



The Palimpsest of Progress: Integrating Vedic Wisdom with Vision 2047 in Indian Education and Gender Policy

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ABSTRACT

A palimpsest is, by definition, a surface written upon more than once — where the old script is never wholly erased, always ghosting through the new. India's modern education and gender policy landscape is precisely such a surface. The National Education Policy 2020 and the Viksit Bharat 2047 framework write their ambitions upon a civilization whose intellectual and gender history extends back three thousand years — and the traces of that earlier writing, particularly its Vedic chapters, continue to shape what is legible, what is valorized, and what is obscured in contemporary governance discourse. This paper examines the intellectual project of integrating Vedic wisdom with Vision 2047's education and gender policy agenda, taking seriously both its potential and its risks. Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship and institutional sources available online, the paper argues that the Vedic tradition — properly read in its historical complexity rather than selectively appropriated — offers a genuinely rich resource for Indian education and gender policy: a tradition of women as Brahmavadinis and Rishikas, a Gurukula model of holistic mentored learning, and a cosmological valorization of feminine intellectual and creative power. Yet it also argues that this resource is only liberatory if it is approached critically — resisting the twin temptations of romantic primitivism and ideological instrumentalization. The paper maps the convergences and tensions between Vedic



educational philosophy and Vision 2047's policy priorities across five analytical dimensions, develops a comparative framework illustrated through two tables, and concludes with recommendations for a critically integrated policy synthesis that draws on ancient India's intellectual heritage without reproducing its historical exclusions.

1. Introduction: The Palimpsest as Analytical Frame

There is an idea, borrowed from manuscript studies and deployed with increasing frequency in postcolonial scholarship, that has particular explanatory power for understanding contemporary India's relationship to its own past. The palimpsest — the old vellum scraped and reused, where the previous text bleeds through the new — captures something important about how civilizational inheritance actually functions in public policy. It is not that the old is replaced by the new. It is not even that the old is simply preserved beneath the new. It is that the layers are in active conversation, each inflected by the other in ways that neither a purely traditionalist nor a purely modernizing reading can fully grasp.

India in 2024 is a country simultaneously reaching forward toward a centenary goal — Viksit Bharat 2047, the vision of a fully developed nation at the hundredth anniversary of independence — and reaching backward toward the Vedic and classical traditions that the National Education Policy 2020 has formally reinstated as the organizing cultural referent for a reinvigorated Indian knowledge system. These two movements are not contradictory. They are, the present paper argues, potentially mutually reinforcing — but only if the integration is undertaken with intellectual honesty about what the Vedic tradition actually contained, for whom, and under what historical conditions.

The paper focuses on two policy domains where this conversation between Vedic heritage and Vision 2047 is most consequential: education and gender policy. In education, the NEP 2020's mandate to integrate the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into curricula at all levels represents the most significant institutional commitment to Vedic and classical scholarship in post-independence India. In gender policy, the Viksit Bharat 2047 framework's designation of women — 'Nari' — as one of its four foundational GYAN pillars, alongside Garib (the poor), Yuva (youth), and Annadata (farmers), places women's empowerment at the explicit centre of national development vision (IJFMR, 2024). The question this paper pursues is: what does Vedic wisdom actually have to offer to these twin policy imperatives, and how do we access that wisdom responsibly?

2. The Vedic Educational Tradition: What Was Actually There



2.1 The Gurukula System and Its Pedagogical Philosophy

The Gurukula — the residential educational institution of the Vedic period, in which students (shishyas) lived with and learned directly from their Guru in a nature-embedded environment — represents one of the oldest documented comprehensive educational systems in human history. Its curriculum was, by any standard, ambitious: the four Vedas (Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda), philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, grammar, ethics, and a range of applied disciplines were all part of its scope (VHU, n.d.). What distinguished the Gurukula, however, was less its curriculum breadth than its pedagogical philosophy. Education in the Gurukula was understood as Vidya — an integrated pursuit of intellectual, moral, and spiritual wisdom that could not be separated into discrete compartments. The student who left the Gurukula was supposed to be not merely learned but wise — not merely knowledgeable but ethically formed.

