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Cultural Diplomacy: Promoting Indian Knowledge System And The Role Of Nep 2020 In Its Revival

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 plays a pivotal role in the revival and global promotion of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) by integrating indigenous wisdom into mainstream education. It promotes interdisciplinary research in Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedic sciences, and fosters collaborations with international institutions

Cultural diplomacy serves as a vital instrument in shaping international relations, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting intellectual exchange. India, with its vast and diverse knowledge systems encompassing Ayurveda, Yoga, Sanskrit, Vedic sciences, classical arts, astronomy, and philosophy—offers a profound intellectual heritage that has influenced civilizations for centuries. This paper serves the purpose of highlighting how India can leverage cultural diplomacy to globally promote its knowledge systems, positioning them as integral to education, healthcare, technology, and sustainable development.

From the expansion of Buddhist philosophy to the mathematical contributions that informed modern computing, the research looks at historical examples of how Indian knowledge has influenced worldwide ideas. It showcases modern diplomatic endeavors that strengthen India's soft power, like International Yoga Day, the incorporation of Ayurveda into international wellness practices, and cooperative educational projects. The paper also assesses how policy frameworks, cultural exchanges, and digital diplomacy have contributed to the institutionalization of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the international academic and research community. The investigation of how cutting-edge technologies—AI, block chain, digital archives, and AR/VR—can modernize, authenticate, and scale IKS for worldwide deployment is a distinctive feature of this study. In order to transform IKS from merely cultural representation to a paradigm of knowledge leadership that tackles global issues like sustainability, mental health, and technological ethics, it promotes cross-sector collaborations between governments, universities, tech firms, and cultural organizations. India can strengthen its intellectual influence and ensure cultural sustainability while establishing IKS as a transformative force in the contemporary knowledge economy by fusing strategic digital initiatives with ancient wisdom.

Key words: Cultural Diplomacy, Sustainable development, Indian Knowledge System, cultural sustainability.

Introduction

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy refers to using cultural exchanges, like art, music, and language, to foster mutual understanding, harmony, feeling of oneness and cooperation between nations, promoting a country's soft power to build the bridges through people-to-people connections. Cultural diplomacy serves as a powerful tool in strengthening international relations through intellectual exchange. In an era of globalization, nations use cultural diplomacy to assert their soft power, influence global discourse, and establish themselves as thought leaders.

The Indian Knowledge System

(IKS) is a vast and diverse body of indigenous knowledge that has evolved over thousands of years in India, with its vast and diverse knowledge systems—spanning Ayurveda, Yoga, Sanskrit, Vedic sciences, classical arts, astronomy, and philosophy—possesses a profound intellectual heritage that has shaped civilizations for centuries.

Role of NEP 2020 in reviving IKS

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has played a crucial role in the revival and promotion of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) by integrating indigenous wisdom into mainstream education. It fosters interdisciplinary research in Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedic sciences while encouraging collaborations with international institutions.

Objective of the Research

This research paper titled **Cultural Diplomacy: Promoting Indian Knowledge System and the Role of NEP 2020 in Its Revival** aims to examine the significance of India's indigenous knowledge traditions, their historical evolution, and their role in contemporary education and diplomacy. The study also seeks to highlight how NEP 2020 serves as a catalyst in reviving and integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into global and national academic discourse.

Historical Influence of Indian Knowledge Systems

India has historically been a hub of cultural diplomacy, with its traditions, philosophical ideas, and knowledge systems spreading across Asia, Europe, and Africa through trade, migration, and scholarly exchanges. This historical trajectory of cultural diplomacy demonstrates India's role as a global influencer long before the term "cultural diplomacy" was formally recognized in modern international relations.

1.1 Buddhist Influence and Spiritual Exchange

Indian Buddhist scholars like Bodhidharma and Atiśa Dipankara spread Buddhist philosophy across Asia, influencing Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan spiritual traditions. In the recent time also, India has revived the Buddhist tourism circuit, connecting with Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and other nations where Buddhism has historical roots, strengthening regional and cultural ties.

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Since assuming office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has revitalized India's foreign policy through the transformation of the Look East Policy into the more action-oriented **Act East Policy (AEP)**. This strategic shift prioritizes proactive engagement with Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific, integrating diplomacy, trade, defense, and cultural ties.

PM Modi's commitment to **cultural diplomacy** is evident in his numerous visits to ASEAN countries, including historic trips to the Philippines (2017) and Brunei (2024), and multiple visits to Singapore and Indonesia, reinforcing economic, maritime, and cultural cooperation. His decision to host all ASEAN leaders during India's Republic Day celebrations in 2018 highlighted the importance of regional ties.

