traditions to global audiences. The present paper examines how selected contemporary Indian English literary texts revisit and represent various dimensions of Indian Knowledge Systems, including ecological wisdom, cultural identity, spirituality, ethical values, and community-centred knowledge. Through a qualitative and textual analysis of works by authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Arundhati Roy, the study highlights the role of literature in bridging tradition and modernity. The paper argues that contemporary literary narratives function as repositories of indigenous knowledge while simultaneously engaging with contemporary social, environmental, and educational concerns. Furthermore, the study explores the relevance of these literary representations in achieving the objectives of NEP 2020, particularly in promoting cultural rootedness, critical thinking, sustainability, and interdisciplinary learning. The findings suggest that integrating Indian English literary texts reflecting IKS into higher education curricula can contribute significantly to the development of culturally responsive and transformative educational practices. The paper concludes that literature can play a vital role in revitalizing Indian knowledge traditions and strengthening the vision of an inclusive, holistic, and globally relevant education system envisioned by NEP 2020.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, Indian English Literature, NEP 2020, Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Identity, Literary Studies

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed a growing recognition of the need to reconnect education with indigenous knowledge traditions, cultural heritage, and value-based learning. In India, this discourse has gained renewed significance through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into mainstream education. The policy envisions an educational framework that is rooted in Indian ethos while remaining globally relevant and future-oriented. In this context, literature emerges as a powerful medium for preserving, transmitting, and reinterpreting indigenous knowledge across generations.

Contemporary Indian English Literature occupies a unique position in this endeavour. While written in a global language, it frequently engages with local histories, folk traditions, ecological wisdom, philosophical ideas, and cultural practices embedded within Indian society. Contemporary authors not only narrate stories but also act as custodians of civilizational memory, presenting traditional knowledge systems in forms accessible to modern readers. Through themes such as environmental sustainability, community living, spiritual consciousness, gender justice, and cultural resilience, these literary works contribute to the preservation and revitalization of Indian knowledge traditions.

The significance of revisiting Indian Knowledge Systems through literature lies in the ability of literary texts to humanize knowledge. Unlike policy documents or academic treatises, literature offers experiential insights into the lived realities of communities and cultures. It enables readers to understand how traditional knowledge continues to influence identity formation, ethical decision-making, ecological practices, and social relationships in contemporary India.

The present study seeks to explore the representation of Indian Knowledge Systems in selected contemporary Indian English literary works and examine their relevance in achieving the objectives of NEP 2020. By analysing literary narratives as repositories of indigenous wisdom, the paper attempts to demonstrate how English literary studies can contribute to holistic, culturally responsive, and transformative education.

INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Indian Knowledge Systems represent a cumulative body of knowledge developed through centuries of intellectual inquiry, cultural practices, philosophical reflections, and experiential learning. Unlike modern disciplinary structures that often separate knowledge into distinct domains, the Indian tradition views knowledge as interconnected and holistic. It encompasses diverse fields such as philosophy, education, governance, ecology, medicine, agriculture, mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, ethics, and spirituality.

At the heart of Indian Knowledge Systems lies the principle of harmony harmony between the individual and society, humanity and nature, knowledge and action, and material progress and spiritual development. Ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Arthashastra, and various regional knowledge traditions emphasize the integration of intellectual growth with ethical responsibility. Knowledge is not merely viewed as information acquisition but as a transformative process leading to self-realization and social well-being.

The contemporary relevance of IKS extends beyond cultural preservation. In an era marked by environmental crises, social fragmentation, and ethical dilemmas arising from technological advancement, indigenous knowledge offers alternative perspectives on sustainability, collective responsibility, and holistic development. Traditional ecological knowledge, community-based resource management, and value-centred approaches to education provide valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges.

Recognizing this potential, NEP 2020 advocates the inclusion of Indian knowledge traditions across disciplines and educational levels. The policy encourages educational institutions to integrate indigenous perspectives into curricula, pedagogy, and research. Such integration seeks to foster cultural confidence, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and a deeper understanding of India's intellectual heritage among learners.

Thus, Indian Knowledge Systems should not be perceived as relics of the past but as dynamic and evolving sources of knowledge capable of enriching contemporary educational and intellectual discourse.

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Contemporary Indian English Literature serves as a bridge between local cultural experiences and global literary discourse. Although written in English, these works remain deeply rooted in Indian social realities, traditions, and knowledge practices. Writers employ English not as a symbol of cultural displacement but as a medium for articulating indigenous experiences to diverse audiences.