This integration of knowledge and character formation resonates powerfully with the holistic educational vision that NEP 2020 articulates. Paragraph 4.27 of the policy envisions an education system 'deeply rooted in Indian culture' that is simultaneously 'vibrant and egalitarian' — one that develops the whole person across intellectual, ethical, and practical dimensions (Ministry of Education). The IKS framework launched by the Ministry of Education in 2023 formalized this ambition institutionally: universities are now required to ensure that at least 5% of mandated credits across all UG and PG programmes are allocated to Indian Knowledge System courses — with at least half of those credits connected to the student's major discipline (Ministry of Education, IKS).

ResearchGate (2025), in a comprehensive review of IKS and NEP 2020, captures the ambition neatly: the Indian Knowledge System comprises Jnan (knowledge), Vignan (science), and Jeevan Darshan (philosophy of life), each emerging from experience, observation, experimentation, and rigorous analysis — not from dogmatic assertion. This is, it is worth noting, an empiricist and pragmatist account of ancient Indian knowledge-making: tradition and modernity are positioned as continuous rather than antithetical. Kumar and Kishor (2024), examining NEP 2020's IKS provisions, further argue that integrating traditional wisdom helps address contemporary social problems and brings indigenous knowledge to life with the help of modern technology — a formulation that positions the Gurukula inheritance not as a museum exhibit but as an active research program.



2.2 Women in the Vedic Intellectual Tradition: The Brahavadini and Rishika Heritage

The most consistently underemphasized dimension of Vedic intellectual history — and the most directly relevant to contemporary gender policy — is the tradition of women as scholars, philosophers, and composers of sacred texts. Table 1 profiles five major figures from this tradition, mapping their primary sources, domains of scholarship, and significance for contemporary education and gender policy.

Table 1

Vedic Women Scholars, Philosophical Domains, and Contemporary Policy Relevance

Figure	Primary Source	Domain of Scholarship	Significance for Contemporary Education and Gender Policy
Gargi Vachaknavi	Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; King Janaka's Court debates	Metaphysics; nature of Brahman; the cosmic web of reality; epistemology	Demonstrates that women's participation in highest intellectual discourse was not only tolerated but institutionally recognized in Vedic society; invoked in NEP 2020's IKS framework as evidence of India's inclusive intellectual tradition
Maitreyi	Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; dialogue with Yajnavalkya	Philosophy of immortality; relationship between wealth, knowledge, and liberation	Her rejection of material wealth in favour of spiritual and intellectual pursuit resonates with holistic education goals of NEP 2020; cited as precedent for women's scholarly autonomy in Vedic IKS scholarship
Lopamudra	Rigveda (credited with hymn composition)	Vedic poetry; philosophical inquiry; sacred composition	One of the Rishikas (female seers) credited with Rigvedic hymns; evidence that women were not merely recipients of Vedic knowledge but active producers of canonical sacred texts
Apala	Rigveda	Medicinal and ritual	Demonstrates breadth of women's



Figure	Primary Source	Domain of Scholarship	Significance for Contemporary Education and Gender Policy
		knowledge; Vedic hymns to Indra	Vedic scholarship beyond philosophy to include applied natural science; supports argument for women's inclusive access to Gurukula education across disciplines
Sulabha	Mahabharata (Shanti Parva)	Advaita Vedanta; dialogue with King Janaka on renunciation and liberation	A parivrajika (wandering female scholar) who engaged Kings on equal philosophical terms; models the Brahmavadini tradition of women who pursued lifelong scholarship beyond domestic roles

Note. Compiled from Culture and Heritage (2024), VHU (n.d.), ICERT Shodh Sari (2024), IJELS (2023), ResearchGate (2023), ARF Journals (2023), and INSPIRA (2023).

