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Indian knowledge systems and holistic teacher education: Integrating guru–shishya parampara, yoga and contemporary pedagogical practices

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Abstract
Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer a rich, historically continuous reservoir of epistemologies, ethical frameworks, contemplative practices, and educational traditions that can deepen contemporary teacher education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly calls for the integration of Indian knowledge traditions into education, including the preparation of teachers who can nurture cognitive, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual development. This article examines how the guru–shishya parampara, yoga, and contemporary pedagogical practices can be integrated into holistic teacher education. It argues that the guru–shishya relationship, when reinterpreted through democratic, rights-based, and child-centred principles, can provide a model of mentoring marked by trust, continuity, moral responsibility, and personalised guidance. Yoga is presented not merely as physical exercise but as an integrated discipline of ethical conduct, breath regulation, attention training, self-regulation, and reflective awareness that supports teacher wellbeing and classroom climate. The article further demonstrates that IKS-informed practices can align productively with constructivism, experiential learning, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, inclusive education, and competency-based assessment. A conceptual framework is proposed comprising four interdependent domains: epistemic grounding, relational ethics, contemplative wellbeing, and pedagogical translation. The article also identifies challenges, including romanticisation of tradition, ritualism without critical reflection, inadequate teacher educator capacity, assessment difficulties, and the risk of cultural essentialism. It concludes with recommendations for curriculum design, teacher educator development, school–university partnerships, research, policy implementation, and ethical safeguards. The central claim is that holistic teacher education requires neither a rejection of modern pedagogy nor an uncritical return to tradition, but a thoughtful synthesis in which Indian knowledge traditions and contemporary educational research mutually enrich one another.

Keywords: Indian knowledge systems, guru–shishya parampara, yoga in education, holistic teacher education, contemplative pedagogy, NEP 2020, teacher wellbeing, culturally responsive pedagogy

Introduction

Teacher education occupies a decisive position in any attempt to transform education. Teachers do not merely transmit prescribed content; they shape classroom relationships, model ethical conduct, influence learners' confidence, and mediate between curriculum, community, and culture. In India, the task of preparing teachers has acquired renewed urgency because education is expected to respond simultaneously to global technological change, persistent social inequalities, environmental crises, and the need for cultural rootedness. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 [1] recognises this complexity by emphasising holistic development, foundational literacy and numeracy, equity, multilingualism, experiential learning, critical thinking, ethics, and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into all levels of education (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020) [1].

Indian Knowledge Systems refer to the diverse knowledge traditions that have developed in the Indian subcontinent over millennia, including philosophical inquiry, linguistic and grammatical analysis, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, ecology, aesthetics, architecture, governance, ethics, psychology, and contemplative practices. The Ministry of Education describes IKS as a guiding principle of NEP 2020 [1] and has supported specialised teacher-training initiatives, research centres, and interdisciplinary scholarship in areas such as yoga, Ayurveda, psychology, linguistics, environmental thought, and the arts (MoE, n.d.; Press Information Bureau, 2022) [3]. In teacher education, IKS should not be reduced to the addition of a few cultural topics to an otherwise unchanged syllabus. Rather, it invites a deeper reconsideration of what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is acquired, what relationships sustain learning, and what kind of person a teacher is expected to become.

Holistic teacher education seeks to prepare teachers who are academically competent, professionally skilled, emotionally balanced, ethically sensitive, and culturally grounded. Such preparation cannot be achieved through content mastery alone. A teacher may know the subject matter thoroughly yet be unable to listen to children, manage stress, respond inclusively to diversity, or create a classroom environment conducive to curiosity. Holistic teacher education therefore integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, moral, and contemplative dimensions of learning. It treats the teacher as a whole person whose beliefs, habits, relationships, and inner dispositions influence practice.