The AEP has deepened India's trade with ASEAN (from USD 71 billion in 2016-17 to over USD 130 billion in 2024) and expanded defense cooperation, including BrahMos missile sales to the Philippines and maritime security ties with Vietnam. Infrastructure initiatives like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway and the Agartala-Akhaura railway have enhanced regional connectivity.

Culturally, the policy has revived shared Buddhist heritage, promoted educational exchange through Nalanda University scholarships for over 300 ASEAN students, and leveraged platforms like International Yoga Day to build people-to-people ties. India's pandemic-era medical aid and disaster relief further illustrate its role as a responsible regional partner.

Through consistent diplomatic outreach and cultural initiatives, PM Modi has positioned India as a key player in Southeast Asia, using the AEP as a comprehensive tool for regional leadership and cooperation.

1.2 The Silk Route and Indian Influence: India played a significant role in the Silk Road trade network, not only in exchanging goods like textiles and spices but also spreading artistic and intellectual traditions. Indian temple architecture, iconography, and linguistic scripts influenced Buddhist and Hindu art across China, Indonesia, and Cambodia.

1.3 Indian Freedom Movement and Cultural Revival

Swami Vivekananda (1893, Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago): His speech on Hindu philosophy and Vedanta gained international recognition for Indian spiritual traditions.

Rabindranath Tagore's Cultural Outreach: Tagore's establishment of Visva-Bharati University promoted cross-cultural dialogue, attracting scholars from around the world.

Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Violent Diplomacy: Gandhi's promotion of Indian philosophy, self-reliance (Swadeshi movement), and non-violence resonated globally and influenced civil rights movements worldwide.

The Indian Knowledge System: A Legacy of Wisdom

Ancient Nalanda University (427–1197 AD) and Takshashila University (6th/5th century BC – 5th century AD) attracted students from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia, and Turkey. It specialized in Buddhist studies, fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, Economics, politics, and warfare.

Mathematical and Astronomical Contributions

The concept of zero, developed by Indian mathematicians like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta, revolutionized arithmetic and calculus, forming the foundation for modern computing.

Sine and cosine functions in trigonometry originated from Indian mathematical texts before being adopted in the Islamic and European scientific traditions.

Ayurveda & yoga: Connecting People Worldwide

Ayurveda, India's ancient system of medicine and yoga has gained global recognition for its holistic approach to health and wellness. It connects people worldwide in various ways:

International Yoga Day (June 21): Launched by the Indian government and recognized by the United Nations in 2015, this global celebration has increased awareness of Yoga as a scientific and spiritual practice.

Global Acceptance & Popularity – Countries like the USA, UK, Germany, Australia, and Japan have embraced Ayurveda through wellness centers, treatments, and educational courses.

Medical Tourism – India attracts thousands of international visitors seeking Ayurvedic therapies for chronic diseases, detoxification, and rejuvenation.

Integration with Modern Medicine – Ayurvedic principles are being researched and incorporated into modern healthcare, including herbal medicine, yoga, and dietary therapies.

Export of Ayurvedic Products – Ayurvedic herbs, oils, and medicines are widely exported, making India a global hub for natural healing products.

Digital & Educational Reach – Online consultations, courses, and wellness retreats spread Ayurvedic knowledge worldwide, connecting people to its healing wisdom.

Through these avenues, Ayurveda continues to bridge cultures and promote natural well-being across the globe.

Global Influence of Indian Languages

India's rich linguistic heritage has profoundly shaped global literature, philosophy, and linguistic studies.

Philosophical & Literary Impact – Sanskrit texts like the Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata have inspired great thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Their themes of dharma, karma, and self-realization have influenced Western literature and philosophy.

Global Usage of Sanskrit & Indian Languages – Many Sanskrit words and concepts like yoga, guru, karma, nirvana, and mantra are now commonly used in English and other global languages.

Translation & Adaptations – Indian epics and literary works have been translated into multiple languages, inspiring adaptations in world cinema, literature, and theater.

Influence on Modern Education & Technology – Indian languages, especially Sanskrit, play a role in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and computational linguistics, as their structured grammar helps in coding and machine learning. Linguistic and Literary Exchange

Education and Academic Collaborations

Indian universities have partnered with global institutions to establish Chairs in Sanskrit and Indic Studies (e.g., Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford).

Exchange programs and scholarships promote cross-cultural learning, attracting international students to study Indian philosophy, Ayurveda, and classical arts.

Key provisions in NEP 2020 for Revival of IKS

1.1 Integration of Sanskrit and Regional Languages

NEP 2020 promotes Sanskrit as a living language, encouraging its study at all levels of education.

Classical and regional languages, such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, are emphasized to preserve India's linguistic diversity.

Establishment of Sanskrit Universities and research centers to enhance scholarship in ancient texts and knowledge traditions.

