

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The education of young minds plays a critical role in shaping the intellectual, cultural, and ethical foundations of a nation. In India, the early years of formal education, especially through textbooks approved by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), form the bedrock for introducing children to the world around them. The NCERT's Class 3 Environmental Studies textbook, titled *Our Wondrous World*, is one such foundational text. It is designed not only to provide basic environmental awareness but also to help children make sense of their surroundings, community, and natural resources in a simplified yet engaging manner. The textbook introduces children to key concepts through four thematic units: Our Families and Communities, Life Around Us, Gifts of Nature, and Things Around Us. These units reflect an effort to connect the child's immediate environment with broader ecological and social understanding.[1] As India moves towards implementing the holistic vision outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a critical question arises: does this textbook sufficiently reflect and integrate the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)? Indian Knowledge Systems refer to the diverse and ancient intellectual traditions that have developed in the Indian subcontinent over millennia. This includes indigenous sciences, environmental ethics, traditional crafts and technologies, linguistic heritage, oral narratives, spiritual philosophies, and cultural practices rooted in local contexts. The NEP 2020 strongly emphasizes the integration of IKS into the educational framework to foster a sense of rootedness, cultural pride, and cognitive pluralism in learners. As such, educational materials at all levels, especially those designed for early education, must be critically evaluated for the extent to which they reflect the values, wisdom, and lived experiences embedded within India's traditional knowledge systems. The current study stems from this imperative. *Our Wondrous World*, as a textbook intended for Grade 3 students, plays a pivotal role in shaping how young learners perceive their environment, society, and cultural norms. Given its significance as a developmental text for early learners, it is essential to examine whether it aligns with the NEP's vision by incorporating traditional Indian wisdom. For instance, are children introduced to local agricultural practices, traditional water conservation techniques, or folklore and festivals that explain ecological balance? Are Indian metaphysical concepts such as the Panchamahabhutas (the five elements) discussed when teaching about nature? Is indigenous terminology used alongside scientific terms to reflect the multilingual and multicultural fabric of India? These are some of the critical questions that this study seeks to answer. The importance of such an evaluation lies in the broader context of decolonizing the Indian education system.[2] Post-independence, the Indian curriculum largely retained Eurocentric narratives and frameworks that marginalized local knowledge. As a result, generations of students have grown up with a fragmented or limited understanding of their own heritage, often viewing it as inferior or unscientific. Integrating IKS into mainstream textbooks is not only about inclusion—it is also about validating and

revitalizing a knowledge system that has sustained diverse ecosystems, communities, and civilisations across centuries. For young learners, exposure to such knowledge can instill a sense of belonging, respect for local traditions, and a deeper connection with the land and its people. This analysis is timely, as NCERT has recently urged all schools to adopt the updated Our Wondrous World textbook from September 2024 onwards. This revision is part of a broader curricular transformation aimed at modernizing teaching methodologies while grounding education in Indian ethos. However, modernization should not equate to Westernization or the erasure of local contexts.[3] It must be an inclusive process that respects India's civilizational diversity and intellectual wealth. A systematic review of this textbook from the lens of IKS is therefore both necessary and constructive, ensuring that the updated curriculum does not replicate past exclusions but instead paves the way for a more culturally responsive pedagogy. This study aims to explore how well the Class 3 textbook integrates IKS elements such as traditional ecological knowledge, cultural rituals, community-based learning, folklore, and ethical practices. It will analyze each thematic unit for content that reflects Indian ways of knowing and being, identifying gaps where such integration is minimal or absent. Through this examination, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on curriculum reform, indigenous inclusion, and the development of educational resources that are both pedagogically sound and culturally affirming. The purpose of this study is not merely to critique but to offer constructive insights that can guide future textbook development and educational policymaking. As India envisions an education system that is globally competent yet deeply rooted in its traditions, early education must reflect this vision in spirit and substance. By critically examining Our Wondrous World from an Indian Knowledge System perspective, this research seeks to affirm the value of indigenous knowledge in shaping young minds and building a more inclusive and culturally vibrant educational landscape. [4]