This article explores the integration of three interrelated elements: the guru–shishya parampara, yoga, and contemporary pedagogical practices. The guru–shishya parampara denotes a traditional relationship of guided learning between teacher and student, characterised by trust, sustained interaction, moral formation, and personalised transmission of knowledge. Yoga, in its broader classical sense, includes ethical discipline, physical postures, breath regulation, concentration, meditation, and self-knowledge. Contemporary pedagogical practices include constructivist

learning, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, social-emotional learning, technology-supported learning, and inclusive education.

The central argument is that these elements can be integrated in a balanced and critical manner. The guru–shishya parampara offers a relational and ethical model of mentorship; yoga offers practices for self-regulation, attention, wellbeing, and reflective awareness; and contemporary pedagogy offers evidence-informed methods for participation, inclusion, differentiation, and assessment. Together, they can help teacher education move beyond a narrow transmission model toward a more humane, reflective, and transformative conception of teaching.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 clarifies the meaning and scope of Indian Knowledge Systems in education. Section 3 examines the guru–shishya parampara and its possibilities and limitations for modern teacher education. Section 4 discusses yoga as an educational and contemplative resource. Section 5 reviews contemporary pedagogical practices that can be aligned with IKS. Section 6 proposes an integrative framework for holistic teacher education. Section 7 considers curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment implications. Section 8 identifies challenges and ethical safeguards. Section 9 presents recommendations, followed by a conclusion and references.

Indian Knowledge Systems: Meaning, Scope, And Educational Significance

Indian Knowledge Systems are not a single, uniform body of doctrine. They encompass plural traditions, debates, regional practices, and evolving interpretations. Sanskrit intellectual traditions, Buddhist and Jain philosophies, Bhakti and Sufi movements, tribal and folk knowledge, regional languages, artisanal practices, medical systems, ecological knowledge, musical traditions, and local educational institutions all contribute to the broader landscape of Indian knowledge. This plurality is essential: treating IKS as monolithic can obscure internal diversity and exclude marginalised communities whose knowledge has often been transmitted orally or through practice rather than through formal texts.

In educational terms, IKS includes at least four dimensions. First, it includes epistemological questions: What is knowledge? How is valid knowledge obtained? What is the relationship between reason, experience, testimony, and intuition? Indian philosophical schools developed sophisticated discussions of perception, inference, language, doubt, consciousness, and liberation. These discussions can enrich teacher education by encouraging prospective teachers to examine their own assumptions about knowledge and learning.

Second, IKS includes ethical and social thought. Concepts such as dharma, ahimsa, seva, satya, karuna, nishkama karma, and svadharma can be interpreted educationally as responsibility, non-violence, service, truthfulness, compassion, and principled action. These concepts should not be presented as rigid rules or used to justify hierarchy. Instead, they can become objects of critical reflection: How do teachers practise non-violence in classroom discipline? What does service mean in a professional relationship marked by power? How can ethical responsibility be balanced with learner autonomy?

Third, IKS includes practical and embodied knowledge. Yoga, Ayurveda, traditional ecological knowledge, crafts, agriculture, architecture, music, dance, theatre, and oral traditions demonstrate that knowledge is not only propositional. It is also embodied, contextual, aesthetic, and community-based. For teacher education, this supports experiential learning, project work, local knowledge integration, and respect for learners' cultural resources.

Fourth, IKS includes contemplative and psychological traditions. Practices of attention, meditation, self-observation, breath awareness, and ethical reflection appear across multiple Indian traditions. These practices are relevant to teacher education because teaching demands sustained attention, emotional regulation, empathy, patience, and the capacity to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

NEP 2020 provides an important policy foundation for incorporating these dimensions. The policy recognises India's ancient and enduring knowledge traditions and calls for their inclusion in curricula, research, and teacher preparation (MoE, 2020). The establishment of the IKS Division and IKS centres reflects an institutional effort to promote interdisciplinary research and educational applications in fields including health, wellness, psychology, language, environment, arts, and traditional knowledge (Press Information Bureau, 2022) [3]. However, policy intent must be translated carefully into classroom practice. The purpose of IKS in teacher education is not to replace modern science or democratic pedagogy with tradition. It is to create a dialogue between tradition and modernity in which both are critically examined.

