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Achar as Educational Formation: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and The Limits of Human-Capital and Class-Reproduction Accounts

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Abstract: Two explanatory registers dominate Indian educational policy discourse: human-capital economics, which construes education as investment in productive capacity, and class-reproduction analysis, which construes it as a mechanism of social stratification. This paper argues that the conceptual vocabularies of both leave one dimension of education insufficiently specified, namely the formation of conduct. It reconstructs the educational thought of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894), for whom achar — regulated practice transmitted across generations and appropriated by the individual — was the principal mechanism by which persons are formed and communities reproduce themselves. Drawing on Sen's reading of Bhudev's conservatism as a transformative rather than defensive project, and on Marginson's critique of human-capital theory, the paper shows that the two registers fall short for different and non-symmetrical reasons: the first has no vocabulary for formation that is not productivity, the second, where it reads inherited practice principally as ideological reproduction, has difficulty assigning that practice a positive and revisable formative role. It then argues that the Indian Knowledge Systems provisions of the National Education Policy 2020 constitute an institutional opening in which Bhudev's account becomes newly usable, and specifies five conditions this opening must satisfy. The paper makes three contributions: it reconstructs achar as an account of educational formation; it distinguishes the different and non-symmetrical limitations of the two registers in representing such formation; and it develops five conditions for evaluating whether contemporary provision can support rather than merely represent a formative project. Evidence from the West Bengal government order constituting a State-Level NEP Implementation Task Force in August 2026 is used to show that the risk identified is one of institutional form rather than of political intention. The limits of the study's documentary base are stated explicitly.

Index Terms **- Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, achar, moral formation, Indian Knowledge Systems, National Education Policy 2020, human capital theory**

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian educational policy is argued about in two languages, and both were learned abroad. The first is the language of human capital, ascendant since the economic reforms of 1991, in which education is an investment whose value is established by the earnings of those who receive it. The second is the language of class analysis, in which education is a mechanism through which existing social relations are reproduced and legitimated. The two are usually presented as adversaries, and in matters of policy they are. This paper is concerned with something they share.

Within the policy discourse examined here, neither register possesses a vocabulary adequate to what a long Indian tradition regarded as the principal work of education: the formation of conduct. The claim is deliberately bounded. It is not that no theoretical tradition anywhere can theorise formation; Aristotelian virtue ethics, the German Bildung tradition and practice-theoretic sociology all do so in their own terms. It is that the two registers that actually organise Indian educational policy argument leave this dimension insufficiently specified, and that an Indian tradition addressed it directly. Human-capital theory cannot express it, because its unit of account is productive capacity and its verification is the earnings function; Marginson (2019) has shown in detail that the theory cannot explain how education augments productivity, cannot account for the role of status, and imposes a single linear pathway on a heterogeneous relation between education and work. A class-reproduction reading cannot readily express it either, for a different reason: where it treats inherited practice principally as a mechanism of ideological reproduction, it has difficulty assigning that practice a positive and normatively revisable formative role.

This is not an argument that either framework is worthless. Human-capital reasoning has supported the expansion of educational provision across the world, and class analysis has exposed forms of educational stratification that no other framework brought into view. It is an argument about a specific and consequential limitation, and about a tradition that addressed precisely what they cannot.

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894) is that tradition's most systematic nineteenth-century educational theorist. Educated at Sanskrit College and Hindu College, he spent his career within the colonial educational apparatus, serving as an Inspector of Schools across Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, receiving the CIE in 1877, and sitting as a member of the Education Commission that reported in 1883 (Mohanta, 2012; Banglapedia, n.d.). He advocated the study of English while insisting on the vernacular as the medium of instruction (Mohanta, 2012). Across his essays he developed an account of education organised not around knowledge transmitted but around achar: the regulated practice, at once domestic, social and ritual, through which conduct is formed.

