

# Discourse of Indian Knowledge System

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**Abstract :** Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) is a section of the Indian Ministry of Education that promotes indigenous knowledge systems. Knowledge assets generated in India are called the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Mathematics, physics, technology, medicine, astronomy, architecture, philosophy, arts, languages, literature, culture, society, and traditions are included. IKS has traditionally established its own written or verbal texts, methodologies, and standards for knowledge generation, validation, and dissemination. The Indian knowledge system covers all sectors of society, unlike the western one. Indian knowledge system lags western methodology. This deficiency is due to two factors: India's history as a nation-state and western society's methodology. History shows the development and collapse of Indian societies like Vedic, Post Vedic, Medieval, Colonial, and Independent India, while western technique is scientific and universal (Eurocentrism in post-colonial discourse). Indian knowledge systems use oral tradition more.

In this paper we are trying to investigate the historical journey of Indian Knowledge system through methodological comparison with the western system. This paper is based on Secondary data using Historical and comparative methods. Through this study Student, Researcher and Intellectuals will definitely be able to learn new and expand their knowledge through Indian Knowledge System.

**Keywords:** Indian Knowledge System, Methodology, Western Tradition, History.

## Introduction

Man is by nature a social animal (Aristotle); human beings are different from the rest of the animals because they are 'concept bearers' alone (Bhargava). With the development of civilisation, the human mind constructed a knowledge system for society, and it transferred from one generation to another through "culture." Because of this, differences were created between one society and another.<sup>1</sup>

Every society has its own roots in civilisation and its own unique knowledge system. This all happens through the process of evolution and is studied by history; for example, the Vedic period is known as the Golden Era of Indian civilisation, where the Indian knowledge system was at its height and Indians developed various institutions related to education, politics, economy, etc.<sup>2</sup> But it is not permanent, while at the time of the Indian developed era, the European knowledge system was not as developed.<sup>3</sup> This era is known as the Dark Age of the European knowledge system.

The whole paper is based on four layers of knowledge systems: *firstly*, it focuses on the Indian

<sup>1</sup>Acarya, P.K. (1996). Indian Architecture, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers, New Delhi.

<sup>2</sup>Banerjea, P. (1916). Public Administration in Ancient India, Macmillan, London.

<sup>3</sup>Altekar AS. State and Government in Ancient India, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas 1992.

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Knowledge System (IKS); secondly, *the* difference between the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) & Western Knowledge System (WKS); thirdly, *the* Colonial Era and Indian Knowledge System (IKS); and lastly, India evolves as a “Vishwa Guru” through the Indian Knowledge System.<sup>4</sup>

The Indian knowledge system is a vast and varied framework that was formed over thousands of years in the Indian subcontinent and encompasses many domains of knowledge, including philosophy, spirituality, physics, mathematics, medicine, and the arts. It is distinguished by a comprehensive methodology, the incorporation of various disciplines, and a profound comprehension of the interdependence of the cosmos.<sup>5</sup> The Indian knowledge structure consists of important elements:

- **The Vedas and Upanishads:** Indian philosophy and spirituality are based on these ancient writings.<sup>6</sup> They include songs, rituals, and philosophical talks about the nature of existence, reality, and the ego.
- **Yoga and Ayurveda:** Ayurveda is a historic medical system that emphasises holistic treatment and balance of mind, body, and spirit.<sup>7</sup> Yoga is a spiritual and physical activity meant to achieve mental and physical well-being.
- **Jyotisha (Astrology):** The foundation of Indian astrology is the idea that planetary motions and cosmic patterns are impacted by people's lives and fates. It covers the investigation of celestial bodies and their effects on people and communities. Darshanas, or philosophical systems, refer to the six main schools of Indian philosophy: Vedanta, Yoga, Samkhya, Vaisheshika, Nyaya, and Mimamsa. Different viewpoints on logic, ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics are offered by each school.
- **Astronomy and Mathematics:** The mathematicians of ancient India made important advances in number theory, algebra, and geometry. In order to analyse celestial events and determine planetary positions and eclipses, Indian astronomers developed advanced mathematical procedures.<sup>8</sup>
- **Arts and Literature:** Indian literature encompasses a broad spectrum of genres, including traditional theatre, philosophical treatises, novels, and epic poetry (like the Mahabharata and Ramayana). India's cultural legacy is deeply ingrained in its traditional dance, music, and visual arts.
- **Dharma and Ethics:**<sup>9</sup> The moral and ethical cornerstone of Indian civilisation is dharma, which is frequently translated as obligation or righteousness.<sup>10</sup> This shows how important it is to fulfil one's duties and live peacefully with nature and others.
- **Gandhian Thought:** Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on truth (satya), nonviolence (ahimsa), and selfless service (seva) had a significant influence on India's freedom movement and continue to motivate social justice and human rights organisations around the globe.

