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Bharatiyata and the national education policy 2020: negotiating contested visions of Indianness in educational reform

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex idea of Bharatiyata (Indianness) from the inter-disciplinary points of view of Indian thinkers, like Tagore, Ambedkar, Vivekananda, Savarkar, Upadhyaya, Thapar, and others. It finds common threads like spiritual-cultural oneness, social justice, anti-colonial struggle, moral conduct (Dharma), and inclusive pluralism embedded in their ideas. Next, the essay critically examines in what manner India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020) synthesizes the various conceptions of Bharatiyata in its education policy.

The analysis finds substantial convergence, especially with regard to emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), multilingualism, holistic growth, and embeddedness; yet, it also finds essential tensions emerging from differing scholarly imaginations and possible essentialism. Therefore, the paper contends that effective implementation of NEP 2020 depends on taking a dialogic, non-stratified perspective towards Bharatiyata in education. This requires ensuring that policy is attuned to India's civilizational continuity but proactively addresses prevailing social inequalities. Practical suggestions include curriculum planning decentralization, robust rigorous IKS research, and critical thinking on disputed narratives of identity.

Keywords: National education policy 2020 (NEP 2020), Bharatiyata (Indianness), Indian knowledge systems (IKS), language policy in education, globalization and indigenous traditions, educational reform in India

Introduction

The Contested Essence of Indianness

Bharatiyata, or the very essence of what it means to be Indian, is as such inherently resistant to a monolithic, single definition. It is, instead, an ever-changing and constantly contested notion, constantly being redefined by India's vast centuries-long civilizational experience, rich philosophical inheritance, and multifaceted socio-political evolution over millennia. As Rabindranath Tagore (1917) ^[16] so astutely noted, Bharatiyata is "a tapestry woven from countless threads of regional cultures, spiritual quests, and shared struggles" (p. 42), implying a rich unity out of enormous diversity.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 firmly places Bharatiyata at the center of educational transformation in India, pushing strongly for the incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and cultivating a strong "rootedness" in indigenous values (Government of India, 2020, p. 4) ^[3]. Bharatiyata is not, however, a fixed inheritance; it incorporates deeply divergent, and at times oppositional, visions put forward by foundational Indian intellectuals across the 20th century. For example, Tagore and Vivekananda talked about universal humanism, Ambedkar hailed equality and social justice, and Savarkar highlighted cultural nationalism. How to harmonize these intellectual traditions is easier said than done, and thus the ambition of the policy requires a deft negotiating of these disparate legacies.

This research paper thus has two main goals: first, to integrate the interdisciplinary understanding of Bharatiyata presented by influential Indian thinkers in literature, sociology, history, philosophy, and political thought; and second, to critically examine NEP 2020's take on these multi-faceted understandings, thus examining its ability to create an education system that promotes a genuinely inclusive, critically active, and evolving Indian identity.

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Finally, while the focus of NEP 2020 on Bharatiyata is an imperative decolonial one, it also operates as a major site of ideological tension. By carefully analyzing the way in which the policy illuminates the transformation of abstract philosophical principles into practical pedagogical practice, this paper seeks to discover effective avenues for education to cultivate Bharatiyata as a living, pluralistic, and dynamic tradition capable of addressing modern India and the world at large.

Theoretical Framework: Interpreting Bharatiyata's Multifaceted Nature

Bharatiyata or Indianness cannot be reduced to simplistic geographical or narrowly political determinations of nationality. It is a richly nuanced idea, born of India's ancient civilizational past, multifaith philosophical heritage, and intricate socio-political accommodations. It has never been conceived of as merely territorial identity—it is also cultural, moral, and religious. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1929) ^[1], speaking as an Indian philosopher, explained Bharatiyata as an "eternal idea" based on Vedanta, a vision of spiritual consciousness transcending India's confounding diversity. To him, Indianness was less about political independence and more about a common metaphysical direction in which materialism was counterbalanced by spiritual depth. For Ambedkar (1936) ^[1], however, no valid expression of Bharatiyata was possible unless the exploitative mechanisms of caste were destroyed. For Ambedkar, India's civilizational and cultural identity was mortally flawed as long as social injustice and discrimination were prevalent. The concept of Bharatiyata thus needed to be reimagined on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ashis Nandy (1983) ^[7] overlaid one more level with his contention that Bharatiyata is not just a historical or philosophical concept but also a psychological one, rendered through the experience of colonial trauma and the tenacity of indigenous lifeworlds. He contended that Indianness bore within it the wounds of domination and the survival strategies of creativity.