## **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Education has always played a transformative role in shaping the cognitive, ethical, and cultural orientations of individuals and societies. In the Indian context, primary education serves as the foundation upon which a child's worldview is built. Textbooks used in early schooling are particularly influential in constructing a child's understanding of their surroundings, community, and environment. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), as the apex body responsible for developing school curricula in India, has been instrumental in producing textbooks that align with national educational goals. Among these, the Environmental Studies (EVS) textbook for Class 3, titled Our Wondrous World, holds special significance. It introduces children to the world they live in through themes like family, nature, society, and objects around them. While the textbook aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of environmental and

social phenomena, it becomes essential to question how effectively it incorporates the rich intellectual and cultural heritage of India, particularly through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).[5]( et al., 2023)

Indian Knowledge Systems represent an extensive and multifaceted body of knowledge developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years. This includes traditional sciences like Ayurveda, astronomy, agriculture, water management techniques, artistic practices, oral traditions, and ethical philosophies. IKS emphasizes harmony between humans and nature, the importance of community and familial structures, and sustainable living rooted in local contexts. These systems are not merely historical artifacts but represent living traditions that continue to be practiced across rural and urban India. Integrating such knowledge into school education can help foster cultural pride, environmental sensitivity, and cognitive plurality in learners. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to decolonize education in India by moving beyond Eurocentric frameworks and incorporating indigenous perspectives. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates for the inclusion of IKS in curricula across school and higher education levels, aiming to make education more holistic, experiential, and rooted in Indian ethos. [6]

Despite these policy directives, there remains a gap between intention and implementation. Textbooks often continue to reflect generic, globalized content that lacks contextual grounding in Indian traditions and lived realities. The Our Wondrous World textbook, introduced with the intention of updating pedagogical approaches and content, presents an opportunity to evaluate whether the newer curriculum addresses this gap. It is essential to assess the extent to which the textbook incorporates elements such as local agricultural practices, traditional festivals and their ecological significance, water conservation methods like stepwells and tanks, stories from Indian folklore, and concepts from Indian philosophy that promote environmental ethics and communal living. Children at the age of 8 or 9, typically in Class 3, are at a developmental stage where their cognitive abilities are expanding rapidly, and they are capable of understanding nuanced social and environmental relationships. This stage also marks a critical period in identity formation and value internalization. Hence, exposing them to India's traditional wisdom through textbooks can have a profound impact on how they relate to their heritage, nature, and society. Moreover, using culturally relevant materials helps bridge the gap between home and school learning, making education more relatable and meaningful. [7]

Therefore, this study becomes pertinent in examining whether Our Wondrous World succeeds in fulfilling the NEP's vision by embedding Indian Knowledge Systems within its content. It aims to investigate whether the textbook moves beyond superficial mentions of festivals and customs to offer a deeper engagement with indigenous knowledge and environmental wisdom. A comprehensive content analysis of the textbook can illuminate how far educational resources have come in representing Indian traditions and where further interventions are necessary. In doing so, the research contributes to the national conversation on educational

reform, curriculum localization, and the need for early pedagogical materials that are not only informative but also rooted in the values and worldviews of the Indian civilization. [8]

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

### **A Study of NCERT Class 3<sup>rd</sup> Textbook of Indian Knowledge System Perspectives.**

## **1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The increasing recognition of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in national educational policies, particularly in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, marks a transformative shift in the pedagogical orientation of Indian schooling. The NEP explicitly advocates for the inclusion of traditional Indian knowledge—ranging from indigenous sciences, ecological wisdom, and health practices to folk traditions, ethics, and cultural narratives—into mainstream education. This shift acknowledges the need to decolonize the curriculum and provide students with a more holistic, culturally relevant, and rooted educational experience. Against this backdrop, examining the foundational textbooks used at the primary level becomes essential, as these are often the first structured encounters children have with knowledge systems and worldviews. The Class 3 NCERT textbook *Our Wondrous World*, recently updated and circulated as part of a national curriculum revision initiative, presents an important case for evaluating how IKS is introduced to young learners at an early stage of their schooling.

