

Indian knowledge systems with Vedic Prospective: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

Education and knowledge lead to the holistic development of humans. Education is a basic need of humans like food, water, and air; without education, it's not easy for a person to sustain in this era, so all we need is basic education. In India, the "Indian Knowledge System" (IKS) enhances the level of education and provides a well-paced path of wisdom for us. IKS is not an immediate phenomenon; it's a long-standing prescribed design of knowledge prepared and followed from antiquity.

It is interesting to study all its aspects, and to glorify its salient features is a prime task of the study. Along with it, in the future, this study will help researchers with further studies. The revival of IKS in a proper and perfect way is necessary for us in this modern era. Here, in this research, IKS is seen as a seed of knowledge which sows in our culture, and in the future, it will definitely enhance our inner self-ability along with a new spirit of intellectuality.

So, it's necessary to understand IKS. Through this research, you will be able to get an outstanding explanation of it.

Key Words: Knowledge System, Education, Vedas, NEP 202, Bhagabat Gita

Introduction

The word "Veda" is often heard in our surroundings, but we don't give it much importance. In the actual sense, we don't seek to clarify the concept. The word "Veda" is from the root "Vid," meaning "to know," and indicates that by which knowledge is obtained of the ways and means of achieving spiritual ends. Veda defines the knowledge of the arena not only of human beings but also of all other living and non-living beings.

In India, when we talk about Veda or Vedic culture, it's not simple to explain. Indians were not ready to accept Veda as man's creation. They often called it a supernatural creation by God or by any supernatural beings. At the beginning of creation, the Rishis learned it through their ceaseless meditation and devotion. Later on, they turned that knowledge into mantras, famously known as "Veda mantras," and advised their disciples to follow them. In this way,

people were introduced to the community through the tradition of Guru-Śiṣya. Thus, another name for Veda is “Śruti,” from which the modern-day English word “memory” has originated. That Śruti or Veda sowed the first seed of the Indian knowledge system.

Although before it, India went through a great urban revolution—the “Sindhu-Sarasvatī culture”—we don’t have extensive knowledge about it. It also falls under the proto-historic age. Therefore, we can assume that the foundation stone of the Indian knowledge system, led by the Vedic pandits through the grace of their knowledge, allowed India to flourish and achieve its ultimate growth.

As we know, the Vedas are four in number: Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. These four Vedas are the pillars of India’s knowledge system. Each Veda deals with different types of knowledge, and collectively, they create an aura of wisdom for Indians. In general, our knowledge system is derived from that sacred age of the Vedas. In that tradition, knowledge has been constituted, stored, and maintained within the framework of oral culture.

According to Bhartṛhari, knowledge is constituted within our inner self and needs the support of an executive framework—India’s cultural traditions—to perform. When we talk about the Indian mind, it does not rely completely on intellect and senses. Instead, it accords the central role of knowledge formation to meditation and deep reflection—cintana and manana. Overall, in our knowledge system, Śabda (words) has played a vital role from the beginning. The concept of seeing something from the “mind’s eye” is deeply rooted in our culture; it represents the typical epistemology of Indian thought.

The Jain thinkers, while describing the perception of ātma-pratyakṣa, refer to what is present to the inner self rather than what is present to the senses. To put it in contemporary vocabulary, the Indian mind has depended more on the hypothetico-deductive methodology than on the observational inductive methodology.

Objective of the Study

- To understand Indian Knowledge System
- To study the existing ideas linked with IKS
- To understand IKS with NEP 2020

Vedic concept of knowledge

The first and foremost era of awakening the inner voice of knowledge in India was the Vedic Age. This period witnessed the emergence of several outstanding domains of knowledge. The concepts of Gurukula and the guru-śiṣya tradition formed the very foundation of education at that time. In the earliest phase, written texts were not widely available; therefore, oral transmission was the primary mode of learning. In this context, the belief that “the guru is always correct” prevailed. The guru was regarded as divine—almost identical with God—and the words of the guru were accepted as the words of God. Consequently, disciples followed the guru with complete faith and obedience.

