

## Reimagining Indian Knowledge Systems: Integrating Timeless Wisdom into Contemporary Global Thought.

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### Abstract

This paper explores how India's ancient systems of knowledge can inform and enhance today's educational and global landscapes. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses a wide spectrum of wisdom — philosophical, scientific, ecological, linguistic, and medical — deeply rooted in classical texts such as the *Vedas* (1), *Upanishads* (2), and foundational works in *Ayurveda* (3) and mathematics (4). Offering a holistic and sustainable worldview, IKS provides valuable frameworks for addressing modern challenges like climate change (5) mental health (6), and educational reform (7). This study traces the historical development of IKS, from its flourishing in ancient India to its marginalization during colonial rule (8), and examines efforts in post-independence India, especially through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (9), to bring IKS back into academic focus. Using an interdisciplinary approach that draws on classical texts (10), policy analysis (11), and real-world case studies (12), the paper argues for viewing IKS not as a cultural relic but as a dynamic, evolving body of knowledge. Reclaiming IKS is shown to be essential for restoring intellectual independence (13), promoting innovation grounded in ethics (14) and contributing meaningfully to global knowledge dialogues (15).

**Keywords:** Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Indigenous Knowledge, NEP 2020, Ayurveda, Holistic Education, Intellectual Decolonization.

## 1. Introduction

India is home to one of the most diverse and enduring intellectual traditions in the world. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses a rich and interconnected set of disciplines developed over thousands of years. These range from philosophy, medicine, and linguistics to agriculture, mathematics, astronomy, and spiritual inquiry (16, 17). Rooted in classical sources such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Shastras*, and regional oral traditions (2, 4), IKS has always been experiential and deeply integrated into everyday life (18, 2). It fused scientific thought with ethical inquiry, linking intellectual pursuits with spiritual, ecological, and social balance (14).

Far from being a uniform or centralized system, IKS reflects contributions from a wide variety of communities—sages, craftsmen, healers, scholars, and farmers—across India’s linguistic and cultural diversity (7). Traditional learning models such as the Gurukul system and the Guru-Shishya tradition emphasized experiential learning, character development, and holistic understanding (19). Disciplines such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedic grammar, and early metallurgy demonstrate IKS’s deep integration of theory and practice (3, 10).

However, during colonial rule, the British education system actively undermined indigenous knowledge traditions. Thomas Macaulay's 1835 Minute pushed for an education system based on English and European ideas (20), and it ignored traditional Indian ways of learning and knowledge (21). This change in education policy made traditional Indian learning and knowledge less valued and not given much attention (13). Even after independence, modern India has largely prioritized Western models of education and science, often at the cost of its own knowledge heritage (22).

Today, as conversations around decolonizing education and embracing diverse knowledge systems gain momentum globally (15), India is witnessing a growing interest in reclaiming its own intellectual roots (23). This revival is not based on nostalgia but is driven by the realization that ancient Indian thought offers practical, sustainable, and ethical insights into modern challenges (24). Whether it is mental wellness, ecological sustainability, or moral education, the principles embedded in IKS hold enduring relevance (6, 11). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has taken a significant step toward integrating IKS into mainstream education (7). Institutions such as IIT Kharagpur, BHU, and emerging universities like Rishihood University are increasingly working to revive and teach indigenous knowledge in modern formats (21). Still, significant hurdles remain—such as limited access to original texts, dominance of English, insufficient training for educators, and lingering colonial biases in academia (25).

Rather than being seen as oppositional to modern science, IKS can be viewed as a partner in dialogue. For example, Ayurvedic principles are being researched alongside modern medicine (26); Vedic mathematics is finding applications in logic and pedagogy (27); and ancient architectural and agricultural practices are being re-examined for their sustainability (28, 29). These connections show that IKS is not stuck in the past but can help shape the future—if approached with critical engagement and openness (27).

