

Integrating Indian Knowledge System into Political Science Curriculum: Opportunities and Challenges under NEP 2020

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Abstract:

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have become an important aspect of the curriculum reform in India after the promulgation of the National Education Policy 2020. Political Science, a field dealing with issues of power, state, governance, justice, citizenship, public institutions and political thought, has a natural affinity with IKS as Indian intellectual traditions abound with reflections on the nature of the state, the nature of the law, ethics, social order, republican traditions, public duty, welfare, decentralisation and constitutional morality. This research paper examines opportunities and challenges of incorporating IKS in the Political Science curriculum for NEP 2020 for cutoff up to March 2025. The paper contends that incorporation of IKS can decolonise the curriculum, enhance civilisational literacy, foster comparative political theory, facilitate interdisciplinary learning and link students with Indian political sources of political theory. The process, however, has some difficulties, including the potential for the use of ideology, lack of well-trained faculty, limited critical translations, uneven institutional capacity, risk of romanticization, and the need to balance tradition and constitutional values. The paper suggests an evidence-driven and inclusive critical framework of integration of IKS comprising ancient, medieval, modern, tribal, regional, Buddhist, Jain, Bhakti, Sufi, Gandhian, Ambedkarite and constitutional traditions. It believes that the use of IKS should not be considered as an addition or decoration to learning but rather an academic framework that can be applied in the comparative, analytical, and democratic learning process in Political Science.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, Political Science curriculum, NEP 2020, Indian political thought, higher education, curriculum reform, governance, decolonisation

Introduction

Curriculum is never apolitical or innocent. It is a society's intellectual focus, history and political vision. Political Science curriculum plays a particular role in the development of an understanding of the state, democracy, citizenship, justice, rights, governance and public ethics. Political Science has traditionally been an integral part of the Indian syllabus in which western political thought, modern Indian political thought, Indian constitution, public administration, comparative politics and international relations have been included. But a large number of scholars and policy makers have pointed out that the political traditions in India have been often rendered either too parochial or subsidiary to Western traditions. The

National Education Policy 2020 brings a new paradigm for this imbalance as it promotes the incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems in the education system from kindergarten to college level (Ministry of Education, 2020).

“Knowledge of India” is a broad term in NEP 2020 as it encompasses ancient Indian knowledge, challenges and aspirations of modern India and knowledge systems associated with philosophy, polity, governance, conservation, agriculture, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and tribal knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2020). This has direct relevance to Political Science as governance, polity, ethics, social institutions and public life are core themes of the discipline. The policy's focus on holistic and multidisciplinary learning also enables a curriculum that is integrated between Political Science and history, philosophy, law, economics, ethics, sociology, and public policy/cultural studies.

In 2020 the Ministry of Education set up the Indian Knowledge Systems Division to encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on Indian Knowledge Systems, preserve and disseminate traditional knowledge and promote its use in education and research (Ministry of Education, 2022). The University Grants Commission (UGC) later provided guidelines on integrating IKS in higher education curricula and recommended to introduce credit courses in IKS in Higher Education programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with at least five per cent of the mandatory credits (UGC, 2023b). The progress of these developments is indicative not only of IKS as a cultural theme but also as a formal educational reform agenda.

This paper explores the possibilities of incorporating IKS in the NEP 2020 curriculum of Political Science. It targets three areas of research questions. What then is the significance of IKS to Political Science? Second, what opportunities are there for curriculum reform due to IKS integration? Third, what are the obstacles in the way of academic credibility, inclusion and democracy in integration? The paper claims that the integration of IKS can add value to the study of Political Science only if it is critical, plural, evidence-based and based on constitutional morality.

Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative descriptive research method with secondary research techniques that are used to obtain data from sources available up to March 2025. The policy documents, UGC guidelines, Ministry of Education releases, curriculum frameworks, books on Indian political thought and academic literature on Indian Knowledge Systems forms the basis of the study. These are National Education Policy 2020, UGC Guidelines for IKS in Higher Education, UGC Guidelines for Faculty Orientation on IKS, the National Credit Framework and documents of the Political Science curriculum like the UGC's Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework.

It is a paper that does not have primary fieldwork. Rather, it examines policy documents and scholarly research to create a discussion that is curriculum based. The study is also normative in addition to being analytical. It is not just about the integration of IKS, it also assesses the proper way of integrating in a democratic and academically responsible way.

