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Convergence and Challenges of the Indian Knowledge System Association with the Sustainable Goals

Ankita Manna*[1] & Suman Atta*[2]

1. Postgraduate Student, Department of Education, Midnapore College (Autonomous), Midnapore, West Bengal, India, Email: ankitamanna557@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author: Assistant Professor (Cont.), Department of Education, Midnapore College (Autonomous), West Bengal, India, Email: suman.atta@midnaporecollege.ac.in

*These authors contributed equally to the study.

Abstract:

This study offers a critical and insightful examination of the convergence between the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on the educational dimension. Adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the global 2030 Agenda, the SDGs aim to address urgent social, environmental, and economic challenges. This research reveals that the core philosophical foundations of IKS- value-based education, holistic learning, ecological sensitivity, self-discipline, and ethical consciousness resonate deeply with the transformative vision of SDG 4: Quality Education. Through a qualitative approach of research using documentary analysis Indian knowledge traditions and contemporary policy frameworks, the study highlights how pedagogical features such as the guru–shishya system, experiential and inquiry-based learning, and multidisciplinary education nurture creativity, emotional resilience, and moral development. These elements represent essential components of sustainable education in the modern world. The study also identifies persistent gaps and challenges in mainstreaming IKS within today's educational structures. Limited curricular integration, inadequate teacher preparation, lack of technological synergy, and institutional constraints continue to hinder widespread implementation. Nevertheless, the findings underscore that a thoughtful and systematic integration of IKS into modern education can serve as a powerful catalyst for building a humane, environmentally responsible, and ethically grounded society. The study concludes that bridging IKS with SDG-driven educational reforms not only enriches the learning experience but also strengthens the global pursuit of sustainable and holistic development.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Holistic Education, Value-Based Learning, Experiential Pedagogy.*

Introduction:

The Indian Knowledge System is a synthesis of thousands of years of intellectual, spiritual and scientific traditions, from the environmental philosophy of the Rigveda to Ayurveda, Buddhist- Jain philosophies, and

the principals of living, and the creation of a balanced relationship between humans and nature. This ancient knowledge is clearly relevant to today's Sustainable Development Goals.

On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda and its (17 goals and 169 targets) Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by the United Nations in 2015, have made global commitments to education a distinct objective and a key component of the overall agenda. Education is a key tool for achieving better health, gender equality, economic empowerment, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion in the long term.

UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development framework emphasizes equipping learning with the needs, capabilities, values and attitudes to contribute to sustainable development. NEP 2020 clearly aligns polices and priorities for society with the SDGs and proposes educational changes that create opportunities to mainstream sustainability at different levels of education.

Moral education is essential for developing civic and ethical values that are important for sustainable behaviour. India's progress and failure significantly affect global indicators. And its diverse population, combined with various economic and social inequalities, presents challenges and opportunities. It attempts to assess the obstacles it faces and explore pathways towards sustainable development. This To analyse the relevance of Indian Knowledge with the target dimensions of the development.

Rationale of the Study:

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast reservoir of traditional wisdom, scientific understanding, ecological ethics, holistic health practices, and cultural philosophy developed over thousands of years. At a time when the world is grappling with environmental degradation, climate change, social inequality, declining mental well-being, and unsustainable consumption patterns, the principles embedded in IKS provide important pathways toward planetary and human sustainability.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise global priorities such as environmental protection, social justice, quality health, equitable education, and responsible economic growth. Many of these dimensions are inherently aligned with IKS traditions such as Ayurveda, Yoga, sustainable agriculture, water conservation, biodiversity preservation, and community-centric governance.

Yet, despite this convergence, several challenges - such as lack of documentation, scientific validation gaps, socio-cultural misconceptions, and policy limitations—create barriers to applying IKS meaningfully in the contemporary world. Examining these convergences and challenges is vital for strengthening India's contribution to global sustainability and for developing culturally grounded, holistic solutions that modern science alone cannot fully address.

This study is therefore justified because it identifies how IKS can meaningfully support the SDGs, explores ways to integrate traditional knowledge with modern science and technology, and analyses the barriers that restrict effective implementation. The rationale lies in bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary sustainability needs, ensuring that the strengths of both knowledge systems are utilized for collective human progress.

Objectives:

Following objectives are constructed-

O1: To analyse the relevance of Indian Knowledge with the target dimensions of sustainable development.

O2: To find possible ways to integrate IKS with modern science and technology.