A mature IKS-based teacher education programme should therefore uphold three principles. First, authenticity: traditions should be studied through credible sources, practitioners, languages, and contexts rather than through superficial symbols. Second, criticality: learners should be encouraged to ask historical, social, and ethical questions about traditions, including issues of caste, gender, exclusion, and authority. Third, relevance: IKS should be connected to the actual challenges faced by teachers, such as classroom diversity, student mental health, assessment pressure, environmental education, and professional identity.

Guru–Shishya Parampara: Reinterpreting A Relational Tradition

The Guru–Shishya Parampara is one of the most recognisable features of Indian educational heritage. In its classical forms, the guru was not simply an instructor who delivered information. The guru was a guide who embodied knowledge, demonstrated ethical conduct, and supported the student's intellectual, moral, and sometimes spiritual formation. The shishya, in turn, approached learning with humility, discipline, service, questioning, and sustained commitment. Knowledge was transmitted not only through texts and lectures but through observation, conversation, practice, correction, and lived example.

This tradition has enduring educational value because it recognises that learning is relational. Contemporary research also supports the importance of teacher–student relationships, mentoring, feedback, and a sense of belonging. Students learn better when they feel seen, respected, and supported. A beginning teacher, similarly, develops professional identity not only through coursework

but through sustained interaction with mentors who model reflection, ethical judgement, and resilience.

The Guru–Shishya relationship can therefore inform modern teacher education in several ways. First, it highlights mentorship. Every prospective teacher should have access to a mentor who observes their practice, provides constructive feedback, listens to their concerns, and helps them connect theory with classroom realities. Mentorship should be ongoing rather than limited to a brief teaching-practice episode. It should include lesson observation, reflective dialogue, joint planning, analysis of student learning, and support during difficult professional moments.

Second, the tradition emphasizes embodied teaching. A guru teaches not only by explaining but by living certain values. In modern terms, this corresponds to professional modelling. Teacher educators demonstrate respect when they listen carefully to student teachers; they demonstrate inquiry when they acknowledge uncertainty; they demonstrate inclusion when they respond equitably to diverse learners. Prospective teachers learn as much from the hidden curriculum of teacher education institutions as from the stated curriculum.

Third, guru–shishya parampara underscores personalised guidance. Classical education often adapted instruction to the learner's readiness, temperament, and stage of development. Contemporary differentiated instruction expresses a similar concern in democratic and inclusive language. Teacher education can use this alignment to prepare teachers who notice individual differences, adapt tasks, provide multiple means of representation and expression, and avoid treating all learners as identical.

Fourth, the tradition values dialogue and questioning. Although popular imagination sometimes portrays the shishya as passive, many Indian intellectual traditions actively encouraged debate, argument, and inquiry. Upanishadic dialogues, Buddhist philosophical debates, Nyaya methods of reasoning, and scholastic commentarial traditions all show that questioning has deep roots in Indian knowledge cultures. Teacher education should recover this dialogical dimension. Prospective teachers should be trained to ask open-ended questions, encourage children's reasoning, welcome multiple perspectives, and treat errors as opportunities for learning.

However, the Guru–Shishya Parampara must be reinterpreted critically. Historical and social realities cannot be ignored. In some settings, the guru's authority was excessive, hierarchical, gendered, caste-bound, or resistant to questioning. A modern educational institution cannot reproduce uncritical obedience, corporal punishment, discrimination, or the suppression of student voice. The ethical test of any revival of guru–shishya parampara is whether it strengthens learner dignity, autonomy, and wellbeing.

