INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 7 | Issue 6

2024

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Reviving Timeless Insights: A Deep Dive into The Indian Knowledge System and Its Modern Significance

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a comprehensive and ancient body of knowledge that has been cultivated and transmitted through generations in India. This system encompasses a wide array of disciplines, including Philosophy, Science, Mathematics, Medicine, and Astronomy, all of which are deeply embedded in the cultural and traditional fabric of Indian society. Historically, IKS has made substantial contributions to global knowledge and has influenced various academic fields, shaped by the philosophical tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. A notable text, the 'Rigveda', illustrates the principle of interconnectedness among all beings, which is a fundamental tenet of IKS that underscores the notion of unity. Prominent figures within this system include Aryabhata, a mathematician credited with the invention of the concept of 'Zero' and significant advancements in Mathematics and Astronomy, and Susruta, often referred to as the father of surgery in ancient India, who provided comprehensive accounts of medical procedures in the "Susruta Samhita". IKS has profoundly impacted various domains, including Mathematics, Medicine, Philosophy, and the Arts, thereby transforming numerous aspects of knowledge. Despite facing critiques for its foundations in ancient traditions and its emphasis on spirituality over empirical evidence, IKS has experienced a revival. Initiatives aimed at revitalizing and preserving traditional knowledge systems, along with government efforts to integrate IKS with contemporary scientific methodologies, have resulted in novel discoveries and innovations in fields such as Agriculture, Medicine, and Environmental Science. Although challenges persist, IKS continues to exert influence across disciplines and holds the potential to shape future advancements in Science, Technology, and Culture. Acknowledging and appreciating the insights of ancient traditions can foster a more holistic and inclusive approach to knowledge and understanding.

Keywords: IKS, Knowledge, India, Disciplines, Scientific.

I. Introduction

The Indian knowledge system represents a vast and diverse collection of traditional wisdom,

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scientific discoveries, and cultural practices that have shaped the Indian subcontinent for millennia. This comprehensive guide aims to introduce readers to the rich heritage of Indian knowledge, encompassing areas such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and sustainable practices that have gained global recognition. The importance of the Indian knowledge system has been highlighted in recent years, with initiatives like the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizing its integration into higher education curricula.

This article will explore the basic structure of the Indian knowledge system, delving into its philosophical schools and thought systems. It will also examine the scientific and technological achievements that have emerged from this ancient wisdom. Additionally, the guide will discuss the social and political aspects of Indian knowledge systems, their relevance in addressing contemporary challenges, and potential applications in fields such as natural farming and water conservation. By understanding the depth and breadth of India's indigenous knowledge, readers can gain insights into the cultural diversity and intellectual contributions that have shaped this remarkable civilization.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS AND THOUGHT SYSTEMS

The Indian knowledge system encompasses a rich tapestry of philosophical schools and thought systems that have shaped the intellectual landscape of the subcontinent for millennia. These schools of philosophy, known as '*Darshanas*', represent diverse approaches to understanding reality, consciousness, and the nature of existence.

(A) Six Orthodox Schools of Indian Philosophy

The esteemed orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, often referred to as the "Astika Schools", hold the revered 'Vedas' in high regard. These six distinct schools, united under the banner of 'Shatdarshanas', serve as the bedrock of classical Indian philosophical wisdom.² The ancient wisdom of "Samkhya Philosophy", believed to be the most venerable of its kind, was brought to life by the sage Kapila. This profound philosophy suggests that all of existence emerges from the interplay of two fundamental principles, viz., 'Purusha', representing the self, soul, or consciousness, and 'Prakriti', embodying matter, the creative force, and energy.³ Rooted in the ancient wisdom of 'Samkhya', Yoga philosophy champions the art of mental and physical mastery. It unveils pathways to spiritual freedom, guiding practitioners through the

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² Orthodox Schools of Indian Philosophy- Details and Difference with Heterodox School for UPSC!, TESTBOOK (Nov. 10, 2023, 11;15 AM), https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/orthodox-schools-of-indian-philosophy.