This paper looks into the main ideas, important themes, the way Indian knowledge systems were pushed aside in history. It uses a comparative and interdisciplinary lens—drawing from sacred texts, academic research, and education policy—to argue for the urgent need to view IKS as a living, evolving system. Reclaiming IKS is essential for building intellectual self-reliance, transforming India's education landscape, and contributing Indian thought to global conversations on knowledge, ethics, and sustainability (29, 30).

## 2. Literature Review (with references)

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its relevance in contemporary debates on sustainability, education, health, and cultural identity. A significant body of research highlights the need to recognize IKS not merely as a historical or cultural artefact but as a living system of thought and practice capable of engaging with modern challenges (31, 32).

Kapoor (31) emphasizes that the structure of IKS is fundamentally integrative, where disciplines such as philosophy, grammar, logic, medicine, and ecology are not viewed in isolation but as interconnected systems. This stands in contrast to the compartmentalization commonly found in Western academic models. Similarly, Balasubramanian (12) explains how Indian philosophy, particularly the Vedantic and Nyaya traditions, established epistemologies rooted in experiential knowledge (*anubhava*) and ethical inquiry.

Scholars like Raghuramaraju (32) and Bandyopadhyay (33) have written extensively about how colonial rule affected Indigenous Knowledge Systems. They argue that the education policies during colonial times replaced traditional ways of knowing by labeling them unscientific or out-dated. Tharoor (34) further critiques British colonial administration for dismantling India's traditional systems of education, particularly through the introduction of Macaulay's English education policy, which prioritized Western content and languages.

In the realm of ecology and agriculture, the writings of Vandana Shiva have been foundational in linking traditional ecological knowledge with sustainable practices. Her work through the Navdanya movement has demonstrated that traditional Indian farming methods—such as seed preservation, biodiversity, and soil regeneration—are not only ecologically sound but also socially empowering for local communities (34, 35). Basu (36) supports this

by illustrating how indigenous ecological practices, particularly in tribal and rural areas, align with modern principles of environmental sustainability.

In health, the resurgence of Ayurveda and traditional medical systems has drawn scholarly and institutional interest. Patnaik (37) discusses the integration of Ayurveda into India's public health strategy, noting its emphasis on preventive care and balance between the mind, body, and environment. Taneja (38) highlights how the Ministry of AYUSH is formalizing Ayurvedic practices for broader public use, particularly in the context of global health crises.

The educational domain has also seen a growing call for the reintegration of IKS. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly advocates for the inclusion of Indian languages, classical knowledge, yoga, and traditional arts in mainstream curricula (9). Raina (39) points out that NEP marks a significant policy-level acknowledgment of IKS, aiming to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary education systems. However, Mukherjee (40) and Kumar (7) caution that curriculum reform must go beyond symbolic gestures and involve substantive teacher training, pedagogical change, and curriculum restructuring.

A recurring critique in the literature is the limited inclusivity in the dominant IKS narrative. Devi (41) and Singh (42) argue that most institutional efforts focus on Sanskritic and upper-caste traditions, often overlooking the contributions of tribal, folk, and women's knowledge systems. These marginal voices have preserved oral traditions, herbal medicine, and ecological practices that are still in use today, but remain underrepresented in formal education and research.

Furthermore, scholars like Chakrabarty (43) and Nanda (44) raise important questions about how to critically engage with IKS without falling into the traps of cultural romanticism or

nationalist appropriation. They argue for a balanced approach that recognizes the richness of indigenous knowledge while subjecting it to ethical and scientific scrutiny.

Despite these challenges, the literature increasingly reflects optimism about the potential of IKS to contribute to global knowledge. Jadhav (45) and Das (46) advocate for the internationalization of Indian thought systems, suggesting that IKS can enrich global debates on ethics, sustainability, and education if supported by research, translation, and institutional backing.