A democratic reinterpretation therefore replaces unilateral authority with relational responsibility. The teacher remains a guide, but the learner is recognised as a rights-bearing person with agency. Feedback remains rigorous, but it is respectful and developmental. Discipline remains important, but it is based on understanding, restorative practices, and self-regulation rather than fear. Knowledge transmission remains valuable, but it is combined with inquiry, collaboration, and co-construction.

In teacher education, this reinterpretation can be operationalised through mentoring contracts, reflective journals, peer observation, case discussions, and structured feedback. For example, a student teacher may keep a weekly reflective journal in which they record a classroom incident, analyse their emotional response, consider alternative actions, and discuss the case with a mentor. The mentor does not merely evaluate performance; the mentor helps the student teacher develop professional judgement. This is a contemporary form of guru–shishya learning: relational, reflective, ethical, and growth-oriented.

Yoga in Holistic Teacher Education

Yoga is often misunderstood as a set of physical postures. While asanas are an important component, classical yoga is a comprehensive discipline concerned with the transformation of attention, conduct, breath, mind, and self-understanding. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras present yoga through ethical restraints and observances, posture, breath control, withdrawal of senses, concentration, meditation, and absorption. This broader understanding makes yoga especially relevant to teacher education, where the teacher's inner state directly affects classroom interactions.

Teaching is emotionally demanding. Teachers face large class sizes, curriculum pressure, administrative responsibilities, diverse learner needs, parental expectations, and, in many contexts, limited resources. Stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced empathy can negatively affect both teachers and students. Yoga-based practices may support teacher wellbeing by cultivating breath regulation, body awareness, relaxation, concentration, and reflective distance from automatic reactions. These practices do not eliminate structural problems such as excessive workload or inadequate staffing, but they can strengthen teachers' capacity to respond constructively within challenging conditions.

A yoga-informed teacher education curriculum can include several components.

First, Ethical Reflection: Yamas and Niyamas can be discussed as professional ethics. Ahimsa can be connected to non-violent classroom management; satya to honest feedback and academic integrity; asteya to respect for learners' time, ideas, and property; brahmacharya to balanced use of attention and energy; and aparigraha to simplicity and avoidance of materialistic competition. Niyamas such as shaucha, santosha, tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara-pranidhana can be interpreted as cleanliness and orderly environments, contentment without complacency, disciplined effort, self-study, and humility before larger purposes.

Second, Asana and Movement: Simple, safe, inclusive physical practices can improve body awareness, posture, and stress release. These should be adapted for different abilities, body types, health conditions, and cultural comfort levels. The aim is not performance or flexibility competition but embodied awareness and wellbeing.

Third, Pranayama and Breath Awareness: Slow, regulated breathing practices can help prospective teachers notice the physiological signs of stress and regain composure. Breath awareness can be used before teaching practice, during stressful interactions, or at the beginning of reflective sessions. Teacher educators should ensure that

such practices are taught safely and do not replace professional mental-health support where needed.

Fourth, Dharana and Dhyana: Attention and meditation practices can strengthen the capacity to remain present. In classrooms, presence is pedagogically significant. A teacher who is mentally present notices a child's confusion, hears a disrespectful comment, senses rising conflict, and recognises moments of curiosity. Mindfulness-based and contemplative practices have been increasingly studied in education for their potential to support attention, emotional regulation, and prosocial behaviour. Yoga can contribute to this broader field while retaining its own philosophical and ethical depth.

Fifth, Svadhyaya and Reflective Practice: Self-study is central both to yoga and to reflective teaching. Prospective teachers can maintain journals, record and analyse short teaching episodes, examine their biases, and explore the relationship between their values and their actions. For instance, a student teacher who becomes irritated when students speak out of turn may use reflective practice to ask: What need is being expressed? What assumption am I making? What response would preserve both order and dignity? Such inquiry turns yoga from a private routine into a professional disposition.