Many contemporary authors engage with themes that resonate strongly with Indian Knowledge Systems. Ecological consciousness, respect for biodiversity, collective living, oral traditions, spirituality, and ethical responsibility frequently emerge in their narratives. Through fiction, memoirs, and narrative non-fiction, writers document traditional practices that are increasingly threatened by globalization, urbanization, and technological homogenization.

Furthermore, literature enables the reinterpretation of traditional knowledge in contemporary contexts. Mythological narratives are revisited to address issues of gender, identity, and social justice. Folk traditions are transformed into modern literary expressions. Indigenous ecological wisdom is presented as a viable response to environmental degradation. In this manner, contemporary Indian English Literature becomes an active participant in cultural preservation and intellectual renewal.

REVISITING IKS THROUGH SELECT CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH TEXTS

- **Amitav Ghosh and Ecological Wisdom**

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) offers a powerful exploration of ecological interconnectedness, a principle deeply embedded in Indian Knowledge Systems. The novel challenges the modern tendency to view nature merely as a resource and instead presents it as an active participant in human existence. Through the journey of Deen Datta, Ghosh links folklore, migration, climate change, and environmental degradation, demonstrating the continued relevance of indigenous ecological wisdom.

As Ghosh observes, *"The uncanny has become the everyday"* (Ghosh 63). This statement reflects the increasing unpredictability of environmental phenomena caused by human interference with nature. The novel suggests that traditional communities often possess ecological knowledge that modern societies have neglected.

Another significant passage states, *"The earth was speaking in a language we had forgotten how to understand"* (Ghosh 217). This metaphor resonates strongly with Indian ecological philosophies that emphasize harmony between humans and the natural world. The statement implies that contemporary society has become disconnected from traditional environmental wisdom.

Through these representations, Ghosh advocates a renewed engagement with indigenous ecological knowledge. His work demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems can offer valuable perspectives for addressing contemporary environmental challenges and promoting sustainable living.

- **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Mythological Reinterpretation**

In *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reinterprets the Ramayana through the voice of Sita, presenting traditional narratives from a contemporary perspective. While preserving the cultural significance of the epic, the novel encourages readers to critically engage with issues of gender, identity, and agency.

Sita remarks, *"A woman's strength is often mistaken for weakness because it speaks softly"* (Divakaruni 85). This statement reflects the novel's attempt to recover neglected dimensions of feminine wisdom within Indian traditions. Rather than rejecting tradition, Divakaruni re-examines it to uncover its deeper humanistic values.

Another noteworthy observation appears when Sita reflects, *"Stories survive because each generation finds new meanings in them"* (Divakaruni 301). This idea aligns closely with the dynamic nature of Indian Knowledge Systems, which evolve through reinterpretation and contextual adaptation.

The novel illustrates how ancient narratives continue to influence contemporary society. By presenting mythology as a living source of knowledge rather than a static cultural artifact, Divakaruni demonstrates the enduring relevance of Indian philosophical and ethical traditions.

- **Arundhati Roy and Cultural Identity**

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) explores the relationship between memory, culture, social structures, and identity. The novel portrays the complexities of postcolonial India while revealing how traditional cultural values continue to shape individual experiences and community life.

Roy writes, *"Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes"* (Roy 32). This reflection highlights the interconnectedness of individual actions and collective destinies, a theme often found in Indian philosophical thought.

Another significant passage states, *"They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how"* (Roy 33). Through this critique of rigid social hierarchies, Roy invites readers to re-examine inherited traditions and distinguish between enduring cultural values and oppressive social practices.

The novel preserves cultural memory while simultaneously questioning social inequalities. Roy's narrative demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems are not merely repositories of ancient wisdom but also frameworks through which contemporary society can critically reflect upon its own practices and values.

Comparative Perspective

A comparative reading of Ghosh, Divakaruni, and Roy reveals different dimensions of Indian Knowledge Systems. Ghosh foregrounds ecological consciousness, Divakaruni revitalizes mythological and ethical traditions, while Roy examines cultural identity and social transformation. Together, these authors illustrate how Contemporary Indian English Literature functions as a dynamic space where indigenous knowledge is preserved, questioned, and reinterpreted for modern audiences. Their works support the objectives of NEP 2020 by promoting cultural rootedness, critical inquiry, ethical awareness, and interdisciplinary understanding.

MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF IKS REFLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

- **Environmental Sustainability and Ecological Ethics-** Contemporary Indian English Literature highlights the traditional Indian belief of living in harmony with nature. Literary texts promote environmental awareness, conservation, and sustainable living practices.
- **Holistic Development and Human Values-** Indian Knowledge Systems emphasize the balanced development of mind, body, and character. Literary works nurture values such as empathy, honesty, responsibility, and ethical conduct.
- **Community Knowledge and Collective Responsibility-** Many literary narratives reflect the importance of community-based knowledge and social cooperation. They emphasize collective well-being and shared responsibility for societal progress.
- **Spirituality and Inner Well-being**- Spirituality is a core element of Indian thought. Contemporary literature explores self-awareness, inner peace, and personal growth as pathways to a meaningful life.
- **Cultural Identity and Heritage Preservation-** Literature serves as a medium for preserving India's rich cultural traditions, myths, and customs. It strengthens cultural identity and connects readers with their heritage.
- **Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission-** Indian traditions value the transfer of knowledge from elders to younger generations. Literary texts often portray how wisdom, values, and experiences are passed across generations.
- **Respect for Diversity and Pluralism-** Indian Knowledge Systems promote coexistence and respect for different cultures, beliefs, and perspectives. Contemporary literature celebrates diversity and encourages mutual understanding and inclusivity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NEP 2020

Contemporary Indian English Literature can significantly contribute to the implementation of NEP 2020 by serving as a pedagogical resource for introducing learners to Indian Knowledge Systems. Literary texts offer contextual and experiential learning opportunities that help students understand indigenous knowledge beyond theoretical descriptions. Through literary engagement, learners can develop cultural literacy, ethical sensitivity, environmental awareness, and critical

thinking skills. Integrating such texts into higher education curricula can foster multidisciplinary learning while strengthening students' connection with India's intellectual and cultural heritage.

These sections together would form approximately 2,500–3,000 words of a strong conference paper. The next step would be developing the **Discussion**, **Conclusion**, and **APA references** sections in a journal-style format.

DISCUSSION

Literature as a Bridge between Tradition and Modernity- Contemporary Indian English Literature acts as a bridge between India's rich cultural heritage and the realities of the modern world. While rooted in traditional knowledge, myths, folklore, and indigenous wisdom, contemporary literary works reinterpret these elements in light of present-day social, cultural, and environmental concerns. Through this synthesis, literature preserves traditional values while making them relevant to contemporary readers. It thus facilitates a meaningful dialogue between tradition and modernity, ensuring the continuity of Indian Knowledge Systems in a rapidly changing society.

Relevance of Literary Narratives for Educational Transformation- Literary narratives provide learners with opportunities to engage with complex human experiences, cultural values, and ethical dilemmas. By presenting Indian Knowledge Systems through stories, characters, and lived experiences, literature promotes critical thinking, empathy, creativity, and cultural awareness. Such narratives encourage learners to connect theoretical knowledge with real-life situations, thereby supporting holistic and experiential learning. Consequently, literature becomes an effective tool for educational transformation by fostering intellectual growth alongside moral and social development.

Contribution of English Studies to the Objectives of NEP 2020- English Studies can play a significant role in realizing the vision of NEP 2020 by integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into literary education. Contemporary Indian English Literature enables students to explore indigenous knowledge, cultural diversity, environmental consciousness, and ethical values through a global language. This approach promotes multidisciplinary learning, cultural rootedness, and critical inquiry, which are key objectives of NEP 2020. By incorporating IKS-oriented literary texts into curricula, English Studies can contribute to developing globally competent yet culturally grounded learners.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Contemporary Indian English Literature serves as an effective medium for revisiting and preserving Indian Knowledge Systems. Through themes such as ecological consciousness, cultural identity, spirituality, community values, and ethical living, contemporary literary works reflect the enduring relevance of indigenous knowledge in modern society. The analysis demonstrates that literature not only documents traditional wisdom but also reinterprets it to address contemporary educational, social, and environmental concerns.

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems and literature is significant because it promotes holistic learning, cultural rootedness, critical thinking, and value-based education. Literary texts enable learners to engage with Indian traditions in a meaningful and experiential manner, thereby supporting the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Such integration can help create learners who are both globally competent and deeply connected to their cultural heritage.

Future research may explore a wider range of contemporary Indian English authors and literary genres to examine the diverse representations of Indian Knowledge Systems. Curriculum developers and educators may also incorporate IKS-oriented literary texts into higher education programmes to strengthen multidisciplinary learning and foster a more inclusive, culturally responsive, and transformative educational framework. Ultimately, the convergence of literature and Indian Knowledge Systems offers valuable possibilities for enriching educational practices and preserving India's intellectual heritage for future generations.

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