



## International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047

**Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025**

**Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

# Unveiling the Indian Knowledge System: A Critical Exploration of its Epistemology and Ontology

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## Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the Indian knowledge system, exploring its epistemology, and ontology. The Indian knowledge system, encompassing diverse traditions such as Vedanta, Yoga, and Ayurveda, offers a unique perspective on the nature of reality, knowledge, and human experience. The paper examines the fundamental principles of the Indian knowledge system, including:

1. **Epistemology:** The paper explores the Indian theories of knowledge, including the concepts of *Pramana* (valid knowledge) and *apramana* (invalid knowledge).
2. **Ontology:** The paper examines the Indian concepts of reality, including the notions of *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) and *Maya* (the illusory world).
3. **Methodology:** The paper discusses the Indian approaches to knowledge acquisition, including the methods of Yoga, Vedanta, and Ayurveda. The paper also analyses the contributions of key Indian thinkers, such as: *Adi Shankara*: The paper examines Shankara's concept of Advaita Vedanta and its implications for Indian epistemology and ontology. *Patanjali*: The paper discusses Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and their significance for Indian methodology. *Charaka*: The paper explores Charaka's contributions to Ayurveda and its relevance to Indian knowledge system.

Indian knowledge system is holistic: The Indian knowledge system offers a holistic perspective on reality, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Indian epistemology is pluralistic: The Indian knowledge system recognizes multiple sources of knowledge, including perception, inference, and testimony. Indian methodology is practice-oriented: The Indian knowledge system emphasizes the importance of practice and experience in knowledge acquisition. This paper argues that the Indian knowledge system offers a unique and valuable perspective on reality, knowledge, and human experience. The paper highlights the significance of the Indian knowledge system for contemporary debates in philosophy, science, and spirituality.

Integrate Indian knowledge system into education: The Indian knowledge system should be integrated into educational curricula to promote a more holistic and pluralistic understanding of reality.

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Promote interdisciplinary research: Researchers should engage in interdisciplinary research to explore the intersections between Indian knowledge system and contemporary debates in philosophy, science, and spirituality.

Support the preservation of Indian texts: Efforts should be made to preserve and translate Indian texts to make them more accessible to a global audience.

This paper argues that the Indian knowledge system offers a unique and valuable perspective on reality, knowledge, and human experience. The paper highlights the significance of the Indian knowledge system for contemporary debates in philosophy, science, and spirituality, and argues that it has the potential to contribute to a more holistic, pluralistic, and practice-oriented understanding of reality.

**Keywords:** *Epistemology, Diverse Traditions, Acquisition, Holistic.*

## **Introduction**

The Indian knowledge system refers to the diverse intellectual traditions that has shaped India's scientific, philosophical and artistic advancement. From astronomy to linguistics, Indian scholars made remarkable contributions that influenced civilizations worldwide. Indian Knowledge system evolved over thousands of years in the Indian Subcontinent. It comprises disciplines such as Philosophy, Science Mathematics, medicine, literature, arts, governance and Environmental Studies. Rooted in ancient text like the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Smritis and classical works. Indian Knowledge system integrates both spiritual and empirical approaches to knowledge. The Indian knowledge system is a vast and interdisciplinary body of knowledge developed over millennia.

IKS provides a structural way to understand the vast and interconnected domains of traditional Indian wisdom. The IKS epistemological framework is particularly significant because of its comprehensive and inclusive approach to knowledge.

The Indian knowledge system, rooted in ancient traditions and philosophies, offers a unique perspective on epistemology, challenging dominant Western paradigms. This essay critically explores the Indian knowledge system, examining its epistemological foundations, anthropological implications, and contemporary relevance.

The Indian knowledge system's epistemological roots can be traced back to ancient philosophies such as Advaita Vedanta, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika. These philosophies emphasize the importance of subjective experience, intuition, and reasoning in the pursuit of knowledge. In contrast to Western epistemological traditions, which often prioritize objective empirical evidence, the Indian knowledge system recognizes the role of subjective experience in shaping our understanding of reality.