The paper makes three claims. First, that achar as Bhudev theorised it is an account of moral formation through practice, and therefore a distinct account of educational formation that cannot be reduced to either of the two explanatory registers examined here, nor treated as a cultural supplement to them. Second, that the Indian Knowledge Systems provisions of the National Education Policy 2020, together with the administrative apparatus established from October 2020, constitute an institutional opening in which such a framework becomes usable in a way it has not been since independence. Third, that Bhudev's own writing supplies five conditions this opening must satisfy if it is to realise his project rather than betray it, and that these conditions are demanding.

The third claim requires emphasis, because it determines what kind of paper this is. The argument concerns institutional possibility, not political intention. A policy framework can create conditions under which a body of thought becomes usable without any guarantee that it will be used well, and the conditions set out in the final section are the terms on which the opportunity can be assessed. Bhudev himself would have insisted on this. His diagnosis of India's subjection was severely self-critical, attributing it to the mistreatment of fellow countrymen and to hatred among Indians themselves, and any use of his thought that omits that self-criticism is not a revival of it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Four debates organise the relevant scholarship.

The first concerns what kind of thinker Bhudev was. An older reading treated him as a traditionalist opposed to the reforming energies of the Bengal Renaissance, positioned against the Westernising enthusiasm of the Young Bengal circle. Sen (2017) has substantially revised this. Locating Bhudev within colonial Bengal and a wider world of racial anxiety, Sen argues that traditionalist conservatism in India was a transformative project seeking to intervene in the racial nature of a colonised people through the reordering of familiality, education and health, and that its interventions were simultaneously liberating and constraining, intended to produce a population capable of redefining its own body of custom through a tense dialogue with Europe (Sen, 2017, p. 363). On this reading Bhudev was not defending a static inheritance but reconstructing a living one, which is the reading adopted here. Raychaudhuri (2002) situates the same disposition within a wider nineteenth-century Bengali engagement with European thought that was neither imitation nor rejection.

The second debate concerns the standing of custom as a category. Davis (2010) argues that the Hindu legal tradition is better understood as a theology of ordinary life than as a system of state-based rules, and that the household, the family and everyday relationships are themselves locations of law. This matters directly for the present argument: it establishes that practised conduct in this tradition is not the residue left over after doctrine has been extracted but a primary normative order in its own right. Bhudev's treatment of achar is intelligible against that background and unintelligible without it.

The third debate concerns the adequacy of human-capital theory. Marginson (2019) mounts the most thorough recent critique, arguing that the theory fails the test of realism through its reliance on a single theoretical lens, closed-system modelling and the inappropriate application of mathematical tools to interdependent variables, and that it cannot explain how education augments productivity, why salaries have become more unequal, or the role of status. The relevance here is specific. If human-capital theory cannot fully account even for the economic outcomes it was built to explain, its incapacity to account for moral formation, which it never attempted, is not a marginal deficiency but an indication of the narrowness of its explanatory ambition.

The fourth debate concerns whether colonial and nationalist educational ideas can be cleanly opposed. Kumar (2005) argues that they cannot: nationalist reformers frequently contested the content of colonial education while retaining its administrative and examining structure, and the quest for self-identity that animated their work sat uneasily beside the quest for equality. This is a caution against triumphalism in any account of indigenous educational revival, and it is observed throughout what follows.

Across these debates a gap is visible. Bhudev is studied as an intellectual and political figure, and increasingly well; he is not studied as an educational theorist whose central category might do work that the dominant frameworks cannot. The present paper addresses that gap.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To reconstruct achar as Bhudev Mukhopadhyay theorised it, and to establish that it constitutes a theory of educational formation rather than a defence of custom.
2. To specify, precisely and separately, why human-capital and class-analytic frameworks are unable to theorise formation of this kind.
3. To examine the institutional provisions through which Indian Knowledge Systems have been introduced into Indian education policy since 2020, on the basis of official documentation.
4. To derive from Bhudev's own writing the conditions under which such an institutional opening would realise rather than betray his educational project, and to identify the failure mode attaching to each.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is qualitative, interpretive and conceptual. It does not examine relationships between measured variables and no hypotheses are formulated.