From this tradition, we derive the first fundamental principle of knowledge: jñāna is

immortal and is transmitted by one who already possesses it; it is not merely a sensory or empirical construct.

Secondly, the Vedic Age also reveals the worship of nature. Some scholars interpret this tradition as evidence that the Vedic people were opposed to idol worship, while others argue that nature itself was worshipped as God. After a critical analysis of ancient texts such as Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, selected ślokaś of the *Ṛgveda*, and other scriptures, I arrive at the conclusion that the worship of nature is deeply rooted in the guru-śiṣya relationship.

Just as disciples revere the guru from whom they learn—regardless of the magnitude of that knowledge—the Vedic people revered everything from which they gained wisdom. Nature, therefore, became the highest object of reverence, as it served as a direct teacher. From nature, they learned the art of living, the art of hunting, the art of expression, and the art of ethical behavior, among many other skills.

Oral knowledge system in India

A different philosophy of knowledge and cognitive processes informs this mode of orality. Knowledge in this mode is simultaneous, not sequential, because it follows the scriptal tradition. It is important to note that oral culture is an alternative culture, not a default one.

Some arguments suggest that Indians were not aware of writing and did not know the art of writing. It feels silly when I listen to this statement. Just before the Vedic age, we had the Harappan culture, which has broad evidence of writing. We have found written inscriptions at various Harappan sites, especially from Mohenjo-daro. How can we say that they did not know the art of writing? Rather, they used alternative methods of spreading knowledge. The scholars of that age had a library in their minds, and the speed of information processing was very high—much higher than in the scriptal mode, where information is first transferred to the mind through the senses.

In this case, the mind-memory is loaded with large bodies of data because the mind has a much larger capacity to store data than the hard disk of a modern computer. Moreover, we can say that the idea of creating a computer hard disk definitely follows the structure of the Indian mind and knowledge. The oral knowledge of data is the best form of knowledge in our culture. Till today, we praise Newton for his mental capabilities, yet we often forget our ancestors, who were the true brand ambassadors of this mental prowess.

The textual knowledge

The texts have a relatively high degree of opacity. The primary text, at least, is not expository; they don't provide the history nor do they explain the methodology of constituting knowledge. They simply state the conclusion in categorical, declarative sentences that have a ring of finality about them. However, the textual work, when prepared for the next generation, is sometimes manipulated by the editors. Over time, this can cause the text to lose its actual value—for example, the *Manu-smṛti*.

Great value has always been attached to knowledge, and tremendous intellectual effort has gone into maintaining textual knowledge. As we have noted elsewhere, even though Hindu

culture is not bibliolatrous, it has accorded a special status to certain texts—the texts of knowledge—and made them perennial objects of study. The difference, however, is that there has been complete freedom to interpret and come up with competing interpretations, a freedom that is not always present in other cultures.

The Spiritual Side of Knowledge

The Indian Knowledge System is a blend of individual, self, and social being. It provides knowledge of different domains, which over time has been institutionalized into various disciplines, vidyā, crafts, and kalā. Indian disciplinary formation includes fields as diverse as philosophy, architecture, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, metrics, sociology, economy, polity, and many more—all originating from the religious perspective of the knowledge of existence.

The concept of 18 vidyās includes the four Vedas, four subsidiary Vedas (Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gāndharva Veda, Śilpa Veda), Purāṇas, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Dharma Śāstra, and Vedāṅga, along with the six auxiliary sciences: phonetics, grammar, meter, astronomy, ritual, and philology. Likewise, it mentions the 64 kalās or crafts. Beyond this, we have knowledge about the ten Mahāvīdyās and nine Siddhis, and so on. Thus, the Vedic knowledge system is not merely a concept; it encompasses several aspects of knowledge viewed through the lens of spirituality.