These opposing strategies have led to three general theoretical perspectives that elucidate the complex nature of Bharatiyata. These are: one, the civilizational continuity perspective, pursued by historians such as K.M. Panikkar and D.D. Kosambi. Panikkar highlighted India's unparalleled ability to assimilate heterogeneous influences—from Persian, Greek, and Central Asian thought to colonial institutions—yet maintain a unique civilizational presence. Kosambi, following a Marxist approach, contended that India's civilization developed not in frozen isolation but through ongoing engagement between material transformations and cultural categories. He demonstrated how agrarian formations, commerce, and class conflicts influenced the evolution of religious and philosophical traditions, and proved that Bharatiyata was never static or permanent, but a continuously evolving process of adjustment.

The second perspective is social negotiation, which has been most forcefully expressed by sociologist M.N. Srinivas and historian Romila Thapar. Srinivas emphasized how phenomena such as Sanskritization and Westernization demonstrate the continuously evolving redefinition of Indianness as social groups appropriate, modify, or reject cultural practices in order to achieve status and legitimacy. Thapar further developed this case by demonstrating that

Bharatiyata throughout history is a contested terrain, where competing accounts endlessly struggle for validity. Her critique of sanitized, idealized antiquity highlights the value of listening to silenced and marginalized voices in hegemonic narratives of Indian history. On this model, Bharatiyata is not an essentialized entity but a site of negotiation between tradition and modernity, continuity and transformation, privilege and resistance.

The third lens is that of ethical nationalism, articulated by thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Deendayal Upadhyaya. Vivekananda's vision for Indianness was based on Advaita Vedanta, stressing the fundamental unity of life, but he also demanded that spirituality express itself in activity—education, service, and social work. Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism followed this spirit by basing Bharatiyata on dharma (moral responsibility) and seva (service) and also demanding decentralized, autonomous communities balancing ancient spiritual traditions with contemporary social welfare. Both traditions dismissed chauvinism in a narrow form and tried to articulate Bharatiyata as an ethical enterprise of obligation to self, society, and humankind.

NEP 2020 implicitly borrows from all these traditions—it uses civilizational continuity by celebrating India's knowledge traditions, it uses social negotiation by stressing pluralism and inclusivity, and uses ethical nationalism by its emphasis on value-based education. However, the policy falls short of clearly formulating how the above dimensions coexist, nor does it adequately engage with their tensions. In valorizing classical traditions, and in particular Sanskritic ones, it is at risk of marginalizing vernacular, subaltern, or non-Hindu epistemologies. This differential stress points to the lack of a clear theoretical framework that can meet the longstanding challenge of seeking to balance inclusivity with cultural grounding.

Diverse Visions of Bharatiyata: Scholarly Perspectives Across Disciplines

If the theoretical models offer general lenses, the rich visions of particular thinkers and scholars disclose the depths of diversity—and sometimes incompatibility—of what Bharatiyata has meant in India's intellectual and political past. Rabindranath Tagore saw Bharatiyata as a unifying spiritual and cultural awareness that went beyond sectional political nationalism. His creation of Visva-Bharati University was itself a practical realization of this vision, uniting scholars and artists from all of Asia and Europe in a space of shared learning. Indianness, for Tagore, was not about exclusions but about openness, about being able to synthesize world influences while sustaining India's internal cultural pulse. Swami Vivekananda also spelled out a vision of Bharatiyata based on Advaita Vedanta but made it actionable to begin with through the teaching of "Practical Vedanta." His Parliament of Religions in Chicago speeches (1893) declared the fundamental unity of mankind, and his subsequent writings placed emphasis on education, service, and upliftment as the proper markers of Indianness. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan took this universalist aspect further, describing Indian civilization as humankind's bequest of spiritual oneness in which material and spiritual existence could coexist seamlessly.