Conceptual Knowledge of Indian Knowledge System

The Indian Knowledge System is a variety of intellectual, practical, philosophical, ethical, artistic, ecological, scientific and social knowledge system which evolved in Indian subcontinent (India) over centuries. It covers textual traditions (Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhist, Jain, Dharmaśāstra, Arthaśāstra, Sangam, Bhakti and Sufi, oral, regional, tribal and community-based traditions). It also comprises

knowledge on mathematics, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, architecture, linguistics, governance and social organisation (Mahadevan et al., 2022).

IKS should NOT be viewed as a uniform, unchanging tradition. India has always had many knowledge traditions, languages, regions, social groups and philosophical debates. For instance, the political concepts in Arthaśāstra are different from those of Dhamma of the Buddhist, non-violence of the Jains, Bhakti of hierarchy and swarajism of Gandhi and constitutionalism of Ambedkar. Thus, an IKS-based Political Science curriculum should not be monolithic, but plural and comparative in nature.

The relevance of IKS in political science relates to Indian traditions that have directly focussed on issues which are central to political science: What is good governance? What is justice? What does the ruler do? What is the best way to restrict power? How is ethics and politics connected with each other? What will be the structure of the duties and rights of society? What is to be done about conflict? How do local institutions play a part? What is the meaning of freedom? These questions are not only Western questions; they have been extensively discussed in the intellectual history of India.

NEP 2020 and Policy Basis for IKS Integration in Schools.

The policy framework for the integration of IKS is the best in NEP 2020. The policy emphasizes that knowledge about India should encompass knowledge pertaining to the ancient India, contribution of ancient India to the present-day India, successes and challenges of ancient India and future aspirations of ancient India in various fields including education, health and environment (Ministry of Education, 2020). Importantly, the policy provides for the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems, tribal knowledge and indigenous knowledge of learning in appropriate sections such as governance and polity.

The policy also supports whole and inter-disciplinary education. It states that India has a strong tradition of multi-disciplinary education in the form of ancient universities like Takshashila and Nalanda and that this learning approach should be revived in the present times in the education system (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the case of Political Science, students should not learn about political institutions by means of legal or western theoretical constructs. They should also explore the tradition of statecraft, ethics, republicanism, decentralisation, public welfare, community decision making and constitutional transformation in India.

This vision is further operationalised at UGC through its IKS guidelines. The guidelines offer a framework for integrating IKS in undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as courses and suggest credit-based courses. Authentic source, disciplinary relevance, contemporary application and interdisciplinary learning are also highlighted as key points in the guidelines (University Grants Commission, 2023a). Faculty development is recognised as essential by the faculty orientation guidelines of UGC as many faculty members might have subject matter expertise but may need extra training on IKS (University Grants Commission, 2023b).

The relevance of IKS to Political Science Curriculum

Political Science is one of the subjects that are most appropriate for integrating with IKS. The answer is because political ideologies and administrative methods are embedded in the Indian traditions. Kautilya's Arthashastra talks about the government, taxation, diplomacy, espionage, welfare, law and public administration (Kangle, 1992). The Buddhist political concepts are related to moral kingship, dhamma, non-violence and welfare. Jain traditions bring in the ideas of Non-violence, Pluralism and Restraint. Deliberation and collective decision-making can be discussed with regard to ancient gana-sanghas and the traditions of the republics. Medieval Bhakti and Sufi traditions can be discussed with regard to social

equality, spiritual democracy and critique of hierarchy. There are several visions of nation, democracy, social justice, decentralisation, secularism, citizenship etc. provided by the modern thinkers like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, Vivekananda, Savarkar, Periyar, Nehru, Lohia and JP Narayan.

IKS can also enhance the learning of public administration. The Indian traditions include discussions on bureaucracy, taxation, welfare, justice delivery, local administration and diplomatic strategy. For the purpose of the comparative political analysis, the four principles of Kautilya's saptanga theory of the state, the mandala theory of foreign policy, and the importance of administrative discipline are relevant (Boesche, 2002). The ideas should not be taught as ideal models, though. They should be critically assessed and compared with the current democratic values, constitutionalism, human rights and public accountability.

IKS also has significance in the Indian political theory. Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill and Marx are commonly studied by students of Political Science. These thinkers are important but Indian thinkers are not only secondary! A balanced curriculum can juxtapose the concept of the philosopher king of Plato with the ruler of Kautilya, liberal rights with Ambedkarite constitutional morality, communitarianism with Indian ideas of duty and social obligation and finally Rousseau's general will with the Gandhian concept of swaraj.

