

Ascetic Knowledge System in Age of AI: Integrating Indian Religious Asceticism within IKS driven Digital Epistemologies

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System is delicately stitched into the cultural, traditional, and philosophical heritage of India. It encompasses the ways of teaching, learning, knowing, propagating and applying knowledge rooted in indigenous epistemologies. In present era of technology and rapidly changing world, it is very important to be connected with one's root. This paper integrates the rich heritage of Indian Knowledge System with that of Artificial Intelligence in special connection with ascetic teachings. The traditional knowledge system has been preserved by the numerous great religious ascetics who have transmitted the ideas, knowledge and composed many literary sources. But in digitized world, where technology is the driving force, it is important to preserve the traditional knowledge to impend one's own identity and cultural existence. This paper explores such relations and delves into the impact of such integration on future. The paper employs qualitative methodology, following descriptive research design. The paper is ultimately relying on secondary resources, a systematic interdisciplinary analysis of historical, sociological, academic articles and textual studies have been done. The paper establishes the clear need of integrating IKS with digital epistemologies of present Indian Education system. It also emphasizes the possible impact of it in decolonizing the young Indian minds. The paper also establishes its link with NEP 2020 and portrays active use of IKS in teaching and nurturing the young blood.

Keywords: IKS, AI, NEP 2020, digital epistemology

Introduction

The Indian Knowledge Systems known as Bharatiya Jnana Parampara establish an extensive and complex system of knowledge which includes all intellectual, philosophical, scientific and spiritual practices that have developed throughout Indian history. The Indian Knowledge System exists as a permanent intellectual tradition which developed through scientific research and scholarly thought and practical testing of knowledge. Puri (2025) viewed IKS rests upon the foundational pillars of *Gnan* (knowledge), *Vignan* (science) and *Jeevan-Darshan* (philosophy of life) which organize knowledge through connecting theoretical knowledge with practical skills. The knowledge systems of this tradition provide a complete understanding of reality which combines all physical, mental, moral and spiritual aspects of human experience.

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IKS defines knowledge as a system which links all the knowledge elements because it views knowledge as a practical experience that people use to improve their personal and group lives.

The roots of IKS can be traced to the Vedic period (approximately 1500-500 BCE) because the Vedic texts which include The Vedas, Upanishads, Brahmanas and Aranyakas created a complete worldview system that connected together different fields of study including cosmology and metaphysics with that of ethics and ritual practice. The Vedic corpus presents knowledge (jnana) as both '*apara-vidya*' (lower knowledge concerned with the empirical world) and '*para-vidya*' (higher knowledge concerned with ultimate reality or Brahman). The distinction creates a knowledge system which organizes information into two categories that include secular and sacred knowledge which together create a unified system of understanding.

Indian sociologist, G.S Ghurye in book Indian Sadhus argued that religious ascetics were responsible for carrying forward the knowledge tradition. He argued that the nature of asceticism among Hindus was paradoxical in nature as they leave their family, parents, clan, name, caste, etc. to get further classified into other categories based on sects and cults. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) approaches knowledge through a comprehensive framework which treats knowledge as a complete system. The system establishes two parts which show how metaphysics connects to ethics and science links to spiritual beliefs. The system establishes a framework for creating human beings who achieve balance through developing their physical health, intellectual abilities, emotional control, moral values and spiritual growth. The knowledge system has survived through religious ascetics who protected its teachings and passed them down through time. Through their ascetic practices which included both renunciation and disciplined living along with meditative research and teacher-disciple mentorship they safeguarded multiple philosophical schools like Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, etc. The knowledge of ascetic practices existed as practical experience which ascetics developed through their daily activities. The knowledge existed in both textual commentary and the actual life example which people demonstrated. Ascetic traditions created an epistemic culture which developed through self-discipline and transformative learning. Whereas, knowledge now exists within digital platforms which screens provide to users through recommendation systems that filter content based on efficiency. Artificial Intelligence with algorithmic systems and data-driven cognitive processes shape the current digital environment. AI systems provide better access to information and stronger analytical tools but they create new definitions of what constitutes knowledge.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is a qualitative-method descriptive research design. The research uses G.S Ghurye's book 'Indian Sadhus' as its basic source, in order to understand Indian Asceticism and its paradoxical nature. Other secondary sources include academic articles, policy papers, philosophical treatises, and current commentaries on artificial intelligence and interdisciplinary education. The interdisciplinary approach to analysis draws on the sociology of knowledge, philosophy of technology, religious studies, and educational theory.