Overall, the research that has been done so far gives us a good understanding of the importance and complexity of IKS. While there is broad support for its revival, scholars consistently emphasize the need for inclusivity, critical analysis, and meaningful integration into academic, ecological, and policy frameworks. This study builds upon these insights by offering a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of IKS, focusing on both its historical journey and its relevance in shaping India's educational and developmental future.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to explore the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its relevance in modern times (32, 16). The methodology combines classical source analysis, policy review, and real-world case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of IKS as both a historical legacy and a living knowledge system (31). The research focuses on tracing the evolution, marginalization, and revival of IKS while analysing its integration into present-day education, healthcare, agriculture, and policy frameworks (5).

### 3.1 Resources Used

The study draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include foundational texts such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Arthashastra*, and classical works on mathematics and astronomy by Aryabhata and Bhaskara II (2, 46). These texts offer direct insights into the philosophical, medical, and scientific knowledge developed in ancient India (3).

Secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and government reports (12). Notable contributions by Kapil Kapoor, A. Raghuramaraju, Vandana Shiva, and Meera Nanda offer diverse contemporary perspectives on IKS and its intersections with modern discourse (47, 48, 32). Official policy documents such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, UGC curriculum frameworks, and reports from the Indian Knowledge Systems Division under the Ministry of Education provide insight into current institutional revival efforts (9, 49).

### 3.2 Research Methods

Four key methods guide this study:

- **Literature Review:** A comprehensive review of ancient texts and modern scholarship helps establish the thematic and conceptual foundations of IKS (10). This includes philosophical commentaries, historical contextualization, and comparative studies (50).
- **Historical Analysis:** This involves tracing the development of IKS through pre-Vedic, classical, medieval, colonial, and postcolonial phases (8). Special attention is given to the colonial disruption of indigenous epistemologies through education reforms like Macaulay's Minute of 1835 (51).

- **Comparative Study:** Key elements of IKS are compared with modern systems in medicine, agriculture, and education. For example, Ayurveda is contrasted with Western biomedicine, and Gurukul pedagogy is evaluated against current school-based learning models (11, 7).
- **Case Studies:** Real-life examples illustrate the practical significance of IKS today. These include Navdanya's organic farming model, the integration of Ayurveda in Indian health initiatives, and the role of NEP 2020 in educational transformation (52, 21).

### 3.3 Analytical Tools

To support these methods, the study applies the following analytical tools:

**Textual Analysis:** Ancient texts are examined to identify themes, structures, and philosophical assumptions central to IKS (53). This includes exegetical analysis of Sanskrit verses and traditional commentaries.

**Policy Review:** Current government policies (and institutional initiatives are analysed to determine how IKS is being restructured into academic curricula, research agendas, and public discourse (49).

**Qualitative Insights:** Observational data from the case studies is synthesized to understand how IKS operates in rural, tribal, and urban settings, and across gender and caste dynamics, highlighting both possibilities and limitations (54).

#### 4. Discussion

The revival of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is becoming increasingly visible across key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and education (16, 32). This resurgence reflects a growing recognition of the value embedded in India's traditional wisdom, particularly in offering holistic, sustainable, and context-sensitive alternatives to modern systems (5). In the field of healthcare, Ayurveda is regaining prominence as a complementary medical system that emphasizes preventive care, individual constitution (*prakriti*), and lifestyle balance (3). Unlike many modern medical practices that focus primarily on symptom management, Ayurveda promotes wellness through natural remedies, diet regulation, and daily routines tailored to each person (55). The Indian government, through the Ministry of AYUSH, has actively endorsed Ayurveda as part of national health programs (56). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Ayurvedic immunity boosters, breathing techniques, and wellness practices were widely promoted, showcasing the system's adaptability and relevance in crisis situations (57). Furthermore, research collaborations and clinical trials are helping to build scientific validation around Ayurvedic formulations, further integrating traditional and modern approaches (11). In the field of agriculture, the Navdanya movement, started by environmentalist Dr. Vandana Shiva, shows how traditional ecological knowledge can support sustainable farming. Navdanya has empowered thousands of farmers across India to return to traditional methods like seed saving, organic composting, and mixed cropping systems, which maintain soil fertility and reduce dependency on chemical inputs (58). These practices are deeply rooted in India's agrarian history, where farming was not just a livelihood but also a cultural and spiritual activity in harmony with nature (59). As environmental concerns grow globally—such as climate change and biodiversity loss—the ecological wisdom preserved in IKS offers valuable insights into resilient food