RQ1. What account of educational formation does Bhudev's category of achar provide?

RQ2. In what respects, and for what distinct reasons, are human-capital and class-analytic frameworks unable to accommodate that account?

RQ3. What institutional provisions for Indian Knowledge Systems exist in current policy, and what do they make possible?

RQ4. What conditions must such provisions satisfy to realise rather than betray the project Bhudev articulated?

V. RESEARCH METHOD

Design

The study combines intellectual history with conceptual analysis and documentary policy analysis. The historical component reconstructs a body of thought in its context, asking what its author was doing in advancing it within the controversies available to him. The conceptual component compares three accounts of what education forms, assessing each by its capacity to express the phenomenon in question rather than by its political affiliation. The policy component examines official documentation of current provision. No empirical claims about learner outcomes are made, and none could be supported by this design.

The analytical procedure ran in five stages. Stage one identified the claims concerning education, achar, family, conduct and social reform attributed to Bhudev in his essays and in scholarship on them. Stage two extracted the dimensions of formation implicit in those claims: its object, its mechanism, its agent, its temporal structure and its criterion of evaluation. Stage three compared those dimensions with the corresponding dimensions of the two policy registers. Stage four analysed policy and administrative documents for their treatment of curriculum, institutional machinery, funding and implementation. Stage five mapped the reconstructed principles onto that provision to derive the five conditions presented in Table 3.

Because the evidentiary base is uneven, four levels of claim are distinguished throughout and marked in the wording. Statements introduced by "Bhudev states" or "Bhudev argues" report positions attributable to his essays. Statements introduced by naming a scholar report that scholar's interpretation. Statements introduced by "we reconstruct" or "this permits a reconstruction" are our analytical synthesis and are not attributed to him. Statements introduced by "applied to current provision" are our contemporary application. Readers should hold us to this distinction, since the principal risk in work of this kind is that a reconstruction is silently attributed to the thinker who occasioned it.

Sources and source criticism

Three source layers are used. Bhudev's own essays, principally those on education, family, society and conduct, constitute the primary layer; his collected essays are available in Bengali (Mukhopadhyay, 2010). Peer-reviewed scholarship constitutes the second layer (Davis, 2010; Kumar, 2005; Marginson, 2019; Raychaudhuri, 2002; Sen, 2017), together with the reference literature on his life and career (Mohanta, 2012). Official policy documentation constitutes the third (Ministry of Education, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2022).

Two protocols were applied. Claims about current policy are sourced to policy documents or to official releases rather than to commentary. Claims about Bhudev's position are advanced only where they can be attributed to his published essays or to peer-reviewed scholarship on them; renderings of his arguments that circulate in unrefereed secondary summaries were not treated as evidence, and readers will find that several claims commonly made about his work are not repeated here for that reason.

Limitations

Six limitations qualify what follows. First, Bhudev wrote in Bengali, and the present study works substantially through scholarship on his texts rather than through sustained close reading of the originals; a study grounded in the Bengali corpus would be able to establish finer distinctions than are attempted here. Second, the study makes no claim about the effects of current policy, which is too recent for outcome evidence and which this design could not evaluate in any case. Third, the comparison of three frameworks is conceptual, and a critic may reasonably hold that each admits of reconstructions more capacious than those considered. Fourth, the paper does not adjudicate the contested political questions surrounding Indian Knowledge Systems, confining itself to what the documentary record establishes about institutional provision. Fifth, Bhudev's acceptance of certain hierarchical social arrangements is noted but not analysed at length. Sixth, the five conditions are theoretically derived and therefore constitute a proposed analytical framework rather than validated evaluative criteria; they have not been operationalised, tested against cases, or assessed for inter-rater reliability, and a different reconstruction of Bhudev would generate a different set. Seventh, the analysis of the West Bengal order examines what that document specifies and omits, which is evidence about administrative form and not about implementation outcomes, since none yet exist.