The anthropological implications of the Indian knowledge system's epistemology are far-reaching. By recognizing the importance of subjective experience, the Indian knowledge system offers a nuanced understanding of human nature and culture. For instance, the concept of "*dharma*" in Hindu

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philosophy emphasizes the importance of individual duty and responsibility in maintaining social order. This perspective challenges Western anthropological assumptions about the nature of human society and culture.

In contemporary times, the Indian knowledge system's epistemology remains relevant, offering insights into fields such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy. For example, the concept of "Advaita" or non-dualism in Vedanta philosophy has influenced Western philosophical thought, particularly in the areas of phenomenology and existentialism. Furthermore, the Indian knowledge system's emphasis on subjective experience and intuition has parallels with contemporary Western philosophical movements such as postmodernism and poststructuralism.

However, a critical exploration of the Indian knowledge system's epistemology also reveals its limitations and challenges. For instance, the system's emphasis on subjective experience can lead to relativism and individualism, undermining the possibility of objective knowledge. Moreover, the Indian knowledge system's anthropological implications can be problematic, particularly in its treatment of social hierarchies and power relations. By critically engaging with its strength and limitations Indian Knowledge System Epistemology can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of knowledge in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Main Thrust**

The Indian Knowledge System represents a rich intellectual philosophical and cultural heritage that has withstood centuries of transformation. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), rooted in ancient traditions and philosophies, continues to hold significant relevance in the age of globalization. With the rapid integration of global markets, cultures, and ideas, the need for incorporating diverse knowledge systems has become increasingly evident. In particular, IKS offers holistic solutions in various domains, including health, education, sustainability, and ethics, which can help address global challenges. Unlike the Western Knowledge System, which largely emphasizes empirical evidence and rationalism, Indian Knowledge System combines practical experience (Anubhava) logical reasoning (Tarka) and scriptural authority (Shruti & Smriti) to develop holistic and interdisciplinary perspectives. This section presents the findings of the research study on the relevance of IKS in a globalized world, based on an extensive review of literature, interviews with scholars, practitioners, and case studies of contemporary applications of IKS.

**1. IKS and Health: Ayurveda and Holistic Wellness**

One of the most prominent areas where IKS holds relevance in the globalized world is in the field of health and wellness. The Indian knowledge system has long contributed to health and wellbeing through holistic approaches such as Ayurveda, yoga siddha and Unani medicine. A traditional system of medicine originating from India, is gaining global recognition as a holistic and preventive

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approach to health. Unlike Western medicine, which often focuses on treating specific symptoms or illnesses, Ayurveda emphasizes a balanced approach to maintaining health by aligning the body, mind, and spirit. The findings suggest that the increasing global interest in Ayurveda is driven by a shift towards preventive and holistic health practices. In countries like the United States and parts of Europe, the demand for alternative medicine is growing, with Ayurveda playing a key role in this transition. Ayurvedic practices such as dietary modifications, herbal remedies, and stress management techniques have been found to complement conventional medical treatments, promoting long-term well-being, and preventing lifestyle diseases.

Moreover, Yoga, a practice closely associated with Ayurveda, has become a global phenomenon. The research indicates that Yoga is no longer limited to its Indian roots but has been adopted widely across the world for its health benefits, particularly in stress reduction, mental health improvement, and physical fitness. The scientific validation of Yoga's benefits for mental health, including its effectiveness in reducing anxiety and depression, has further fuelled its global appeal.

Thus, the findings highlight that IKS, especially Ayurveda and Yoga, offers a valuable contribution to global health systems by promoting preventive care, mind-body balance, and sustainable wellness practices. The Indian knowledge system provides a holistic and time-tested approach to health and medicine that compliments modern biomedical sciences.