O3: To explore the Challenges to the application of IKS in the contemporary world.

Research Question:

Based on the objectives, the key research questions are-

RQ1: How is the Indian Knowledge System relevant to the target dimensions of Sustainable Development Goals?

RQ2: What possible approaches can be used to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems with modern science and technology for sustainable development?

RQ3: What are the major challenges in applying Indian Knowledge Systems within the contemporary global and national contexts?

Methodology:

The study was conducted based on the document review method towards qualitative research methodology. The data for this paper were collected from primary and secondary sources such as research articles, ancient Indian scriptures, philosophy, health systems, environmental thought, indigenous and modern source reviews, UN SDGs related documents, reports and research papers and electronic journals. The method was used to collect the information obtained from the collected documents. In this study, the impact of sustainable development goals through Indian knowledge system has been analyzed in depth. The content of each document has been reviewed in detail through the research.

Analysis and Discussions:

This study analyses and explains the progress and challenges of the Indian knowledge system and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Objective 1: To analyse the relevance of Indian Knowledge with the target dimensions of Sustainable Development

Analysing the relevance of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) with the target dimensions of Sustainable Development involves exploring how India's indigenous intellectual, cultural, ecological, and philosophical traditions contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Indian Knowledge System, rooted in ancient scriptures, holistic sciences, ethical living, ecological balance, and community-centric practices, provides frameworks that align closely with the global agenda of sustainable development introduced by the United Nations.

Firstly, IKS emphasises harmony between humans and nature, which directly supports SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Ancient Indian practices such as conservation of forests (Aranyani traditions), river reverence, sustainable agriculture (Krishi-parashara), water harvesting (Johads, step wells), and biodiversity preservation demonstrate ecological wisdom that aligns with modern sustainability strategies. Analysing these connections helps highlight how traditional environmental ethics can complement contemporary climate policies.

Secondly, Indian Knowledge upholds the principles of holistic health and well-being, central to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, and Naturopathy emphasize preventive healthcare, balance, and mental well-being. The global acceptance of Yoga highlights how Indian wisdom contributes to mental health resilience, stress reduction, and overall physical harmony, fulfilling essential health-related SDG outcomes.

Thirdly, IKS promotes quality education and lifelong learning, which connect strongly with SDG 4 (Quality Education). Ancient systems like Gurukula, Nalanda, Takshashila, and Buddhist monastic education encouraged learner-centred methods, moral education, experiential learning, and multidisciplinary knowledge. Analysing this relevance shows how IKS can enrich NEP 2020's vision of holistic, competency-based education grounded in cultural roots.

Fourthly, Indian Knowledge fosters social equity, justice, and inclusive development, corresponding to SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Teachings from Upanishads, Buddhism, Bhakti movement, and reformers emphasise equality, dignity, non-violence, and compassion. These philosophical foundations can guide today's democratic values, conflict resolution, and gender-sensitive policies.

Fifthly, economic sustainability principles embedded in IKS, such as swadeshi, local craftsmanship, sustainable consumption, and community livelihood models—align with SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Traditional agricultural practices, cottage industries, handloom, Ayurveda-based entrepreneurship, and circular economy models reflect sustainable livelihood strategies that modern societies are re-embracing.

Finally, the ethical and spiritual dimensions of IKS promote inner development, self-restraint, compassion, and collective responsibility—values essential for achieving all SDGs. These philosophies support global efforts towards sustainable lifestyles, peace-building, and ethical governance.

Thus, analysing the relevance of IKS with SDG target dimensions shows that Indian Knowledge is not merely historical wisdom, but a living, adaptable, and holistic framework that can significantly contribute to environmental sustainability, social justice, holistic health, quality education, and inclusive economic progress. The objective is fulfilled by demonstrating how ancient Indian insights converge meaningfully with modern global sustainability goals (Joshi, R. H., 2025).

Objective 2: To find possible ways to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with modern science and technology

The objective focuses on identifying practical strategies through which traditional Indian wisdom can be harmonised with the rapidly evolving scientific and technological landscape. This involves examining how the strengths of IKS- holistic understanding, community-centric knowledge, ecological sensitivity, and ethical foundations—can complement evidence-based, technology-driven modern systems. Achieving this integration is essential for creating sustainable, culturally rooted, and innovation-oriented solutions for contemporary societal challenges.

