

Stimulating Indian Knowledge System, Arts and Culture

16 September 2021

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Introduction

The rapid changes in the global knowledge economy with the advancement in science and technology have led to dramatic changes in the society. No doubt that India has leaped many boundaries in all sectors- commerce, technology and development etc., but at the same time there has also been detachment from our belief and fall in values. In such a fluid scenario, it is very important to retain our glorious ancient past which reverberates the philosophy of Upanishads revolving around the concepts of the *Brahman* (the universal soul) and the *Atman* (the individual soul), the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita elucidating the ideals of the '*KarmaYoga*' (the path of action), the '*Bhakti Yoga*' (the path of devotion), and the '*Gyan Yoga*' (the path of knowledge) for self-realisation. Today we need to draw our identity from such a sprawling belief system which gives a unique stature to India at the global platform where people from abroad look up to India and resort to yoga and meditation to de-stress and rejuvenate their mind. As part of ShikshakParvprogramme, the webinar on "Stimulating Indian Knowledge System, Arts and Culture" was organized on 16 September 2021.

Session Highlights

The webinar started with setting up of the background of the day's deliberations by the chairperson of the session Prof. Harshad P. Shah, Vice Chancellor, Children's University. He stated that the NEP 2020 envisions a complete overhaul of the Indian education system and to prepare the curriculum right from the foundational stage to senior secondary school stage grounded in the Indian ethos. He said that the word '*Bharat*' is composed of '*bha*' which refers to radiance. The word Bharat itself means a nation which is full of radiance. This radiance is the knowledge accumulated over thousands of years and has enlightened not just itself but the whole world. He highlighted that the West says that "we are masters of the universe", but Indian philosophy says that "we are a small particle of the universe" and so, we need to delve deep into

the knowledge traditions of our country. Prof. Shah emphasized that we need to preserve our knowledge system by giving full support to our languages. Sanskrit as well as all Indian languages needs to be studied and promoted in order to go deep into our literature which is a treasure house of knowledge. He ended by saying that he had given a brief background on the theme of the webinar, and now the speakers will explain the topic at length. He introduced the co-chair of the session Dr. Rabin Chhetri, Director, SCERT, Sikkim and invited him to give his opening remarks.

Dr. Chhetri started by saying that NEP 2020 is a public policy; many aspects of it have come from the grassroots. Everyone looks at it as modern, global and well-accepted policy. He highlighted that the vision of the policy says that the Indian education system should be rooted in Indian knowledge system and ethos. He agreed that it is extremely important to sow the seeds of Indian culture in young minds. He drew attention to the fact that the significant proportion of the population of North-East is tribal and has the best traditional knowledge. This traditional knowledge also needs to be preserved and documented. He remarked that this will lead India to being a global knowledge center.

Dr. Chhetri explained how Copernicus and Galileo were persecuted in the West, and so Modern Science was at loggerheads with religion in the West. In continuation of that, when the British came to India, they had this impression that religion was a contradiction to Modern Science. However, he argued that our culture has always been that of a seeker and not just a believer. The Vedas and the Upanishads have always promoted inquiry and discussions. He lamented the fact that we as a civilization have been forgetting our roots and have indulged in ‘civilization amnesia’. He encouraged all to overcome it and realize the full potential of our living civilization. He asserted that this can surely be achieved by implementation of the NEP, 2020. Prof. Shah thanked Dr. Chhetri for his deliberations and invited the presenter of the session Prof. Saroj Sharma, to share her presentation. He informed the viewers that she is the Chairperson of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which is an autonomous institution, under the Ministry of Education.

Prof. Sharma lauded the *Shikshak Parv* programme as a great initiative to deliberate on the implementation of the NEP 2020. She remarked that from pictorial diagrams in the caves to modern deliberations on philosophy, we have always been a society where knowledge has been respected. Through her presentation, she stressed the need to study our *Bharatiya* traditions in detail. All the six traditions of Indian philosophy need to be understood and revisited. She stated that the ancient knowledge of our country travelled from here to Arabia to Europe and now there has been new research into it. She mentioned that there were at least 64 universities in India in the ancient times. She stated that the challenge before the Indian education system today is to inculcate Indian ethos into the minds of young children through integration of *Bharatiya* arts, literature, and culture in the curriculum.

Prof. Sharma called for the incorporation of Indian philosophy and science, Vedas, Ayurveda, traditional knowledge, Indian languages and literature in the school curriculum. She highlighted that NIOS has also been taking steps to ensure that *Bharatiya* knowledge is included at all levels in the curriculum. NIOS has launched the new stream 'Indian Knowledge Tradition' for reviving the Vedic Education, Sanskrit Language and literature, Indian Philosophy and many other areas of ancient Indian Knowledge. Under this stream, NIOS already developed five courses at both secondary and Sr. Secondary level in Sanskrit Medium and Hindi: *Veda Adhyayan*, *Sanskrit Vyakaran*, *Bhartiya Darshan*, *Sanskrit Sahitya*, and Sanskrit (Language Subject). She added that through the diaspora study center, NIOS has been trying to introduce Indian Knowledge System to the diaspora abroad.