systems and community-based agricultural models (60). Education is another critical domain where IKS is being reintegrated through policy reforms and institutional support (39). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift by advocating for the inclusion of Indian languages, classical knowledge, yoga, arts, and traditional sciences like Ayurveda and Vedic mathematics in the curriculum (9). This policy emphasizes multilingual education, value-based learning, and the integration of culture and ethics into academic content (7). Institutions such as IIT Kharagpur, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), and Rishihood University have taken active steps to establish IKS research cells, initiate interdisciplinary courses, and encourage Sanskrit and regional language studies as mediums of accessing ancient texts (61). However, while these efforts represent positive momentum, the revival of IKS must go beyond tokenism or romanticized revival (62). A genuine reawakening requires inclusive representation of diverse knowledge traditions across caste, gender, language, and regional boundaries (63). Historically, much of the documented IKS has centered on Sanskritic, Brahmanical sources (64). Yet, equally significant contributions come from tribal communities, folk traditions, women practitioners, and oral histories that have long sustained local knowledge in medicine, ecology, and spiritual practice (64). For example, Siddha, Unani, and tribal healing systems continue to operate at the grassroots level, though often excluded from mainstream IKS narratives (11). Moreover, critical engagement is essential to ensure that revival efforts do not blindly adopt all traditional practices without evaluation (10). Some elements of historical knowledge—such as those rooted in rigid social hierarchies or gender exclusion—must be reinterpreted through a modern ethical lens (12). Reclaiming IKS should involve separating universal principles from context-specific customs that may no longer serve contemporary society (64, 65).

In essence, the on-going revival of IKS demonstrates its potential as a living, adaptive system of knowledge that can enrich contemporary society when approached with both respect and critical inquiry (66). Its value lies not only in preserving heritage but in shaping a more ethical, balanced, and inclusive future. For IKS to be fully realized in today's world, continued academic research, institutional collaboration, and public awareness will be crucial—especially if it is to contribute meaningfully to global dialogues on sustainability, well-being, and holistic development (67).

## **5. Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore, contextualize, and critically evaluate the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in relation to both its historical significance and contemporary relevance (32, 31). By investigating the philosophical foundations, institutional efforts, and practical applications of IKS, this research aims to demonstrate how ancient Indian wisdom can contribute to solving present-day global challenges (5). The study also addresses the impact of colonialism on indigenous knowledge traditions (68) and analyses current policy-driven strategies to restore their rightful place in academia and public life (9).

### **5.1. To explore the philosophical and epistemological foundations of IKS**

This study aims to examine the core principles that underpin IKS, such as holistic reasoning, experiential learning, ethical integration, and spiritual inquiry (12). It investigates how knowledge in ancient India was constructed through texts like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ayurveda*, and *Arthashastra* (2,3), and how these principles continue to offer viable alternatives to fragmented, discipline-specific approaches found in many modern systems (14).

## **5.2. To assess the historical development and disruption of IKS**

An important objective is to trace the evolution of IKS from its classical roots to its marginalization during colonial rule (8). The study critically analyses how the imposition of Western education systems, especially during the British Raj, led to the decline of indigenous knowledge institutions and epistemic frameworks (69, 7). It also highlights the long-term consequences of this displacement on Indian academia and identity (70).

## **5.3. To evaluate the revival efforts and integration of IKS in contemporary education, health, and sustainability**

This research investigates how IKS is being reintroduced through institutional initiatives, public policies, and community movements. Special focus is placed on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates for the inclusion of Indian languages, traditional knowledge, and value-based learning (5). Other examples include the integration of Ayurveda in public health, Navdanya's work in ecological farming (16) and the development of IKS research centers in premier institutions like IIT Kharagpur and BHU (17).