All things considered, the Indian knowledge system is a reflection of a holistic worldview that emphasises the quest for spiritual enlightenment in addition to material advancement and aims to balance the welfare of the individual with that of society and the environment.

Over thousands of years, a large and diversified body of knowledge has evolved to form the Indian knowledge system.<sup>11</sup> It includes a wide range of disciplines, including physics, medicine, philosophy,

<sup>4</sup>Kapoor Kapil, Singh Avadhesh (2021). “Indian Knowledge Systems Vol – I & II”, Indian Institute of Advanced Study .P.H ,Shimla

<sup>5</sup>Pride of India: A Glimpse into India's Scientific Heritage, Samskrita Bharati, New Delhi.

<sup>6</sup>Sampad and Vijay (2011). “The Wonder that is Sanskrit”, Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry.

<sup>7</sup>Bhandarkar DR. Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity, Banarus 1929.

<sup>8</sup>Basham L. The Wonder that was India, Calcutta, Rupa and Co 1967.

<sup>9</sup>Mackenzie Brown D. The White Umbrella. Jaico 1980.

<sup>10</sup>Ram Sharan Sharma. Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas 1991.

<sup>11</sup>Mabbett W. Truth, Myth and Politics in Ancient India. Thomson Press 1971.

spirituality, the arts, and social sciences.<sup>12</sup> The emphasis on integrated and holistic learning is one of the main characteristics of the Indian knowledge system. Information was traditionally passed down orally, with pupils living with their professors and learning practical skills, moral principles, and spiritual advice in addition to academic information.<sup>13</sup>



Source: <https://www.pashudhanpraharee.com/indigenous-knowledge-system-and-documentation-process-in-india/>

**Figure1: Indian Knowledge System.**

Indian philosophy has had a significant impact on the Indian knowledge system, especially the six major schools of Hindu philosophy (Shad Darshanas). These educational institutions delve into basic enquiries concerning the essence of existence, the self, ethics, and the nature of reality. Moksha, dharma, and karma are among the key ideas of this intellectual school.

India is the birthplace of many different spiritual traditions, including Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. These faiths place a strong emphasis on the pursuit of ultimate truth, self-realisation, and personal transformation.<sup>14</sup> Meditation, yoga, and mindfulness are examples of practices that originated in Indian spiritual traditions and have become increasingly popular across the globe.

Throughout history, India has made substantial contributions to a number of scientific fields. Mathematicians from ancient India, like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta, made significant advances in algebra, arithmetic, and trigonometry. India is also credited with developing the decimal system and the notion of zero, sometimes referred to as the Hindu-Arabic number system.

Ayurveda, or traditional Indian medicine, is another significant facet of Indian knowledge. Ayurveda is

<sup>12</sup>Spellman JW. Political Theory of Ancient India Oxford 1964.

