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Review Paper

Knowledge in Practice: Insights from the Indian Knowledge System

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a diverse collection of intellectual traditions that have evolved over thousands of years, rooted in the wisdom of the Vedas, Upanishads, and later texts in philosophy, science, and medicine. Unlike modern compartmentalized knowledge, IKS promotes an integrated approach, linking the material and spiritual realms, and emphasizes the interconnectedness of various fields like philosophy, science, ethics, and governance. At its core, IKS views knowledge (vidya) as a tool for practical application, aiming at self-realization, social harmony, and sustainable living. It advocates for a holistic approach to learning that fosters individual and collective well-being. Ancient Indian practices like Vedanta, Ayurveda, Yoga, and Sanskrit grammar have shaped India's cultural and spiritual landscape and continue to offer insights for addressing contemporary global challenges. This paper explores how IKS is applied to modern issues such as ethical governance, sustainability, mental health, and personal development, showing its relevance in today's world. It also highlights how IKS offers valuable solutions through its integrated, responsible, and holistic approach to knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast and profound repository of wisdom developed over thousands of years, intricately linked to the traditions, culture, and spirituality of the Indian subcontinent. Spanning disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, logic, medicine, and the arts, IKS provides a holistic and integrated framework for understanding the world. Unlike knowledge systems focused solely on theory, the Indian approach emphasizes practical application, aiming to transform both the individual and society. Central to the Indian Knowledge System is the belief that knowledge (*vidya*) is more than the accumulation of facts; it is a tool for self-realization, higher consciousness, and the promotion of social harmony. This perspective views all forms of knowledge as interconnected, weaving together the material and spiritual realms. Learning is perceived as an ongoing, dynamic

journey, emphasizing ethical responsibility and the moral implications of knowledge in fostering personal and collective well-being.

This article explores the insights and applications of the Indian Knowledge System across various domains, including philosophy, education, science, and governance. Ancient Indian traditions such as Vedanta, Ayurveda, Yoga, and Sanskrit grammar exemplify how knowledge was used to address practical challenges and enrich daily life. These traditions not only illuminate the historical evolution of knowledge but also provide valuable lessons for addressing contemporary global issues such as sustainability, mental health, and ethical governance.

In an era where knowledge is often compartmentalized, the Indian Knowledge System offers a refreshing alternative: an

integrative framework that bridges diverse disciplines and underscores the interconnectedness of life. Its emphasis on inner transformation and spiritual growth complements its practical applications in solving real-world problems. By revisiting and adapting the principles of IKS, we can cultivate a more balanced, ethical, and conscious approach to modern challenges, paving the way for a harmonious and sustainable future.

Main body:

In the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), knowledge is not simply an abstract or theoretical concept but is deeply connected with practical application in daily life, ethical behaviour, spiritual progress, and social harmony. The concept of "knowledge in practice" refers to how knowledge is not only acquired but also implemented to improve one's life, enhance moral values, and achieve higher goals such as liberation (mokṣa) or self-realization. Here are some ways in which knowledge manifests in practice within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS):

1. Practical Application of Knowledge: Dharma and Ethics

In the Indian tradition, knowledge is intricately linked to dharma (righteousness or moral order), which directs how individuals live their lives, interact with others, and contribute to society. The practice of knowledge is rooted in ethical living and performing one's duties in harmony with cosmic order.

Dharmaśāstra: Texts such as the Manu Smṛti, Mahābhārata, and Bhagavad Gita emphasize that knowledge is valid when it is applied in ethical contexts. Practical knowledge in these texts guides individuals to act in accordance with universal principles, promoting social welfare, personal integrity, and compassion.

Sadhana: In the spiritual traditions of Yoga, Vedanta, and Buddhism, knowledge is a tool for inner transformation. The practice of meditation (dhyāna), self-discipline (sādhana), and ethical conduct (yama and niyama) are considered practical applications of knowledge aimed at spiritual liberation (mokṣa). The realization of Brahman or Atman in Advaita Vedānta is not just a philosophical concept but an experience that transforms how one lives.

2. Knowledge in Action: The Role of Action (Karma)

In many Indian philosophies, knowledge is understood not as passive but as an active force that requires application in real-world actions. The concept of Karma (action) is key to understanding how knowledge becomes practice in everyday life.

Karma Yoga: In the Bhagavad Gita, Karma Yoga refers to the practice of selfless action, where knowledge of the self and the universe informs one's actions. The idea is that when knowledge is applied with the right intention, without attachment to the results, it leads to spiritual growth and contributes to the well-being of others.

Practical Wisdom (Prājña): Prājña, or wisdom, is considered to be an action-oriented form of knowledge in many Indian traditions. It is about making wise decisions in the face of complex situations, using practical reasoning grounded in ethical principles. This kind of wisdom is a dynamic form of knowledge that responds to immediate needs.

