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Reviving India's Ancient Wisdom: The Potential of the Indian Knowledge System in Transforming the Education System

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Abstract

India's ancient civilization boasts a vast and profound repository of knowledge across disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, science, medicine, arts, and governance. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), rooted in holistic learning and experiential wisdom, presents a transformative opportunity for reimagining contemporary education. This paper explores the principles of IKS, its relevance in the 21st century, and its integration into modern educational frameworks. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the paper argues that embracing IKS can foster critical thinking, ethical values, sustainability, and inclusive development.

Keywords: India's ancient civilization, Indian knowledge system, multidisciplinary approach, holistic learning, experiential wisdom.

Introduction

India's ancient educational traditions were deeply embedded in the cultural and philosophical ethos of the land. From the Vedic Gurukula system to the globally acclaimed institutions like Takshashila and Nalanda, education in India was once synonymous with holistic development. However, the colonial intervention introduced a system that prioritized rote learning over critical inquiry and alienated generations from indigenous wisdom. As India aspires to become a knowledge superpower in the 21st century, the need to revisit and revitalize the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) becomes imperative.

The Indian Knowledge System is an embodiment of wisdom and insight, where a harmonious blend of knowledge and science, worldly and spiritual pursuits, action and duty, as well as enjoyment and renunciation, can be found. The educational system since the Rigveda era has placed great emphasis on the ethical, physical, spiritual, and intellectual values of life, promoting virtues such as humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance, and respect for all. Education was recognized as the cornerstone of human greatness in the Vedas. For instance, the University of Nalanda, which was established in the 5th century CE, was one of the world's first universities where students from different parts of the world came to study various subjects such as philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics.

In the Indian tradition, education was not just about intellectual growth but also physical development. Yoga, which originated in India, has been an integral part of Indian education for thousands of years. The practice of yoga is

believed to promote physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, all actions were considered as a means to acquire expertise. For example, the Indian classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Manipuri are not only a form of art but also a means of acquiring expertise in body movements, rhythm, and expression.

Gurukuls served as the foundation of education, where students practiced under the guidance of their teachers. They followed celibacy and devoted themselves to acquiring knowledge in eighteen different branches, including Vedangas, Vedas, Upavedas, Mimamsa, Nyaya, Puranas, and Dharmashastra. This comprehensive education system enabled them to lead a prosperous life and excel in their chosen fields. For instance, Aryabhata, an Indian mathematician and astronomer who lived in the 5th century CE, made significant contributions to the field of mathematics and astronomy, including the concept of zero and the value of pi.

In the Indian education system, true educators were those who possessed skills, were detached from material desires, and focused solely on imparting knowledge. Education was not seen as a means of earning a livelihood or accumulating wealth. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, established the Visva-Bharati University in 1921, which aimed to promote the ideals of Indian culture and education.

India has a rich cultural heritage and a history of intellectual accomplishments that have been acknowledged worldwide. However, the British colonial rule and their policies had a negative effect on India's education system, causing a decline

in its prosperity. In recent times, there has been a growing interest in reviving India's ancient wisdom and traditions through the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). With the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), India is on a path to transform its education system by incorporating Indian knowledge traditions.

IKS refers to the body of knowledge developed in the Indian subcontinent over millennia, encompassing areas such as:

- Vedas and Upanishads: Spiritual and philosophical insights.
- Ayurveda and Yoga: Holistic health and wellness practices.
- Mathematics and Astronomy: Contributions by Aryabhata, Bhaskara, and others.
- Arts and Aesthetics: Natya Shastra, classical music, and dance.
- Social and Political Thought: Arthashastra, Dharma Shastras.

The essence of IKS lies in its interconnectedness, ethical orientation, and emphasis on experiential learning. Unlike fragmented disciplines in modern education, IKS promotes an integrated approach to knowledge.

IKS and the Contemporary Education Crisis Today, India's education system faces challenges such as:

- Overemphasis on exams and memorization.
- Lack of contextual and value-based education.
- Dissonance between education and employability.
- Mental health issues and burnout among students.

IKS, with its holistic and student-centric approach, offers remedies to many of these issues. For instance, the Gurukula system emphasized personalized instruction, moral education, and life skills alongside intellectual pursuits.

Integration of IKS in the National Education Policy 2020

The NEP 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational philosophy by acknowledging the value of IKS. It proposes:

- Reviving classical languages and Sanskrit.
- Promoting Indian arts, music, and crafts.
- Introducing courses in yoga, Indian philosophy, and knowledge systems.
- Encouraging research in traditional knowledge and practices.

These steps reflect a broader vision of making education more rooted, inclusive, and future-ready.

Case Studies and Institutional Efforts Several institutions and initiatives have begun incorporating IKS into their curriculum:

- IITs and IISc conducting research in ancient Indian science and technology.
- IGNC and Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth promoting traditional medicine.
- CBSE introducing elective courses on knowledge traditions.

These efforts, though fragmented, demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of integrating IKS into mainstream education.

Challenges and Criticisms Despite its potential, integrating IKS into modern education faces challenges:

- Perceived lack of scientific validation
- Risk of ideological misuse or glorification
- Resistance from entrenched academic paradigms

- Need for updated and accessible educational materials

Addressing these concerns requires a balanced approach that upholds academic rigor while respecting traditional epistemologies.

The Way Forward: Strategies for Integration To effectively mainstream IKS in education, the following strategies are suggested:

- **Curriculum Reform:** Develop interdisciplinary modules that incorporate IKS themes.
- **Teacher Training:** Equip educators with knowledge and tools to teach IKS.
- **Research and Documentation:** Encourage academic studies on IKS using contemporary methods.
- **Public Awareness:** Promote IKS through media, museums, and community programs.
- **Policy Support:** Provide funding and institutional backing for IKS initiatives.

In conclusion, the Indian Knowledge System has the potential to revive India's ancient wisdom and traditions and transform its education system to provide inclusive and equitable quality education to all. The National Education Policy 2020 is a testament to India's rich intellectual tradition and aims to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all, aligning with the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. The incorporation of IKS will enable India to fulfill its responsibilities towards itself, its people, and society, thereby integrating all aspects of life into this holistic system. With the transformation of the education system, India will not only revive its ancient knowledge but also ensure the prosperity of its future generations.

Reviving and integrating the Indian Knowledge System in education is not a nostalgic return to the past but a forward-looking endeavor to enrich learning with depth, diversity, and relevance. By blending ancient wisdom with modern insights, India can craft an education system that is not only competitive globally but also compassionate, creative, and culturally resonant.

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