Yoga should also be integrated into the education of children through teachers. A teacher trained in yoga-informed self-regulation can introduce short, age-appropriate practices such as mindful breathing, gentle stretching, silence, gratitude reflection, or body scan exercises. These practices may support classroom climate, transition management, emotional literacy, and attention. However, schools must be sensitive to religious diversity, consent, physical safety, and cultural context. Yoga in public education should be presented as a secular, voluntary, health-and-wellness-oriented practice where appropriate, while respecting the beliefs of all students and families.

The deepest contribution of yoga to teacher education may be the cultivation of equanimity. A teacher with equanimity is not indifferent to injustice or student suffering. Rather, equanimity is the capacity to remain steady, observant, and compassionate amid difficulty. It allows a teacher to respond to provocation without humiliation, to failure without despair, and to success without arrogance. In this sense, yoga supports the moral core of teaching.

Contemporary Pedagogical Practices and Their Alignment with IKS

Contemporary pedagogy emphasizes active learning, understanding, participation, inclusion, and evidence-informed decision-making. Constructivism holds that learners actively construct meaning by connecting new information with prior knowledge and experience. Social constructivism adds that knowledge is developed through social interaction, language, collaboration, and cultural tools. Inquiry-based learning positions learners as investigators who pose questions, gather evidence, interpret findings, and communicate conclusions. Experiential learning emphasises concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. These approaches resonate strongly with Indian traditions of dialogue, debate, observation, and self-inquiry.

The Guru–Shishya Parampara can enrich these methods by adding depth to the teacher's role. In inquiry-based learning, the teacher is not absent; the teacher designs questions, models thinking, provides timely guidance, and helps learners reflect on their process. This is consistent with a modernised guru role: less authoritarian, more facilitative, but still responsible for intellectual and ethical guidance.

Yoga aligns with contemporary pedagogy through attention and self-regulation. Learning requires working memory, sustained attention, emotional control, and metacognition. Short contemplative practices can prepare learners for focused work. Teachers can begin a lesson with one minute of silent breathing, use a brief pause after a difficult question, or end with reflective journaling. These practices are not substituting for good instructional design; they are supports that help students access learning.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is another important point of alignment. This approach recognises that students bring cultural knowledge, languages, family practices, and community experiences into the classroom. IKS can help teachers value local knowledge, oral traditions, regional languages, crafts, ecological practices, and community histories. For example, a science teacher might explore traditional water-management practices alongside modern hydrology; a mathematics teacher might use local architectural patterns, textiles, or market practices to teach geometry and measurement; a language teacher might draw upon folk narratives, proverbs, and regional oral traditions while developing critical literacy.

Inclusive education requires teachers to identify and remove barriers to participation. IKS-informed teacher education should explicitly address casteism, patriarchy, ableism, linguistic exclusion, religious discrimination, and economic inequality. A holistic approach cannot celebrate heritage while ignoring historical exclusions. Prospective teachers should learn how to create classrooms where Dalit, Adivasi, minority, gender-diverse, disabled, and economically disadvantaged learners experience dignity and belonging. This requires anti-discriminatory pedagogy, accessible materials, universal design for learning, and critical examination of curriculum content.

Formative assessment is also compatible with IKS. Assessment should not be reduced to high-stakes examinations. Continuous observation, portfolios, self-assessment, peer feedback, performance tasks, and reflective journals can capture the development of understanding, values, and practical competence. In a guru–shishya-inspired model, feedback is diagnostic and relational: it identifies strengths, names next steps, and preserves the learner's motivation. In a contemporary assessment framework, feedback must also be transparent, criterion-referenced, and free from bias.

Technology can support this integration when used thoughtfully. Digital platforms can provide access to primary texts, translations, lectures, virtual museum resources, language-learning tools, and collaborative projects. However, technology should not replace embodied practice, human relationship, or local engagement. A teacher education programme might use technology to document reflective practice, share classroom artefacts, connect rural and urban student teachers, or create digital portfolios, while preserving face-to-face mentoring and community-based learning.