Completely in contrast, Ambedkar's conception of Bharatiyata was built around social justice and equality. The caste system was the biggest hindrance to any real sense of

national identity for him. His book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) ^[1] made it crystal clear that Bharatiyata was not possible until social hierarchies were eliminated and liberty, equality, and fraternity were the lived values of Indian society. Romila Thapar, based on her historical work, validated this view by revealing how dominant narratives tended to romanticize antiquity and stifle marginalized voices. She demanded Bharatiyata be regarded as a fractured landscape rather than a harmonious whole and that historical scholarship would uncover silences and exclusions to render Indianness truly inclusive. Srinivas, on the other hand, brought out the ways in which modernization processes tended to paradoxically reinforce caste systems instead of abolishing them. His theories of Sanskritization and Westernization brought out how Indianness kept getting redefined through adaptation, negotiation, and resistance strategies.

Another influential and divergent formulation was provided by V.D. Savarkar, who redefined Bharatiyata with his concept of Hindutva. Indianness for Savarkar was based in sacred geography, and India was both fatherland and holy land for Hindus. His cultural nationalism was exclusionary, where the nation was mainly characterized by Hindu identity and other religious communities were marginalized to the periphery. Conversely, Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, as much as it borrowed from Hindu traditions, envisioned a more inclusive and equanimous approach. He focused on the primacy of dharma and selfless service while pushing decentralized, village-centered self-reliance as the most genuine expression of Bharatiyata. Both thinkers had developed against the backdrop of anti-colonial experience, but while Savarkar's vision gravitated toward exclusivism, Upadhyaya attempted to integrate tradition and contemporary social imperatives in a less polarizing mould. Critical accounts of Bharatiyata have been produced by scholars such as Ashis Nandy and D.D. Kosambi. Nandy contended that true Indianness lay not in statist initiatives or majority narratives but in the diverse lifeworlds of subaltern publics who opposed homogenization. Nandy saw Bharatiyata as a site of resistance where local practices endured in spite of colonial rule and statist centralization. Kosambi, employing Marxist historiography, followed the way material and economic factors constantly reconfigured India's cultural and religious forms. For him, Bharatiyata was never a fixed inheritance but always dialectically redefined in terms of class struggles, agrarian changes, and developments in modes of production. Arun Shourie threw another cautionary note in by contending that Bharatiyata was only truly reclaimable by way of diligent and truthful scholarship that laid bare both colonial distortions and modern ideological manipulations. Otherwise, he cautioned, Indianness would be left vulnerable to mythmaking and propaganda.

Combined, these various visions emphasize that Bharatiyata has never been monolithic. It is a dynamic, contested, and changing tradition, simultaneously spiritual and political, inclusive and exclusive, ethical and material. Tagore, Vivekananda, and Radhakrishnan emphasized its universalist and spiritual-humanist aspects, Ambedkar and Thapar called for social justice and critical historiography, Savarkar and Upadhyaya formulated contradictory forms of cultural nationalism, whereas Nandy, Kosambi, and Shourie unfolded its pluralist, materialist, and deconstructive aspects. This multiplicity indicates that Bharatiyata is not

one voice or one framework but needs to be received as a dialogue of voices, a dynamic space of contestation in which the concept of Indianness is constantly disputed and reinterpreted. NEP 2020 and Bharatiyata: Foundational Framework and Emerging Challenges

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is a turning point in Indian educational imagination in the way that it makes Bharatiyata, or Indianness, the reforming ethos. In contrast to previous policy agendas that put modernization, industrial training, or international competitiveness at the center, NEP 2020 aims to base education in India's civilizational heritage, while harmonizing rootedness with the imperatives of global citizenship. To this extent, Bharatiyata is not imagined as a symbolic extension but as the normative basis of pedagogy, curriculum, and school culture. Nevertheless, although the policy attempts boldly to weave cultural identity into education, its realization in practice has produced both innovative possibilities as well as critical strains.

