

Incorporating IKS in English Language Education: Perspectives from Critical Pedagogy

Arzuman Ara

ABSTRACT:

IKS or Indian Knowledge System has been occupying a central position of attention in education as envisioned in the National Education Policy, popularly termed as NEP-2020. Subsequently, there is a need to incorporate IKS in material design and teacher training so that NEP 2020 can result in a successful educational programme in its implementation. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that focuses on arousing conscientization in place of a “banking model of education”. Learners’ background forms an important component in the Freirean dialogic pedagogy. The Indian Knowledge System as envisioned in NEP 2020 is also an attempt to incorporate the learners’ background, culture and heritage in pedagogy. This is a decolonial approach so that the learners can feel a sense of pride in their heritage replacing the colonization of mind. This is also an attempt to eliminate the ‘alienation’ affect which is brought in by the colonial system of education. This paper is a theoretical study that will explore the theoretical possibilities and approaches of critical pedagogy about NEP 2020 in the context of decolonial education and the Indian Knowledge System.

Keywords: IKS/Indian Knowledge System, National Education Policy, decolonial, critical pedagogy, dialogic pedagogy.

Introduction0

Education is the backbone of a society. In each society, education and knowledge building take place in many and varied ways. We cannot think of any society without its system of education and knowledge practices. Knowledge systems give world-views and perspectives while knowledge practices can give the necessary skills and education to people to build a civilization and help in sustaining it. Pedagogy consists of modes of transaction of knowledge; it includes the methods, approaches, and techniques that are used in imparting knowledge/education. Since the ancient times many societies have developed their own system of pedagogy. In the recent years, in the wake of various social conflicts and cultural differences, academia and educationists have

been deliberated on the instability of the previous assumptions and practices in/of pedagogy as seen in the implementation of NEP 2020. In the field of humanities in India, education is facing a crisis that has led to the argument that we need to examine the problematic situation in terms of our present time and situation so that, we can find ways to re-contextualise pedagogy to solve our present needs and problems. Critical pedagogy is one such approach that aims at understanding the problem and the crisis. Emerging in the 1960s with the works of Paulo Freire, Critical Pedagogy has evolved as a cross-disciplinary field that interrogates and emphasizes the impact of power relations in the educational process opposing the historicist assumption that, pedagogy is to produce the preferred type of citizen through the banking model of education. Critical pedagogy emphasizes

understanding and involving the learner's context and background in the pedagogic practice through a dialogic method so that, the learners can acquire a selfhood and critical consciousness to question and challenge the normative policies and practices. The National Curriculum Framework 2020 of India has envisaged incorporating Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in the education system with a number of reforms which are in favour of a learner-centric system. The call is clear for a decolonialist and critical approach to restructure the education system of India. The present chapter explores the possibilities for incorporating the Indian Knowledge System in education from the theoretical perspectives of Critical Pedagogy.

The objective of the Study:

The objective of this study is based on the postulations that,

- a. English education in India is largely colonialist;
- b. NEP 2020 provides certain principles for decolonization;
- c. there is a need to decolonize English education in India by incorporating IKS;
- d. Critical Pedagogy can be an alternative pedagogical approach for decolonisation of English education in India.

The objectives of this study are:

1. to understand the principles of NEP 2020 as decolonial endeavours towards education with special reference to English education in India;
2. to explore how IKS can be integrally incorporated as a means towards decoloniality in English education;
3. to explore how critical pedagogy as an

alternative pedagogic approach, that aligns with the decolonialist principles of NEP, can be applied to incorporate IKS in English education.

The study follows the critical tenets as postulated by Paulo Freire as decolonialist pedagogy.

Methodology:

This current study follows a theoretical and analytical methodology based on the theories of decoloniality and critical pedagogy. It explores the theoretical possibilities regarding how critical pedagogical tasks like dialogue and interaction based on the learners' background and native knowledge can be applied to incorporate IKS in English education which can help in decolonizing the Indian mind.

Present English Language Education System: Problem of Coloniality

Our current mode of English Language education heavily follows the colonial curriculum and educational system which is creating a kind of alienation between the learners and their environment. There is also a gap between what is presented in the texts for teaching and the experience and culture of the learners. Regarding the colonial system of English education, Alok Mukherjee (2009, pp.176-77) points out that the Western rulers, who wanted to reform the Indian society, had utilitarian and evangelical ideologies which aimed at equipping the colonized natives with practical skills and Christian values. This was to change the very structure of the society in India following a Eurocentric and white supremacist agenda. Mukherjee points out that the British colonizers felt that the best language to learn for the lower social orders, that is the Indians, was English. These educational goals of the Britishers were driven by the hegemonic agenda to ensure subservience to the current

social structure. This agenda, Mukherjee says, “was to be taken up with greater anxiety that grew regarding the ‘threat’ to culture by forces of philistinism and barbarism, with significant implications for the curriculum and purpose of English Studies” (ibid). Mukherjee further comments that whereas the education imparted in England only “cut across class”, in India, it had to traverse through both “race” and “class” (ibid). English, he says, was to “restore” the Hindus with “their lost Aryan civilization, through initiation into its modern avatar, namely European (or, specifically British) culture” (ibid).

