

Indian Knowledge System: A Holistic Framework of Education

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Abstract: *Today's education system focuses on market-driven educational outcomes that tell "How to earn" but fail to describe "How to live a happy life". In simple terms, it neglects the integration of body, mind and intellect. Based primarily on original texts such as the Rigveda, Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and classical literature, these works help enlighten the world with embedded moral responsibility that fosters social harmony and self-realisation among the younger generation. It preserves ancestral knowledge and helps instil traditional and cultural values in new generations for a better future. Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy is reflected in the broader institutional framework of Visva-Bharati, a living process of powerful epistemological study that combines nature, creativity, and cultural pluralism. Through secondary scholarship by Ananda Coomaraswamy, S. Radhakrishnan, and others, a reinterpretation of the Indian knowledge system in modern times is presented to understand the relevance of the traditional educational system, which was seen as degraded in contemporary writings, and to call for scrutiny. This paper argues that the Indian knowledge system is the only way to overcome ethical and ecological problems exemplified in Visva-Bharati's Vidya Bhavana, which sets an example of a holistic framework for the Indian educational system in the 21st century.*

Key Words: Indian Knowledge System, Holistic, Tagore, Education, Modern.

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Introduction

Education, a central pillar of the Indian knowledge system, creates responsible citizens for tomorrow. In the Indian intellectual system, education is not only meant to acquire a degree, complex skills or jobs, but rather it focuses on the overall development of the individual that helps them to use this knowledge to handle different life situations effectively. Classical Indian texts are living proof of the Indian knowledge heritage that led to the path of self-realisation and awareness about spiritual life. It helps individuals to perform learning by understanding them for the honest pursuit of truth. Many canonical texts, such as the *Upanishads*, conceptualise that the Indian knowledge system disseminates *avidya* and pushes individuals towards inner transformation, or one can say, sails people from the land of ignorance to the land of wisdom. Indian education leads to understanding oneself, which tends to increase economic productivity in one's life. Moreover, the *Bhagavad Gita* reflects the vision of doing, learning and action that is guided by dharma. *Gita* integrated knowledge (*jnana*) defines action (*karma*) and gets purified by devotion (*bhakti*). In Chapter 3 of the *Gita*, it is mentioned “*na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛt*” (3.5), which means you can't stop your actions, but with proper knowledge, one can perform responsibly without harming others. In simple words, Indian education prepares individuals for ethical engagement and contemplation in performing their work. They advocate actual knowledge that doesn't create false ego and dilemma, but instead focuses on compassion, humanity and a sense of duty towards others, which form the base for holistic education. The Indian Knowledge System is seamlessly interwoven with the educational system, which plays a significant role in character formation and also helps them to understand others' emotions, and individuals are able to control their mind and emotions according to circumstances. This culminated in not only cognitive development but also in establishing social harmony, growth, and integrity that became inherently holistic. Even, holistic Indian education interpreted through the *Rigveda*, where human knowledge is considered as an essential part of nature, community and cosmic order (*Rita*), because it leads to ecological and ethical learning.

Modern scholars such as S. Radhakrishnan advocated Indian knowledge not only about knowing but also about understanding the process of becoming information that helps us to recognise the right and wrong path for performing action. As action is indeed part of individual life, for escaping from troubles, the Indian knowledge system alone creates moral values in humans to rightly perform their actions without disturbing others. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy described that Indian education is centred mainly on character formation in the process of learning and training. These perspectives clearly indicate that the ancestral continuity of educational thought was the only way to protect society from fragmentation. Rabindranath Tagore, the concept of modern education is embedded in Indian intellectual traditions. According to him, colonial education only developed mechanical minds that foster false ego, arrogance and a superiority complex. In simple terms, that suppresses individual creative skills and keeps them away from their cultural and traditional practices. Tagore's vision of education helps learners to express freely, instils peace within the mind and provides an opportunity for self-realisation. His educational institution, Visva Bharati, is a living heritage of

a powerful blend of nature, creativity and unity of knowledge. His education sets a traditional continuation of Indian knowledge heritage, which helps in keeping alive ancestral values to strive for a happy life, which is the need of today's world. Most of the educational setup fails to create responsible citizens for tomorrow.

Moreover, contemporary official documents such as the National Education Policy 2020 emphasised the need to make education connected with grounded cultural practices. This is a macro-level policy that focuses on experiential learning, multidisciplinary education and ethical norms. Through this, Indian knowledge heritage became enriched with integration across all domains. It offers a framework to move beyond rote memorisation to understand and master the subject for regenerating human values. While the National Curriculum Framework 2022-23 gives a boost to NEP 2020 programs by providing a micro-level curriculum design that integrates NEP programs in the classroom by focusing on multilingualism, Indian traditions and local cultural practices. The Indian Knowledge system leads to transformation by describing the purpose of education and learning. However, one can say these policies can't be implemented without engagement with the Indian knowledge system because that was the firm base of textual and intellectual learning. This paper carefully examines the Indian Knowledge system through assessing primary and secondary sources, to understand the need for Indian education in the 21st century. Through critical engagement, one can determine the limitations of today's education that lacks coherent and grounded learning that gives rise to hatred among each other and increases distance from one's own traditions, beliefs and practices.