An Integrative Framework for Holistic Teacher Education

The integration of IKS, guru–shishya parampara, yoga, and contemporary pedagogy can be organised through four interdependent domains: epistemic grounding, relational ethics, contemplative wellbeing, and pedagogical translation.

Epistemic grounding refers to prospective teachers' understanding of knowledge itself. Student teachers should study Indian epistemologies alongside modern theories of learning. They should examine questions such as: How do perception, inference, testimony, and experience contribute to knowledge? How do language and culture shape understand? What is the relationship between local knowledge and scientific knowledge? How can teachers avoid both uncritical acceptance and dismissive rejection of traditional knowledge? Epistemic grounding helps teachers become intellectually humble and curious.

Relational ethics refers to the quality of relationships within educational settings. Drawing on guru–shishya parampara, this domain emphasises trust, respect, responsibility, dialogue, and care. It also incorporates democratic values, child rights, gender equality, inclusion, and professional boundaries. Relational ethics asks future teachers to consider power carefully. A teacher has authority over grades, discipline, attention, and recognition; ethical practice requires using that authority to enable learner agency rather than to produce dependence or fear.

Contemplative wellbeing refers to the teacher's inner capacities: attention, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, and self-awareness. Yoga provides a structured set of practices for developing these capacities. This domain should include regular, safe, and voluntary practice as well as theoretical study. It should also connect personal wellbeing with professional ethics. A teacher who regulates their own stress is better positioned to avoid punitive reactions and to respond to students with patience.

Pedagogical translation refers to the ability to convert these foundations into classroom practice. A teacher may understand constructivism, respect cultural diversity, and practise meditation, yet still struggle to design an inclusive lesson. Pedagogical translation involves lesson planning, questioning, differentiation, assessment, classroom management, community engagement, and use of local resources. It is the bridge between vision and action.

These four domains can be developed through a spiral curriculum. In the first year of a teacher education programme, student teachers might study foundational IKS concepts, participate in introductory yoga and reflective practice, and observe classrooms with a focus on relationships and inclusion. In the second year, they might apply these ideas through micro-teaching, case analysis, community-based projects, and school internship. In the final phase, they might conduct action research: identify a classroom problem, design an IKS-informed intervention, implement it, collect evidence, reflect, and revise. This spiral ensures that IKS is not treated as a separate subject but as a living orientation to professional practice.

Consider a concrete example. A student teacher notices that children in a multigrade rural classroom are restless during the afternoon session. Instead of relying solely on punishment, the student teacher designs a ten-minute transition routine involving gentle stretching, guided breathing, and a brief reflective question. The mentor helps the student teacher observe whether the routine improves engagement and reduces disruptive behaviour. The student teacher also examines whether the practice is culturally appropriate, voluntary, safe, and inclusive. This simple example shows the integration of yoga, reflective mentorship, classroom management, assessment, and ethical sensitivity.

Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment in Teacher Education

A holistic IKS-informed teacher education curriculum should include both compulsory and elective components. Core components might include: foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems; educational philosophy East and West; child development and learning; inclusive education; language, culture, and society; yoga and contemplative practice; professional ethics; pedagogy of school subjects; assessment; and school internship. Electives might include Indian aesthetics and arts education, traditional ecological knowledge, Sanskrit or classical language studies, Indian psychology, Ayurveda and health education, folk pedagogies, and comparative philosophy.

Pedagogy within teacher education should model the practices it advocates. Lectures may be necessary for introducing concepts, but they should be combined with discussion, debate, case studies, role-play, field visits, reflective journals, collaborative projects, and practicum experiences. If teacher educators want student teachers to become dialogic, they must experience dialogue. If they want them to value local knowledge, they must engage with communities. If they want them to practise inclusion, teacher education classrooms must themselves be accessible and equitable.