The most celebrated of these figures is Gargi Vachaknavi, whose participation in the philosophical debates at King Janaka's court — as recorded in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad — represents one of the earliest documented instances of a woman challenging the foremost philosopher of her age in public, on the most fundamental metaphysical questions imaginable. Her questions about the nature of the cosmic web, about what pervades Brahman, were not merely tolerated; they were preserved in canonical sacred texts and are still studied today (Culture and Heritage, 2024). The significance of this preservation is not trivial. It means that Vedic society did not merely permit women's intellectual participation in high-stakes philosophical discourse — it valued it enough to write it down and pass it forward.

Maitreyi's contribution is of a different character but equally significant. Where Gargi's Upanishadic presence is combative and inquisitorial — she presses Yajnavalkya until he admits she has approached the limit of what mortal minds can know — Maitreyi's is contemplative and self-directed. Her famous rejection of the offer of all earthly wealth in favour of the knowledge that leads to immortality is a philosophical position, not merely a personal preference. 'What should I do with that by which I shall not be immortal?' she asks (ICERT, 2024). This question encodes a theory of value — that



intellectual and spiritual knowledge is categorically superior to material possession — that undergirds the Vedic educational philosophy at its deepest level.

The Rishika tradition — women as authors and composers of the Rigveda itself — adds yet another dimension. IJELS (2023) documents that figures like Lopamudra, Apala, Visvara, and Ghosa are credited with Rigvedic hymn composition: they were not merely students of the Vedas but producers of its canonical content. The implication is unsettling in the best possible way: the sacred text that grounds all subsequent Vedic authority was partly written by women. Women, in the Vedic period, were not only recipients of knowledge but generators of the foundational authoritative texts through which knowledge was transmitted.

VHU (n.d.) summarizes the structural underpinning: women who pursued lifelong Vedic studies were known as Brahnavadinis, a category that recognized the existence of women who did not confine their intellectual engagement to the period between childhood and marriage but continued it throughout their lives. The gurukula's curriculum — Vedas, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, grammar — was, at least in principle, as available to women of intellectual dedication as to men. 'Women had access to the same Gurukula education as men,' VHU notes, 'and their contributions were documented in sacred texts, indicating societal recognition.' The goddess Saraswati, patroness of knowledge, speech, and learning, embodied the valorization of feminine intellectual energy at the cosmological level: the divine keeper of Vidya was herself feminine.

3. The Historical Fracture: From Vedic Inclusion to Post-Vedic Exclusion

Intellectual honesty demands that the Vedic tradition of women's scholarship be understood in its full historical arc rather than selectively retrieved at its most favorable point. IJELS (2023) traces the trajectory with precision: Rig Vedic society, in which women studied alongside men, participated in yajnas and public debates, and were encouraged by their fathers to pursue knowledge as deeply as possible, gave way — gradually, unevenly, but unmistakably — to a later Vedic and post-Vedic period characterized by progressive restriction. By approximately 600 BCE, the Upanayana ceremony — the formal initiation into Vedic study that had been available to girls — was becoming optional and then rare for women (IJELS, 2023). By the era of the Dharmashastra literature, it had been formally withdrawn.

The mechanisms of this reversal are complex and still debated among historians of ancient India. What is clear is that the Ardhangini (complementary half) model of the early Vedic period — in which husband and wife participated jointly in religious and intellectual life — was replaced by a model that



increasingly confined women to domestic and ritual auxiliary roles, reserving the highest intellectual and spiritual functions for Brahmin men. ARF Journals (2023), in a study of women's position in the Rig Vedic period, acknowledges the paradox: 'Women in ancient India have gone through two things in their life — subjection and deliverance' — a formulation that captures the oscillating character of the historical record more honestly than either pure celebration or pure condemnation.