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bhudev's position in colonial Bengal

The colonial educational settlement in Bengal was organised around an explicit civilisational purpose, and the Bengali response to it divided. One current embraced European rationalism and treated inherited practice as superstition; another withdrew into a defensive traditionalism that refused engagement altogether. Bhudev occupied neither position. He advocated the study of English while insisting on the vernacular as the medium of instruction, and he argued for Hindi as a link language for India, translating Bengali works into Hindi and successfully recommending that Hindi replace Persian in the courts of Bihar (Mohanta,

2012). He worked inside the apparatus he criticised, rising to Inspector of Schools and serving on the Education Commission of 1882–83 alongside the Director of Public Instruction for Bengal (Banglapedia, n.d.; Mohanta, 2012).

Sen's (2017) characterisation captures the resulting intellectual posture. What looks like traditionalism was a transformative project directed at the condition of a colonised population, pursued through the reordering of family, education and health, and expected to yield a people capable of redefining its own custom through sustained argument with Europe. The conservatism was instrumental to a reconstruction, not a refusal of one. This matters for the present argument because it establishes that appeals to achar in Bhudev are not appeals to the authority of the past as such.

Achar as a theory of formation

A note on what the scholarship can and cannot establish. Sen (2017) is relied upon here for the character of Bhudev's conservatism — that it was transformative rather than defensive — and that reliance is secure. Sen is not relied upon for the account of achar as educational formation, which is our reconstruction from his essays and from the wider literature on custom as a normative category. Readers should not take the authority of the former to underwrite the latter.

Achar in Bhudev's usage denotes considerably more than the English "custom" conveys. It covers daily regimen, domestic obligation, social conduct, ritual observance and ethical disposition, treated together as a single regulated practice. Its standing as a normative category is not idiosyncratic to him; Davis (2010) shows that in the Hindu legal tradition the household and everyday relationships function as locations of law, so that practised conduct constitutes a primary normative order rather than a residue of doctrine.

Five terms must be distinguished before the argument proceeds, since the manuscript would otherwise slide between them. A practice is repeated participation in a regulated activity. A disposition is an acquired tendency to act in certain ways. Conduct is the embodied enactment of such dispositions in ordinary life. Moral formation is the development of dispositions that are normatively evaluable, that is, assessable as right or wrong rather than merely as efficient or habitual. Educational formation is the intentional institutional organisation of the conditions under which such dispositions are acquired. Achar as Bhudev uses it spans the first four. Whether it also constitutes the fifth is the question this paper examines, and the answer advanced here is that it does so only where the conditions of participation are deliberately arranged — which is what makes it an educational category rather than an ethnographic one. Not all repetition produces moral formation; habit and virtue are distinguished in this tradition, as they are in others, by whether the agent comes to understand and endorse the end the practice serves.

Three features make this a theory of formation rather than a defence of inherited practice. The first is that achar operates on the person through repetition rather than through instruction. What it produces is a disposition to act in certain ways, acquired by participating in a regulated practice over time. This is why it cannot be transferred between cultures as a set of propositions might be: it is learned by doing, in a particular setting, alongside others already competent in it.

The second is that achar is simultaneously generational and individual. The conditions of formation are established by preceding generations and maintained collectively, while their appropriation depends on the individual's own disciplined practice. Taken together, these features permit a reconstruction — ours rather than necessarily Bhudev's own formulation — of education as the institutional site at which social transmission and individual appropriation are brought into relation.

The third is that the tradition is understood as codified experience rather than as revelation beyond question. On this account the authority of a practice derives from what it has been found to accomplish, which makes the practice answerable to its results. This is the feature that permits immanent criticism, and Bhudev used it: his diagnosis of India's political subjection identified as a national sin the treatment of fellow countrymen, including the exclusions of caste, and he pointed to a commonality across India's communities in household life, food and daily activity that cut across confessional boundaries. A defence of achar that could not criticise achar would not be his.