Assessment should measure more than recall. It should assess understanding, application, reflection, ethical reasoning, and professional growth. Possible assessment tasks include: a reflective portfolio connecting yoga practice with classroom experiences; an analysis of a traditional knowledge practice and its educational potential; a lesson plan integrating local cultural resources; a case study on inclusive classroom management; a peer-teaching episode with structured feedback; and an action-research report. Rubrics should make expectations clear and should assess both quality of thought and sensitivity to learners' diverse needs.

School internship is especially important. Student teachers should not merely perform routine lessons; they should be mentored to observe, question, and improve practice. Internship seminars can provide space to discuss difficult incidents, ethical dilemmas, stress, classroom diversity, and community expectations. Mentors in schools need preparation too. They should understand the aims of holistic teacher education and be able to provide feedback that is specific, respectful, and developmental.

Language policy is another curricular consideration. India's linguistic diversity is a resource, not an obstacle. Teacher education should prepare teachers to use learners' home languages as bridges to learning, while also developing proficiency in languages of wider communication. Multilingual pedagogy, translation, code-switching, and culturally familiar examples can make learning more meaningful. IKS can support this by validating the intellectual value of regional languages and oral traditions.

Finally, teacher educator development is essential. Many teacher educators may have limited formal exposure to IKS, yoga philosophy, or contemplative pedagogy. Professional development should therefore include study days, residential workshops, collaborative research, partnerships with IKS centres, and opportunities to learn from scholars, practitioners, and community knowledge holders. Teacher educators should also be trained to handle controversial or sensitive topics with balance, historical accuracy, and respect for pluralism.

Challenges and Ethical Safeguards

The integration of IKS into teacher education faces several challenges. The first is romanticisation. Traditions may be idealised as uniformly wise, harmonious, and scientific, while their historical complexities and exclusions are ignored. This can produce a superficial cultural pride rather than genuine understanding. A rigorous approach requires historical study, textual literacy, engagement with practitioners, and attention to debate within traditions.

The second challenge is ritualism without reflection. Practices such as chanting, ritual greeting, or symbolic observance may be included without any connection to learning, ethics, or pedagogy. Such practices may create an appearance of cultural integration while leaving teaching unchanged. IKS integration should be judged by whether it improves understanding, relationships, wellbeing, inclusion, and professional practice.

The third challenge is cultural essentialism. Indian society is plural. Treating "Indian culture" as a single essence can marginalise Adivasi, Dalit, minority, regional, and women's perspectives. Teacher education should present IKS as plural and contested. It should include voices that have historically been excluded and should encourage students to examine power within knowledge traditions.

The fourth challenge is the misuse of tradition to justify hierarchy. The language of respect for the guru can be distorted into demands for unquestioning obedience. This is incompatible with democratic education and child rights. Teacher education must clearly distinguish between respectful mentorship and authoritarian control. Feedback, correction, and discipline are legitimate; humiliation, fear, discrimination, and suppression of dissent are not.

The fifth challenge is inadequate capacity and resources. Teacher education institutions vary widely in faculty expertise, library resources, infrastructure, and school partnerships. Introducing yoga or IKS without trained educators can lead to poor-quality or unsafe practice. Institutions should invest in faculty development, qualified yoga professionals, safe spaces, accessible materials, and partnerships with universities and IKS centres.

The sixth challenge is assessment and evidence. Claims that yoga or IKS-based practices improve learning must be examined carefully. Well-designed research should consider context, dosage, fidelity of implementation, participant consent, and multiple outcomes, including academic learning, wellbeing, classroom climate, and equity. Anecdotal enthusiasm should not replace evidence.

Ethical safeguards should therefore include informed consent, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity, religious neutrality in public institutions, physical safety, mental-health referral pathways, and attention to power dynamics. Yoga practices should be adapted for students with disabilities and health conditions. Contemplative practices should not be imposed. Discussions of caste, gender, religion, and region should be facilitated with care and scholarly balance.

