

Reimagining Indigenous Pedagogy through the Bhagavad Gītā: An NEP 2020 Perspective

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal education to promote holistic, value-based, and experiential learning. In this context, the Bhagavad Gita emerges as a significant pedagogical text that embodies indigenous educational philosophies rooted in Indian intellectual traditions. This paper examines the Bhagavad Gita as a foundational source of indigenous pedagogy, highlighting its relevance to the objectives and vision of NEP 2020. Through a qualitative and interpretative analysis of selected verses, this study examines the pedagogical principles embedded in the Bhagavad Gītā, including dialogic learning, experiential wisdom, reflective self-awareness, ethical reasoning, and the integrative framework of knowledge (jñāna), action (karma), and devotion (bhakti). The teacher–student dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna is examined as an early model of learner-centered and transformative education, aligning closely with NEP 2020’s focus on critical thinking, moral education, and holistic development. The paper further situates the Bhagavad Gita within indigenous pedagogical traditions that prioritize character formation, social responsibility, and inner well-being alongside intellectual growth.



By mapping these pedagogical insights onto contemporary educational frameworks, the study demonstrates how the Gita can contribute meaningfully to curriculum design, value education, and interdisciplinary teaching practices. The paper argues that engaging with the Bhagavad Gita as an indigenous pedagogical text not only revitalizes traditional knowledge systems but also strengthens the ethical and cultural foundations of modern education envisioned under NEP 2020.

Keywords: Indigenous Pedagogy, Bhagavad Gītā, NEP 2020, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Value Education, Holistic Learning

Introduction

The discourse on education in the twenty-first century increasingly acknowledges the inadequacies of narrowly technocratic and outcome-driven learning models that prioritize measurable performance over meaningful understanding. In response to these limitations, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a paradigm shift in India’s educational philosophy by foregrounding holistic development, ethical grounding, and the systematic integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Rather than treating education as a mere instrument for economic productivity, NEP 2020 envisions learning as a transformative process that cultivates not only cognitive competence but also moral discernment, emotional intelligence, social responsibility, and self-awareness—qualities essential for both individual fulfilment and collective well-being.

Within this reoriented educational vision, classical Indian knowledge traditions acquire renewed pedagogical relevance. Among these, the *Bhagavad Gītā* occupies a distinctive position—not simply as a spiritual or philosophical scripture, but as a dialogic, reflective, and profoundly transformative educational text. Structured as a sustained philosophical conversation between teacher (Krishna) and learner (Arjuna), the *Gītā* presents a dynamic model of learning rooted in questioning, ethical deliberation, and experiential insight. The text integrates intellectual inquiry with moral action, self-knowledge, and social duty, thereby offering a comprehensive framework for education that transcends the conventional division between knowledge and values.

This paper seeks to reinterpret the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a foundational text of indigenous pedagogy and to critically examine its alignment with the principles and objectives articulated in NEP 2020. By situating the *Gītā* within contemporary educational debates on learner-centred pedagogy, value-based education, and interdisciplinary learning, the study demonstrates its continuing relevance for curriculum design and



pedagogical practice. In doing so, the paper argues that engaging with the *Bhagavad Gītā* as an indigenous pedagogical resource enables a meaningful synthesis of traditional wisdom and modern educational aspirations, thereby strengthening the ethical and cultural foundations of education in the twenty-first century.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Educational Renewal

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) constitute context-specific modes of knowing that arise from long-term interaction between communities and their cultural, social, and ecological environments. Such knowledge is embedded in everyday practices—agriculture, healing, storytelling, rituals, and governance—and is sustained through collective memory rather than individual authorship. Learning within IKS occurs through observation, imitation, apprenticeship, and participation in community life, thereby dissolving rigid boundaries between theory and practice. For example, traditional ecological knowledge among indigenous communities guides seasonal farming cycles, resource conservation, and climate adaptation, illustrating how learning is inherently ethical, relational, and action-oriented.

The renewed emphasis on IKS in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a conscious attempt to address the epistemic marginalization produced by colonial education systems that privileged abstract, Eurocentric knowledge frameworks. By foregrounding indigenous epistemologies, NEP 2020 seeks not only to restore cultural continuity but also to cultivate locally relevant and sustainable forms of learning. This shift is evident in policy recommendations that encourage the integration of indigenous languages, local histories, and traditional practices into curricular design, thereby making education more inclusive and socially grounded.