³ Indian philosophy, WIKIPEDIA (Dec. 7, 2024, 01;44 AM), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_philosophy.

transformative practices of focus and meditation.⁴

The "Nyaya Philosophy", established by the sage Gautama, finds its roots in the revered "Nyaya Sutras". This intriguing school of thought champions the power of logical reasoning, positing it as the essential pathway to attaining salvation.⁵ The "Vaisheshika Philosophy", established by the brilliant mind of Kannada, is celebrated for its groundbreaking atomic theory and is hailed as one of the most pragmatic philosophies out there.⁶ The "Mimamsa Philosophy" delves into the art of accurately deciphering Vedic scriptures and their accompanying rituals. In contrast, 'Vedanta', often referred to as "Uttara Mimamsa", embarks on a profound journey to uncover the essence of ultimate reality and the intricate bond between the individual soul and the divine cosmos.⁷

(B) Buddhist and Jain Philosophical Traditions

Buddhism and Jainism, two prominent non-conformist schools of thought in Indian philosophy, arose as fresh perspectives to challenge the established Vedic traditions. At the heart of Buddhist philosophy, established by *Siddhartha Gautama*, lies a bold departure from the Hindu beliefs in a lasting self ('*Atman*') and an ultimate reality ('*Brahman*').⁸ It teaches the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as means to overcome suffering and achieve enlightenment.

Jain philosophy, brought back to life by *Mahavira*, champions the principle of non-violence, known as '*Ahimsa*', and holds the profound belief that every creature possesses a soul, referred to as '*Jiva*'.⁹ It imparts the wisdom that true freedom can be attained by embracing virtuous actions, seeking knowledge, and exploring philosophical thought.¹⁰ Both Buddhism and Jainism share concepts such as karma, rebirth, and the goal of liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

(C) Syncretic and Folk Traditions

The Indian knowledge system has also been enriched by syncretic and folk traditions that have emerged from the interaction between various philosophical schools and religious practices. These traditions have played a crucial role in shaping the cultural diversity and intellectual

⁴Schools of Indian Philosophy, UNACADEMY (Nov. 25, 2024, 11:25 AM), https://unacademy.com/content/upsc/study-material/general-awareness/schools-of-indian-philosophy/.

⁵ ORTHODOX SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY- DETAILS AND DIFFERENCE WITH HETERODOX SCHOOL FOR UPSC!, *supra* note 1.

⁶ SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY, supra note 3.

⁷ ORTHODOX SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY- DETAILS AND DIFFERENCE WITH HETERODOX SCHOOL FOR UPSC!, *supra* note 1.

⁸ INDIAN PHILOSOPHY, *supra* note 2.

⁹ *Id*.

¹⁰ SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY, *supra* note 3.

contributions of Indian civilization.

Syncretic movements like the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' traditions have embarked on a quest to unite diverse religious and philosophical viewpoints. These vibrant movements celebrate devotion, love, and personal experience as gateways to spiritual enlightenment, often soaring above the constraints of strict dogmas. Folk traditions, deeply rooted in local cultures and practices, have contributed to the diversity of Indian philosophical thought by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and beliefs.

The interplay between orthodox schools, heterodox traditions, and syncretic movements has resulted in a dynamic and multifaceted Indian knowledge system that continues to evolve and adapt to contemporary challenges.

III. SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The Indian knowledge system has a rich history of scientific and technological achievements that have significantly influenced various fields. These contributions span across mathematics, medicine, and architecture, showcasing the ingenuity and innovation of ancient Indian scholars.

(A) Mathematical Innovations and Discoveries

Indian mathematicians have left an indelible mark on the world of mathematics, crafting the very bedrock upon which many contemporary mathematical ideas stand. Among their most remarkable feats is the invention of the decimal number system, a revolutionary concept that has become a universal standard across the globe. This system, along with the concept of 'Zero', revolutionized mathematical calculations and paved the way for advanced Arithmetic and Algebra.