Digital initiatives to translate ancient manuscripts and make them globally accessible.

1.2 Inclusion of Ayurveda, Yoga, and Traditional Knowledge in Education

NEP 2020 integrates Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, and Unani medicine into mainstream medical education and research.

Yoga and meditation are promoted as essential components of physical and mental well-being in school curricula.

Encourage interdisciplinary research linking traditional Indian medicine with modern healthcare, fostering innovation in holistic wellness.

Expansion of Ayush centers and collaborations with global institutions to validate and promote traditional healing systems.

1.3 Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education Approaches

Introduction of multidisciplinary universities, allowing students to study a combination of sciences, humanities, and traditional knowledge.

Encouragement of flexible learning paths, enabling students to pursue courses in IKS alongside mainstream subjects.

Promotion of experiential learning, including traditional arts, agriculture, and environmental sustainability based on ancient Indian wisdom.

Research-based projects on ancient Indian sciences, mathematics, and philosophy, integrating them into STEM fields.

1.4 Role of Indian Universities and Research Institutions

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Division at AICTE fosters academic research and innovation in traditional Indian wisdom.

Major universities, such as Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Nalanda University, are strengthening programs in Sanskrit studies, Ayurveda, and Indic sciences.

Establishment of centers of excellence for IKS research, collaborating with international institutions for knowledge exchange.

Government initiatives like National Mission for Manuscripts and digitization projects to preserve and promote India's ancient texts.

NEP 2020 emphasizes interdisciplinary studies, integrating Indian and Western methodologies for global academic discourse.

Digital Diplomacy and Technological Integration

The rapid digitalization of education and knowledge dissemination has provided India with a unique opportunity to modernize and globalize IKS.

AI and Blockchain for Authentic Knowledge Preservation:

AI-driven translation tools can make Sanskrit and ancient Indian texts accessible to a wider audience.

Blockchain technology ensures authenticity and prevents misinterpretation of IKS.

Digital Archives and Open Access Learning:

Platforms like Muktabodha and IGNCA are digitizing ancient manuscripts for scholarly and public use.

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) are being leveraged for immersive learning experiences in ancient history and philosophy.

Government-led Digital Initiatives:

Bharatavani Project: A multilingual knowledge dissemination initiative promoting Indian languages.

e-Vidya and Swayam: Online education platforms integrating traditional knowledge into modern curricula.

IKS and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The principles of Indian Knowledge Systems align closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in:

Healthcare (SDG 3): Ayurveda promotes holistic wellness, preventive healthcare, and herbal medicine.

Quality Education (SDG 4): Incorporating IKS into curricula fosters indigenous knowledge preservation and innovation.

Climate Action (SDG 13): Ancient Indian ecological wisdom, as seen in texts like Arthashastra and Vrikshayurveda, offers sustainable environmental solutions.

Sustainable Consumption (SDG 12): Concepts like Ahimsa (non-violence) and minimalism encourage responsible consumption and ethical living.

Challenges in Globalizing IKS

Despite its immense potential, several challenges hinder the global institutionalization of Indian Knowledge Systems:

Lack of Standardization: Variations in traditional knowledge interpretations and practices make it difficult to create a universally accepted framework.

Western Skepticism and Scientific Validation: Many elements of IKS require empirical validation to gain acceptance in global academia and healthcare.

Commercialization vs. Authenticity: Over-commercialization of Yoga and Ayurveda sometimes leads to dilution and misrepresentation.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and Biopiracy: Protecting India's indigenous knowledge from biopiracy and unauthorized patents remains a legal challenge.

Strategic Recommendations for Promoting IKS Globally

1.1 Strengthening Policy Frameworks:

Formulating robust policies under Ministry of Culture, AYUSH, and MEA for structured global promotion.

Encouraging research-backed integration of IKS into global healthcare, technology, and sustainability frameworks.

1.2 Enhancing Digital Outreach:

Expanding e-learning platforms and MOOCs offering courses on IKS.

Creating AI-driven chatbots and knowledge repositories to make Sanskrit texts and traditional knowledge accessible to global audiences.

1.3 Fostering International Collaboration:

Partnering with UNESCO and international universities to establish Centers for Indic Studies.

Conducting joint research programs on Ayurveda, Yoga, and sustainable living.

1.4 Empowering Cultural Ambassadors:

Training diplomats, scholars, and practitioners as IKS Ambassadors to represent India's intellectual heritage at global forums.

Organizing international festivals, conferences, and symposiums dedicated to Indian philosophy and knowledge traditions.

Conclusion

By integrating ancient wisdom with modern advancements, India can address global challenges like sustainability, mental health, and ethical technology development, ensuring that its intellectual legacy continues to inspire and shape the future of global knowledge systems.

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