Prof. Sharma ended her presentation by emphasizing that Indian knowledge, arts and culture is well-renowned across the globe and we must hand-down this *aatmagaurav* (self-respect) to our youngsters. NEP, 2020 is a sustainable policy and will help India reach the goals of UNESCO's 2030 Agenda. Prof. Shah appreciated Prof. Sharma's presentation and her attempts to awaken *aatmagaurav* among all, which in turn will inculcate *rashtragaurav* (national pride). He then introduced the first speaker Prof. Girishwar Mishra, Former Vice Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi Atarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha and invited him to make his deliberations.

Prof. Mishra started by saying that *ShikshakParv* has been endeavouring to take our education system to new heights. He remarked that *Bharat* is an ancient country where the stream of knowledge has been flowing incessantly from one generation to another and is flowing without fail even today. In the colonial times, a shadow emerged in our eyes and because of that we have been ignoring and forgetting our own ethos and values. He emphasized that our knowledge is not just for *Bharat* but for the entire world. There is no contradiction between the national and global here. He explained that India does not want to leave anyone behind or alienate anyone; we intend to take everyone along; this is our philosophy and the base of our cultural ethos. He stated that ‘one who sees everyone, only he sees completely’ is the root of our vision. ‘*Ekohambahusyamah*’ is the root of our knowledge tradition. He highlighted that we need to investigate ourselves through our own means and vision.

Prof. Mishra elaborated that there are two areas of *Bharatiya* Knowledge: *Shastra* and *Lok*. We need to preserve and promote both these aspects and not ignore one of these. He suggested that every school should have a small museum where local objects are kept, that will surely inculcate the *lokgyaan* (folk knowledge) amongst the students. He ended his deliberations by expressing hope that by including Indian knowledge systems in the curriculum, *Swaran* (Golden) *Bharat* can become a reality. Prof. Shah thanked Prof. Mishra for explaining *adhyatmikgyan* (spiritual science) and the roots of *Bharat* in detail. He then invited Dr. AmeetaWattal, Chairperson and Executive Director, DLF Foundation Schools and Scholarships to make her presentation.

Dr. Wattal started her presentation by stating that while she is a believer of the Sanskrit ‘*VasudhaivaKutumbakam*’ (the world is a family), India is very close to her heart. She explained that we have to learn things in the context of the place where we have grown up. The Indian Knowledge System offers many solutions to our life. We need to explore the depth of our heritage and preserve them. She emphasized that through visuals and presentations, along with sharing of our common history we need to preserve and promote our culture, which is based on diversity.

She further elaborated that Indian cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. We should introduce our children to the arts, stories, photography, history, natural landscape, sustainability, oral traditions, heritage cities, heritage sites, submerged kingdoms, dance forms, ancient

languages and scripts, ancient herbs etc. of our country. She stated that projects, celebration of local festivals and tours can ensure that this is done, and a connection is made between our ancient heritage and our young generation. She ended her presentation by saying that it is extremely essential that we make a connection between our past, our present and our future. Prof. Shah thanked Dr. Wattal for taking the audience on a tour of Indian knowledge, arts and literature from Kashmir to Sindh through her presentation. He invited the last speaker of the session Dr. Praveen Kumar Tiwari, Associate Professor, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University, Bareilly to share his presentation.

Dr. Tiwari stated that the traditions and culture of our country is ancient yet new. It has been a steady flowing river of knowledge, which has not lost its sheen completely. He commented that many attempts were made to shatter our knowledge traditions and establish many propagandas and narratives. The colonialists were at the forefront to further this agenda and fueled a narrative against *Bharat*. He added that while they were doing this, they were also looting India's resources. They tried to establish the false narratives of Aryan Invasion and Aryan-Dravidian struggle only to undermine *Bharat*. He further explained that the Europeans undermined Indian education system, although we were much ahead of them when they came here, and they themselves have written about it in their works. He lamented that we fail to mention our treatises on ancient metallurgy, calendar, astronomy, Ayurveda, surgery, democracy, engineering, architecture, linguistics, agriculture, literature etc. of India to our young generations. Thus, in this context, he appreciated the endeavour by the Ministry of Education to incorporate Indian Knowledge System into our education system. Prof. Shah thanked Dr. Tiwari for his enriching presentation.

Question and Answer Session

Due to the paucity of time, the chairperson Prof. Shah put up only one question from the list of selected key questions received on MyGov portal from the public. He asked how Indian Knowledge System, Arts and Culture can be promoted in daily life. Prof. Girishwar Mishra stated that the present webinar had substantial suggestions on how to incorporate Indian

Knowledge Systems into real life. He highlighted that small opportunities can be created in daily life to learn about Indian traditions through experiential learning, which includes seeing, doing and feeling. This can be taken up at schools and home, to supplement book learning. He advocated for the formulation of strategies in schools for all stages to participate in such activities. For this, teachers need to have the vision that Indian knowledge must be a part of students' lives and not just a lesson.

Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, the chairperson Prof. Shah quoted an English Professor – “we teach England first, and then English.” He stated that in India we teach English first and India never. It is crucial to know India and its vast knowledge. He remarked that Indian knowledge systems have the potential to improve the quality of life drastically. We should be proud that we were born in a great nation like India. He said that the policy's push towards incorporating India and Indian Knowledge System into our education system should be taken forward to the individual and household level. He appreciated the NEP, 2020 for bringing in independent thinking into education 74 years after Independence. He called for all viewers to take forward learnings from this webinar and thanked them for tuning.