Table 1 sets the resulting account against the two explanatory registers examined here.

Table 1. Three accounts of what education forms

	Human-capital framework	**Class-analytic framework**	**Achar as theorised by Bhudev**
What education is taken to form	Productive capacity, expressed as marginal productivity of labour and realised in earnings	Position within relations of production; consciousness of that position	Conduct: a disposition to act rightly, acquired by repeated participation in regulated practice
Where formation is located	In the individual, as an accumulated stock	In the collective, as a structural position	Across generations and the individual jointly; transmitted socially, appropriated personally
How formation is verified	Rates of return, earnings differentials, employability	Correspondence between schooling and class reproduction	Conduct sustained over a lifetime and recognised by those competent to judge it
Standing of inherited practice	Irrelevant unless it raises productivity	Presumptively ideological; to be unmasked	The medium of formation itself; accumulated practical experience in codified form

	Human-capital framework	Class-analytic framework	Achar as theorised by Bhudev
Characteristic blind spot	Cannot express what education forms other than capacity to earn	Cannot grant inherited practice any positive formative role	Risks treating the inherited as self-validating and insulating it from moral criticism

The final row is included deliberately. An analysis that attributes blind spots to two registers and none to the third is advocacy rather than analysis. The characteristic risk of a formation-through-practice account is that inherited practice comes to be treated as self-validating, which is precisely the risk Bhudev's own self-criticism was designed to manage, and which the conditions set out below are designed to test.

Why human-capital instrumentalism cannot accommodate formation

The incapacity here is definitional rather than accidental. Human-capital theory assumes that education determines the marginal productivity of labour and that this determines earnings, and its explanatory apparatus is built accordingly (Marginson, 2019). Formation of conduct produces no measurable increment in productivity and no earnings differential; a person of settled and temperate disposition is not thereby more employable in any way the earnings function registers. The framework does not deny that such formation occurs. It has no place to record it, which in a policy environment organised around measurement amounts to the same thing.

Marginson's critique strengthens the point by showing that the framework underperforms on its own terrain: it cannot explain how education augments productivity, why salaries have become more unequal, or the role of status, and it imposes a single linear pathway on a heterogeneous passage between education and work (Marginson, 2019). A framework already strained by the economic phenomena it was designed for cannot reasonably be asked to carry the whole account of what education does.

Bhudev's relevance here lies in the shape of his objection rather than its vehemence. On his account, what education transmits is the accumulated practical experience of preceding generations, and its beneficiaries are substantially those who come after; this is the temporal structure that the familiar image of planting a tree whose fruit one will not eat expresses. An evaluative framework that recognises only returns accruing to the individual who received the education cannot represent that structure at all. This is not a moral complaint about selfishness but an observation about what a measurement system is able to see.

Why class-analytic critique cannot accommodate formation

The second limitation is of a different kind and should not be assimilated to the first, nor attributed to an entire intellectual tradition. Marxist, Gramscian, Althusserian and Bourdieusian analyses treat culture very differently from one another, and several of them are considerably more attentive to formation than the policy-level shorthand suggests. The target here is narrower: a class-reproduction reading of inherited practice, of the kind that circulates in Indian educational debate, in which transmitted culture is understood principally as securing consent to existing social relations. On that specific configuration, inherited practice enters analysis as material for demystification, and the possibility that it might be the medium through which persons acquire normatively defensible dispositions is difficult to accommodate without revising a central commitment.

Two qualifications are essential. First, the suspicion is frequently vindicated. Indian inherited practice has carried caste exclusion, and any account of achar that failed to say so would be worthless. Bhudev himself did not fail to say so. Second, the strongest versions of this tradition are considerably more attentive to culture than the schematic account allows, and a critic would be entitled to object that the target here is a policy-level simplification rather than the best available theory.