Conceptual Ideas behind the Indian Knowledge System

Indian Knowledge System, rooted in self-discipline and focused on transmitting knowledge from one person to another, is free from restrictions of age, race, caste and creed. It leads to personal transformation and poses serious questions for the modern educational system, which emphasises value-free and neutral education. Most importantly, learners should not only focus on acquiring knowledge but also be more alert in participatory processes to connect with the knower for understanding their learning. The core ideas that led to the development of the Indian knowledge system were determined through relation with education because that is a formative phase for making individuals capable of dealing with political and social crises. In relation to practice, it makes learning more interesting and meaningful through lived experiences and action. This orientation pushed learners to do self-assessments to understand their strengths and flaws, which gives scope for improvement. In contrast to exam-centric education, which is only concerned with performance and economic outcomes and lacks understanding. In the Indian education system, more emphasis put on the teacher-student relationship, in which both are interdependent variables, which describes a powerful ethical journey that is filled with devotion towards the teacher and facilitator towards students for their better future, that not remain limited to monetary exchange of education but it emerges as living connection between two persons that generates a new way of life.

Education is a life-long process that does not get finished with certification, as it continues till death, which is the real essence of the Indian Knowledge system. Nevertheless, it gives

way for a relation with social duty as learning prepares individual to perform their duty with dignity, integrity and awareness. Indian education seems connected with the environment because learning in ashram and later places, such as Santiniketan, where acquiring knowledge makes one closer to nature, reinforces the idea of ecological sensibility in learners. It creates individuals who become sympathetic to environmental issues, making them more responsible towards environmental protection. In simple terms, one can say environment, ethics, social, political and cultural beliefs are firmly embedded in the Indian Knowledge system, which were the core ideas behind the development of IKS. Indian Education, a powerful epistemological system that focuses on the development of the individual and community on a broader scale, aims to create a kind, sympathetic, and civilised human being.

Literary Discussion about Holistic Education

Through primary textual analysis, it portrayed learning as a disciplined practice that requires responsibility, intellect and consciousness. Traditional education is seen as an essential part of cognitive, spiritual and ethical life. For instance, there were many words with different meanings, depending on their learning how one learns to perceive in life, which is why ethical learning is considered to be essential for peace of mind. The holistic education emerged from canonical texts such as the *Sruti*, *Smriti*, the *Upanishads* and epics that provide a comprehensive view about holistic education. The *Rigveda*, which cultivates proper education, provides clarity in the mind about the past, present and future. It fosters communal responsibility rather than only advancement. Moreover, the *Atharvaveda* gives a clear understanding of holistic education that Indian education helps learners to know the importance of the relation between health, body and knowledge that develops self-control in the individual. It places more emphasis on the purity of life, known as *brahmacharya*, where the learner's mind becomes active and attentive towards their actions by performing their work with good intentions. Even the *Upanishads* advocated that a learner should be prepared from within for acquiring knowledge by awakening their curiosity about the explanation of facts, and they should be consistent in their learning process by repeatedly questioning the relevance of the information. That's what we call early inquiry-based education for better understanding. The epics, such as the *Mahabharata*, describe *vidya* as based on discipline, moral values and ethical governance and proper education is only seen as knowledge that leads to the welfare of the community and society. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which projected not only economy and polity, but also describe the need for Indian education as part of administrative training for the ministers and officials, because Kautilya emphasised the fact that educational training instils moral values in individuals along with skills. It provides direction to individuals to possess strong values that help them to assert control over their emotions, such as greed, hunger and desires to make the right decision for the welfare of society. Other references, such as *Yoga Vasishtha*, examined Indian learning as a process that focuses on evolving mind consciousness that makes learners capable of asserting and reflecting the information that is seen as experiential learning that follows detachment from evil deeds. Emotions and Creativity have always been an essential part of the Indian educational system, as it is evidently seen in Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra*, which advocates a new orientation in the

learning process by broadening the scope of education through emphasising creativity and human emotions as a justified way of reflecting their learning in a more meaningful manner. These primary texts clearly depicted Indian education focused on experiential learning, personal as well as professional development and moral responsibility towards the welfare of society.