Ancient Indian mathematicians achieved significant advancements in the fields of Trigonometry, Geometry, and Algebra. Notable figures such as *Aryabhata*, *Brahmagupta*, and *Bhaskara II* made substantial contributions to these disciplines. For example, *Aryabhata* approximated the value of pi to be 3.1416, a figure that is strikingly close to the contemporary value.¹³ The "*Pythagorean Theorem*", while familiar to various cultures, was also independently unearthed and articulated in the ancient texts known as the "Śulba Sūtras".¹⁴

¹¹Rajendra K Pandey, *Syncretic Traditions and Peaceful Coexistence in India: the case of Sufism*, GLOBALCULTURZ (May 12, 2017, 10:33 PM), https://www.globalculturz.org/2017/05/syncretic-traditions-and-peaceful.html.

¹² Indian mathematics, WIKIPEDIA (May 6, 2005, 04:00 PM), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_mathematics. ¹³ Study Material, MOOLJI JAITHA COLLEGE (M.J.COLLEGE) (12:15 PM) https://mjcollege.kces.in/Downloads/study_material.

¹⁴ INDIAN MATHEMATICS, *supra* note 11.

(B) Ayurveda and Traditional Medicine

For thousands of years, 'Ayurveda' has stood as a pillar of the Indian wisdom tradition, weaving together the threads of health and wellness. This ancient system of medicine takes a holistic view, championing the harmony between the body, mind, and spirit to foster overall wellbeing. Ayurvedic principles have gained global recognition for their potential in addressing various health issues and promoting overall wellness.

The ancient scriptures of 'Ayurveda', notably the "Charaka Samhita" and "Sushruta Samhita", offer a treasure trove of knowledge on Anatomy, Surgery, and Herbal Medicine. These remarkable texts unveil surgical methods that were remarkably sophisticated for their era, showcasing procedures like 'Rhinoplasty', which stands as one of the pioneering practices in the realm of plastic surgery.¹⁶

(C) Architectural and Engineering Marvels

The Indian knowledge system has produced numerous architectural and engineering marvels that continue to inspire awe and admiration. These structures showcase the advanced understanding of mathematics, physics, and engineering principles possessed by ancient Indian architects and builders.

A shining beacon of love and architectural genius, the Taj Mahal stands as a timeless masterpiece. Erected in the 17th century, this iconic structure weaves intricate geometric designs with unparalleled artistry, showcasing the remarkable skills of its creators. The *Brihadeshwara Temple* in Thanjavur stands as a breathtaking wonder, showcasing a colossal tower that defies convention. This architectural masterpiece is crafted without a drop of mortar, ingeniously relying on the seamless interlocking of stones to maintain its impressive strength and stability. 18

The Konark Sun Temple, a gem recognized by UNESCO, stands out with its extraordinary architecture that mimics a grand chariot. This magnificent edifice is not just a feast for the eyes; it also boasts intricate astronomical instruments that skillfully measure time and chart the movements of the stars.¹⁹ These architectural wonders not only serve as testaments to the

¹⁵Principles of Ayurveda, EVEREST AYURVEDA (May 13, 2016, 12:356 PM), https://www.everest-ayurveda.com/principles-ayurveda.

¹⁶ Laxman Majhi, *The Contribution of Ancient Indians to the World of Science and Technology*, 11 IJCRT c898, c898-c904 (2023).

¹⁷ Mayank Chawla, *21 Stunning Architectural Marvels in India*, INDIAN HOLIDAY (June 26, 2024, 12:50 PM), https://www.indianholiday.com/blog/stunning-architectural-marvels-in-india/.

¹⁸J.V Mahajan, *India's Ancient Architectural Marvels*, PREDICT (Dec. 2, 2023, 12:50PM), https://medium.com/predict/unveiling-indias-architectural-marvels-a-journey-back-in-time-4736c2414290. ¹⁹ MAYANK, *supra* note 16.

advanced knowledge and skills of ancient Indian builders but also continue to inspire modern architects and engineers.

IV. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

The Indian knowledge system encompasses a rich tapestry of social and political thought that has shaped governance models, economic theories, and social organization for millennia. These ancient wisdom traditions continue to influence modern India's approach to statecraft and societal structures.