The argument does not require more than this. Bhudev's position is that the resources for reforming a practice are more likely to be found inside the tradition that sustains it than in a theory imported for the purpose, because a tradition that can be criticised in its own terms can be reformed without being dismantled. Whether that is correct is a real question, on which reasonable people differ. What can be said is that it is a position the dominant frameworks do not occupy, and that a policy environment in which only those registers are available cannot even formulate it.

The institutional opening

One terminological caution is required at the outset. "Indian Knowledge Systems" names an administrative category rather than a unified body of knowledge. It gathers Sanskritic textual traditions, regional and vernacular learning, tribal and oral knowledge, and a range of technical and medical practices that developed under different conditions and answer to different criteria of validity. Treating the category as though it designated a single system would reproduce, at the level of analysis, the homogenisation that the fifth condition below warns against at the level of policy. The plural is used here deliberately and the internal diversity is treated as constitutive.

Something has changed in the institutional conditions under which such a framework might be pursued. Paragraph 4.27 of the National Education Policy 2020 addresses India's traditional knowledge as a curricular concern (Ministry of Education, 2020), and an Indian Knowledge Systems Division was established under the Ministry of Education in October 2020, located at the All India Council for Technical Education, with a remit covering interdisciplinary research, preservation and dissemination, and the funding of research centres (Press Information Bureau, 2022). Table 2 sets out the principal measures and their documentary basis.

Table 2. Institutional provision for Indian Knowledge Systems and its documentary basis

Provision or measure	Documentary basis	What it makes institutionally possible
Indian traditional knowledge named as a curricular concern	National Education Policy 2020, para. 4.27 (Ministry of Education, 2020)	Indigenous categories may be taught as knowledge rather than as heritage illustration
Establishment of the Indian Knowledge Systems Division	Division established under the Ministry of Education in October 2020, located at AICTE (Press Information Bureau, 2022)	A standing administrative agency with a budget line, rather than a curricular recommendation alone
Funding of research centres, fellowships and faculty development	Programmes reported by the IKS Division (Press Information Bureau, 2022)	Scholarly capacity in the area can be built, which is the precondition of serious work
Inclusion of Indian knowledge within curriculum frameworks	National Curriculum Framework treatment of Knowledge of India as a cross-cutting theme (Press Information Bureau, 2022)	Indigenous material enters the school curriculum through a general framework rather than as an elective enclave
State-level implementation machinery in a previously non-participating state	Government of West Bengal, Higher Education Department, Order No. 981-Edn(CS)/12016(99)/46/2026-CS SEC, 20 August 2026, constituting a State-Level NEP 2020 Implementation Task Force	Reform is coordinated through an apex body with named working groups and a phased roadmap; the Terms of Reference specify curriculum, credit, industry linkage and quality assurance, and do not mention Indian Knowledge Systems

The reach of this framework has recently widened in a way that permits the argument to be tested rather than merely asserted. West Bengal had declined to adopt the National Education Policy, producing its own State Education Policy in 2023 as an alternative. On 20 August 2026 the state's Higher Education Department issued an order constituting a State-Level NEP 2020 Implementation Task Force as the apex coordinating body for translating national directives into a state-specific programme of reform across 31 state-aided universities and more than 500 affiliated colleges (Government of West Bengal, 2026). Bengal is the intellectual setting in which the thought examined in this paper was produced, and the framework now operates in the province whose nineteenth-century educational argument it inherits.

The order repays close reading, because it is the clearest available evidence of how a formative policy vision is rendered into administrative form. Its Terms of Reference direct the Task Force towards curriculum overhaul and the four-year undergraduate structure with flexible entry and exit; industry-linked curricula, apprenticeships and credit-backed internships with periodic sector skill-gap audits; institutional mentoring and NAAC or NBA readiness; and credit standardisation through the Academic Bank of Credits. Its four Working Groups cover curriculum and credit framework, technical and vocational education, industry partnership and internships, and institutional mentoring and faculty development. Its three-phase roadmap sequences statutory alignment, curriculum depth with industry linkage, and quality assurance with credit mobility (Government of West Bengal, 2026).