The Indian Knowledge System

The question often arises that when world is changing so rapidly then why to go back to ancient system of knowledge. For that we need to understand 'Knowledge' first. Knowledge here in this system is neither purely theoretical nor merely utilitarian; it is transformative and evolving. It seeks to refine human consciousness, regulate social life, and harmonize individual aspirations with universal principles. The philosophical schools of *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimamsa*, and *Vedanta* collectively demonstrate a high degree of logical rigor, metaphysical depth, and epistemological sophistication. The six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy—*Nyaya* (logic and epistemology), *Vaisheshika* (atomistic metaphysics), *Samkhya* (dualistic cosmology), *Yoga* (practical discipline for self-realization), *Mimamsa* (ritual hermeneutics), and *Vedanta* (metaphysical inquiry into ultimate reality)—further systematized IKS into rigorous philosophical traditions. Each school developed sophisticated methods of inquiry (*pramana*) which included perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumana*), comparison (*upamana*), testimony (*shabda*), postulation (*arthapatti*) and non-apprehension (*anupalabधि*) to create an epistemological system which matches the complexity of any global intellectual tradition. The holistic nature of IKS reaches all aspects of existence because it connects all knowledge instead of treating different domains as isolated entities. The Darshanas provide complementary perspectives on reality and knowledge acquisition. The *Nyaya* (by *Akshapada Gautam*) system develops both logical and epistemological methods while *Vaisheshika* (by *Maharshi Kanad*) defines ontological concepts which delves into the basic structure of everything that is *Atoms*, which Maharshi Kanad called '*Parmanu*' and *Sankhya* (by *Kapil Muni*) studies how consciousness interacts with physical matter. The *Yoga* system offers practical methods for individuals to achieve self-realization while *Mimamsa* concentrates on duties and rituals and *Vedanta* investigates the ultimate unity of all existence.

IKS extends beyond philosophical investigation to incorporate practical fields which include Ayurveda, astronomy, mathematics, linguistics, architecture and governance. Ayurveda uses its focus on preventive health and *dosha-balance* and body-mind-spirit integration to demonstrate how IKS applies its principles. Yoga and meditation provide training for people to achieve mental control and emotional stability. The ethical principles of Dharma and Karma establish social duties for people to follow while Ahimsa and Seva create pathways for people to develop compassion and work together in harmony.

Experience based epistemology serves as the main characteristic of IKS. The process of transformation becomes complete when knowledge reaches the person who understands it. People today tend to follow modern informational models because they believe that accumulating knowledge will lead to their personal realization. Ascetic traditions operationalize this experience-based dimension through renunciation of excess, regulation of desires, disciplined inquiry, and moral accountability.

Why IKS is Important Today?

Contemporary society faces multiple difficulties when IKS needs to be integrated into current discussions. Colonial scholars treated Indian knowledge systems as non-scientific, mythological and superstitious which resulted in their exclusion from both academic and policy

domains. The post-colonial movement to restore IKS needs to find a middle ground which requires them to reject both uncritical idealization and unreasoned rejection while they practice academic research that honors both ancient knowledge and modern scientific methods and requirement. The process of translating IKS concepts into Western intellectual frameworks leads to epistemological violence because it requires the reduction of holistic context-dependent knowledge into basic material. The English language cannot directly translate the terms dharma, karma, atman and moksha which need complex approaches for interpretation.

The current importance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems exists because modern society faces multiple ethical, psychological, environmental, and epistemological challenges. The contemporary world experiences three problems which include military conflicts, consumerism, environmental degradation, and mental health issues, along with social fragmentation. IKS establishes ethical guidelines which people should follow to live responsibly by using Dharma, Karma, Ahimsa, Seva, and '*Vasudhaiv-Kutumbakam*' principles. The principles establish ethical responsibility standards while promoting compassion, environmental stewardship, and global interconnectedness. The practices of Yoga and meditation together with Ayurveda create frameworks which help people achieve their physical and mental health goals. The world today experiences excessive anxiety together with technological overload and identity confusion, which makes ascetic disciplines essential for achieving balance through self-reflection and self-control. The ascetic ideal promotes moderation through its promotion of reflective practices which lead to accumulation of knowledge. The values represented in asceticism are not antiquated; they are increasing in urgency.

IKS functions as a necessary element which helps to eliminate systems of colonial knowledge. Colonial educational systems have historically treated Indigenous knowledge systems as mythical traditions which lack scientific value. By reintegrating IKS, the intellectual continuity of IKS is validated, providing a sense of confidence in Indigenous systems of knowing, while locating Indian learners within their own civilizational heritage as well as enabling them to engage on a global scale. This tradition centers on religious asceticism as its main focus. The ascetics who abandoned society continued their roles as teachers and social reformers through their work as knowledge carriers and interpreters of religious texts. The practitioners used monastic institutions and *gurukula* systems and oral transmission methods to maintain their intricate philosophical systems and moral training which existed throughout many years. Their knowledge acquisition approach used four methods which included tapas (discipline), svadhyaya (self-study), dhyana (meditation), and seva (selfless service). Knowledge was validated through lived realization rather than abstract theorization alone.