One of the most prominent manifestations of Bharatiyata in NEP 2020 is the systematic incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The policy states that India's contributions to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, literature, philosophy, and the arts need to be re-introduced as living traditions engaging contemporary scholarship. Based on this directive, the Ministry of Education set up the IKS Division under AICTE in 2020 to further research and curricular development. Institutions like IIT Kharagpur and Delhi University have introduced courses in Ayurveda, Indian metallurgy, and Vedic mathematics, framing them as complementing scientific learning. These steps resonate with Vivekananda's invocation to restore India's spiritual and intellectual heritage and Radhakrishnan's belief that India's integration of material and spiritual knowledge is its gift to the world as a civilization. But scholars such as Krishna Kumar caution that such initiatives threaten to privilege Sanskritic and Brahmanical traditions over folk, tribal, Islamic, Buddhist, and Dravidian epistemologies. If left unchecked, selective privileging would distort the plural nature of Bharatiyata towards a mere cultural essentialism.

The policy equally projects language as a central conduit for cultural rootedness. NEP requires mother-tongue or regional language teaching up to at least Grade 5 and ideally Grade 8, based on cognitive and cultural evidence that children learn more effectively in their household language. Andhra Pradesh and Odisha states have implemented mother-tongue teaching in tribal languages like Koya, Kui, and Savara, with NCERT studies in 2022 revealing considerable gains in understanding and remembering. These experiments are consistent with Ambedkar's egalitarian dream of democratizing education for downtrodden groups. However, the concomitant promotion of Sanskrit as a classical language has evoked controversy, particularly from Dravidian political parties and linguistic minorities who see it as an effort toward cultural homogenization. Niraja Gopal Jayal contends that even though linguistic pluralism needs to be central to Bharatiyata, Sanskritization could endanger aligning the policy with Hindu-nationalist paradigms of identity.

NEP's conception of integral and value-oriented education is another important aspect of its grappling with Bharatiyata. Beyond memorization, the policy attempts to integrate intellectual development with ethical thought, imagination, beauty, wellness, and compassion. Early pilot programs like

Delhi's "Happiness Curriculum" and Himachal Pradesh's "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" clubs show how schools are trying out incorporating values of empathy, service, and respect for diversity in their everyday curriculum. The National Curriculum Framework (2023) has formalized this focus by inculcating constitutional values, care for the environment, and wellness practices such as yoga and meditation into subjects. These efforts represent Vivekananda's appeal to education as character-building and Tagore's understanding that cultivating imagination and sensitivity are at the heart of learning. However, critics like Sujata Patel observe that value curricula tend to rely more on Hindu scripture sources and underrepresent Bhakti, Sufi, Buddhist, and Dalit traditions. Unless it is broadened, such selective framing is in danger of perpetuating the very hierarchies Ambedkar aimed to destroy and Thapar consistently critiques in her history writing.

Also very important is NEP's focus on vocational training and skill formation. Through the initiation of "bagless days," internships, and industry-school clusters, the policy attempts to contextualize learning with local crafts, economies, and livelihoods. Some states like Gujarat and Maharashtra have connected schools with entrepreneurs and artisans, whereas tribal districts in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have incorporated vocational modules on forest-produce management and indigenous crafts. These experiments resonate with Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, which had envisaged decentralized, self-sufficient village economies as the foundation of Bharatiyata. Initial evidence indicates that such experiments can endow local knowledge with value and create dignity around indigenous skills. However, sociologists such as Nandini Sundar warn that vocational training may become a two-tiered education system—where privileged, urban students follow globalized academic tracks and marginalized groups are relegated to low-skill paths. If this happens, Bharatiyata may be reduced to localized labor for the poor instead of being a comprehensive resource for everyone.

At the center of NEP's formulation of Bharatiyata is its emphasis on ethics and civic values. The policy also specifically appeals to the inclusion of empathy, service (*seva*), democratic spirit, and respect for diversity in school curricula. Constitutional values are recognized by the National Curriculum Framework 2023 as cross-cutting themes transcending subjects with the aim of reconciling cultural pride with liberty, equality, and fraternity. This is in line with Ambedkar's idea of constitutional morality and Radhakrishnan's appeal to universal harmony. Yet, on the ground, curricula frequently emphasize pride in ancient traditions without sufficiently discussing caste, gender, or communal inequalities. The fact that caste-based discrimination continues in schools and universities demonstrates the disconnect between policy aspirations and social realities. Unless curricula clearly incorporate Ambedkarite, feminist, and Dalit-Bahujan viewpoints, Bharatiyata can be hailed as cultural pride without facing the structural injustices that impede its actualization.