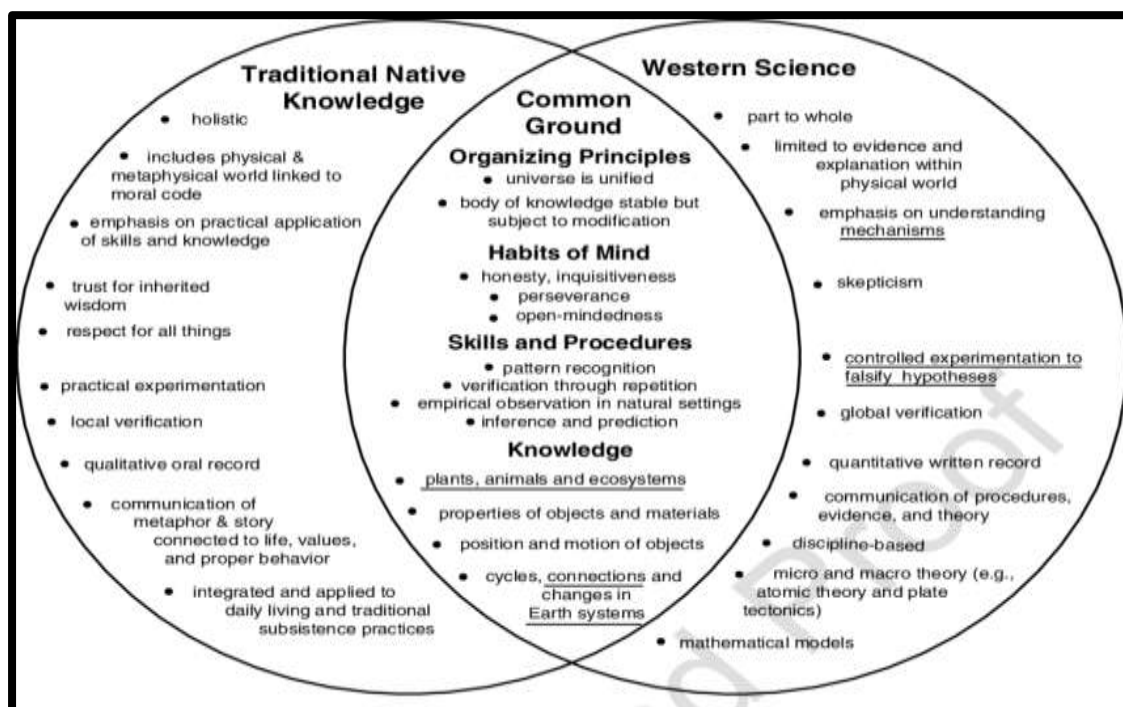
<sup>13</sup>Appadorai. Indian Political Thinking, Oxford University Press 1971.

<sup>14</sup>Sharma U. Humanism in Contemporary India Political Thought (Hindi), Vineet Meerut 1980.

a holistic medical method that emphasises establishing harmony and balance in the body, mind, and soul. To enhance well-being, it combines a variety of methods, including herbal medicine, diet, yoga, and meditation.

The Indian knowledge system also heavily relies on Indian literature and the arts. Indian classical music, traditional art forms like painting, sculpture, and architecture, and dance styles like Kathak and Bharatanatyam have a long history and are ingrained in Indian culture. The Indian knowledge system is the culmination of centuries of education, discovery, and philosophical study. Its synthesis of diverse fields, holistic approach, and profound comprehension of the interdependence of all facets of life are its defining characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

**Difference between Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and Western Knowledge System (WKS):** Western science is scientific and measurable,<sup>16</sup> while traditional knowledge is essentially subjective and qualitative.<sup>17</sup> While the Indian knowledge system is usually passed down verbally by elders from one generation to the next, Western science is founded on the intellectual and literary transmission of scholars.



Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Similarities-and-differences-between-traditional-Native-knowledge-and-western-science\\_fig1\\_270286466](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Similarities-and-differences-between-traditional-Native-knowledge-and-western-science_fig1_270286466)

**Figure2: Difference between Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and Western Knowledge System. (WKS).**

There are significant distinctions between the Western and Indian knowledge systems in regard to their

<sup>15</sup>Kosambi DD. Myth and Reality, Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture, Bombay 1962.

<sup>16</sup>Prem Arora, Brij Gover. Selected Western and Indian Political Thinkers. Cosmos Bookhive (P) Ltd., New Delhi.

<sup>17</sup>Parekh, Bhikhu. 1992. "The Poverty of Indian Political Theory." History of Political Thought 13 (3): 535–60.

approaches, foundations, and areas of emphasis. Here are a few significant variations:

- **Bases/Foundations:** The Vedas, Upanishads, and other ancient religious and philosophical writings form the foundation of the Indian knowledge system. It emphasises spirituality—the goal of emancipation and self-realization—and dharma, or duty. On the other hand, the scientific method, rationalism, and empiricism form the foundation of the Western knowledge system. It emphasises the search for objective truths, evidence-based reasoning, and logical thinking.

- **Epistemology:** The main sources of knowledge in the Indian knowledge system are contemplation, intuition, and revelation. It emphasises introspection and subjective experience as ways to understand the essence of reality. To gain knowledge, on the other hand, the Western knowledge system emphasises more experimentation, observation, and logical analysis. It focusses on the outside world and uses empirical data to build universal truths.