***2. IKS and Education: Holistic and Ethical Learning***

The Indian knowledge system has played a vital role in traditional and modern education. The educational philosophy embedded within IKS is also highly relevant in today's globalized context. Traditional Indian educational systems, such as the Gurukul system, emphasized experiential learning, ethical development, and holistic growth, which contrasts with compartmentalized and the often exam-driven approaches seen in modern education systems worldwide. Unlike western education which focuses on material knowledge, Indian knowledge system integrates spiritual, ethical and scientific wisdom. The findings reveal that these ancient educational practices can provide valuable insights into contemporary pedagogy, especially in an era that emphasizes the development of not just cognitive skills but emotional intelligence, creativity, and ethical reasoning.

Indian philosophies such as Vedanta, Jainism, and the teachings of Buddha promote values like compassion, self-awareness, non-violence (Ahimsa), and a sense of duty toward society (Dharma). These concepts can be integrated into modern educational curricula to promote character-building alongside intellectual development. The research found that educational institutions globally are beginning to incorporate aspects of IKS, such as mindfulness and meditation practices, which enhance students' emotional and psychological well-being. Additionally, the focus on self-learning and inquiry in traditional Indian education systems is gaining traction in contemporary global educational reforms. Inquiry-based learning and experiential approaches foster critical thinking and a deep understanding of concepts, which are seen as essential skills in the 21st century. As

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globalization continues to reshape the education landscape, the values embedded in IKS- such as respect for diversity, ethical responsibility, and interconnectedness- offer meaningful contributions to creating well-rounded individuals who are equipped to navigate a complex, multicultural world. The NEP 2020 emphasises multidisciplinary learning and Indian knowledge traditions in higher education.

**3. IKS and Sustainability: Environmental Wisdom**

In the face of the growing environmental crisis, IKS provides valuable insights into sustainable living and ecological conservation. Traditional Indian ecological knowledge, deeply rooted in cultural practices, emphasizes the interdependence of humans and nature. Ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas and the Puranas reflect a deep reverence for the natural world, advocating for sustainable agricultural practices, forest conservation, and the responsible use of natural resources. Unlike modern exploitative models' Indian knowledge system promotes sustainability through organic farming, water conservation, bio diversity protection and climate resilience. The findings indicate that many of these ancient practices are remarkably in line with modern sustainability sustainability principles. For instance, traditional Indian methods of organic farming, crop rotation, and water conservation are increasingly being recognized as effective in promoting sustainable agriculture. The research highlights several case studies in which traditional Indian farming techniques have been successfully integrated into contemporary practices to reduce the environmental impact of industrial agriculture.

Furthermore, the concept of Ahimsa (non- violence), which extends to the protection of all living beings, has influenced various environmental movements in India, such as the Chipko Movement, where local communities have fought to protect forests from deforestation. The ethical principles of Ahimsa and Dharma advocate for harmonious coexistence with nature, encouraging practices that are sustainable and ecologically responsible.

Globally, the adoption of IKS-based practices such as sustainable farming techniques, organic food production, and forest conservation is contributing to the growing movement toward ecological sustainability. Traditional water management, organic farming and sacred ecology align with modern sustainability goals offering low-cost ecofriendly alternatives. As climate change and environmental degradation continue to pose threats to global ecosystems, the research finds that integrating IKS into contemporary environmental policies and practices offers a pathway toward more sustainable and ethical ways of living.

**4. IKS and Globalization: Preserving Cultural Identity in a Globalized World**

The IKS has rich intellectual and cultural heritage that must be preserved amidst globalization. Globalization often leads to cultural homogenization, where dominant global cultures and ideas overshadow local traditions and indigenous knowledge systems. The findings indicate that IKS, in





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this context, plays an essential role in preserving cultural identity and promoting the diversity of human knowledge. In modern era of globalization Indian Knowledge System faces both opportunities and challenges. While global integration offers numerous benefits, such as the exchange of ideas and resources, it also presents the risk of erasing unique cultural identities and knowledge systems. On one hand globalization has propelled Indian traditions like Yoga, Ayurveda and Vedic mathematics on to global stage, on the other hand it has also led to cultural dilution commercialization and intellectual property exploitation. The research highlights that the integration of IKS into global frameworks offers an opportunity to protect and promote the richness of Indian culture, philosophy, and knowledge. Efforts to preserve ancient texts, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, alongside the documentation and promotion of traditional practices, have become a focal point for scholars and cultural preservationists. The global interest in Yoga and Ayurveda, for example, has encouraged the recognition of these practices as valuable global assets, while also helping to preserve and share the cultural heritage they represent.