Primary education forms the bedrock upon which all future learning is built. Textbooks at this level do more than impart factual knowledge—they shape cognitive frameworks, instill values, and influence identity formation. Given the sensitivity of this developmental phase, the absence or superficial inclusion of indigenous perspectives could lead to a disconnection between learners and their own cultural heritage. As India seeks to promote a more inclusive and context-sensitive model of education, it becomes imperative to assess whether such policy-level intentions are being translated effectively at the classroom level. The rationale for this study stems from the urgent need to bridge the gap between educational theory and practice by analyzing one of the key tools of pedagogy—the textbook—through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems. Many studies have examined the influence of Eurocentric models on Indian textbooks, often highlighting a skewed representation of history, science, and culture. However, relatively fewer studies have critically analyzed the presence or absence of IKS in primary-level educational materials. This research intends to fill that gap by focusing specifically on the content structure and thematic progression of the Class 3 EVS textbook. It aims to uncover whether the material fosters an appreciation of traditional knowledge, local ecological practices, ethical philosophies from Indian traditions, and cultural narratives that have been passed

down for generations. Doing so will help educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to better understand the current state of IKS integration and identify potential areas for improvement. The rationale also draws strength from the belief that education should empower children to see their cultural background as a source of knowledge and strength. When young learners are exposed to Indian worldviews, ethical practices, and indigenous science in a systematic and meaningful way, it enhances their cultural confidence and prepares them to engage with global knowledge systems on equal footing. This study, therefore, is not only an academic exercise in content analysis but also a contribution toward a larger national effort to make education more reflective of India's pluralistic, diverse, and intellectually rich traditions.

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To analyze the representation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the NCERT Class 3 textbook *Our Wondrous World*.
- To identify elements of environmental wisdom, cultural values, and traditional knowledge within the textbook's four units.
- To examine how Indian heritage, folklore, and indigenous practices are integrated into the learning material.
- To explore the extent to which the textbook promotes Indian philosophical, scientific, and ethical perspectives in early education

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- To what extent does the NCERT Class 3 textbook "Our Wondrous World" incorporate elements of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)?
- In what ways are environmental wisdom, cultural values, and traditional knowledge represented within the textbook's content?
- How are aspects of Indian heritage, folklore, and indigenous practices integrated into the learning material?
- Does the textbook promote Indian philosophical, scientific, and ethical perspectives in early education? If so, how?

## **1.6 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION**

This study is focused on critically analyzing the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the Class 3 Environmental Studies (EVS) textbook *Our Wondrous World*, published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The scope of this research is confined to a qualitative content analysis of the textbook, particularly in relation to how themes such as traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous science, cultural narratives, environmental ethics, and local practices are incorporated into the learning material. The study explores whether these components are meaningfully embedded in the four thematic units of the book: “Our Families and Communities,” “Life around Us,” “Gifts of Nature,” and “Things around Us.” It examines both the textual and visual content, including illustrations, stories, activities, and questions, to determine the depth and authenticity of IKS representation. The study does not attempt to evaluate the textbook from a general pedagogical, linguistic, or cognitive development perspective; rather, it maintains a strict focus on cultural content aligned with the Indian Knowledge System framework. Moreover, it does not assess the effectiveness of the textbook in terms of student learning outcomes or classroom implementation, as such evaluations would require empirical classroom-based or field-based research with teachers and students. Instead, the analysis remains at the level of curriculum content and theoretical alignment with the goals set by the NEP 2020 regarding the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and values in early education. Another key delimitation of the study is that it restricts its sample to a single textbook from a specific grade level—Class 3—and does not extend to other subjects or higher classes, even though similar questions could be applied to a broader range of NCERT publications. This narrow focus allows for a deeper and more concentrated investigation into a specific and timely curriculum revision initiative. Additionally, the study uses purposive sampling and excludes any non-IKS related material within the book, focusing exclusively on sections that either directly or implicitly convey indigenous knowledge. The scope of this research includes a thematic and interpretive analysis of one NCERT textbook to assess the presence and quality of IKS elements. The delimitations lie in its restricted sample size, its exclusion of classroom or learner impact analysis, and its specific focus on cultural representation rather than general educational content. These boundaries are necessary to ensure clarity and depth within the chosen research objectives, and they also provide a foundation for future studies that may expand the scope to include comparative or empirical elements.