- **Approach to Education:** Within the Indian knowledge system, education has long been viewed as a whole process that aims to develop a person's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Oral traditions have long been used for knowledge transmission and the guru-disciple relationship. On the other hand, the West's knowledge system places more value on a more specialised and structured approach to education, emphasising academic disciplines and the acquisition of information and skills in particular fields.

- **Time Perception:** The Indian knowledge system sees reality as a sequence of recurrent cycles of creation, preservation, and disintegration. This leads to a cyclical understanding of time. It highlights how all occurrences are interrelated and embodies the idea of endless recurrence. On the other hand, the Western knowledge system often takes a linear view of time, emphasising development, linear history, and a sense of progress towards a particular objective or endpoint.

- **Areas of Focus:** Philosophical and spiritual questions are given a lot of weight in the Indian knowledge system. It explores the nature of consciousness, moral conundrums, and metaphysical issues. It has significantly influenced fields like philosophy, meditation, yoga, Ayurveda, and yoga. Contrarily, the Western knowledge system has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on advances in science, mathematics, and technology, which has resulted in advances in fields like engineering, physics, chemistry, and biology.

- **Mode of Transmission:** IKS is often transmitted orally from one generation to another, within the context of community life. Elders, shamans, and other respected members of the community play key roles in preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge through storytelling, ceremonies, and practical activities. On the other hand, formal educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities typically transmit WKS. Written texts, lectures, experiments, and academic research are central to the dissemination of knowledge within WKS.

It is crucial to remember that there are overlaps and influences between the Indian and Western knowledge systems, and these distinctions are generalisations. Both systems have advantages and benefits, and modern cultures frequently gain from combining concepts from several knowledge systems.

**Colonial Era<sup>18</sup> and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS):** The Colonial Era significantly impacted the Indian knowledge system, which had been deeply rooted in diverse traditions of philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, literature, and spirituality for millennia. Here's an overview of how colonialism affected various aspects of the Indian knowledge system.

India endured numerous difficulties and suffered on multiple fronts throughout the almost two centuries of colonialism that ended in the middle of the 20th century. The emergence of Western knowledge

<sup>18</sup>Annie Besant. India: Bound or Free, London, Theosophical Publishing Society 1926.



systems (WKS) and the demise of indigenous knowledge systems were two important factors. During the colonial era, indigenous knowledge systems were suppressed and neglected. British colonial policies frequently undercut local customs and expertise, viewing them as inferior to Western understanding. British colonial rule intentionally attempted to impose Western knowledge systems on Indian society.

This includes the advancement of English as a language, Western scientific methods, and Western educational institutions. English-medium schools and universities were founded by the British, who gradually transformed them into centres for the spread of Western knowledge at the expense of indigenous systems. The implementation of WKS further facilitated the loss of India's cultural identity.

Indians sometimes felt alienated from their own cultural history due to the emphasis on English education and Western ideas. This had significant sociocultural ramifications since it impacted Indian people's sense of identity and self-worth. Below is a summary of these problems: These problems include the erosion of cultural identity, the imposition of Western knowledge systems, the disruption of traditional education systems, the decline of indigenous knowledge, and the impact on socioeconomic development, among others. During the colonial era, the imposition of Western knowledge systems and the marginalisation of local knowledge significantly transformed India's knowledge systems. This had far-reaching implications for Indian society, culture, and development, and its effects persist to some extent today.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have been revived since the end of colonialism through a variety of projects that are meant to preserve, promote, and recover indigenous knowledge.

**India evolves as a “Vishva Guru” through the Indian Knowledge System:** IKS attempts are being made to reclaim, preserve, and promote ancient knowledge, traditions, and values that are fundamental to Indian heritage.<sup>19</sup> This is part of the Indian cultural rebirth. The following are some ways that IKS supports India's cultural rebirth:

- **Reviving Traditional Arts and Crafts:** IKS promotes the resuscitation of intricately woven, traditional Indian arts and crafts. Classical music, dancing styles like Bharatanatyam and Kathak, traditional painting techniques like Madhubani and Tanjore, and handicrafts like metalwork, weaving, and ceramics are examples of these disciplines. In addition to giving artists job possibilities, the revival of traditional arts contributes to the preservation of cultural legacy.
- **Supporting Indigenous Languages:** As a means of conserving cultural knowledge and identity, indigenous languages are emphasised by IKS. Language revitalisation and promotion initiatives, including those for Sanskrit, Tamil, Bengali, and other languages, help preserve literary works, cultural practices, and oral traditions.
- **Reinterpreting Ancient Books:** In order to extract timeless wisdom that is still applicable today, IKS encourages researchers and practitioners to revisit ancient books like the Vedas, Upanishads, epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and philosophical treatises. These writings offer a storehouse of information about morality, religion, politics, and social mores that can help with today's problems.<sup>20</sup>
- **Reviving Traditional Medicine:** As more individuals look for all-natural, holistic solutions to healthcare issues, Ayurveda, the traditional Indian medical system, is seeing a resurgence. In an effort to promote wellness and preventative healthcare based on conventional wisdom, organisations and practitioners are attempting to integrate Ayurvedic concepts with contemporary medical techniques.
- **Encouraging Spiritual Practices:** IKS encourages spiritual practices that are becoming more and more well-liked in India and around the world, such as mindfulness, meditation, and yoga. Through the

<sup>19</sup>Nayak GC. Indian Political Tradition, Kalyani Publications, New Delhi 2009.

<sup>20</sup>Verma VP. Ancient & Medieval Indian Political Thought. Laxmi Narain Agarwal 1986.

use of traditional Indian theories and methods, these practices provide holistic approaches to mental, bodily, and spiritual well-being.

- **Honouring Festivals and Rituals:** Indian festivals and rituals play a significant role in preserving cultural identity and fostering a sense of community. Traditional celebrations like Diwali, Holi, Durga Puja, and Navaratri are being revived and preserved in an effort to promote a feeling of cultural pride and continuity among future generations.

- **Involving Youth and Decolonising Education:** In order to promote a respect for Indian history, IKS initiatives target youth through educational programs, workshops, and cultural events. Future generations can benefit from cultural values and information passed down through the inclusion of IKS in school curricula and extracurricular activities. Post-colonial discourse frequently criticises the Eurocentric biases in colonial-era educational institutions that devalue indigenous knowledge and languages while advancing Western patterns of thought. Incorporating indigenous perspectives, literature, and knowledge systems in curricula has been an attempt to decolonise education.

- **Encouraging Sustainable Living:** Conventional Indian knowledge systems provide valuable perspectives on eco-friendly building techniques, organic farming, and water conservation. Bringing these traditions back can help protect the environment and build resilience against major world issues like climate change.

- **Reclamation of Indigenous Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge systems that were suppressed or marginalised during colonial control must be reclaimed and valued, according to post-colonial scholars and activists. This includes initiatives to bring back age-old customs in fields including farming, handicrafts, spirituality, and Ayurvedic treatment.

- **Critique of Orientalism:** Post-colonial scholars have examined how Western Orientalist discourse created and misrepresented ideas about Indian knowledge systems and civilisations, drawing inspiration from the writings of Edward Said. They have brought attention to the necessity of dispelling myths and depictions that uphold the colonial power structures.

- **Globalisation and Hybridity: Conversations concerning how globalisation affects indigenous knowledge systems have been sparked by postcolonialism.** Globalisation can help spread Indian knowledge around the world, but it also brings up issues of cultural appropriation, commodification, and diluting ancient customs.

- **Political and Economic Empowerment<sup>21</sup>:** Indigenous knowledge and traditions have been promoted by post-colonial movements as sources of resilience and self-sufficiency with the aim of empowering marginalised groups. This includes campaigns to defend local economies, encourage environmentally friendly growth, and oppose corporate abuses.

- **Language Revitalisation:** As a means of passing on customs and cultural legacy, indigenous languages are being preserved and promoted through post-colonial activities. Indigenous language revival contributes to the preservation of literature and oral traditions, as well as the dissemination of knowledge.

- **Interdisciplinary Conversations:** Post-colonialism promotes interdisciplinary conversations that link indigenous knowledge systems and Western academic fields. This methodology fosters intercultural comprehension, enhances academic dialogue, and recognises the legitimacy of various modes of knowledge acquisition.

The resurrection of Indian culture through IKS is a multimodal strategy that incorporates academic study, community involvement, policy support, and public awareness campaigns in order to protect and promote India's rich cultural legacy for future generations. In conclusion, the Indian knowledge system has been extremely beneficial to India's culture and society. Through influencing social structures,

<sup>21</sup>Krishna Rao MV. Studies in Kautilya, Delhi 1959.

customs, values, education, religious practices, and artistic expressions, it has enhanced Indian life and contributed to its cultural richness and intellectual heritage.

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