This historical fracture is not merely a matter of antiquarian interest. It directly shapes the interpretive challenge that confronts anyone attempting to integrate Vedic wisdom into contemporary gender policy. The Vedic tradition is not one thing; it is a palimpsest within itself — the early Vedic inheritance of Gargi and Maitreyi written over by the Manusmriti's restrictions, which were themselves partially challenged by the Bhakti and reform movements of later centuries, which were in turn engaged — though not resolved — by nineteenth-century social reformers like Rammohan Roy and twentieth-century constitutionalism. Any serious policy engagement with Vedic wisdom must account for this layered and contested history rather than extracting only the most flattering sections.

4. NEP 2020 and the Indian Knowledge System: Policy Architecture and Implementation

The National Education Policy 2020 represents the most comprehensive attempt in post-independence India to institutionally reintegrate the Vedic and classical inheritance into the modern educational system. Its foundational principle, stated in the document's preamble, is that Indian education should be 'strongly rooted in the Indian and local context and ethos in terms of culture, traditions, heritage, customs, language, philosophy, geography, ancient and contemporary knowledge' — a formulation deliberately broad enough to encompass both the high-caste textual tradition of the Vedas and the wide river of regional, folk, and indigenous knowledge systems that run alongside it (Ministry of Education).

The IKS institutional mechanism operationalizes this vision. Ministry of Education guidelines issued in June 2023 required all universities to incorporate IKS into curricula at all levels; a separate directive in May 2023 introduced courses on Indian heritage and culture spanning Vedic mathematics, yoga, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Indian languages, classical arts, music, dance, drama, and performing arts (Ministry of Education, IKS). The UGC has established a dedicated IKS division and allows students to pursue a minor degree by completing 18 to 20 credits in IKS subjects — a structural incentive that positions the Vedic and classical inheritance as a credentialized academic pursuit, not a cultural supplement.



The research community's response has been broadly affirmative on the IKS vision while noting significant implementation challenges. EPRA Journals (2024), reviewing NEP 2020 and IKS integration, identifies three substantive opportunities: restoring India's intellectual self-confidence through engagement with its own knowledge traditions; providing culturally relevant educational content that makes abstract concepts more accessible to students rooted in Indian contexts; and generating new research frontiers at the interface of traditional and modern knowledge systems. Kumar and Kishor (2024) in *Educational Quest* add that integrating IKS with current education will help researchers and students understand contemporary social problems — a pragmatic rather than nostalgic justification that positions the gurukula's legacy as a living intellectual resource.

IERJ (2025), however, raises a concern that deserves full acknowledgment. The IKS literature, it notes, has been concentrated on the high-caste textual traditions of the Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda, and classical arts — raising the uncomfortable question of whether IKS integration, as currently designed, risks becoming an exercise in Brahminical cultural restoration dressed in the language of cultural inclusion. Indian knowledge is emphatically not only Vedic knowledge: it includes the extensive agricultural, ecological, and medical knowledge of Adivasi communities; the philosophical and ethical traditions of Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh thought; the craft and material knowledge of artisan communities whose contributions to India's physical heritage are as significant as the Upanishads; and the literary and musical traditions of regional languages. A genuinely inclusive IKS must be precisely that — a system of India's plural knowledges, not a selective anthology of Brahminical texts.

5. Viksit Bharat 2047: Vision, Architecture, and Gender Imperatives

5.1 The GYAN Framework and the Nari Pillar

The Viksit Bharat 2047 initiative — the Indian government's comprehensive framework for transforming India into a developed nation by the centenary of independence — operates through what is officially described as the GYAN framework: four foundational pillars comprising Garib (the poor), Yuva (youth), Annadata (farmers), and Nari (women). The explicit placement of women as one of four structural pillars of national development marks a significant discursive shift from earlier development frameworks that positioned women's empowerment as a welfare dimension of broader development programs. In the GYAN framework, women are not a vulnerable group to be protected by development; they are a generative force without whose full participation development cannot succeed (IJFMR, 2024).