Table 1- Possible IKS Themes for Political Science Curriculum

Political Science area	Relevant IKS content	Learning value
Political theory	Dharma, rajadharma, swaraj, ahimsa, nyaya, constitutional morality	Expands concepts beyond Western theory
Indian political thought	Kautilya, Buddha, Ashoka, Basaveshwara, Kabir, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore	Builds civilisational and modern political understanding
Public administration	Arthaśāstra, local governance, welfare ethics, administrative responsibility	Links traditional statecraft with modern governance
Comparative politics	Gana-sanghas, panchayat traditions, republics, monarchy, empire	Enables comparative study of political forms
International relations	Mandala theory, diplomacy, non-alignment, civilisational dialogue	Connects ancient and modern strategic thought
Public policy	Welfare, environment, community knowledge, social justice	Applies IKS to contemporary governance issues
Research methods	Textual analysis, oral traditions, archival sources, field-based local knowledge	Encourages interdisciplinary methods

Opportunities of Integrating IKS into Political Science Decolonising the curriculum

Curriculum decolonisation is one of the largest opportunities. Decolonisation does not imply the rejection of Western knowledge. Instead, it implies redressing the balance in which Western ideas are viewed as universal and Indian ideas as local or cultural. The students of Political Science must be acquainted with Locke and Ambedkar, with Machiavelli and Kautilya, with Rousseau and Gandhi. IKS integration will assist students in viewing India as not merely the object of political analysis, but also as a source of political theory.

Enhancing Indian political thinking.

Political Science departments already teach Indian political thought, but often in a limited manner. This area can be enhanced with IKS integration that incorporates classical, medieval, regional, tribal and modern traditions. It may stimulate students to read original texts, translations, commentaries and modern interpretations. Rather than memorising thinker-wise summaries, students will be able to examine arguments about power, justice, social order, freedom and governance in Indian traditions.

Promoting comparative political theory

Political Science can be compared with the help of IKS. Comparative political theory is a study of political concepts in civilisations. For example, students can compare Kautilya and Machiavelli on realism, Ashoka and modern welfare state theory on moral governance, Gandhi and Thoreau on civil disobedience, Ambedkar and liberal constitutionalism on rights and social justice, and panchayat traditions with participatory democracy. It can transform political theory into a less Eurocentric and more global one.

Connecting business ethics and governance.

Contemporary politics tends to divide politics and morals. The Indian traditions often relate political power to moral responsibility, albeit in various forms. Public duty, ethical leadership and accountability can be discussed in terms of such concepts as dharma, rajadharma, lokasangraha, sarvodaya, swaraj and constitutional morality. It can be applied to students who are going to work in the public service, civil society, law, journalism and policy research.

Encouraging interdisciplinary learning

NEP 2020 is a firm believer in multidisciplinary education. The integration of IKS is inherently interdisciplinary in nature in that Indian political concepts are connected with philosophy, economics, law, religion, ecology, literature and social reform. To illustrate, to study Gandhi, one has to be involved with ethics, economics, village society, non-violence and political action. Ambedkar studies involve law, caste, democracy, economics and constitutionalism. The study of Kautilya involves the study of economics, war, diplomacy and administration.

Linking curriculum to local government.

IKS can be applied by Political Science to bridge the gap between classroom learning and local institutions and knowledge of the community. Students are able to learn about gram sabhas, panchayats, customary institutions, local conflict-resolution, tribal councils, water management systems and community forest governance. Field-based learning can help to make Political Science more practical and rooted in the social world.

Table 2- Opportunities and Expected Outcomes

Opportunity	Curriculum practice	Expected student outcome
Decolonisation	Include Indian and Western thinkers in equal analytical depth	Balanced intellectual perspective
Comparative theory	Compare Indian and global concepts of state, justice and rights	Critical and comparative thinking
Ethical governance	Teach dharma, swaraj, sarvodaya and constitutional morality	Public ethics and civic responsibility
Field-based learning	Study panchayats, local institutions and community practices	Practical understanding of democracy
Interdisciplinarity	Link politics with philosophy, law, ecology and economics	Holistic political understanding
Research development	Use primary texts, translations and oral history	Stronger research methods

Graph 1- Suggested Distribution of IKS-Linked Content in Political Science

Curriculum area	Suggested emphasis
Indian political thought	30%
Governance and administration	20%
Ethics, dharma and public duty	15%
Constitutional comparison	15%
Local self-government and community knowledge	10%
Research methods and primary texts	10%

Interpretation: The graph presents a suggested model of distributing IKS-related content throughout Political Science. Indian political thought is provided with the largest share since it is the most direct field of integration. Much attention should also be paid to governance, ethics and constitutional comparison.