## **5.4. To identify the challenges and limitations involved in mainstreaming IKS**

While revival efforts are underway, several structural and epistemological barriers remain. This study seeks to identify these challenges, including the lack of teacher training, insufficient research funding, language accessibility, and the underrepresentation of tribal, folk, and women-led knowledge systems (18, 19). Fixing these gaps is important for inclusive and meaningful implementation (20).

### **5.5. To promote a balanced, inclusive, and critically engaged revival of IKS**

This objective emphasizes the need to avoid uncritical glorification of tradition (21). Rather than ignoring them, the study suggests a careful way to bring back IKS in a better way. This approach keeps the good parts of IKS, like how it works with nature, thinks about right and wrong, and fits into different situations, while also being ready to change and improve (22). This includes re-evaluating practices rooted in historical inequalities and integrating pluralistic voices that have often been excluded from dominant narratives (10).

### **5.6. To position IKS as a contributor to global knowledge discourse**

Finally, the study seeks to highlight the potential of IKS to engage with international conversations around decolonizing education, redefining sustainability, and offering holistic models of development (24). By presenting IKS as a living knowledge system, the research underscores its capacity to act as a dialogic partner—rather than a rival—to modern science and global theory (25).

## **6. Conclusion (with embedded references)**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) stands as a testament to the depth, diversity, and sophistication of India's intellectual and cultural heritage (1). Far from being a relic of the past, IKS represents a living and evolving body of wisdom that has the potential to meaningfully contribute to contemporary global challenges (2). Rooted in holistic thinking, ethical foundations, and a deep understanding of interconnectedness between humans, society, and nature (3, 5), IKS offers alternative frameworks to address issues such as environmental degradation, mental health, education reform, and sustainable development (2). This study has critically examined the foundations of IKS, its historical marginalization under colonial influence (7), and its emerging revival in modern India (12). The research has

highlighted how Ayurveda (9), ecological farming movements like Navdanya (10), and educational reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) (11) illustrate practical ways in which IKS is being re-integrated into public life. Furthermore, it has emphasized the important role of government institutions, academic bodies, and grassroots efforts in promoting the visibility and applicability of IKS across diverse sectors (9). However, the process of reclaiming IKS must be approached with both discernment and inclusivity. It is essential to move beyond a nostalgic or idealized view of tradition and instead engage critically with its content (13). This includes recognizing and addressing the exclusions and inequalities embedded in certain historical practices, such as caste or gender-based restrictions (71). An inclusive approach must acknowledge the contributions of tribal, regional, and folk traditions, which often remain underrepresented in mainstream IKS discourse (72). Moreover, true revival requires not only policy changes but also transformation at the institutional and pedagogical levels (11). Curriculum development, teacher training, interdisciplinary research, and community-based learning models are all vital to ensuring that IKS becomes an integral part of India's academic and social ecosystem (11). Embracing indigenous languages and promoting research in Sanskrit and regional dialects are equally important in unlocking access to traditional texts and oral knowledge (7). In the broader global context, IKS offers a valuable perspective in a world increasingly seeking alternatives to extractive, individualistic, and fragmented models of growth (20). The emphasis within IKS on ethical conduct, harmony with nature, collective well-being, and experiential learning aligns with many international efforts aimed at creating more equitable and sustainable societies (21). By contributing these perspectives to global discourse, India has the opportunity to establish itself not only as a technological or economic power, but also as a knowledge leader grounded in its own civilizational strengths (22). In conclusion, reclaiming Indian Knowledge Systems is not merely an act of cultural preservation—it is a

forward-looking strategy for intellectual self-reliance, educational transformation, and global contribution (23). When nurtured thoughtfully and inclusively, IKS can serve as both a foundation and a compass for building a more holistic, ethical, and sustainable future for India and the world (24).

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