For every question that arises in your mind, if you cannot find an answer, just refer to our sacred spiritual scriptures. You will see the problem lose its significance, and you will find a proper solution. Nowadays, a popular saying among the youth of India is: "If you have a problem and cannot find a solution, just open the great Bhagavad Gītā. Open any page, and you will find your answers." This showcases the legacy of our Vedic knowledge. Our spirituality is entirely scientific and progressive. The main issue is that, over time, we have been unable to apply it practically in our lives, which has led to setbacks. Our knowledge is grounded in practicality, whereas our education system relies heavily on notes and books. It's time to change the way we apply this knowledge. Our education system needs to adopt this wisdom and make the best use of it.

Purity in knowledge is essential. According to Advaita Vedānta, two forms of knowledge were practiced by the people of the Vedic era: nitya, which refers to knowledge gained experientially within the self, and anitya, which refers to knowledge generated by the mind and senses through sensory cognition. It emphasizes the knowledge we gain from our experiences, senses, mind, and observation. In our context, knowledge is everywhere; everything provides us with some form of knowledge—we just need to observe or sense it in its purest form.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya speaks of viśuddha jñāna, meaning purified knowledge, which is isolated from the senses and located within the self. He stressed two variables: knowledge (jñāna) and action (karma). His philosophy states that one must apply knowledge through right action. However, many people possess knowledge but lack karma or right action, rendering their knowledge ineffective.

Some Jaina thinkers also discussed purified knowledge, emphasizing two variables: *pratyakṣa jñāna* (knowledge present to the self) and *parokṣa jñāna* (knowledge from the senses and mind). They highlighted the interdependence of these two variables, and their analysis provided clarity on the concept of purified knowledge.

When discussing the interdependency of variables, we have a great example in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It integrates all the insights from tradition and organizes a philosophy of interconnectedness among *jñāna* (knowledge), *karma* (action), and *bhakti* (devotion). These three are the main pillars of our knowledge, akin to the three jewels of Buddhism and the *triveda* of *Sanātana Dharma*. Specifically, the *Bhagavad Gītā* disperses references to *jñāna* throughout the text. Chapter Four is described as *Jñāna Yoga*, where the essence of purified knowledge is elaborated.

Indian knowledge system In Traditional India

In traditional India, knowledge is not singular, and truth is not always absolute; both are understood in their plural forms of existence. Our knowledge has always guided us toward the actual truth of life, teaching us the art of overcoming *Māyā* (misleading illusion) and enabling us to attain salvation, breaking the cycle of life and death.

When we discuss these concepts, I would like to highlight that the great philosopher Rousseau presented a philosophy of life in his book *Social Contract*, where he introduces the theory of the "Chained Man." The opening line states, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." This reflects the Western knowledge system, which identifies the same fundamental truth that our scriptures conveyed thousands of years ago—that man is bound in chains. However, there is a subtle difference: while Western ideology identifies the chains, it does not fully reveal how to break free from them.

Thus, we can say that the Western knowledge system is clear and refined, but it does not lead us to the ultimate conclusion. In contrast, our Indian *Sanātana* knowledge system not only identifies the chains—represented by *Māyā*—that bind us but also provides a path to liberation through *Jñāna* (knowledge), *Karma* (action), and *Bhakti* (devotion).

The western tradition and Indian knowledge system

In the Western tradition, "knowledge" has been held as opposed to innocence and associated with power that leads to the fall of man. What is common throughout Western history of ideals is the man-centered worldview. In the Middle Ages, God is the object of study for the sake of man, for his redemption. From the Renaissance onwards, the focus shifts to nature as the object of study for the sake of man.

It is interesting that knowledge is an instrument of power in this conflict model, an instrument to handle adversaries. In the Old Testament, man is given dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, over the cattle, and over the earth. However, since man cannot live without these things, how can he have dominion over them? It's only possible because of the knowledge man possesses.

But the Western tradition often portrays man as dominion over others, whereas our

knowledge prescribes that we live on the earth because of nature and its aspects. Therefore, we must respect, learn from, and protect them. This is why the worship of nature has prevailed in India since the creation of the earth.