3. Knowledge in Social Practice: Role in Society

Indian epistemology also emphasizes the importance of valid knowledge in maintaining societal order and harmony. The implementation of knowledge in the social sphere is essential for the collective well-being.

Rājadharmā: The concept of Rājadharmā, or the duties of a ruler, as elaborated in the Mahābhārata and the Arthashastra, emphasizes that a ruler must govern with knowledge that is informed by ethical principles. Practical knowledge in this context includes governance, diplomacy, war strategies, and justice.

Education and Learning: In classical Indian society, knowledge was applied not only to individual spiritual growth but also to the betterment of society. Gurukulas (traditional learning centers) and universities like Nalanda and Takshashila emphasized practical knowledge in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, logic, and medicine, all applied to improve societal conditions.

4. Knowledge in Rituals and Spiritual Practices

Knowledge in Indian traditions is often applied in the form of rituals and ceremonies. Vedic rituals, Pujas, yajnas, and mantras are not only seen as symbolic actions but as practical applications of sacred knowledge that establish a connection between the material and spiritual realms.

Vedic Knowledge: The practice of Vedic rituals involves the application of knowledge in the proper recitation of mantras, offerings, and acts of devotion. The Vedas are treated as repositories of eternal knowledge, and their recitation and application are believed to have cosmic significance, aligning the practitioner with the divine order.

Tantric Practices: In Tantrism, knowledge is applied through meditative techniques, mantra repetition, and specific rites. These practices are meant to channel spiritual energy (Shakti) for personal empowerment, liberation, and the realization of the divine within oneself.

5. Practical Knowledge in Medicine: Āyurveda

Āyurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, is a prime example of how knowledge is applied in practice. Rooted in Vedic philosophy, Āyurveda is a holistic approach that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual health. It draws on the knowledge of the body's constitution (doshas), the balance of elements, and the interconnectedness of the body and mind.

Diagnosis and Treatment: The knowledge of body types, illnesses, and natural remedies is applied through personalized treatments, including diet, herbs, physical therapy, meditation, and lifestyle practices.

Health as Balance: Practical knowledge in Āyurveda emphasizes the balance of the body's energies, aiming to maintain harmony with nature. It demonstrates how knowledge, when applied to daily life, contributes to long-term well-being and vitality.

6. Knowledge in Science and Technology: Ancient Contributions

Ancient Indian scholars contributed significantly to scientific knowledge that was highly practical and was used to solve real-world problems.

Mathematics and Astronomy: Indian mathematicians such as Āryabhaṭa and Brahmagupta contributed to the development of the decimal system and accurate models of astronomy. This knowledge was applied for calendar making, navigation, and construction of architectural marvels.

Architecture and Engineering: The knowledge embedded in Vastu Shastra (ancient Indian architecture) and Shilpa Shastra (science of arts and crafts) was practical in building temples, cities, and homes by cosmic principles. These fields relied on the application of knowledge related to proportions, measurements, and the sacredness of spaces.

7. Knowledge in Practice: The Role of Intuition and Spiritual Experience

In many Indian traditions, knowledge goes beyond intellectual understanding and is realized through direct intuitive experience. Spiritual practices emphasize the importance of inner transformation and realization, where knowledge is experienced directly and applied to transcend the ego.

Jnana (Knowledge) and Bhakti (Devotion): In Advaita Vedānta, knowledge of the self (Atman) as one with Brahman is not merely intellectual but experiential. The realization of this knowledge in daily life transforms the practitioner's consciousness and leads to liberation. Similarly, Bhakti Yoga emphasizes that devotion rooted in knowledge leads to a life of service and divine connection.

Meditation and Mindfulness: In Buddhism and Yoga, practices such as meditation and mindfulness are ways of applying knowledge of the self and the nature of the mind. These practices involve not just mental concentration but a practical integration of wisdom into daily life for overcoming suffering and attaining peace.

CONCLUSION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a profound and integrated approach to knowledge that transcends the boundaries

of traditional academic disciplines. Rooted in ancient texts and practices, IKS emphasizes the interconnectedness of philosophy, science, ethics, and spirituality, advocating for a holistic understanding of the world. Unlike the fragmented knowledge systems prevalent in modern times, IKS views knowledge as a transformative tool for self-realization, social harmony, and sustainable living.

Through its practical applications, such as those found in Vedānta, Āyurveda, Yoga, and other ancient Indian disciplines, IKS offers valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges like ethical governance, mental health, sustainability, and personal development. The system's focus on the responsible and ethical application of knowledge highlights the importance of balance between material progress and spiritual growth, offering a pathway to a more harmonious and integrated world.

In conclusion, the Indian Knowledge System provides timeless wisdom that is not only relevant for personal and collective well-being but also offers sustainable solutions to modern global issues. By embracing the holistic, integrated approach of IKS, we can create a more mindful, conscious, and ethically guided future, where knowledge serves not only intellectual growth but also the betterment of society as a whole.

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