(A) Governance Models and Statecraft

Dive into the wisdom of ancient India, where texts like *Kautilya*'s '*Arthashastra*' unveil the intricate dance of governance and statecraft. At the heart of this wisdom lies '*Rajadharma*', the noble duty of a ruler, which champions the ideals of justice and ethical leadership. This principle underscores that a king's foremost responsibility is to safeguard and nurture the well-being of his people. The ancient Indian state was a well-oiled machine, built upon the seven foundational pillars of the "*Saptanga Theory*", viz., the ruler, his trusted ministers, the land they governed, fortified defenses, the treasury, a formidable army, and loyal allies. Together, these elements wove the fabric of a thriving realm.²⁰ This holistic approach to governance aimed to create a balanced and prosperous state.

The king's task of appointing ministers was deemed a vital responsibility. *Manu*, a prominent ancient Indian philosopher, proposed five essential criteria for choosing these leaders, viz., adherence to tradition, demonstrated skill, rigorous evaluation, achievement of goals, and a trial of bravery.²¹ The king was expected to consult with his ministers on policy matters, highlighting the importance of collective decision-making in ancient Indian governance models.

(B) Economic Theories and Practices

The Indian knowledge system has historically acknowledged the critical role of economic prosperity in enhancing societal well-being. Ancient literature underscored the necessity of wealth generation and its effective management. A notable example is *Kautilya*'s '*Arthashastra*', which offers comprehensive directives regarding economic policies, taxation, and trade practices.²² The text championed a harmonious blend of private and public enterprises, envisioning a mixed economy where both could thrive side by side. It emphasized the

²⁰ Sudeshna Basu, An Overview of Ancient Indian Governance, 4 JETIR 874, 874-877 (2017).

²¹Krati Sahu, *Statecraft in Ancient India Notes*, STUDYSHIPWITHKRATI (Dec. 4, 2022, 03:35 PM), https://www.studyshipwithkrati.com/post/statecraft-in-ancient-india-notes.

²² S Kalpalatha, A Glimpse of Indian Economic Thought in Ancient Indian Literature, 3 JDMS 13, 13-17 (2020).

importance of regulations to maintain fairness and integrity in their interactions.²³

In the realm of ancient Indian philosophy, the idea of 'Artha', which embodies the pursuit of material wealth, was deemed crucial for attaining both spiritual enlightenment and sensual pleasures. The thinkers of that era understood the delicate dance between economic success and societal harmony. They believed that the government should take a hands-on approach in steering the economy, ensuring fair pricing for vital commodities, and nurturing the growth of agriculture and trade.²⁴

(C) Social Organization and Ethics

The Indian knowledge system placed great emphasis on social organization and ethical conduct. The concept of 'Dharma', which encompasses moral, social, and religious duties, played a central role in shaping societal norms. The caste system, while controversial in modern times, was seen as a means of organizing society and ensuring social stability in ancient India.

The Indian knowledge system is steeped in a rich tapestry of ethics and morality. Timeless works such as the 'Thirukural', penned by the wise Thiruvalluvar, illuminate the path to virtuous living, the art of wealth accumulation, and the quest for joy and spiritual liberation.²⁵ The importance of moral education and the role of the state in promoting ethical behavior were recognized as crucial for maintaining social order.

The Indian knowledge system's approach to social and political aspects was characterized by a holistic worldview that sought to balance material prosperity with spiritual and ethical considerations. This integrated approach continues to influence India's governance models, economic policies, and social structures, offering valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges.

V. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

The Indian knowledge system (IKS) holds immense potential for addressing contemporary challenges and shaping the future of education, sustainability, and global problem-solving. As India moves forward, integrating this ancient wisdom with modern approaches can lead to innovative solutions and a more holistic approach to development.

(A) Integrating IKS in Modern Education Curricula

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is making waves in the Indian education landscape

²⁵ *Id.* at 13.

²³Ancient thought, economic **WIKIPEDIA** (Sept. 15, 2007, 12:38 PM), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_economic_thought.