In Indian thought systems, the goal of knowledge is not to exercise power over others but to gain power over oneself—mokṣa or liberation of the self from its own limitations. The direction of governing knowledge towards liberation or salvation is the actual action or karma. Moreover, the Indian knowledge system is the greatest wonder of the universe. It teaches us the true sense of living, the correct exercise of power, and shows us the path of liberation and salvation. Our knowledge is not a mere concept; it is practical in nature, guiding us away from misery and misfortune.

It teaches us equality, non-violence, brotherhood, and much more. Our knowledge system has always been progressive—from the Vedic age to the modern era. We may have ignored its true essence, but it's time to revive the foundation of this knowledge, marking a new phase of life and laying a paradigm for future generations.

Knowledge is the core of karma, and karma is guided by knowledge. We can harmonize both through our senses, devotion, and observation, ultimately leading to salvation for ourselves and others..

NEP 2020 and Indian knowledge system

We have already discussed extensively about the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), and we find that IKS is a collective method of knowledge. It is not to be taken as a singular package, and it has a significant impact not only in India but also around the world. When we discuss IKS in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, we must first focus on its goals.

NEP 2020 aims for a 100% literacy rate among the youth of India. Our ancient knowledge system reflects a similar aspiration; IKS aims to eradicate illiteracy from the very beginning. According to the great kingmaker Cāṅakya (Kauṭalya), education has three primary outcomes: the creation of new knowledge, the proper application of that knowledge at the right time, and the utilization of all knowledge in real life to maximize its benefits.

NEP 2020 has also identified three core aims in its implementation:

Development of New Ideas and Knowledge: It focuses on practical and vocational education rather than purely textual learning. Some scholars have referred to it as a "paperless education system" because, beyond textbooks, students are guided toward practical knowledge and the development of their intellect.

Interdisciplinary Education: NEP 2020 provides a flexible path for students to pursue vocational and general education simultaneously, allowing them to apply their learning effectively.

Real-Life Experiential Learning: This includes studies on the environment, poverty, business, and other modern issues.

NEP 2020 marks a significant paradigm shift in the educational system by implementing digital education. Thousands of educators and educational organizations, both domestic and international, are participating in this new initiative, offering students multiple career choices and creating more opportunities.

For the first time, NEP 2020 welcomes private investors to contribute capital to India's educational system. Just like in ancient times, it aims to provide free and compulsory education for all. IKS promotes an inclusive, equitable, and relevant education system, which is a key feature of NEP 2020.

Moreover, NEP 2020 is poised to be a revolution for IKS in the future. Its primary features are highly relevant for India, and although it has been recently implemented, it will take some time to reach its full potential. As previously discussed, over time, India lost its prominence in practical knowledge traditions. NEP 2020 focuses on reviving that lost glory of IKS and will, in time, showcase the best of IKS to the global community.

In the next ten to fifteen years, our education and knowledge systems are expected to reach their zenith through NEP 2020. It will reveal the true essence of knowledge that has always existed in India but lacked proper recognition. Gradually, it will eliminate the problems and challenges within our education system, transforming India into a great temple of knowledge. Perhaps through NEP, we will take a step towards reclaiming the title of "Vísva-Guru" or Universal Teacher.

Conclusion

After an extensive discussion, it's clear that IKS (Indian Knowledge System) is a traditional education system in India that incorporates a modern perspective. IKS, as a progressive method of development, shows us the actual sense of living on Earth. It enables us to acquire knowledge from everything, whether it is a living or non-living being.

It teaches us the method of practical education and the practical implications of existing ideas or knowledge. Besides, it encourages us to develop new ideas and knowledge through our education system. Much like a simple cardboard, when we concentrate on IKS, it provides us with a unique design of experience and knowledge that alleviates our misery and propels us toward the ultimate space of development.

Regarding NEP 2020 (National Education Policy 2020), it highlights many features of IKS and focuses on the revival of classical knowledge of existence with a new spirit of interest. In the future, we may witness another era of renaissance inspired by our Indian thought and knowledge.

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