Viksit India (n.d.) maps the quantitative ambitions: a composite GDP target of USD 30-40 trillion by 2047 (from a current base of approximately USD 3.5 trillion); per capita income of USD 15,000-18,000; 100% literacy; zero poverty. The gender dimensions of these targets are not incidental. The IMF has estimated that a 5.8% increase in female labour force participation has the potential to boost GDP in emerging economies by 8% — a figure that makes women's economic empowerment not a social expenditure but an economic investment with quantifiable returns (ICWA, 2024). India's current female labour force participation rate stands at approximately 25%, substantially below the global average, representing one of the largest untapped economic resources in the world's most populous country.

5.2 From Women's Development to Women-Led Development

A conceptually important shift within the Viksit Bharat gender discourse is the explicit move from women's development — a framework in which policy acts upon women to improve their outcomes — to women-led development — a framework in which women are positioned as active architects and drivers of national progress. India's G20 Presidency in 2023 formalized this reorientation internationally: under India's leadership, G20 EMPOWER 2023 prioritized the transition from women's development to women-led development as a global policy commitment, with India committing to six international conferences and 86 virtual meetings on gender equality and women's empowerment (ICWA, 2024).

India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ruchira Kamboj, stated at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women: 'Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of developed India, or Viksit Bharat, necessitates the full and equal participation of women.' She further articulated the aspiration for an India 'where women are self-empowered and not dependent on anyone, where they can make independent decisions and take risks without fear' (DD News, 2024). The structural policy mechanisms through which this vision is being pursued include the Women's Reservation Act providing 33% legislative representation, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program addressing sex-selective practices and girls' education, the JAM Trinity financial inclusion initiative, and over 14 lakh elected women representatives at the grassroots Panchayati Raj level (Ritam Digital, 2024).

ResearchGate (2024) provides a more sobering empirical baseline against which these ambitions must be measured: despite India's strong gender-focused constitutional provisions and legal frameworks, implementation remains weak, particularly in rural areas. Women's workforce participation at 25% significantly underperforms the global average; patriarchal norms, wage disparities, workplace discrimination, and the unequal burden of unpaid domestic labour together constitute what the paper calls a 'structural obstacle' that policies cannot dissolve without deeper social transformation. Only 40% of



rural women have smartphone access, limiting the reach of digital empowerment initiatives. These are not implementation failures at the margin; they are fundamental structural constraints that require not merely more schemes but a shift in the political economy of gender in India.

6. The Convergence Matrix: Where Vedic Wisdom and Vision 2047 Meet — and Where They Diverge

Table 2 maps the principal convergences and tensions between Vedic educational philosophy and the policy priorities of NEP 2020 and Viksit Bharat 2047. Five analytical dimensions are developed: holistic Vidya, the Brahmavadini tradition, the Guru-Shishya Parampara, Shakti cosmology, and the ethical values of Satya and Nishkama Karma. For each, the table identifies both the contemporary policy resonance and the unresolved critical concern that must be addressed for the integration to be intellectually honest and practically productive.

Table 2

Convergence Matrix: Vedic Educational Principles, NEP 2020/IKS Expressions, Vision 2047 Relevance, and Unresolved Tensions

Vedic Educational Principle	Expression in IKS/NEP 2020	Relevance to Viksit Bharat 2047	Unresolved Tension / Critical Concern
Holistic Vidya: integration of intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and vocational knowledge in the Gurukula	NEP 2020 Para 4.27: education deeply rooted in Indian ethos; IKS courses across all UG/PG programmes; revival of Sanskrit and classical disciplines	Vision 2047 targets 100% literacy and universal quality education; holistic skill-plus-values education seen as essential to producing ethical citizens alongside productive workers	Risk that 'holistic' framing conceals selective retrieval of tradition; IKS emphasis may privilege upper-caste textual traditions while marginalizing Dalit, tribal, and subaltern knowledge systems
Brahmavadini tradition: women as permanent	IKS scholarship explicitly cites Gargi, Maitreyi, and	Viksit Bharat 2047 GYAN framework: 'Nari' (women) as one of four development	Historical decline of Brahmavadini tradition from 600 BCE onward cautions