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study lies in its timely and focused inquiry into the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) within early school education, particularly through the lens of the NCERT Class 3 Environmental Studies textbook *Our Wondrous World*. With the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 placing renewed emphasis on embedding indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, and traditional wisdom

into mainstream curricula, this study directly aligns with a national educational priority. By critically analyzing the textbook content, the study contributes to understanding how well current educational materials reflect India's diverse intellectual traditions and cultural frameworks. It provides insights into whether the foundational educational resources used by young learners are representative of their own heritage and environment, and whether they serve to build a sense of cultural identity, ecological responsibility, and rootedness in Indian values.

The findings of this study will be valuable for multiple stakeholders. For curriculum developers and textbook writers, the study will highlight strengths and gaps in current content, offering guidance on areas where IKS can be more effectively integrated without compromising academic rigor or pedagogical clarity. For policymakers, especially those involved with the implementation of the NEP 2020, the study can serve as a practical assessment of how policy intentions are manifesting in real educational content. For educators, the analysis offers a deeper understanding of how textbooks can be used not just as information carriers, but as tools for value-based, culturally grounded teaching. Moreover, for researchers and academics in education, cultural studies, and curriculum design, the study contributes to the growing body of literature that critiques, reimagines, and strengthens indigenous knowledge frameworks within formal education. In a broader context, this study supports the larger movement of decolonizing the Indian education system by questioning how far textbooks—often seen as neutral or objective—truly reflect the lived realities and wisdom of India's communities. At a time when global challenges such as climate change, sustainability, and social cohesion demand localized, ethical, and community-based responses, the relevance of traditional ecological knowledge, sustainable practices, and value-based learning becomes even more critical. Early exposure to such knowledge can shape the attitudes and behaviours of young learners in meaningful ways. The study holds significance not only in evaluating a textbook but in contributing to the vision of an education system that is holistic, inclusive, and reflective of India's civilizational depth. It supports the goal of preparing students who are not only academically proficient but also culturally aware and socially responsible.

## **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis is systematically organized into six chapters to provide a coherent and comprehensive exploration of the representation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the NCERT Class 3 textbook *Our Wondrous World*.

### **Introduction**

The first chapter introduces the study, outlining its background, statement of the problem, rationale, objectives, research questions, and scope and delimitations. It also discusses the significance of the study and provides

an overview of how the thesis is organized. This chapter sets the stage for understanding the relevance of examining Indian Knowledge Systems within early educational curricula.

### **Review of Related Literature**

This chapter surveys existing research and theoretical frameworks related to Indian Knowledge Systems, indigenous education, curriculum development, and environmental education. It critically examines scholarly works on the integration of traditional knowledge in modern textbooks and the role of the National Education Policy 2020 in promoting culturally rooted education. This chapter establishes the academic context and justifies the need for the present study.

### **Research Methodology**

Chapter 3 details the qualitative research design and methods employed for this study. It explains the purposive sampling of the NCERT Class 3 textbook, data collection procedures, and the content analysis approach. The chapter also describes the development of a coding framework based on IKS themes, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the methodology.

### **Textbook content analysis**

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis, organized according to the textbook's four thematic units. It highlights the presence, representation, and gaps of Indian Knowledge Systems in textual and visual content. The findings are interpreted in relation to the research questions, providing insights into the textbook's alignment with IKS principles.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in greater depth, comparing them with existing literature and theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2. The discussion evaluates the extent to which the textbook reflects Indian heritage, folklore, environmental ethics, and indigenous scientific knowledge. Recommendations for enhancing IKS integration in early education curricula are also proposed.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The final chapter summarizes the key findings, addresses the research objectives, and offers concluding remarks on the study's contributions to education and cultural preservation. It outlines practical recommendations for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educators. Suggestions for future research are also provided to encourage further exploration in this important area.