Two observations follow, and neither concerns anyone's sincerity. The first is that Indian Knowledge Systems appears nowhere in the order, and neither does any category corresponding to the formation of conduct. The second is that the vocabulary in which the reform is specified — credits, entry and exit points, skill-gap audits, employability, quality-assurance readiness — belongs almost entirely to the human-capital register whose limitations were set out above. Applied to the present argument, this is the risk named earlier made visible: not that policymakers intend to exclude formative concerns, but that the administrative instruments available for implementing an educational policy are instruments built to count things, and a disposition is not a countable thing. This is a risk of institutional form rather than of political intention, and it would arise under any government using this machinery.

The same document also indicates where the difficulty is addressable. The Task Force is empowered to constitute further sub-committees and co-opt additional experts, and its Working Groups have named chairs and a reporting cycle; Phase I covers the amendment of university statutes, which is the point at which anything not written into the regulatory architecture becomes progressively harder to insert (Government of West Bengal, 2026). A formative dimension, if it is to be more than curricular decoration, would have to enter at that stage and through that machinery. The observation is offered as an analytical finding rather than as advocacy, and it is precisely the kind of finding the five conditions below are designed to generate.

The significance of this provision lies in its character rather than its scale. A curricular recommendation asks institutions to include material; a division with a budget line, a research programme and a funding mechanism builds the scholarly capacity without which inclusion is merely nominal. This is the difference between an invitation and an infrastructure, and for a body of thought that has been institutionally homeless in Indian education since independence, the difference is substantial.

Two cautions are required and neither is rhetorical. The first is that provision is not achievement: whether these arrangements produce serious scholarship or a thin curricular veneer is an empirical question that cannot yet be answered, and this paper makes no claim about it. The second follows from Kumar (2005). Nationalist educational reform in India has repeatedly contested the content of inherited colonial structures while leaving those structures intact, with the result that indigenous material is taught through an examining apparatus whose assumptions are precisely those the material was meant to displace. The risk that Indian Knowledge Systems becomes another examinable subject inside an unchanged architecture is the central risk, and it is a risk of form rather than of intention.

The conditions of a genuine realisation

Bhudev's own writing supplies the terms on which this opening should be judged. Table 3 sets out five conditions and the failure mode attaching to each.

Table 3. Conditions for realising rather than betraying the project, derived from Bhudev's framework

Condition	Basis in Bhudev	Evidentiary status	Implication for current provision	Failure mode
Formation, not content	His complaint that an education conducted in borrowed categories produces people who misrecognise their own practices	Attributable to his essays; reported by Sen (2017)	Indigenous categories must shape how students are formed, not only what they study	A curricular module taught through the framework it was meant to displace
Practice, not proposition	His treatment of achar as learned by participation rather than by instruction	Attributable to his essays; our reconstruction of its educational consequence	Provision must include lived and practical participation, not examinable content alone	Conversion into memorised assessable material; the vocabulary survives, the mechanism does not
Immanent criticism	His identification of caste exclusion and of hatred among Indians as national failings	Attributable to his essays	Inherited practice must remain answerable to criticism generated from within the tradition	Practice defended because inherited rather than because defensible
Inclusive specification	His account of a commonality across Indian communities in household life, food and daily activity, and his praise of Muslim egalitarian ideals	Attributable to his essays; our application to the collective-specification problem	The collective whose achar is at issue must be specified inclusively	Narrowing into the cultural property of one community; forfeiture of the claim to be national
Plural sources	Not stated by Bhudev; derived from the internal diversity of the category itself	Our analytical extension, not attributed to him	Traditions drawn upon must extend beyond the Sanskritic and classical to tribal, minority and vernacular knowledge	Exclusion of most Indian knowledge by a programme conducted in the name of indigeneity

The first two conditions concern pedagogy. If achar forms through participation rather than instruction, then a programme that converts it into examinable propositional content has preserved the vocabulary and lost the mechanism. Students would learn about a formative practice instead of undergoing one, which on Bhudev's own analysis is the characteristic error of an education conducted in borrowed categories.