Vedic Educational Principle	Expression in IKS/NEP 2020	Relevance to Viksit Bharat 2047	Unresolved Tension / Critical Concern
scholars (not merely educated until marriage)	Lopamudra as evidence that women's intellectual equality has Vedic roots; NEP endorses gender-equitable access to all academic disciplines	pillars; Beti Bachao Beti Padhao; Women's Reservation Act (33%); target of matching or exceeding global STEM enrollment parity	against treating Vedic precedent as a continuous inheritance; selective use of ancient examples can obscure more recent patriarchal norms
Guru-Shishya Parampara: relational, mentored, residential learning centered on direct transmission	NEP 2020 endorses value-based mentorship; revised B.Ed. programmes emphasizing teachers as nation-builders; recognition of India's residential and co-educational Gurukula model as pedagogical heritage	Target of attracting and retaining quality teachers; professionalizing education administration; ensuring faculty development as central to Vision 2047's knowledge economy goals	Guru-Shishya hierarchy was gendered: Brahmavadinis required specific access pathways not uniformly available across castes; romanticization of Gurukula risks obscuring structural inequalities in classical Indian education
Shakti cosmology: feminine as divine intellectual and creative force (Saraswati, Vak, Aditi)	IKS scholarship frames goddesses of knowledge (Saraswati) as symbolic evidence of Vedic reverence for female intellect; cultural argument for legitimacy of women's scholarship in	Nari Shakti framing: 'Nari Shakti' used as state discourse for women-led development; G20 EMPOWER 2023 under India's presidency prioritized women-led development as national foreign policy commitment	Symbolic reverence for feminine divinity historically coexisted with material subordination of actual women; risk that 'Shakti' rhetoric substitutes cultural affirmation for structural policy reform



Vedic Educational Principle	Expression in IKS/NEP 2020	Relevance to Viksit Bharat 2047	Unresolved Tension / Critical Concern
	contemporary India		
Satya and Nishkama Karma: truth-seeking and selfless action as ethical foundations of knowledge	NEP 2020 emphasizes ethical and value-based education; IKS integration aims to embed moral reasoning (Satya, Ahimsa, Karuna) across disciplines	Vision 2047 governance goals include transparent, accountable, citizen-centric governance; ethical public administration seen as necessary condition for sustained development	Whose ethics? Vedic moral framework reflects specific socio-cosmological ordering; unexamined integration risks conflating normative tradition with universal ethical standard

Note. Compiled from Ministry of Education NEP 2020, Ministry of Education IKS (2023), ICWA (2024), IJFMR (2024), Emerald Publishing (2026), VHU (n.d.), ICERT (2024), and Viksit India (n.d.).

The convergence matrix reveals something important that neither the champions of IKS integration nor its critics fully acknowledge. There are genuine, substantive resonances between Vedic educational philosophy and the policy aspirations of Vision 2047 — the holistic Vidya tradition and NEP's whole-person education goal; the Brahmavadini inheritance and Vision 2047's Nari Shakti framework; the Guru-Shishya Parampara and the renewed emphasis on quality mentorship and faculty development. These are not superficial rhetorical overlaps. They reflect genuine structural compatibilities between a civilization's deepest educational values and the policy goals of a nation attempting to develop in ways consistent with its own inheritance.

But the unresolved tensions column is equally important. It documents the risks of what might be called selective antiquarianism: the construction of an idealized Vedic past that showcases Gargi and Maitreyi while leaving Manusmriti in the footnotes; that celebrates Saraswati as cosmic feminine intelligence while neglecting the material conditions under which most Indian women have historically accessed — or been denied access to — knowledge; that invokes Shakti as a legitimating mythology for women's empowerment while structural barriers to women's economic participation remain among the highest in the democratic world.