The Age of AI: Digital Epistemologies with special reference of NEP 2020

The digital revolution creates an entirely new way for people to understand knowledge. AI systems use their ability to analyze patterns for content creation and form customized educational experiences while their technology mimics human decision-making processes. The fast development of computational intelligence creates new challenges for established concepts which define human thought processes and the ability to act and create original work. The combination of ascetic knowledge systems into digital epistemologies demands intellectual

study because it serves as a fundamental duty for all human societies. Artificial intelligence has reconfigured educational practices by the way of adaptive learning systems, personalized testing, digital repositories, and data analysis. AI-based education practices provide better problem-solving skills and learning opportunities.

However, AI is based on computational models. As explained in philosophical accounts of consciousness and computation, AI can mimic self-referential processes without realizing witnessing consciousness. The Vedantic distinction between *Ātman* and conditioned identity shows that consciousness cannot be equated with algorithmic processing. This ontological distinction is critical. It warns against the confusion of technological simulation with experiential consciousness. Ascetic knowledge systems focus on internal realization, moral development, and controlled consciousness, which cannot be equated with digital processing.

Though, AI improves learning opportunities but does not replace the experiential aspect of ascetic knowledge systems. Also, Ogburn (1922) in his book *Social Change* said, “Cultural lag occurs when unequal and different rates or degrees of change between interdependent parts of culture, i.e., material and non-material leads to maladjustment”, to which Alvin Toffler called for a balanced approach calling it ‘future shock’. Further, AI systems raise ethical issues related to algorithmic bias, data colonialism, and digital inequality. Without philosophical foundations, technological development can lead to the promotion of instrumental reason over wisdom. The inclusion of Indigenous and Local Knowledge Systems (IKS) in AI systems brings ethical considerations to technological development.

Epistemological Characteristics of IKS

The epistemological framework of IKS contains several distinctive characteristics which define its system of knowledge.

- **Holism and Integration**

The IKS system of knowledge maintains a unified connection which unites all areas of knowledge instead of dividing reality into separate categories of subject and object and mind and matter and sacred and secular elements. The human experience consists of physical and psychological and social and spiritual aspects which exist as interconnected parts of a unified whole.

- **Experiential Validation**

IKS recognizes scriptural authority (Shabda - pramana) as an important source of knowledge yet the system considers direct experiential knowledge (anubhava) to be equally essential. The yogic and meditative traditions use subjective experience as a valid source of knowledge which requires practitioners to develop their abilities through disciplined practice (sadhana) and receive confirmation from realized teachers (guru).

- **Ethical and Salvation Oriented**

The IKS knowledge system exhibits value-based knowledge which connects to ethical conduct (dharma) and spiritual liberation (moksha). Knowledge acquisition serves two purposes which

include studying for academic purposes and using knowledge in practical situations but main goal of knowledge acquisition remains to change human awareness and reduce human suffering (dukkha).

- **Plurality and Inclusivity**

The IKS system permits different academic methods and cultural viewpoints. The Jainism belief of ‘anekantavada’ allows multiple viewpoints to exist while Vedanta's synthetic approach demonstrates how different ideas can operate together within a unified system.

- **Cyclical and Temporal**

The IKS system functions through a cyclical time system which includes kalpa and yuga because it does not follow a straight path of historical events. The way people understand tradition and innovation together with continuity derives from this temporal system.

NEP 2020: Emphasis on IKS

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces fundamental changes to India's educational system by establishing new methods of learning that combine complete education with multiple academic disciplines and Indian cultural traditions while promoting digital educational methods. The policy establishes Indian Knowledge System (IKS) as a core epistemological resource which people must understand through their proper development. The policy presents Indian philosophical traditions and scientific achievements and linguistic diversity and classical arts and indigenous teaching methods as essential elements of the standard educational program. The NEP 2020 program aims to restore indigenous knowledge systems which European colonial powers had pushed into obscurity through their practice of educating students in Western knowledge. The IKS research centres assist higher education institutions by developing research programs that support interdepartmental studies of ancient texts and present-day scientific research methods. The policy creates a framework which merges cultural heritage with modern progress while showing that knowledge extends beyond professional abilities to encompass fundamental human understanding of different societies.