The single most important determinant of whether NEP's vision for Bharatiyata will work is teacher readiness. The National Mission for Mentoring and the efforts of NCERT have started training teachers in IKS, inclusive pedagogy, and values-based education, including modules based on Panchatantra tales, Bhakti poetry, and folk culture. Yet, a 2022 Parliamentary Standing Committee report indicated

that more than half of Indian teachers are untrained in these paradigms. Lacking well-trained instructors who are able to critically interact with contested concepts of Indianness, classrooms could turn Bharatiyata into rote nationalism or cultural tokenism. Krishna Kumar has pointed out that teachers tend to steer clear of contentious topics or recite simplified state narratives, detracting from the potential of critical dialogue. Therefore, unless teacher education is given long-term investment, Bharatiyata will be more rhetoric than reality.

Beyond issues of implementation is an even deeper intellectual issue: reconciling the inherently incompatible visions of Bharatiyata itself. NEP 2020 calls on universalist ideals of Tagore, Vivekananda, and Radhakrishnan, egalitarian critiques of Ambedkar and Thapar, nationalist templates of Savarkar and Upadhyaya, and pluralist counter-narratives of Nandy and Kosambi. However, the policy does not explain how these rival traditions will be taught to students. Will curricula facilitate critical comparison, such as putting Savarkar's exclusivist Hindutva in contrast to Ambedkar's radical egalitarianism, or Thapar's critical historiography alongside Upadhyaya's dharmic ethics, or will one grand narrative of Bharatiyata be legitimated as official truth? The response will decide if education facilitates dialogic pluralism or ideological closure.

Finally, NEP 2020 is a bold effort to inscribe Bharatiyata into India's education system through the rejuvenation of IKS, promoting mother tongues, holistic education, increased vocational training, and inculcating ethics and constitutional values. Case studies show that these efforts have transformative power: mother-tongue education among tribal communities has enhanced learning outcomes, vocational courses enshrine local skills, and value-based curricula instill empathy and civic consciousness. But academic criticisms and initial implementation problems indicate abiding threats: homogenization of knowledge, marginalization of minority traditions, stratification along vocational streams, and poor teacher preparedness. At the end of the day, NEP 2020's success or failure will depend less on its textual promises than on classroom life—whether Bharatiyata is instructed as monolithic tradition or as a plural, contested, and transforming conversation. It is only by accepting its internal contradictions and multiple voices that Bharatiyata can be a living pedagogical resource, able to decolonize Indian education and equip generations to come for a fair, equitable, and globally oriented India.

Alignment with Diverse Scholarly Visions

The National Education Policy 2020 presents unambiguous moments of alignment with many of the various scholarly visions of Bharatiyata set forth by India's top thinkers. Its focus on wholistic education is in close harmony with the spiritual-humanist vision of Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. According to Tagore, education should develop creativity, ethical awareness, and a sense of world citizenship, a perspective echoed in NEP's appeal to go beyond memorization to foster critical thinking, aesthetics, and moral reasoning. Vivekananda's concept of "Practical Vedanta," which linked spirituality to service, uplift, and building inner strength, also resonates with NEP's emphasis on value-based education and the development of character along with intellectual development. Here, then, the policy does not just pay lip service to cultural rootedness but works actively towards inculcating it in the daily life of

students, a continuity with India's spiritual and philosophical tradition.

The egalitarian imaginations of B.R. Ambedkar and Romila Thapar are likewise partially reflected in the policy. NEP's avowed commitment to inclusive education, its emphasis on overcoming gender and socio-economic disparities, and its appeal for equity in access harmonize with Ambedkar's demand that liberty, equality, and fraternity should be the very foundation of a just social order. The policy's acknowledgment of socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) and its prioritization of special initiatives to make sure they are engaged in education reflect Ambedkar's call for revolutionary steps to take down frameworks of inequality. Thapar's focus on inclusion and her criticism of nostalgic, exclusionary histories have echoes in NEP's acknowledgement of the imperative of curricula that acknowledge plurality and truth over single grand narratives. However, even as there is rhetorical convergence, concerns remain regarding whether practice will follow principle in implementation, especially where it comes to breaking entrenched hierarchies of caste, gender, and class.