Difficulties of the IKS into Political Science.

Possibility of ideological bias.

The threat of ideological abuse is the most severe. IKS may be abused when it is offered as one and homogenous and politically convenient tradition. The knowledge traditions in India are diverse and contentious and internally varied. A conscientious curriculum should have Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, Bhakti, Sufi, tribal, regional, feminist, anti-caste, Gandhian, Ambedkarite and constitutional viewpoints. The curriculum can turn out to be ideological instead of academic in case only selected traditions are incorporated.

Romanisation of the past.

Romanticisation is another challenge. IKS is not to be taught as though the past was ideal. Hierarchy, gender inequality, caste exclusion and political violence were also present in ancient and medieval Indian societies. A Political Science curriculum should be able to impart both accomplishments and constraints. As an example, the administrative concepts of Kautilya are significant, but they should be contrasted with the contemporary democratic accountability and human rights critically. Likewise, the social order based on dharma has to be considered in connection with the criticism of caste and constitutional morality by Ambedkar.

Lack of trained faculty.

The faculty policies of UGC acknowledge that a large number of teachers might need further introduction to IKS (University Grants Commission, 2023b). The teachers of Political Science can be trained in contemporary political theory, comparative politics or public administration, but not in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Persian, Tamil or regional traditions of sources. In the absence of faculty training, IKS integration can be superficial.

Absence of quality teaching resources.

A large number of IKS texts exist in challenging languages or in specialised scholarly editions. Students require good translations, commentaries, glossaries and contextual introductions. The material of poor quality may cause confusion. Political Science requires critical editions, historically informed interpretation and comparison with modern political concepts.

Striking a balance between IKS and constitutional values.

The curriculum of Political Science in India should not be out of touch with the constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity, secularism, justice and dignity. Constitutional morality should not be undermined with the help of IKS. Rather, IKS is to be instructed in conversation with the Constitution. To illustrate, the students can draw parallels between rajadharma and constitutional accountability, swaraj and democratic participation, social duty and fundamental rights and duties.

Institutional inequality

All universities do not have the same resources. Central universities and elite institutions can probably create IKS courses, bring experts and establish interdisciplinary centres. Smaller colleges might not be able to cope with the shortage of faculty, library constraints and administrative burden. Thus, open educational resources, teacher training, digital modules and materials in regional languages should be implemented.

Table 3- Challenges and Possible Solutions

Challenge	Effect on curriculum	Possible solution
Ideological bias	Selective and one-sided teaching	Plural, evidence-based syllabus design
Romanticisation	Uncritical glorification of the past	Comparative and critical pedagogy

Faculty shortage	Superficial teaching	Faculty orientation and interdisciplinary workshops
Lack of translations	Limited access to primary texts	Reliable translations and annotated readers
Language barriers	Students cannot access original texts	Bilingual teaching material
Institutional inequality	Uneven implementation	Shared digital resources and model syllabi
Constitutional concerns	Conflict with democratic values	Teach IKS in dialogue with constitutional morality

Proposed Model Curriculum

A practical model for political science to involve the use of IKS should be considered in two parts, namely core and elective. There is no need to replace the existing Political Science curriculum; it should complement it. The ability to work through a possible structure is:

This course covers classical and modern political thought in India

The names of Kautilya, Buddha, Ashoka, Basaveshwara, Kabir, Nanak, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, Periyar and Nehru may appear in this paper. Emphasis should be on the ideas of State, Justice, Equality, Freedom, Social Reform and Democracy.

Ancient statecraft, local governance, panchayat traditions, revenue systems, welfare ideas, public ethics and administrative responsibility may be included in this paper.

Comparative Political Theory: Indian and Western Perspectives is an elective paper that students are free to take. Comparative Political Theory: Indian and Western Perspectives is an elective paper which is open for students to take.

This paper can be a comparative study of Kautilya and Machiavelli, Gandhi and Thoreau, Indian republican traditions and liberal constitutionalism, Ashok and welfare governance, etc. with modern democracy.