Additionally, IKS offers a counter-narrative to the dominant Western-centric knowledge frameworks that often prioritize materialism and individualism. Indian philosophies, such as those found in Vedanta and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, emphasize values like compassion, interconnectedness, and collective well-being. These principles offer alternatives to the often profit-driven and competitive values that dominate modern globalized societies, providing a inclusive and ethical worldview that could help address global issues such inequality, poverty, and social justice.

#### ***5. IKS and Technology: Complementing Modern Scientific Knowledge***

The research finds that while IKS is deeply rooted in traditional knowledge, it does not reject the advancements of modern science and technology. Instead, IKS can complement modern scientific practices by offering alternative perspectives, particularly in areas like health, medicine, and environmental conservation. For instance, the use of herbal remedies and natural treatments in Ayurveda can be integrated with modern pharmacology to create more effective, holistic healthcare solutions. Recent scientific research validates Ayurvedic practices such as Turmeric for anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties, Panchakarma therapy for detoxification and metabolic balance. Indian mathematicians made significant contribution that continue to influence modern science. Indian Mathematician like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta introduced zero and place value notation forming the basis of computing.

Similarly, the traditional Indian approach to astronomy, which emphasized the study of the cosmos, has parallels with modern scientific inquiries into the universe. Many scholars argue that ancient Indian texts such as the Surya Siddhanta contained advanced astronomical knowledge that aligns with modern findings. These instances illustrate how IKS can engage with and enhance contemporary scientific understanding, bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and modern technology.

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Despite the evident relevance of IKS, several challenges remain in fully integrating it into global frameworks. One major obstacle is the commercialization and misinterpretation of IKS-based practices. The global popularity of Yoga and Ayurveda has led to their commercialization, often stripping them of their original cultural and philosophical.

This commodification undermines the integrity of IKS and risks distorting its true essence. Additionally, there is a lack of formal recognition of IKS in global education systems and scientific institutions. The dominance of Western knowledge systems and the perception that traditional knowledge is outdated or unscientific have hindered the widespread integration of IKS. Efforts to incorporate IKS into modern institutions must involve cross-cultural dialogue and a respectful exchange of knowledge, ensuring that IKS is valued not just as an ancient relic but as a living and evolving system. The key to preserving IKS lies in integrating it with modern education, protecting its intellectual rights, and ensuring its authentic representation in global platform.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Indian knowledge system offers a unique perspective on epistemology, challenging dominant Western paradigms. The epistemology of the IKS is a complex and nuanced framework that has shaped intellectual traditions across disciplines for centuries. Rooted in diverse philosophical schools it offers multiple ways of acquiring knowledge from empirical perception to logical influence and authoritative testimony. The IKS represents a treasure trove of wisdom and intellectual inquiry. Its profound epistemological and ontological insights offer valuable, perspectives that can enrich our understanding of knowledge, reality and the human experience. Through its emphasis on subjective experience, intuition, and reasoning, the Indian knowledge system provides a nuanced understanding of human nature and culture. While its limitations and challenges must be acknowledged, the Indian knowledge system remains a valuable resource for contemporary philosophical and anthropological inquiry.

Ultimately, this exploration of the Indian knowledge system highlights the importance of pluralism and diversity in epistemology. By engaging with non-Western knowledge systems, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human knowledge and experience. As we move forward in an increasingly interconnected world, it is essential that we recognize the value of diverse knowledge systems and work towards a more inclusive and equitable understanding of human knowledge. This require a continuous process of exploration dialogue and integration acknowledging both the historical significance and the enduring relevance of this ancient and vibrant intellectual tradition. IKS is not just India's past it is a vital part of its future and a gift to the world.



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