National Education Policy 2020 utilizes digital learning modalities for designing educational systems where all students can learn in an effective manner at their own pace. The policy also advocates for the establishment of digital infrastructure, online resources, virtual labs, and open educational resources. This is based on the assumption that educational technology can transform the learning process. The policy also conceives the application of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and adaptive learning for improving the effectiveness of teaching. Digital content creation in regional languages, teacher training in educational technology, and initiatives for virtual universities shall also be helpful in improving the learning process, especially in rural and urban areas. This policy also links digital technologies with educational reforms while promoting skill-based learning and critical thinking. At the same time, it conceives digitization as an instructional methodology instead of a technical solution.

National Education Policy 2020 outlines a new perspective for the educational development process by combining Indian Knowledge Systems with digital learning modalities. The policy

conceives a new framework for the educational system where technological capabilities shall be leveraged while respecting cultural traditions. The policy formulation also reflects indigenous knowledge systems for developing digital educational systems where students can be equipped with global competencies while maintaining strong links with their own communities. The educational system of the twenty-first-century India shall be a combination of technological advancements and traditional knowledge systems, where both elements shall function as major driving forces for research and development.

Integration of AI with IKS

The integration of ascetic knowledge systems within AI-driven epistemologies needs to be developed through clear conceptual understanding. Meditation and self-inquiry and spiritual realization remain inaccessible to AI systems. The system provides substantial benefits for three areas which include preservation and accessibility and interdisciplinary communication. Ancient manuscripts can be digitized, translated, and indexed through AI-supported tools. The systematic archiving process enables the preservation of ascetics' oral teachings. These digital platforms avail comparative philosophical research along with their capacity for cross-referencing different sources and mapping out required themes. The development of personalized learning modules for Vedanta Yoga philosophy and Dharma studies needs adaptive algorithms which allow students to interact with IKS material at various depth levels. The simulation technologies demonstrate both cosmological and metaphysical models which help users understand those concepts while maintaining philosophical depth.

The AI system provides users with a tool which enhances their practical knowledge but does not act as a full replacement for their experiential learning. Modern society experiences a loss of indigenous knowledge because of migration and generational disconnection and poor documentation and economic demands and quick societal changes. The revitalization process begins through system-based documentation methods which include intergenerational contact learning materials and gender-equal educational programs and institutional backing. The combination of traditional ecological practices with modern sustainability programs creates an environmental framework which becomes more valuable. People do recognize that digital platforms have expanded reach and are useful for preserving knowledge traditions that are fragile.

However, they also emphasize that authenticity has to be at the heart of the matter. There is a general consensus that artificial intelligence should support and supplement human mentorship and disciplined practice. The educational systems which utilize ascetic knowledge systems together with AI technology create pathways for knowledge to flow through existing academic fields while developing new educational methods. Artificial intelligence technologies enable better data preservation methods while making stored information more accessible which ethical ascetic traditions support through their principled standards and practical knowledge. Students who study IKS-based curricula develop higher levels of ethical understanding and deeper connections to their cultural backgrounds. The integration matches the objectives of National Education Policy 2020 which advocates for multiple subject areas to be taught through indigenous knowledge systems together with educational practices which emphasize moral values.

Educational decolonization proceeds through this integration which establishes a base for indigenous knowledge systems. The digital platform establishes indigenous knowledge systems as valid sources of knowledge which challenge existing power structures about knowledge. The process of technology development creates cultural ties because it achieves knowledge through technological development. Digital educational systems develop their ethical values when artificial intelligence systems use Dharma-based ethical reasoning together with sustainability principles that connect all living things.

The broader philosophical implication concerns the nature of knowledge itself. The definition of knowledge as data shows that education becomes a business relationship. Human development and ethical understanding represent the essence of knowledge which requires technology to follow human goals. Ascetic traditions remind us that the ultimate aim of learning is realization, not merely information processing.

Conclusion

The combination of Indian religious ascetic practices with AI-based digital knowledge systems offers essential benefits to modern educational systems. The project needs intellectual strength together with policy backing and interdisciplinary teamwork and ethical monitoring. The National Education Policy 2020 provides a supportive framework for such synthesis. AI can effectively preserve, disseminate, and pedagogically enhance IKS content, but it cannot replace the experiential core of ascetic practices.

Ascetic knowledge systems provide educational institutions with intellectual depth together with controlled restraint and moral ethical standards which exist in the present time when people use digital technology for everything. When technology serves wisdom rather than overshadowing it, education evolves into a balanced model that honors tradition while embracing innovation. Indian education will need to maintain the present equilibrium between digital growth and spiritual self-reflection, which will safeguard human progress and cultural heritage through technological development.

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