The continuation of the colonial system in education has resulted in creating a colonial mindset. The imperialist objectives of the colonial curriculum have been reinforced in the postcolonial situation of globalization and new forms of economic imperialism. Our learners are getting reduced to “techno-coolies” (2006:159), as Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy have pointed out leading to an alienation from one’s cultural roots. Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy say:

...already, in some sections of the population, the Indian social fabric is changing. The cultural values, family relationships, respect for elders, respect for knowledge, ability to be happy even without material comforts, and philosophical and religious values of Indians are being replaced by ‘foreign’ values; it is more and more one-way traffic – from the West to the East. The electronic media is also helping this process and English is the language of ‘pop culture’. (2006, p. 176)

Therefore, there has to be a clear call to decolonize the current educational system and incorporation of IKS in the Indian educational system is a step towards that.

Indian Knowledge System: An Appraisal

Thinkers have multiple views about Indian Knowledge System (IKS henceforth). The views surround understanding the Indian knowledge system in terms of theological beliefs (which are mostly philosophical and about the metaphysical and divine sphere of the universe) as well as the practical aspects of living a life. The worldviews of the Indian sages and thinkers are systematized in understanding the Indian Knowledge System besides many modern thinkers.

Kapil Kapoor, in his book *Indian Knowledge System*, says:

Indian civilization has always attached great value to knowledge — witness its amazingly large body of intellectual texts, the world’s largest collection of manuscripts, its attested tradition of texts, thinkers and schools in so many domains of knowledge... India’s knowledge tradition is ancient and uninterrupted like the flow of the river Ganga, from the *Vedas (Upanisads)* to Sri Aurobindo, knowledge or *jnana* has been at the centre of all rational and speculative enquiry in India. (p.11)

However, one is required to understand that there is no singular alignment of the different schools or methods of such thoughts, rather, IKS is an amalgamation of multiple streams of thoughts. One can consider the famous essay of A K Ramanujan “Is there an Indian Way of Thinking” in this context. Ramanujan has pointed out that there are differences, disparity, “inconsistencies”, multiplicity and diversity. Regarding the inclusion of Western thoughts in India, he opines that Indian adaptations and realignments of Western cultural artefacts have been made to meet “pre-existing, context-sensitive” requirements. English, Ramanujan says, fits into the “Sanskrit slot” when

it is “borrowed into (or imposed on) Indian contexts”, it takes on many of the traits of the “older native Father tongue”, Sanskrit, as well as its “pan-Indian elite character - as a medium of laws, science, and administration, and its formulaic patterns; it also becomes a part of Indian multiple diglossia”, which is a trait of “context-sensitive societies”. Quoting Singer (1972) who says that Indians “‘compartmentalize’ interests” when they acquire expertise in contemporary “science, business, or technology”, Ramanujan says that the new ways of thinking and acting coexist with more traditional “religious” practices rather than replacing them. Just as weapons of war were once worshipped and were called as “*ayudhapuja*”, so are now “computers and typewriters” worshipped. Even though it is difficult to contain the “‘modern’, the context-free”, becomes more contextual (p. 57).

Ramanujan’s view appears to be in contrast with the views of Alok Mukherjee mentioned above on the surface level. Nonetheless, one has to remember that Ramanujan’s contention is in terms of how Indian systems absorb and accommodate the ‘foreignness’ of western knowledge cultures while Mukherjee points out how the modern knowledge system has brought in layers of coloniality in the name of knowledge which is deemed to require decolonisation. The reason for mentioning Ramanujan here is to point out how he emphasises the “underbelly” of Indian knowledge practices which accommodates “differences, disparity, “inconsistencies”, multiplicity and diversity” – which is eroded with the colonial materialist knowledge system and “schooling”.