Importantly, NEP 2020 reframes indigenous knowledge traditions not as oppositional to modern education but as complementary intellectual resources. Indigenous pedagogies emphasize holistic development, ethical responsibility, and interdependence—values increasingly recognized as essential in addressing global challenges such as environmental degradation and social fragmentation. For instance, indigenous conservation ethics resonate with contemporary sustainability education, while oral traditions support narrative-based learning and critical reflection.

Within this framework, the *Bhagavad Gītā* emerges as a compelling example of indigenous pedagogy. When approached as a dialogic educational text rather than a purely religious scripture, the *Gītā* models reflective inquiry, moral reasoning, and experiential learning. The Krishna–Arjuna dialogue demonstrates how learning unfolds through questioning, doubt, and ethical deliberation, offering a pedagogical structure that



aligns with NEP 2020's learner-centric vision. Such engagement illustrates how indigenous knowledge traditions can function as living, adaptable pedagogical frameworks that contribute meaningfully to contemporary educational renewal while preserving their cultural integrity.

3. The Bhagavad Gītā as a Pedagogical Text

3.1 Dialogic Learning and the Teacher–Student Relationship

The pedagogical architecture of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is fundamentally dialogic, with learning unfolding through an extended and purposeful exchange between Krishna and Arjuna. Significantly, the educational process does not commence with instruction or doctrine but with crisis. Arjuna's psychological paralysis—manifested through moral hesitation, emotional vulnerability, and cognitive dissonance on the battlefield—constitutes the epistemic starting point of learning. Doubt, confusion, and ethical anxiety are not dismissed as intellectual weakness; rather, they are acknowledged as productive conditions that invite reflection and transformation. This positioning of uncertainty as pedagogically generative anticipates modern educational theories that recognize questioning and discomfort as essential to deep learning.

Krishna's role as teacher departs markedly from authoritarian or transmission-based models of instruction. Instead of offering immediate prescriptions, he adopts a facilitative pedagogical stance, employing a variety of instructional strategies such as probing questions, analogies drawn from everyday life, philosophical reasoning, and contextual illustration. For instance, metaphors like the chariot, the battlefield, and the imperishable self-function as cognitive tools that translate abstract ethical principles into relatable experiential frameworks. Through these methods, Arjuna is encouraged to interrogate his own assumptions about duty, attachment, and agency rather than passively accept externally imposed conclusions.

Learning within this framework is dialogically co-constructed. Krishna repeatedly invites Arjuna to reflect, decide, and act with discernment (*viveka*), culminating in the affirmation that the final choice rests with the learner. This pedagogical move foregrounds autonomy and moral agency, positioning education as a process of self-realization rather than compliance. In contemporary classroom terms, this approach resonates with discussion-based seminars, Socratic questioning, and inquiry-driven learning, where teachers function as facilitators guiding students toward independent reasoning.

The dialogic teacher–student relationship articulated in the *Gītā* finds strong resonance with the learner-centred vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 emphasizes active participation, critical thinking, and meaningful engagement over rote memorization. Practices such as classroom debates, reflective dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving mirror the *Gītā*'s pedagogical emphasis on dialogue



and ethical deliberation. By privileging responsiveness over rigidity and inquiry over dogma, the *Bhagavad Gītā* offers an early yet sophisticated model of transformative pedagogy—one that aligns seamlessly with NEP 2020’s conception of education as an interactive, reflective, and ethically grounded process.

3.2 Experiential Wisdom and Reflective Learning

A defining feature of the pedagogical philosophy articulated in the *Bhagavad Gītā* is its insistence on experiential wisdom as the foundation of authentic knowledge. The text consistently moves beyond abstract theorization to emphasize *anubhava* (direct lived experience) and *viveka* (discriminative insight) as essential components of learning. Knowledge is validated not through memorization or intellectual mastery alone but through its capacity to illuminate action, transform perception, and guide ethical decision-making.

Learning in the *Gītā* unfolds through sustained reflection on one’s actions, emotions, and responsibilities within the social and moral order. Krishna repeatedly urges Arjuna to cultivate self-awareness by observing the interplay between desire, duty, and consequence. This reflective process enables the learner to internalize knowledge and apply it meaningfully in real-life contexts, thereby bridging the gap between understanding and action.

Such an experiential orientation closely parallels NEP 2020’s emphasis on learning by doing, reflective practice, and contextual engagement. The policy promotes pedagogical approaches that connect knowledge to lived realities, encouraging learners to engage critically with real-world situations. In this light, the *Gītā* offers valuable pedagogical insights for contemporary practices such as reflective journaling, dialogic discussions, ethical simulations, and problem-based learning. Its emphasis on reflection and experiential understanding reinforces the idea that education is most effective when it fosters inner transformation alongside intellectual development.