Recommendations

First: Teacher Education Curricula should include a foundational course on Indian Knowledge Systems that is historical, plural, critical, and practice-oriented. The course should examine philosophy, language, arts, science, ecology, ethics, and education, while addressing social exclusion and internal diversity.

Second: Guru–Shishya-Inspired mentorship should be institutionalized. Every student teacher should have a trained mentor throughout the programme. Mentorship should include classroom observation, reflective dialogue, feedback, emotional support, and guidance on professional ethics. Mentors should be prepared for this role through structured training.

Third: Yoga should be integrated as a compulsory but flexible component of teacher wellbeing and professional development. It should include ethical reflection, breath awareness, safe movement, attention practices, and reflective self-study. Participation should be adapted to individual needs, and coercion or religious imposition must be avoided.

Fourth: Teacher Education Institutions should adopt contemplative and reflective pedagogy. This may include beginning-of-class grounding practices, reflective journals, case discussions, silence-based reflection, peer feedback, and mindfulness-based approaches to classroom challenges. Such practices should be linked explicitly to teaching competence.

Fifth: School–University–Community partnerships should be strengthened. Student teachers should engage with local knowledge holders, artisans, farmers, health practitioners, artists, and community educators. Such engagement should be reciprocal and respectful, not extractive. Communities should be recognised as partners in knowledge production.

Sixth: Assessment Systems should include portfolios, reflective journals, performance tasks, peer assessment, and action research. These methods can capture holistic growth better than written examinations alone. Rubrics should assess ethical reasoning, cultural responsiveness, inclusive practice, and reflective capacity.

Seventh: Teacher Educators require sustained professional development. Institutions should organise workshops on IKS, yoga, inclusive pedagogy, contemplative education, and research methods. Collaboration with IKS centres, universities, and practising schools can improve quality and credibility.

Eighth: Research should be encouraged on the impact of IKS-informed teacher education. Studies should examine teacher wellbeing, classroom climate, student engagement, inclusion, professional identity, and learning outcomes. Research should use mixed methods and should pay attention to context, equity, and long-term effects.

Ninth: Policy Implementation should provide resources, not only directives. This includes faculty positions, curriculum frameworks, digital repositories, translation support, library resources, safe practice spaces, and funding for school partnerships. Without resources, IKS integration risks becoming symbolic.

Tenth: An Ethics Charter should guide IKS integration. It should affirm dignity, equality, and freedom of conscience, inclusion, evidence, safety, and critical inquiry. The charter should make clear that revival of tradition must strengthen, rather than weaken, democratic and rights-based education.

Conclusion

Indian Knowledge Systems offer teacher education a valuable opportunity to recover dimensions of learning that narrow, examination-centred models often neglect: relationship, embodiment, ethical formation, attention, wellbeing, cultural rootedness, and reflective wisdom. The guru–shishya parampara, critically reinterpreted, provides a model of mentorship based on trust, dialogue, responsibility, and sustained guidance. Yoga provides practical resources for self-regulation, presence, compassion, and professional resilience. Contemporary pedagogy provides methods for active learning, inclusion, differentiation, assessment, and evidence-based improvement.

The challenge is to integrate these resources without romanticising the past or abandoning the achievements of modern education. Holistic teacher education should prepare teachers who can think critically, teach inclusively, care ethically, regulate themselves wisely, and connect classrooms with communities and cultures. Such teachers will be better equipped to nurture not only academic achievement but also the full human development of learners.

Ultimately, the integration of IKS into teacher education is not about replacing one knowledge system with another. It is about creating a dialogue in which Indian traditions, democratic values, scientific inquiry, and contemporary pedagogical research inform one another. When this dialogue is conducted with rigour, humility, and ethical clarity, it can help India develop teachers who are professionally competent, culturally grounded, emotionally balanced, and deeply committed to the wellbeing and dignity of every learner.

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