Indian Knowledge System, thus, includes knowledge rooted in Indian/Bharatiya civilization which includes knowledge of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture, Astrology, Mathematics, Logic

and Grammar, and so on. The approach of IKS is essentially multidisciplinary which aims to bring “Indian civilization among other classical civilizations and inter-civilizational exchanges” (UGC, *Guidelines for Training/ Orientation of Faculty on IKS*) to the forefront. The objective pertains to decolonising the Indian mind with its “PanchPran” resolutions i.e. “Erase all traces of servitude” and “Be proud of India’s heritage and legacy” by the Hon’ble Prime Minister in his Independence Day speech” (UGC, *Guidelines for Training/ Orientation of Faculty on IKS*). National Education Policy 2020 is the key policy document which is emphasising upon building IKS in the education system of today following the visions of the hon’ble PM Shri Narendra Modiji. The UGC Chairperson, in this regard points out that, there is a need for “seamless integration of Indian traditional knowledge with modern subjects,” “the need to make our youth aware of the vast repositories of ancient traditional knowledge in India and clearly map this knowledge with modern scientific advancements and technologies” (M. Jagadesh Kumar, “Foreword” *Guidelines for Training/ Orientation of Faculty on IKS*).

The Ministry of Education in its *A Concept Note on Stimulating Indian Knowledge System, Arts and Culture* released during SHIKSHAK PARV, 2021, dated 16th September 2021, defines IKS with reference to NEP 2020 as:

NEP Para 4.27: “Knowledge of India” will include knowledge from ancient India and modern India, and a clear sense of India’s future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc. These elements will be incorporated in an accurate and scientific manner throughout the school curriculum wherever relevant; in particular, Indian Knowledge Systems, including tribal

knowledge and indigenous and traditional ways of learning, will be covered and included in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, yoga, architecture, medicine, agriculture, engineering, linguistics, literature, sports, games, as well as in governance, polity, conservation. Specific courses in tribal ethno-medicinal practices, forest management, traditional (organic) crop cultivation, natural farming, etc. will also be made available. (p.1)

This brings into the light what should form the subject of teaching-learning.

The Ministry of Education on its website on IKS presents the vision as: To promote interdisciplinary research on all aspects of “Indian Knowledge Systems”, preserve and disseminate “Indian Knowledge Systems” for further research and social applications. (np, <https://iksindia.org/vision.php>)

Since the call for incorporation of IKS in Indian education can be multidisciplinary, it can be incorporated in English education as well. Many of the postcolonial thinkers have pointed out that we need to be free from the cultural baggage (Marathe *et al* 1993: 8) of English for the sake of the nation; this is particularly important as a moment when the nation aspires to become a *viswaguru*, and hence, it requires a re-orientation of its education system.

Critical Pedagogy and its Principles:

Critical pedagogy uses a dialogic approach aiming at *conscientization* through a dialogic mode of transaction in pedagogy. Ira Shor defines Critical Pedagogy as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received

wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (1992:129).

Bringing the learner to the forefront of the pedagogic domain, critical pedagogy resists the banking model of education. The banking model of education has the following characteristics:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the programme content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire 1993:54)

Banking model of education leads to a kind of colonisation of the collective body and mind of the learners. The students become victims of a kind of oppression being deprived of their *selfhood*, their history, background and culture. This results in “safe” and “normal” citizens who would not resist any oppression of the regime’s power and oppression. Freire, therefore, suggests that:

The answer seemed to lie:

- a. in an active, *dialogical*, critical and criticism-stimulating *method*;
- b. in changing the *programme content* of education;
- c. in the use of *techniques* like thematic “breakdown” and “codification”

Our method, then, was to be based on dialogue, which is a horizontal relationship between persons. (Freire 2005: 40)

The idea of dialogic method and learner-centrism in pedagogy have been traditional practices in India. Story-telling, problem-solving and education according to the learner’s capability were in practice as seen in many texts. Hence, the principles and praxis of Critical Pedagogy can be aligned with the decolonialist approaches of NEP 2020.

Critical Pedagogy for implementation of Decolonialist NEP Principles through IKS

NEP’s policy to include IKS is has a strong alignment with the principles of critical dialogic pedagogy. The major points in NEP 2020 include multilingualism and IKS. Both are related to the learners’ backgrounds. Critical pedagogy emphasises bringing the learners to the forefront of pedagogy. Therefore, learners’ language and learners’ background of local and Indian

knowledge can form a core of the pedagogy. Inclusion of the learners’ language and background can eradicate the detrimental influences of the ‘alienness’ of the Western cultures that is eroding the traditional values and cultures of India. The mission of IKS in NEP 2020 is to bring in the traditional and indigenous knowledge of India in the academic domain so that the learners are in touch with their culture, tradition and heritage. The NEP or National Education Policy of 2020 aims to integrate IKS in the following manner:

1. innovative methods to teach IKS including innovative methods propounded by NEP 2020, avoidance of bookish teaching, the use of audio-visual material, possible field studies, some exposure to a few primary sources, possible activities and micro-research projects, innovative ways to evaluate learning. (np)

Traditionally, in India, the *Guru-Shishya Parampara* had stressed upon practical and experiential knowledge with a close relationship between the mentor and the learner. Although the Guru was held in a reverential pedestal as equivalent to God, but the Guru aimed at creating an awareness through practical learning. The practical and experiential knowledge could be built through a constructive dialogue between the *Guru* and the *Shishyas*. The *Prashna Upanishad* is a brilliant example of how dialogue in the form of questioning leads to critiquing leading to the formation of higher consciousness about the universe.

