



Developmental History of Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract:

India's ancient knowledge system is a unique, multidisciplinary and timeless reservoir of knowledge that encompasses diverse fields such as philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, literature, arts, spirituality and social sciences. The purpose of this study is to analyse the origin, history and evolution of the ancient Indian knowledge system. To explore how the core philosophies, values and human welfare-oriented principles of the Indian knowledge system were formed. To highlight the relevance of IKS in modern society and education, especially in the context of NEP 2020. The study has conducted based on the method of documentary review and historical analysis following the qualitative approach of research. The study found that the ancient Indian knowledge system has played a significant role in human welfare through its multidisciplinary and holistic approach. Its philosophies, values and branches of knowledge – such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Mathematics, Science and Ethics – remain equally relevant even today. The conclusion of the study shows that the ancient Indian knowledge system is not merely a historical heritage but also a powerful guiding framework for modern society and education. IKS has the ability to connect the knowledge of the past with the needs of the present. Its revival in policies like NEP 2020 proves that it can play an important role in the future development of education and society.

Keywords: *IKS, Ancient Knowledge, NEP 2020, Historical Heritage, Multidisciplinary Integrate.*

Introduction:

The Indian knowledge system is a unique, multidisciplinary and timeless repository of knowledge that has been enriched through thousands of years of development and experience. From the ancient Vedic period to the Upanishads, Buddhist and Jain philosophies, Ayurveda, Yoga, Indian Mathematics, literature, arts and social sciences – in every field, the Indian knowledge system carries its own distinct identity and heritage. In this long evolutionary journey, not only has knowledge expanded, but fundamental values such as human welfare, ethics, health, environmental awareness, and social equity have also developed.

The core feature of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is its integrated and holistic perspective, where human beings are viewed as inseparably connected with nature, society, and the universe. While Western epistemology emphasizes fragmentation, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) focuses on creating a

harmonious balance among the physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects of life. The roots of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) lie in the Vedic age, when knowledge was transmitted orally across generations through stories, hymns, rituals, and song traditions. Later, this knowledge was recorded in various texts, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Puranas. These ancient texts contain numerous important concepts related to philosophy, mathematics, medicine, ethics, and governance, which remain equally relevant even today.

The topic ‘Developmental History of Indian knowledge system’ is particularly significant because this history reveals how India’s intellectual tradition has continuously evolved—from Vedic literature to modern times—and how various disciplines in each era have addressed the practical needs of human society. Understanding the developmental journey of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a clear insight into the cultural and intellectual roots of India, and helps us realize how profound its value is in today’s global context. As NEP 2020 emphasizes integrating ancient knowledge with modern education, understanding the developmental history of IKS becomes even more essential, because this knowledge provides a strong foundation for current and future educational systems, research, policymaking, and social development.

Therefore, IKS is not merely a part of history; it is a powerful guiding framework for modern society, education, and research. IKS has an exceptional ability to connect the knowledge of the past with the needs of the present. Its revival in education and policymaking—especially through NEP 2020—demonstrates that IKS can play a significant role in the holistic development of future generations.

Review of Related Literature:

A literature review is a critical component of research and academic writing, serving multiple essential purposes, including- Understanding Existing Knowledge, Identifying Knowledge Gaps and Selecting Appropriate Methodologies. Here researcher has studied various related works, these are as follows-

Laxmi k & Kalluraya (2023) conducted a study on History of the Indian knowledge system. The aim of the study was to analyse the development of the ancient Indian knowledge system its philosophy and values which are relevant for human welfare and sustainable development. The research was carried out based on only qualitative method. The research findings indicate that the ancient Indian knowledge system is still highly relevant for human welfare and moral, social and cultural development. The current education policy attempts to integrate this knowledge and values with modern education to develop students as “true global citizens”.

Mehta (2024) conducted a study on An Exploration of The Indian knowledge system: Roots, significance and contemporary Relevance. The aims of this study were to analyse the origins, characteristics and modern relevance of the ancient Indian knowledge system and to explain how it can contribute to contemporary education, society and global sustainable development. The findings of the study reveal that IKS is an integrated, diverse and sustainable knowledge system that has shaped India’s intellectual heritage. Through NEP 2020, IKS can play an effective role in addressing contemporary global challenges.

Khan & Sharma (2024) made a study on An overview on Indian knowledge system. The purpose of this study was to explain the development, implementation, innovation and future possibilities of the Indian knowledge system and to show how IKS can create new opportunities for the country’s youth and economy. The research was carried out based on only descriptive method. The findings of the study revealed that IKS can play an effective role in solving modern social problems and can be easily integrated with digital education. It is clear that specially trained teachers are required to prove quality IKS education.

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyse the origin and evolution of the ancient Indian knowledge System.
- To highlight the relevance of IKS in modern education especially in the context of NEP 2020.

Methodology:

The study has conducted based on the method of documentary review following the qualitative approach of research. Data for this paper has collect from various primary and secondary sources such as, various books, research articles, and electronic journals. Methods has used to collect information- document review, archival investigation, representative themes, that were found across collected documents, and analysed. In this study, Indian Knowledge System has been analysed deeply. The content of each document has reviewed in detail by the researchers.