The third and fourth conditions concern the relation between tradition and criticism, and they are the demanding ones. Bhudev held that a practice is authoritative because of what it has been found to accomplish, which makes it answerable; and he applied that standard to his own society, naming the mistreatment of countrymen as a national failing. A programme that invokes his authority while exempting inherited practice from criticism inverts his position. The fourth condition follows from his account of an underlying commonality across India's communities, expressed in the ordinary textures of household life. A programme conducted in the name of that commonality cannot consistently narrow into the property of a single community.

The fifth condition concerns the range of traditions admitted. Indian inherited knowledge is not exhausted by the Sanskritic and the classical, and a programme that treats it as though it were reproduces, in the name of indigeneity, an exclusion of tribal, minority and vernacular traditions. The policy framework itself contemplates a wider range, including tribal and indigenous knowledge, which means the condition is one the programme may meet rather than one it is barred from meeting.

These conditions are offered as an evaluative instrument rather than as a verdict. They specify what would have to be true for the present institutional moment to constitute a genuine recovery of Bhudev's educational project, and they can be applied by any observer, sympathetic or otherwise, to evidence as it accumulates.

VII. CONCLUSION

The prominence of two influential explanatory registers in Indian educational discourse has a cost that is rarely stated precisely. It is not that either register is valueless, and it is not that they have produced no knowledge. It is that between them they leave unoccupied the ground on which a long Indian tradition placed the central work of education: the formation of conduct through participation in regulated practice. Human-capital reasoning cannot register such formation because its unit of account is productive capacity, and Marginson (2019) has shown that the framework is strained even by the economic phenomena it was built for. A class-reproduction reading has difficulty registering it because inherited practice enters that analysis primarily as an object of suspicion.

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's achar occupies that ground. It is a theory of how persons are formed, generationally transmitted and individually appropriated, answerable to what it accomplishes and therefore open to criticism in its own terms. Read as Sen (2017) reads it, his conservatism was a project of reconstruction rather than preservation, which is what makes it available for use rather than merely for commemoration.

The institutional provisions for Indian Knowledge Systems established since 2020 constitute an opening in which that framework becomes usable: not a curricular gesture but an administrative apparatus with a research programme and a funding mechanism. Whether the opening is realised depends on conditions that Bhudev's own thought specifies, and those conditions are exacting. They require that indigenous categories shape formation rather than furnish content; that practice not be converted into proposition; that inherited practice remain answerable to criticism from within; that the collective be specified inclusively; and that the traditions drawn upon extend beyond the classical and Sanskritic. A programme meeting these conditions would be a recovery of his project. A programme failing them would be the thing he diagnosed, in a different costume.

Three implications follow. The theoretical implication is that education cannot be fully theorised through productivity and reproduction alone, and that the question of what else it forms is not a parochial Indian question but a general one on which an Indian tradition has something specific to say. The methodological implication is that indigenous educational concepts require reconstruction from primary textual traditions rather than from policy branding, since a category invoked in policy documents and a category reconstructed from texts are not the same object and may diverge sharply. The policy implication is that the incorporation of Indian knowledge should be assessed by whether its formative logic survives institutional translation, which is an empirical question about administrative instruments rather than a political question about intentions.

Further work should proceed on two fronts. The Bengali corpus of Bhudev's essays warrants sustained close reading by educational researchers, who have largely left it to historians and literary scholars, and such reading would place the reconstruction offered here on a firmer textual footing than the present study can claim. And the five conditions are susceptible of operationalisation against the implementation record now beginning to accumulate, which would allow this institutional moment to be assessed against evidence rather than expectation.

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