One of the most important ways to integrate IKS with modern science is through scientific validation and documentation. Many traditional practices in medicine, agriculture, architecture, and ecology are based on empirical knowledge accumulated over centuries. Systematic research, laboratory testing, interdisciplinary studies, and digital documentation can help verify, refine, and modernize IKS practices. For example, validating Ayurvedic formulations, traditional rice varieties, or water conservation systems using scientific methods can help bring indigenous knowledge into mainstream scientific discourse.

Another key avenue is technology-enabled preservation and dissemination of IKS. Creating digital repositories, mobile applications, GIS mapping of traditional ecological knowledge, and AI-based tools for language preservation can ensure that ancient texts, folk knowledge, and region-specific practices are

protected and made accessible to scholars and the public. This integration helps bridge generational gaps and supports educational reforms.

IKS can also be integrated with modern science through interdisciplinary research collaborations. Universities, research institutions, and technology centres can develop programmes that combine Ayurveda with biomedical sciences, Vastu Shastra with sustainable architecture, Yoga with neuroscience, and traditional agriculture with contemporary climate science. Such collaborations can yield innovative models for health, wellness, and ecological resilience.

Furthermore, IKS-based sustainable technologies offer valuable opportunities for integration. Traditional water harvesting structures, natural dyes, organic farming, indigenous seeds, biodegradable materials, and eco-friendly construction techniques can be combined with modern engineering, biotechnology, and renewable energy solutions. This helps fulfil global sustainability needs while preserving cultural heritage.

Educational reforms provide another strong pathway for integration. Incorporating IKS into school and university curricula alongside modern science promotes multidisciplinary and culturally grounded learning. Projects, internships, field visits, and experiential learning programmes can expose students to both scientific methods and indigenous wisdom, encouraging innovation at the grassroots level.

At the policy level, integration can be strengthened through government-led initiatives, such as the IKS division under the Ministry of Education, collaborations with IITs and IISERs, and funding support for research in traditional knowledge domains. Regulations that protect intellectual property rights of local communities, alongside incentives for IKS-based start-ups, can further accelerate integration.

Community participation is also essential. Engaging artisans, farmers, healers, and indigenous groups in scientific projects ensures that knowledge exchange happens ethically and sustainably. This bottom-up integration enriches scientific understanding and empowers local communities.

Thus, analysing possible ways to integrate IKS with modern science and technology reveals a wide range of strategies—scientific validation, digital technology, interdisciplinary research, sustainable innovation, educational reforms, supportive policies, and community engagement. These avenues demonstrate that IKS and modern science are not opposing systems but complementary knowledge traditions that can jointly contribute to sustainable development, cultural continuity, and technological progress.

Objective 3: To explore the challenges to the application of IKS in the contemporary world

Exploring the challenges to the application of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in the contemporary world requires a realistic understanding of the structural, cultural, scientific, and policy-related barriers that hinder its effective implementation. Although IKS contains immense potential for sustainability, holistic health, ecology, and education, its translation into modern systems is not straightforward. This objective involves analysing the key obstacles that affect how traditional knowledge can be integrated and applied in present-day globalised, technologically advanced societies (Ghosh, B., 2021)

One of the major challenges is the epistemological gap between IKS and modern scientific frameworks. IKS is holistic, experiential, and context-specific, while modern science follows reductionist, laboratory-based methods. This fundamental difference in knowledge systems creates difficulties in validating traditional practices through contemporary scientific criteria. As a result, many IKS components face skepticism and limited acceptance in academic or institutional domains.

Another significant challenge is the lack of documentation, standardisation, and scientific validation. Many traditional medicinal, agricultural, and ecological practices are transmitted orally and vary by region. In the

absence of systematic research, controlled trials, and standardized protocols, it becomes difficult to scale or certify these practices for modern use. This gap restricts their integration into mainstream healthcare, education, environmental policy, or technological applications.

Further challenges arise from policy and institutional limitations. Although government bodies have shown increasing interest in promoting IKS, issues such as inadequate funding, limited interdisciplinary research infrastructure, insufficient training for teachers or practitioners, and fragmented administrative support hinder effective implementation. These institutional gaps reduce the capacity of IKS to be systematically incorporated into education systems or national development programs.

Social and cultural challenges also play an important role. Due to colonial influence and modernisation, many people perceive IKS as outdated, unscientific, or merely symbolic. This weak social acceptance affects both policy decisions and public participation. The danger of commercial misuse, superficial adaptation, or misrepresentation—such as in yoga, Ayurveda, or traditional crafts, further complicates the proper application of IKS.