Insights from Historical Context:

It is possible to gain a better understanding of the Indian Knowledge System's (IKS) history by looking at its historical growth via several stages, starting with the Vedic era and progressing to the post-Vedic and classical times, as well as into the colonial era. Each of these stages reflects a distinct facet of IKS, demonstrating how Knowledge changed over time in response to sociocultural, political, and economic shifts. This deeply ingrained IKS's historical trajectory offers important insights into its resilience and continuation in addition to illuminating its beginnings.

The Indus Valley Civilization:

Although the Indus Valley Civilization's (IVC) written script is still unintelligible, Archaeological data clearly points to a highly developed society with sophisticated understanding. Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, two of its well-planned towns, have exceptional granaries, sophisticated drainage systems, urban planning, and uniform weights and measurements, demonstrate a deep grasp of geometry, engineering, and public health.

Their brickwork's accuracy and consistent ratios (1:2:4) show a useful utilization of mathematical concepts. The fact that Lothal has dockyards further suggests superior understanding of maritime engineering and hydrodynamics. Even so, there is still much to be discovered because of the unintelligible script, the IVC surely lay some of the first laying the foundation for India's organized knowledge systems and showcasing early urban planning as well as hydraulic engineering.

Vedic Period:

The foundation of IKS lies in the Vedic period, which began around 1500 BCE. The Vedas are known as the oldest surviving literary works in the world, where the profound experiences of the sages are expressed in the form of poetry known as mantras. The word 'Veda' means knowledge, derived from the Sanskrit root 'vid', and the Vedas are called *apaurusheya*—meaning they are not created by humans, but are the revelatory knowledge received by the sages. The Vedas are also referred to as *Shruti* and *Smriti* because this knowledge was passed down orally from generation to generation. When it seemed that preserving the knowledge orally was becoming difficult, *Vedavyasa* collected this knowledge from various stages and recorded it in written form, which became a historic step in the preservation of the Vedas. The four Vedas—*Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*—are evidence of the diverse knowledge repositories of ancient Indians. The meticulous preservation of the Vedas proves how deeply our ancestor's valued knowledge and how diligently they worked to preserve every single letter.

Post-Vedic and Classical Periods:

The post-Vedic and classical eras witnessed the additional formalization and diversification of Indian expertise. Many of the ideas presented in the Vedas were developed during this period, and a number of significant writings were created, such as the Upanishads, the Puranas, and the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. Often regarded as the philosophical pinnacle of Vedic teachings, the Upanishads introduced significant metaphysical ideas like Atman (the self or soul) and Brahman (the ultimate reality). During this time, several philosophical systems known as the Darshanas emerged, including Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Vedanta, Purva Mimamsa, Samkhya, and Yoga. These educational institutions provide methodical foundations for comprehension, understanding, reality, and the essence of life. Considerable progress was made in the fields of science and mathematics. Prominent academics like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta made revolutionary contributions to mathematics and astronomy, while Aryabhata introduced concepts of Earth rotation, trigonometric functions, and approximations for pi. The text of Brahmagupta, Brahma Sphutasiddhanta described significant algebraic and arithmetic theories. The traditional Through foundational writings like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, which established Ayurveda, this era also saw advances in medicine. These books covered surgical techniques, herbal remedies, medical ethics, and all-encompassing methods of health, which mirror the integrative character of IKS.

Influence of Buddhism and Jainism:

Around the 6th century BCE, the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism opened a new horizon in the evolution of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). These traditions not only enriched IKS spiritually but also made significant contributions to ethics, epistemology, and human-centered thinking. The experiential inquiry, meditation, and mindfulness emphasized in the Buddhist Tripitaka strengthened the ethical and philosophical foundation of IKS. On the other hand, the Jain doctrine of Anekantavada, or the theory of multiple perspectives, made Indian thought more logical, tolerant, and accepting of diverse viewpoints. The logical and mathematical ideas of Jain scholars such as Mahavira and Acharya Bhadrabahu expanded the scope of the knowledge system, which later became a distinctive feature of Indian philosophical traditions. Thus, Buddhist and Jain philosophies played a crucial role in shaping IKS into an integrated framework of human development, ethics, and rational thinking.

Colonial Encounter and its Impact:

The colonial period marked a significant transformation in the trajectory of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), as British governance systematically undermined indigenous modes of education and traditional channels of knowledge transmission. Long-established institutions like Gurukulas and Madrasas were marginalized, while Western educational models were enforced. The adoption of English as the primary medium of instruction further alienated large sections of society from their own intellectual traditions. Additionally, Western scholars diminished the status of IKS by portraying it as irrational and rooted in superstition. Despite these challenges, several traditional knowledge practices, including Yoga and Ayurveda, persisted through informal means and continued to thrive within particular communities.

In the post-independence period, India faced the challenge of constructing a new national identity, and efforts to overcome the impact of colonialism led to a renewed evaluation of indigenous knowledge. Nationalist leaders and thinkers—such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi—played significant roles in reviving the indigenous intellectual tradition and highlighting its relevance for modern India. After independence, the movement toward “decolonizing education” strengthened, emphasizing the reintegration of local languages, traditions, and perspectives into the educational system, helping IKS adapt to new socio-cultural realities.