7. Navigating the Tensions: Critical Integration Rather Than Ideological Appropriation



7.1 The Risk of Romantic Primitivism

The most pervasive intellectual risk in the project of integrating Vedic wisdom with Vision 2047 is romantic primitivism — the construction of an idealized ancient golden age whose perfections shame the present, whose values are straightforwardly available for retrieval, and whose retrieval is itself a form of political statement. Adda247 (2024), reviewing women's position in the Vedic age, typifies this tendency when it notes that women of the Vedic period 'enjoyed equal status with men' without substantively engaging the evidence that this status was class-contingent, regionally variable, and historically unstable. The gurukula tradition of inclusion was real — but it was also limited: even VHU (n.d.) acknowledges that higher education for women was primarily available to those with the social capital and family support to access it, meaning in practice that Brahnavadini status was a privilege of the educated elite, not a universal provision.

IERJ (2025) raises the connected concern that the current IKS implementation framework risks positioning the Brahminical textual tradition as the default 'Indian knowledge system' — marginalizing the vast and sophisticated knowledge systems of communities whose contributions to India's civilization have been systematically undervalued in the scholarly record. A genuinely decolonial integration of Indian knowledge systems would need to include the ecological knowledge of Adivasi communities, the agricultural wisdom encoded in regional farming traditions, the medical and botanical knowledge of folk healers, and the architectural innovations of craftsperson communities — not only the Upanishads and Vedic mathematics.

7.2 The Risk of Ideological Instrumentalization

A second, structurally different risk is ideological instrumentalization: the deployment of Vedic heritage selectively to legitimize contemporary political positions, rather than to genuinely engage with the ancient tradition on its own complex terms. When ancient examples of women's intellectual achievement are cited to demonstrate that the Indian tradition has always valued women — without examining why the Brahnavadini tradition declined, why Manu's prescriptions for women gained canonical authority, or why the reform movements of the nineteenth century found so much work to do — the historical argument is being put to ideological rather than scholarly service.

The Emerald Publishing (2026) study of women's empowerment as the cornerstone of Viksit Bharat offers a useful corrective here. Its analysis identifies structural barriers to women's empowerment — low labour force participation, inadequate political representation, pervasive gender-based violence —



that cannot be addressed by cultural affirmation alone, however historically deep that affirmation runs. Women's empowerment requires 'comprehensive social, economic and political strategies,' the study concludes — strategies whose success depends on confronting the material conditions that constrain women's agency, not on celebrating the symbolic achievements of ancient women philosophers.

7.3 Toward Critical Integration: What It Would Actually Require

The path between romantic primitivism and reflexive dismissal of the Vedic inheritance is available — but it requires intellectual discipline. It requires engaging with the Vedic tradition in its historical complexity: celebrating Gargi while also studying the conditions under which the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad was composed and transmitted, and who had access to that transmission. It requires reading the gurukula model as evidence of what integrated education can achieve while also asking what structural prerequisites — teacher quality, community commitment, fiscal adequacy, family support — are necessary to realize those achievements in contemporary institutional contexts.

Above all, it requires a commitment to what might be called the Maitreyi principle: the Vedic tradition's own insistence that authentic knowledge-seeking cannot be confined to what is socially convenient. Maitreyi's question — 'What should I do with that by which I shall not be immortal?' — is a challenge not just to material wealth but to any form of intellectual or policy engagement that settles for the comfortable partial answer. Applied to the project of integrating Vedic wisdom with Vision 2047, it suggests that the inquiry must be pursued to its uncomfortable edges — including the questions about caste, class, and gender that the Vedic tradition itself both opened and closed.

8. Toward a Critically Integrated Policy Synthesis: Recommendations

The convergence analysis and critical engagement developed in preceding sections support a set of specific policy and scholarly recommendations.