²⁴ Kalpalatha, *supra* note 21, at 13-15.

by weaving Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the fabric of mainstream learning. This innovative strategy seeks to enrich students' educational journeys by blending age-old wisdom with modern insights. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has crafted a curriculum that celebrates the richness of the Indian knowledge heritage, exploring a variety of topics from agriculture and irrigation methods to cherished traditional practices.²⁶

To effectively weave this integration into the fabric of education, it's essential to craft thoughtfully designed courses that shine a spotlight on the rich tapestry of traditional Indian knowledge systems. These courses should not only stimulate critical thinking but also nurture cultural consciousness and inspire a blend of disciplines. By embedding IKS into the curriculum, students will not only cultivate a profound respect for their cultural roots but also hone skills that resonate with the demands of today's dynamic world.²⁷

(B) Sustainable Development and Environmental Solutions

The Indian knowledge system provides significant perspectives on sustainable living practices and environmental conservation. Historical Indian literature underscores the interconnectedness of all living entities and advocates for the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", which translates to "the world is one family". These foundational concepts are gaining prominence in the context of contemporary environmental issues and the imperative for the conservation of natural resources.²⁸

Ancient ecological wisdom rooted in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) holds the key to unlocking sustainable development. By promoting eco-conscious and resource-savvy methods, the education system can nurture a generation of students with a green mindset. Merging time-honored traditions with contemporary environmental science paves the way for groundbreaking solutions to pressing challenges like climate change, dwindling water supplies, and the preservation of our planet's rich biodiversity.²⁹

(C) Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges

The Indian knowledge system offers a distinctive viewpoint that can be utilized to tackle global challenges. By integrating India's historical wisdom with modern knowledge frameworks, it is possible to devise innovative solutions for a range of contemporary issues. General MM

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²⁶Denis Vaz, *Integrating Traditional Indian Knowledge Into the Education System*, 45 (TJ/JPT) 3151, 3151-3157 (2024).

²⁷ Id. at 3152-3154.

²⁸ Sakshi Vermani Rishi, *Relevance of Indian Knowledge System in the Present Scenario*, LINKEDIN · DR. SAKSHI VERMANI RISHI (May 3, 2023, 04:07 PM), https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/relevance-indian-knowledge-system-present-scenario-sakshi-vermani.

²⁹ Vaz, *supra* note 25, at 3152.

Naravane, the former Chief of Army Staff, underscored the significance of leveraging the extensive reservoir of ancient knowledge to refine current strategic thought and address security challenges through realpolitik within the present geopolitical context.³⁰

In order to fully leverage the capabilities of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in tackling global issues, it is imperative to develop research initiatives and collaborative platforms. A study conducted by the College of Defense Management (CDM) recommended the creation of an "Indian Culture Study Forum" to facilitate further research and to organize regular workshops and annual seminars focused on insights derived from ancient Indian culture and texts.³¹ Such initiatives can foster interdisciplinary research and promote the application of traditional knowledge to contemporary problems.

As India proudly presents its distinctive knowledge systems to the globe, the revival of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) emerges as both a cultural renaissance and a savvy strategy in the international arena. By weaving traditional wisdom into the fabric of education and research, India has the opportunity to amplify its global presence and offer profound insights that enrich the shared tapestry of human understanding.³²

The Indian knowledge system represents a vast treasure trove of wisdom, encompassing

VI. CONCLUSION

philosophical schools, scientific achievements, and social structures that have shaped India's rich cultural heritage. This comprehensive guide has explored the diverse aspects of this system, from ancient philosophical traditions to groundbreaking mathematical discoveries and architectural marvels. The integration of this traditional knowledge with modern approaches has the potential to address contemporary challenges and contribute to global problem-solving. Looking ahead, the revitalization of the Indian knowledge system opens up exciting possibilities to enhance education, promote sustainable development, and foster innovative solutions to global issues. By blending ancient wisdom with current knowledge, India is poised to make significant contributions to the world stage. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage

enduring relevance of India's intellectual legacy in today's rapidly changing world.

but also paves the way for a more holistic and inclusive approach to progress, highlighting the

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[ISSN 2581-5369]

³⁰ AP Singh, *Ancient Indian Knowledge Systems and their Relevance Today – With an Emphasis on Arthaśāstra*, INDIA FOUNDATION (Mar. 2, 2022, 04:30 PM), https://indiafoundation.in/articles-and-commentaries/ancient-indian-knowledge-systems-and-their-relevance-today-with-an-emphasis-on-arthasastra/.

³¹ *Id.*

³² Vaz, *supra* note 25, at 3151-3157.

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