The Dialogic approach of Critical Pedagogy is at par with the principles of innovative pedagogy that can replace the bookish knowledge. The Dialogic approach of Critical Pedagogy can be said to be a Freirian avatar of the Samvada tradition of India to a great extent. In the word samvad, “sam” means together and “vada” has

multiple meanings like argument, conversation, discourse, and discussion. Like the Platonic *Dialogues*, in India, there is a long tradition of ‘Samvada’ since time immemorial. *Shrimad Bhagavata Geeta* is a brilliant example of how Arjuna received enlightenment about the *trilokas* from Lord Krishna through a series of questions and answers and debates.

The dialogic approach of pedagogy which gives a prominent place to questioning and *Samvada* has immense possibilities to decolonize the Indian mind in place of the colonialist English education system. Indian texts taken from the background of the Indian learners can be a repository of IKS and that will bring the learners’ background in the forefront of learning. As an indigenous system of enlightenment, *prashna* and *samvada* can be applied to teach the indigenous knowledge system of India. Deepa & Amartheja (2024) have pertinently pointed out the possibilities of employing *samvada* as a pedagogic praxis. They say that:

Samvad questioning encourages pupils to approach the idea in a ‘logic-based’ manner, producing their own evidence and arguments. Samvad teaching is a strategy that facilitates the teaching and learning process through interactive conversations, question posing, and response, resulting in the formation of new questions, comprehensions, and ideas. Samvad teaching employs open and divergent questions that encourage students and teachers to think, exchange, and develop diverse ideas in order to construct knowledge collaboratively. (Deepa & Amartheja, 2024)

Samvada can bring a collaborative learning experience in the formal teaching of English Language as the learners can speak and listen to each other and reflect upon their own position and role in the society, this can create critical

awareness leading to harmony and development of the nation.

Conclusion

NEP 2020, no doubt provides a great emphasis upon integration of IKS in the education system of India; but we also need to be careful regarding its implementation. Framing a policy will require certain infrastructural changes for its implementation. The stakeholders need to be aware of the requirements. Extensive researches and funding will be required. Besides, learning about IKS should not result in narrow parochial nationalism or vein glorification of the past – about which Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has warned us in his visionary Radhakrishnan Report. The teachers need to be alert and critically aware so that they can make the learners aware in turn. The tenets of critical pedagogy, such as, conscientization and dialogic/*samvada* approaches are relevant in this regard. As India lands on the Moon, its vision and mission should also be a leader in science and technology being rooted in the ethos of its tradition, culture and heritage. Thus, building and knowledge structure and a system of knowledge practice based on IKS can be one step towards docolonisation following the critical pedagogical principles.

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Dr. Arzuman Ara, Associate Professor in the English and Foreign Languages University, Shillong campus and visiting faculty at Oakton Community College, USA.

OBITUARY

Dr. N.S. Prabhu



With the passing of Prabhu, the ELT profession has lost one of its legendary figures.

He will be chiefly remembered as the godfather of Task Based Learning, which he developed through his well-known Bangalore Project (1979-84), documented in his only book to be published outside India: *Second Language Pedagogy* (1987). He was a staunch believer in the power of teachers to develop their own pragmatic theories of teaching - articulated in what he called, 'the teacher's sense of plausibility'.

But Prabhu had already made major contributions in his *English Through Reading 1 & 2*, co-authored with Prof. W.W.S. Bhaskar, and in the *Gul Mohar* series co-authored with Tickoo, Sasikumar and Bhaskaran in 1974. Amazingly, the series is still going strong 50 years later!

Prabhu published little in book form, so we are fortunate, thanks to the editorial efforts of Geetha Durairajan, to have a collection of his complete articles, arranged chronologically from 1966-2018. *Perceptions of Language Pedagogy* (Orient Black Swan, 2019), is a treasure house of material for teachers and trainers alike. It deserves pride of place on any teacher training programme.

Prabhu did not seek the limelight but it was nonetheless fitting that in 2021 his work was recognised when he was given the ELTons Lifetime Achievement Award in London.

He will be remembered for his sharp intellect, his original ideas, his practical wisdom and his humane care for colleagues and students. I was privileged to work with him for a number of years in Madras in the 1980's and in Singapore in the 1990's and to experience the care and support he gave to his students and colleagues alike. May he rest in peace.

- Alan Maley