First, the IKS curriculum framework must be expanded beyond Brahminical textual traditions to genuinely incorporate the plural knowledge systems of India's diverse communities. Adivasi ecological knowledge, Dalit philosophical traditions, regional folk science, and the knowledge systems embedded in artisanal and agricultural practice all deserve inclusion within the IKS framework — not as tokens of diversity but as substantive intellectual contributions deserving equal scholarly rigor. IERJ (2025) makes this recommendation explicitly; it deserves institutional implementation.



Second, the gender history of the Vedic and classical tradition should be taught in its full arc — not the selective highlights of Gargi and Maitreyi without the regressive chapters, and not the regressive chapters without the progressive ones either. The intellectual honesty demanded by genuine engagement with the Vedic inheritance is precisely the capacity to hold both its illuminated and its shadowed moments in view simultaneously. Teaching this history in its complexity would itself be a form of critical thinking education consistent with Vision 2047's epistemic goals.

Third, the Brahnavadini tradition deserves explicit institutional recognition as a historical precedent and normative model within India's gender policy discourse — but this recognition must be coupled with concrete structural investments in the conditions that made Brahnavadini scholarship possible: family support for women's intellectual ambitions, community respect for women's scholarly authority, and institutional access to the highest levels of intellectual debate. Celebrating Gargi while women remain underrepresented in India's highest research institutions and governance bodies is a form of cultural hypocrisy that the tradition itself, at its best, would not have recognized as knowledge.

Fourth, the Nari pillar of Vision 2047 should be operationalized through both structural policy reform and cultural change investment. The ResearchGate (2024) analysis is correct that digital access, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy are transformative tools — but they operate within a cultural and structural environment that must also change. Investments in rural women's smartphone access, legal empowerment programs, pay equity enforcement, and political capacity building for women in local governance are as necessary as the cultural recognition of India's Brahnavadini heritage — and neither is sufficient without the other.

Fifth, the Guru-Shishya Parampara model offers genuine pedagogical wisdom for NEP 2020's implementation, particularly in the emphasis on relational, mentored learning as a supplement to formal instruction. Universities piloting IKS programs should invest in identifying and supporting faculty who can serve as genuine scholarly mentors in the IKS tradition — not merely course administrators — and should design institutional incentives that reward this kind of sustained intellectual mentorship relationship rather than optimizing purely for research output metrics.

9. Conclusion: Writing New Script on Old Vellum

The palimpsest metaphor with which this paper opened does not resolve its tensions — it names them. Writing new policy on the vellum of Vedic inheritance means that the old text will always be legible beneath the new, that the traces of Gargi's debates will surface within NEP 2020's IKS guidelines



whether acknowledged or not, that the Shakti tradition will inflect Nari Shakti discourse whether its historical complexity is engaged or conveniently suppressed. The question is not whether the integration will happen — it already is happening, in the very architecture of contemporary Indian education and gender policy. The question is how it will be done: with the intellectual seriousness and historical honesty that the ancient tradition, at its best, demanded of all genuine inquiry.

What makes Gargi's philosophical intervention in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad so remarkable is not merely that a woman was asking hard questions in a room full of male scholars. It is that she was asking questions that had no comfortable answers — questions that pushed Yajnavalkya to the limit of what he knew and forced him to acknowledge that limit. That spirit — the refusal to accept the convenient partial answer, the insistence on pressing the inquiry until it reaches its actual boundary — is, this paper has argued, the most important thing the Vedic tradition has to offer to Vision 2047's project.

Applied to the integration of Vedic wisdom with contemporary education and gender policy, it means: engage the tradition rigorously, not romantically. Honor its women philosophers by taking seriously the structural conditions they actually worked within and against. Build on its holistic pedagogical vision without replicating its historical exclusions. And hold both the promise and the complexity of the palimpsest in view — reading, as any good scholar must, both the text written on top and the ghost script that bleeds through from beneath.

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