The policy also speaks to integral and contextual paradigms embodied in Deendayal Upadhyaya and D.D. Kosambi. NEP's emphasis on practical education, "bagless days," and local industry-aligned skill development resonates with Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, which posited that India's power resided in decentralized, autarkic village economies and dharma-based governance. In its strategy of inviting students to localize learning, NEP celebrates the dignity of labor and local forms of knowledge, resonating with Upadhyaya's belief in theological-cultural-economic self-sufficiency. Kosambi's historical-materialist perspective also resonates in NEP's initiative to encourage interdisciplinary research into Indian Knowledge Systems, which invites study of traditional knowledge in social, historical, and material contexts. By connecting scientific inquiry with cultural heritage, the policy therefore implicitly seeks to endorse Kosambi's contention that culture develops dialectically through material development and must be studied on those terms.

However, alignment is not enough, and NEP's effectiveness in capturing such visions requires the extent to which contested traditions are inclusively addressed. If Bharatiyata is made out to be a plural, dialogue-based construct-joining Tagore's universalism, Ambedkar's egalitarianism, Thapar's critical historiography, Upadhyaya's dharmic ethics, and Kosambi's materialist critiques-then the policy may be able to live up to its vision of forging an even-handed and critical model for education. But if this stress on cultural grounding descends into selective idolization or majoritarian chauvinism, the plural character of Bharatiyata will be in jeopardy, and the promise of the policy in transformation lost.

Critical Tensions and Implementation Challenges

Even with these points of consonance, NEP 2020 is marked by severe tensions and implementation challenges. The primary concern is the danger of homogenization, specifically through the elevation of Sanskrit and Brahmanical thought at the expense of Indian Knowledge Systems in the name of plurality. Although the policy professes to celebrate plurality, the primacy of the "classical" tends to override equally rich folk, tribal, Dalit-

Bahujan, and Islamic contributions to Indian civilizational identity. For example, although there has been significant attention to Sanskrit philosophy and texts, indigenous ecological practices, oral traditions, and subaltern epistemologies have not received the same institutional attention. Such selective privilege is against the pluralist visions of Bharatiyata expressed by intellectuals such as Thapar, Nandy, and Ambedkar.

Another tension is in the potential exclusion of non-Hindu contributions, which works against the inclusivity promoted by Tagore, Vivekananda, and Ambedkar. Savarkar's exclusivist understanding of Bharatiyata in relation to Hindu sacred geography remains present in segments of public discourse, and there is a danger of educational institutions adopting such narrow constructs in implementing NEP. If Bharatiyata is constructed as the equivalent of Hindu identity, the considerable contribution of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and tribal cultures to India's history and culture might be diminished, undermining the policy's plural and dialogic ethos.

Equity too remains an unsolved issue. Although NEP makes commitments to inclusive education, stronger mechanisms for the breaking down of caste and gender-based exclusions are less explicitly stated. Ambedkar's critique of caste also reminds us that access is not enough if institutional discrimination continues. Schools and universities tend to reproduce social hierarchies through hidden curricula, teacher bias, and unequal distribution of resources. Without pedagogic transformation and institutional change, NEP's vision of equality may turn into symbolic rhetoric. In the same vein, although the policy focuses on gender equality, it does not have clear strategies on how to overcome the structural and cultural constraints facing the education of women and girls, especially in rural and marginal areas.

The focus on skill-building and employability, as crucial as it is, poses another dilemma. If technical education comes to be defined mainly as a tool of economic productivity, Bharatiyata threatens to be reduced to market-friendly cultural packaging. This diminishes culture to human capital as opposed to cultivating its moral, spiritual, and critical aspects. Although vocational programs appeal to Upadhyaya's ideal of self-reliance, they need to steer clear of stratifying students into discrete tracks of education-globalized academics for the elite and localized vocational training for the underprivileged. In the absence of protection, this process may consolidate social cleavages instead of creating an inclusive national culture.

The lack of frameworks to balance competing scholarly visions is another tension. NEP cites universalist, egalitarian, nationalist, and pluralist values but leaves no mechanisms to balance them in the curriculum. How will schools reconcile Savarkar's Hindutva with Ambedkar's radical egalitarianism, or Upadhyaya's dharmic vision with Thapar's critical historiography? Will pupils be taught to critically debate competing visions, or will one narrative be privileged? The response will decide whether Bharatiyata is learned as a living dialogue or is presented as an orthodoxy imposed on students.