In Western writings, two strands of perspectives emerged, with some thinkers, such as J.S. Mill, Macaulay, Charles Grant and Hegel, describing Indian education in derogatory terms such as inferior, degraded and useless, which need critical examination to understand the true nature of the Indian education system. J.S. Mill, in his work *The History of British India*, which he never visited, portrayed Indian civilisation as despotic and backward. According to him, Indian education has no philosophical depth or pedagogical system, which is not true because, if we refer to the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Nyaya Sutras*, we find a rational and logical inquiry-based Indian knowledge system. Mill's analysis lacks a methodological approach that created a Eurocentric and utilitarian ideology based upon missionary and colonial reports. So, without engaging with Indian texts, one can't portray Indian civilisation as inferior to any system, which is a biased approach. Another thinker, Macaulay, in his work *Minute on Indian Education*, mentions that 'a single shelf of a sound European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia', which describes his colonial and Eurocentric framework and lacks a balanced approach, because without correctly understanding Indian languages and following translations, it leads to sweeping generalisations. Even Charles Grant, in his work *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, described Indian education as inadequate and society as degraded, and he uplifted Christianity as a Western modernising force, which showcases his selective study and overlooks the Indian ethical texts and traditions. G.W.F. Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, conceptualised history through a Eurocentric lens as a progressive and linear movement. He regarded Indian education as a cyclical process that lacks historical *consciousness*. If we refer to Indian primary texts such as epics and *Puranas*, they demonstrate cyclical concepts for developing consciousness over time, which do not limit the human mind. Hegel's understanding of the Indian philosophical system as mystical portrays his tendency to overlook the systematic reasoning, inferences and metaphysics that developed through *Mimansa* and Buddhist traditions. In response to these arguments, many scholars such as Ananda K Coomaraswamy criticised the Western parameters of civilisation and described it as an industrial prioritised system and argued that Indian education creates humans of good character, wisdom, and makes them capable of living a dignified life. Moreover, S. Radhakrishnan described that the Indian education and knowledge system transforms humans completely, which cultivates ethical values, discipline and spiritual awareness in their lives. In his work, *Indian Philosophy and Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, he criticised the colonial interpretation of projecting IKS as mystical and advocated that the Indian system developed logical reasoning and moral duty among citizens. According to him, Indian education never separates Indian knowledge from freedom, values and harmony, that's why it is called the holistic Indian Knowledge System.

These textual references need more critical engagement and objective analysis to understand the Indian and Western education systems properly. No system can be considered degraded or inferior because each has its own advantages and limitations that converge with each other to shape or complete its own limitations. As many thinkers supported this, such as Aristotle in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, views show resemblance with Indian texts because he linked education with practical reasoning, which is what Indian education advocates in belief, tradition and culture. Even John Dewey emphasised experiential learning and logical thoughts; his views converge with Indian traditions, which leads to understanding about Indian education as a lifelong process that evolves cyclical growth of historical imagination. Moreover, Rudolf Steiner and Montessori focused on Indian educational traditions as based on self-discipline, wisdom and creativity that develop the human mind to tackle difficult situations with ease. This view indicates the overall development of humans by understanding oneself and awakens the consciousness in humans to work. Nevertheless, knowledge emerged not as a space of domination or control, but as a new way of realising their own self-identity and helps to develop control over their emotions. Apart from this, the Indian Knowledge system is not only about education and holistic development, but it's also seen as a path towards attaining liberation, as proved through the Bhagavat Gita, which states that knowledge cuts ignorance through the weapon of wisdom, which focuses on the process of inner purification of mind and body, along with intellectual development. It generates a sense of responsibility in speaking to others and also affects the thought process of an individual. Interestingly, the concept of liberation does not mean to leave household responsibility; instead, it prepares individuals to handle family matters more sympathetically by setting aside ego and patriarchal values. In the long run, this creates an individual who can efficiently run a family by managing all responsibilities at the same time, which is what is called as liberation of mind, body and soul.

So, after undergoing literary discussion, one can easily recognise the Indian and Western education systems, both of which are culturally different; they converge with each other on the central principles of education, such as Indian education advocating for ethical governance, morality, teacher as a guide for the learner, and metaphysics and Western education advocates for institutional and democratic practices. Their points of convergence help us to recover complete educational traditions that should be depicted as a synthesis without getting fragmented, and moving with their traditions and cultures.

Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge system, one of the comprehensive frameworks for holistic education, has evolved in society. This system describes these as the inherited values that present from early years; it converges with a new formulation, but the foundational base has always been the same. This research argues that Indian education has neither been inferior nor backward; it has always been a historical system that has been integrated into today's world for sustainable growth and shared human partnerships as a duty towards the welfare of society, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Colonial and Utilitarian thinkers have asserted a narrow perspective that resulted in clashes and disturbed communal harmony because their works lack critical examination. The Indian Knowledge system detaches individuals from greed, anger, and negative thoughts, eventually helping them to think for others with full wisdom and

compassion. In modern and colonial writings, Indian education was marginalised in many aspects to serve imperial needs rather than for human development. Actual knowledge never lets learners disappoint; it is always able to find its way to overcome difficult situations. In today's world, it has become a need of the hour to regenerate skill learning with value-based education; without knowledge, one can't understand which to use where in the circumstances. Recent policies attempt to integrate the Indian knowledge system in institutional development for the development of historical consciousness in a broad arena that will boost human growth. Most importantly, new initiatives and policies will remain aloof without being integrated adequately into Indian thoughts and traditions. If this happens, it would risk the true potential of the Indian Knowledge system and would lead to inclusion rather than a guiding view. The Indian Knowledge System, which embodied a civilisational understanding of education that moved beyond the pragmatic approach of the modern pedagogical system. In a competitive world, where ethical and ecological crises have become common, Indian education emerges as a solution that not only takes us to the past but also helps to channelise human force with a new orientation and reflects a holistic vision of education-based growth.

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