Elective Paper 2: IKS, Constitution and Social Justice

Caste, gender, religious pluralism, tribal knowledge, social movements, constitutional morality and debates on tradition and modernity may be explored in this paper.

Skill/Project Component

Students can do fieldwork on any of the following topics: local governance, oral political traditions, community dispute resolution, gram sabha participation, traditional ecological governance or local democratic practices.

Image Suggestions

Image 1: NEP 2020 and Indian Knowledge System classroom presentation



Caption: NEP 2020 encourages the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into modern education through multidisciplinary and culturally rooted learning.

Image 2: Students studying Indian political thought and constitutional values



Caption: Political Science curriculum can connect Indian political traditions with constitutional democracy, rights and social justice.

Image 3: Gram Sabha or Panchayat meeting



Caption: Local self-government provides a practical field for linking Indian governance traditions with contemporary democratic participation.

Discussion

Incorporating IKS into the Political Science is not just a matter of putting some ancient books on the syllabus. It calls for a more profound shift in the concept of political knowledge. Political Science in India should not be confined to the imported theoretical categories; on the other hand, it should not be hostile towards global theory. The most effective is a dialogic method. Indian ideas are to be put in dialogue with global ideas.

For instance, Kautilya could be discussed with the help of Machiavelli and against democratic constitutionalism. Gandhi can be studied alongside Tolstoy and Thoreau but also against the background of Ambedkar's critique of the village society. Ambedkar can be introduced as a political philosopher of modern India who also proposes a new constitutional morality which opposes the oppressive social traditions. The concepts of non-violence, pluralism and ethical politics may be mentioned in the context of Buddhist and Jain ideas. Traditions of tribal governance can be discussed in the context of autonomy, ecological citizenship and participatory democracy.

Such a curriculum will enable students to see India not just as a case study in political theory, but as a place of political theory. It will also develop students' critical thinking skills as they will be asked to compare different traditions and make judgments as to their relevance to today's issues. But it needs to be done in an honest way. IKS needs to be based on evidence, in context with other things, and in debate. It should consist of both praise and criticism.

Recommendations

First, universities need to establish a balanced Political Science syllabus that incorporates the inclusion of IKS in core and elective courses. It is not intended that IKS is only available as an optional paper. It should be present in Political theory, Public Administration, Indian Politics, Comparative Politics, Public Policy. Secondly, it is important that curriculum designers ensure that there is plural representation. Classical, modern, regional, anti-caste, feminist, tribal and constitutional traditions have to be included in political thought in India. This will avoid the problem of narrow-mindedness or ideology interpretation.

Thirdly, universities should form annotated readers for Political Science students. The readers should have translations of excerpts from Arthaśāstra, Buddhist literature, Ashokan edicts, Bhakti poetry, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, Periyar and other thinkers, and critical introductions.

Four, training of faculty members is a must. Political Science teachers should be provided with workshops on the subjects of IKS, primary texts, translation techniques, political theory and constitutional interpretation by UGC and universities.

Fifth, to promote field projects. Theory and practice help strengthen Political Science. IKS can be meaningful in projects on panchayat, gram sabha, local governance, community dispute resolution and public ethics.

Sixth, IKS integration should be in line with constitutional values. The Constitution of India remains to be the normative basis of education in Political Science. IKS should not supplant the constitution.

Conclusion

Incorporation of Indian Knowledge System in Political Science curriculum under NEP 2020 presents a great opportunity to 'root', 'comparative', 'interdisciplinary' and 'intellectually balanced' higher education. Political Science has been particularly identified as an appropriate subject for integrating IKS, as the traditions of India have a wealth of concepts of statecraft, rule of government, justice, ethics, social order, diplomacy, decentralisation and public duty. This transformation can be ensured through the institutional framework of NEP 2020, UGC guidelines and the IKS Division.

But care must be taken for successful integration. IKS should not be an ideology and a romanticisation of the past. It needs to be taught critically, inclusively and academically. While Kautilya, Buddha, Ashoka, Gandhi and Ambedkar should be in a strong PS curriculum, dissenting, regional, tribal, feminist and anti-caste voices must also be included. It should also explore similarities and differences between Indian traditions and global traditions and relate it with the present-day constitutional democracy.

Future of IKS in PS relies on curriculum design, teacher training, dependable resources, institutional support and democratic pedagogy. With proper implementation, IKS could help students to comprehend the political legacy of India while equipping them with the skills to respond to the contemporary issues of democracy, justice, governance and citizenship.

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