Post Independence revival and NEP 2020:

There were major initiatives to revitalize and unify the Indian Knowledge System after independence in 1947 into the educational system. However, these initiatives encountered significant obstacles because of the dominance of western institutional structures, policymaking, and academic epistemology. The use of Western models in education resulted in the marginalization of traditional Indian knowledge in postcolonial India, which was frequently viewed as antiquated or not relevant. It was challenging to completely return IKS to a position of comparable importance alongside Western paradigms of science.

Despite these obstacles, academics, educators, and cultural leaders continued to work to revitalize IKS. The arts, sciences, and customs were documented and promoted through initiatives. Organizations similar as the ancient manuscripts were preserved in large part by Banaras Hindu University and the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan. encouraging study on traditional Indian ideas and sciences as well as Sanskrit studies. Still, the IKS was not widely supported by institutions and was only partially integrated into the standard educational system essential for broad acceptance.

The Indian Knowledge System has seen a resurgence in attention in recent years, especially with the introduction of the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP). NEP 2020 expressly acknowledges the significance of combining conventional In integrates traditional knowledge with contemporary education and prioritizes an interdisciplinary strategy that is consistent with the IKS's integrative and comprehensive approach. This strategy is viewed as a revolutionary move toward recovering India's intellectual heritage and making sure IKS is an essential component of India's educational system.

Core philosophies and Human Welfare in IKS:

The core philosophies, values, and human-welfare-oriented principles of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) evolved gradually over thousands of years. Rooted in the lifestyle of ancient Indian society, spiritual inquiry, natural environment, and social practices, this knowledge system prioritized holistic human development, ethics, and social well-being. IKS is not merely a collection of theoretical knowledge; it embodies principles of living, codes of conduct, and the pursuit of equity and justice within society. The ancient scriptures, philosophies, literature, sciences, and medical traditions encapsulated these ideals, which remain relevant today in promoting human welfare and moral values within modern education. Thus, the foundational principles and philosophies of IKS continue to serve as a timeless guide for both individual and societal development.

Contemporary Relevance of IKS:

In the present era, the relevance of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is steadily increasing, especially in its applications within education and society. In the context of NEP 2020, the importance of IKS has become even more evident, as it promotes the integration of ancient knowledge with modern educational practices. IKS is not merely the preservation of past wisdom; it serves as a powerful tool for enhancing the holistic development, ethical values, critical thinking, and creativity of learners. By incorporating various branches of ancient Indian philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, and arts into contemporary education, students gain not only academic knowledge but also life-oriented skills, problem-solving abilities, and strong moral foundations. From this perspective, IKS plays a significant and contemporary role in shaping today's educational framework.

Findings:

- Origin, History, and Evolution of IKS Results show that while the Indian Knowledge System emerged during the Vedic era, its foundations were formed much earlier by ancient philosophical and cultural traditions, including the oral Aruti tradition, pre-Aryan heritage, and the intellectual practices of the Indus Valley Civilization. IKS progressively developed into a comprehensive and multifaceted system of knowledge over time through the Vedic era, the Upanishadic period, Buddhist and Jain philosophies, classical sciences, Ayurveda, mathematics, astronomy, and many art forms.
- Establishment of Fundamental Ideas, Principles, and Subfields According to research, the fundamental ideas of the Indian Knowledge System—such as Dharma (ethics), Artha (prosperity), Kama (human wants), and Moksha (liberation)—were founded on the ideas of equality, human welfare, morality, and a knowledge-based lifestyle. The values and different branches of IKS were shaped in large part by harmony with nature, a holistic worldview, experiential learning, self-inquiry, and social welfare. Ayurveda, yoga, mathematics, Indian philosophy, linguistics, and the arts are just a few of the branches that are based on a common understanding of knowledge that promotes human welfare.
- IKS's Significance in Contemporary Society and the NEP 2020 Setting The study's conclusions unequivocally demonstrate that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is still very important in today's world, especially when it comes to integrated skill development, education, health, sustainable living, and moral growth. By bridging the gap between traditional Indian knowledge and modern education, NEP 2020 seeks to transform the educational system and foster students' creativity, problem-solving skills, holistic development, and value-based education. The basis for transdisciplinary learning is being strengthened and India's traditional knowledge history is being revitalized through the incorporation of IKS into contemporary educational practices.

Conclusion:

The research makes it clear that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a comprehensive knowledge framework based on human welfare, ethics, equality, and a holistic vision of life rather than just a continuation of past intellectual traditions. Its inception and development have combined many levels of intellectual growth within Indian society to create a comprehensive and cohesive system that is still useful today. The results show that the fundamental ideas and subfields of IKS strongly correspond with the demands of contemporary society, including skill development, sustainable living, moral education, and mental health. By establishing a significant link between traditional knowledge and modern education, NEP 2020 enhances its relevance even further. Thus, it can be said that IKS still plays a useful, pertinent, and human-centered guiding function in the development of contemporary society and education.

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