4. Integration of Knowledge, Action, and Devotion

A defining pedagogical insight of the *Bhagavad Gītā* lies in its refusal to fragment human learning into isolated intellectual, practical, or emotional domains. Instead, the text articulates an integrative educational vision in which *jñāna* (knowledge), *karma* (action), and *bhakti* (devotion) function as interdependent dimensions of human development. This synthesis challenges reductionist educational models that privilege cognitive achievement while neglecting ethical responsibility and emotional depth.

Jñāna in the *Gītā* extends beyond the acquisition of information or conceptual clarity. It involves the cultivation of reflective awareness, self-knowledge, and critical insight into the nature of reality, the self, and moral responsibility. This form of knowing encourages learners to interrogate assumptions, recognize



inner motivations, and develop discernment (*viveka*), thereby fostering intellectual maturity rather than mere academic proficiency.

Karma, as articulated in the *Gītā*, reframes action as an educative process rather than a purely instrumental activity. Action becomes a site of learning where ethical intention, social responsibility, and disciplined effort converge. By emphasizing selfless action performed with awareness and accountability, the text presents learning as inseparable from participation in the social world. Education, therefore, is not confined to classrooms but unfolds through engagement with communal, professional, and civic responsibilities.

Bhakti introduces an affective and ethical dimension that anchors knowledge and action in emotional balance, empathy, and commitment. Far from representing passive devotion, *bhakti* in the *Gītā* fosters humility, trust, and moral orientation, enabling learners to act without ego-driven attachment to outcomes. This dimension of learning nurtures inner stability and ethical resilience—qualities increasingly recognized as essential for well-being in high-pressure educational environments.

The integrative pedagogical model of the *Bhagavad Gītā* resonates strongly with NEP 2020’s rejection of rigid disciplinary boundaries and its emphasis on interdisciplinary and holistic education. By encouraging the simultaneous development of cognitive, ethical, and emotional capacities, the *Gītā* offers a conceptual framework for curriculum design that balances intellectual rigor with moral sensitivity and psychological well-being. Such an approach affirms education as a transformative process aimed at cultivating reflective, responsible, and emotionally grounded individuals capable of meaningful participation in society.

5. Ethical Reasoning and Character Formation

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, education is fundamentally an ethical enterprise oriented toward the formation of character rather than the mere accumulation of knowledge. Krishna’s pedagogical intervention consistently centres on *dharma*, which the text presents not as a fixed or externally imposed code of conduct but as a context-sensitive and reflective ethical responsibility. Dharma, in this sense, demands discernment, self-awareness, and responsiveness to situational complexity rather than blind adherence to rules.

Arjuna’s learning trajectory illustrates this ethical pedagogy in action. His initial state of moral paralysis is not resolved through prescriptive instruction but through sustained ethical reflection that enables him to reclaim agency. The culmination of learning is marked by Arjuna’s ability to act with clarity, responsibility, and inner conviction. This shift from confusion to conscious ethical choice underscores the *Gītā*’s emphasis on empowered moral agency as the ultimate goal of education.

Such an ethical orientation aligns closely with the objectives of NEP 2020, which foregrounds value



education, responsible citizenship, and constitutional ethics as central educational outcomes. By engaging learners in ethical reasoning rather than moral indoctrination, the *Gītā* offers pedagogical resources for cultivating integrity, resilience, empathy, and social accountability. This approach resists the instrumentalization of education for purely economic ends and reaffirms its role in nurturing morally grounded individuals capable of ethical decision-making in complex social realities.

6. Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice: A NEP 2020–Aligned Model

Reconceptualizing the *Bhagavad Gītā* as an indigenous pedagogical text opens significant possibilities for curriculum design and classroom practice. Importantly, this engagement does not require the text to be taught as religious doctrine. Instead, its pedagogical principles can be integrated thematically and methodologically across disciplines, fostering interdisciplinary learning aligned with NEP 2020’s competency-based framework.

6.1 Classroom Application Model Linked to NEP 2020 Competencies

1. Dialogic Learning and Critical Thinking

Drawing inspiration from the Krishna–Arjuna dialogue, classroom pedagogy can be structured around guided dialogic sessions that foreground questioning, reasoning, and ethical deliberation. For instance, teachers may introduce a thematic question—such as the tension between personal emotion and social responsibility—and facilitate small-group discussions where learners articulate, challenge, and refine their viewpoints. The instructor assumes the role of a facilitator rather than an authoritative source, encouraging multiple perspectives and reflective listening. Such dialogic practices directly support NEP 2020 competencies related to critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, and learner agency.