Another contemporary challenge is the erosion of ecological and cultural resources that IKS depends upon. Loss of biodiversity, climate change, destruction of indigenous habitats, and declining traditional livelihoods directly impact the survival of traditional knowledge. Without the ecological and cultural contexts that originally shaped IKS practices, the authenticity and effectiveness of such knowledge are threatened.

Legal and ethical issues also create obstacles. Concerns about biopiracy, intellectual property rights, and benefit-sharing often arise when traditional knowledge is commercialised without protecting the interests of indigenous communities. Lack of clear regulatory mechanisms discourages community participation and trust.

Thus, exploring these challenges shows that applying IKS in contemporary systems requires addressing epistemic conflicts, scientific limitations, institutional constraints, socio-cultural misperceptions, ecological threats, and legal complexities. By analysing these barriers, this objective highlights the need for integrative strategies, responsible policies, and sensitive approaches that can ensure the sustainable and ethical application of Indian Knowledge Systems in the modern world.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of how the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) converges with and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while also addressing the challenges that shape its contemporary application. Academically, the study enriches existing scholarship by providing a structured analytical framework that links indigenous knowledge to global sustainability targets. It deepens theoretical understanding by highlighting interdisciplinary pathways through which traditional Indian wisdom can be meaningfully integrated with modern scientific approaches. By identifying existing challenges, the study also opens new avenues for future research in indigenous studies, sustainability science, and educational policy.

From a policy perspective, the study holds considerable importance because it generates evidence-based insights that can guide national and institutional decision-making. It supports the creation of strategic policies aimed at promoting IKS within mainstream education, research, and national development initiatives. The study also helps policymakers design ethical frameworks for documentation, protection, and responsible utilisation of traditional knowledge, thereby strengthening India's commitment to the SDGs.

The study is equally significant for society, as it highlights how IKS can inspire sustainable lifestyles rooted in ecological balance, collective well-being, and community values. By emphasising traditional ecological

wisdom, holistic living practices, and community-centric approaches, the study promotes public awareness about the contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledge. It helps strengthen social cohesion by reconnecting individuals and communities with their cultural roots and shared heritage.

In the realm of science and technology, the study underscores the potential of IKS to contribute to innovative, sustainable solutions. By identifying possibilities for integrating traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous agricultural practices, Ayurvedic principles, and cultural technologies with modern scientific advancements, the research encourages the development of new hybrid models of innovation. It also promotes collaboration between traditional practitioners and modern scientific institutions, expanding the scope of interdisciplinary research.

Culturally and ethically, the study is significant because it contributes to the preservation and respectful representation of India's civilizational knowledge. It reinforces the importance of safeguarding traditional practices and promoting community-centred, ethical approaches to their implementation. The study also strengthens cultural pride by highlighting the global value of India's philosophical and ecological heritage.

Finally, the study has global relevance as it positions IKS as a meaningful contributor to worldwide sustainability efforts. The principles embedded in IKS—such as balance, harmony, self-restraint, ecological responsibility, and holistic well-being—align with the core philosophy of the SDGs. By demonstrating how ancient Indian wisdom can address modern global challenges, the study contributes to international discourses on sustainable development, cultural knowledge, and environmental ethics.

Conclusion:

The present study explores the convergence and challenges of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the importance of integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary global development needs. The analysis demonstrates that IKS contains profound insights on ecological balance, social harmony, holistic health, sustainable agriculture, ethical living, and community governance—all of which resonate strongly with the core dimensions of sustainable development. By examining the relevance of IKS to SDGs, identifying pathways for integrating traditional knowledge with modern science and technology, and analysing the challenges that complicate its contemporary application, the study underscores the transformative potential of indigenous knowledge for global sustainability.

The findings indicate that IKS can make significant contributions to environmental conservation, climate resilience, inclusive education, cultural preservation, and sustainable livelihoods when supported by scientific validation, policy interventions, and community participation. However, epistemological gaps, inadequate documentation, socio-cultural biases, regulatory issues, and ecological degradation pose barriers to meaningful implementation. Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary research, ethical frameworks, participatory governance, and educational reforms that place indigenous wisdom alongside scientific innovation.

Overall, the study affirms that the Indian Knowledge System is not a relic of the past but a living, dynamic resource capable of enriching modern sustainability efforts. Its integration with contemporary science can create pathways for holistic, culturally grounded, and ethically responsible development. The conclusion reinforces that harnessing IKS is vital—both for India's national progress and for the global pursuit of sustainable development.

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