Lastly, teacher readiness is a key bottleneck. Integrating Bharatiyata into classrooms necessitates teachers who not only grasp IKS but also have the capacity to lead nuanced discussions about identity, history, and diversity. However, teacher training in India is underdeveloped. Despite NEP's demand for ongoing professional development and

introduction of programs like the National Mission for Mentoring, huge gaps still exist. Without adequately trained teachers, the ideal of Bharatiyata can be turned into mindless slogans instead of thoughtful participation. Teachers are the most influential in determining classroom culture, and their empowerment will be the key to the success or failure of NEP's vision.

Towards a Dialogic Bharatiyata in Education: Recommendations

In order to resolve these tensions and fulfill its revolutionary potential, NEP 2020 needs to instill a dialogical approach to Bharatiyata. This involves recognizing that Indianness is not one unitary, fixed reality but an aggregate and shifting tradition. The education system needs to engage with diverse traditions—such as Bhakti, Sufi, Dalit-Bahujan, tribal, and feminist epistemologies—in addition to classical Sanskritic learning, with the marginalized voices being given equal emphasis. Instead of representing Bharatiyata as a singular cultural legacy, curricula need to educate students as a site of criticism, comparison, and argument, urging students to assess several views.

Social justice viewpoints centrally integrated are inevitable. Scholars such as Ambedkar, Phule, and Periyar, as well as feminist thinkers, cannot be relegated to supplementary status but as essential figures in India's intellectual and moral tradition. By prioritizing caste, gender, and class struggles, education can cultivate a richer, more comprehensive understanding of Bharatiyata as an enterprise of social transformation, not cultural romanticism. Concurrently, NEP must link Indian epistemologies with other Global South traditions and global philosophy in order to avoid cultural exceptionalism and promote cross-learning, mirroring the universalist spirit of Tagore and Vivekananda. Another critical recommendation is to enhance interdisciplinary research on IKS. By integrating philology, history, archaeology, sociology, and contemporary science, research can guarantee that knowledge is contextualized, rigorously tested, and freed from political fabrication. Such an approach, as Arun Shourie had intimated, is necessary to restore Bharatiyata from distortion and mythmaking. Empowerment of teachers must also be the priority, with robust training in both content knowledge and critical pedagogy. Teachers must be trained to deal with sensitive topics, promote discussion, and nurture inclusive classroom culture. It is only when teachers are strengthened as agents of dialogic encounter that Bharatiyata can be translated into the lived experience of schooling in any meaningful way.

Conclusion: Bharatiyata as a Living Resource for Education and Nationhood

Bharatiyata in its plurality, dynamism, and contestation embodies India's most valuable educational treasure. It speaks through civilizational continuity, historical negotiation, and ethical traditions, providing means to negotiate both the dilemmas of modernity and the injustices of society. NEP 2020's vision to place Bharatiyata at the heart of education is to be welcomed and required, an expression of the need to decolonize learning and cultivate cultural grounding. However, its success hinges on resisting ideational capture, homogenization, and selective celebratory formulations. Genuine success is in making classrooms rooms of conversation wherein various visions—Tagore's humanism, Vivekananda's spirituality, Ambedkar's egalitarianism, Thapar's critical historiography, Upadhyaya's dharmic ethics, Savarkar's nationalism, Kosambi's

materialism, and Nandy's pluralism—are engaged with instead of suppressed or enforced.

As Tagore had dreamed of, India's unity should not emerge out of enforced conformity but out of the harmonious convergence of varied voices. Bharatiyata needs to be imparted not as a relic of the past but as a living, dynamic conversation, able to absorb contradictions while promoting compassion and inclusivity. If NEP 2020 is successful in this role, it is possible to make education a method for both personal fulfillment and social regeneration. If it is unsuccessful, Bharatiyata can turn into a hollow slogan, devoid of its critical, ethical, and redemptive potential. The destiny of Indian education, and the future of the country itself, lies in the realization of Bharatiyata as a plural, dialogic, and living tradition which enables future generations to confront their heritage with honesty, criticality, and hope.

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