2. Ethical Case-Based Learning

Ethical dilemmas presented in the *Bhagavad Gītā* can be adapted into case-based learning modules relevant to contemporary contexts. For example, Arjuna’s conflict between duty and compassion can be reframed as a modern professional or civic dilemma involving conflicting responsibilities. Students may be asked to analyse the situation, identify ethical principles involved, and propose reasoned courses of action. These activities cultivate problem-solving abilities, ethical reasoning, and civic consciousness, aligning closely with NEP 2020’s emphasis on applied learning and responsible citizenship.

3. Reflective and Experiential Learning Modules

Reflective practices inspired by the *Gītā* can be incorporated through learning journals, guided self-reflection prompts, or short contemplative exercises at the conclusion of lessons. Students may reflect on questions



such as the relationship between intention and action or the role of self-awareness in decision-making. Such experiential activities promote emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and mental well-being, supporting NEP 2020's focus on holistic development and socio-emotional learning.

4. Value Education and Leadership Formation

The *Gītā*'s emphasis on selfless action (*niṣkāma karma*) and ethical responsibility provides a valuable framework for leadership and value education. Classroom activities may include leadership reflection tasks, service-learning projects, or role-based simulations that require learners to make decisions balancing personal interest and collective welfare. These practices encourage learners to conceptualize leadership as ethical service rather than authority, aligning with NEP 2020's vision of education that nurtures integrity, accountability, and social engagement.

Through these pedagogical applications, the *Bhagavad Gītā* operates as a dynamic educational resource that informs teaching strategies and learning outcomes while remaining responsive to contemporary educational goals. Such an approach ensures that indigenous pedagogical insights are meaningfully integrated into classroom practice without reducing the text to a static or canonical artifact.

7. Theoretical Synthesis: Bridging Indigenous Pedagogy and Contemporary Education

The pedagogical philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gītā* offers a coherent indigenous framework that integrates epistemological, ethical, and experiential dimensions of learning. At the epistemological level, knowledge is dialogic and reflective rather than transmissive. At the ethical level, learning is oriented toward character formation and moral agency. At the experiential level, education unfolds through engagement with action, emotion, and responsibility.

NEP 2020 provides a contemporary policy framework that enables the meaningful integration of such indigenous pedagogical insights into formal education. The convergence between the *Gītā*'s educational vision and NEP 2020's objectives suggests that indigenous knowledge traditions are not peripheral to modern education but central to its renewal. Together, they offer an alternative educational paradigm that resists fragmentation, instrumentalism, and ethical neutrality.

This synthesis demonstrates that the revitalization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems is not merely an act of cultural preservation but a strategic intervention in reimagining education as a holistic, ethical, and learner-centred enterprise. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, when engaged pedagogically, thus becomes a critical interlocutor in shaping educational thought and practice in the twenty-first century.



Conclusion

This study has examined the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a foundational source of indigenous pedagogy and demonstrated its pedagogical consonance with the transformative vision articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. By approaching the *Gītā* as an educational text rather than a theological prescription, the paper has shown that classical Indian philosophical traditions offer coherent pedagogical frameworks capable of informing contemporary educational reform. The convergence between indigenous epistemology and modern policy discourse underscores the continuing relevance of traditional knowledge systems within formal education.

At the level of pedagogy, the *Gītā* articulates a model of learning grounded in dialogue, reflection, ethical deliberation, and experiential engagement. Knowledge, action, and affect are treated as interrelated dimensions of education, challenging reductive approaches that isolate cognitive achievement from moral and emotional development. Such an integrated pedagogical vision aligns closely with NEP 2020's emphasis on learner-centred education, interdisciplinary learning, and holistic development, while also deepening these objectives through philosophical grounding.

Philosophically, the *Bhagavad Gītā* reframes education as a process of ethical self-formation rather than instrumental skill acquisition. Its emphasis on discernment (*viveka*), responsible action (*karma*), and ethical orientation (*dharma*) positions education as a means of cultivating moral agency and social responsibility. This ethical orientation offers a critical corrective to technocratic educational models and reaffirms the normative purpose of education in shaping reflective and accountable individuals.

In synthesizing policy imperatives, pedagogical practice, and indigenous philosophical insight, this study argues that the meaningful integration of texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* can strengthen the ethical and cultural foundations of education envisioned under NEP 2020. Such integration does not represent a retreat into tradition but a dialogic engagement between inherited wisdom and contemporary educational aspirations. Recognizing indigenous pedagogical texts as active intellectual resources enables education to function not only as a vehicle for economic advancement but as a transformative force for individual and social development.



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