
INTEGRATING INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS) INTO CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC POLICY FRAMEWORKS

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ABSTRACT

As nations deal with complex global challenges ranging from climate change and mental health crises to sustainable agriculture there is a growing recognition of the limitations of purely technocratic, Eurocentric policy frameworks. This paper explores the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into contemporary public policy. IKS encompasses a holistic corpus of knowledge arising from the Indian subcontinent, covering fields such as Ayurveda, Vastu, Arthashastra, mathematics, and philosophy. This research investigates how these ancient systems can be recontextualized to draft policies that are culturally rooted yet globally relevant. The paper analyses current policy shifts, specifically the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the rise of the AYUSH sector, to understand the practical applications of IKS. It concludes that while IKS offers sustainable, low-cost, and human-centric solutions, its integration into public policy faces significant challenges regarding standardization, scientific validation, and ideological resistance.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Public Policy, Sustainable Development, NEP 2020, AYUSH, Decolonization, Governance, Arthashastra, Indigenous Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Public policy in the post-colonial world has largely been dominated by Western epistemologies. Governance models, economic theories, and educational curricula in countries like India were structured around frameworks inherited from colonial rule, often dismissing indigenous wisdom as archaic or unscientific. However, the 21st century has ushered in a paradigm shift. The fragility of modern systems—highlighted by ecological collapse and lifestyle diseases—has necessitated a "return to roots" approach, not as a regression, but as a retrieval of tested sustainable practices.

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the structured systems of knowledge developed in the Indian subcontinent over millennia. This includes tangible sciences like metallurgy and medicine (Ayurveda), as well as intangible frameworks like ethics (Dharma), statecraft (Arthashastra), and linguistics (Vyakarana).

The introduction of IKS into public policy is not merely an act of cultural preservation; it is a strategic policy intervention. For instance, managing water resources using ancient stepwell technology (Baolis) offers a decentralized solution to modern water scarcity. Similarly, integrating Ayurveda into public health policy provides a preventative healthcare model that complements modern reactive medicine. This paper argues that mainstreaming IKS into public policy creates a "civilizational state" model of governance that is responsive to local realities while contributing to global sustainability goals.

OBJECTIVES

1. Defining and Contextualizing IKS

- **Scope:** Define IKS as a multi-disciplinary system encompassing *Jnana* (knowledge), *Vijnana* (science), and *Jivan-Drishti* (worldview).
- **The "Whole-of-Life" Approach:** Unlike Western compartmentalization, IKS views governance, ecology, and individual well-being as interconnected.
- **Epistemological Grounding:** Briefly introduce concepts like *Pratyaksha* (perception), *Anumana* (inference), and *Sabda* (reliable testimony) as the "scientific method" of IKS.

2. Analysing Current Policy Frameworks

This objective focuses on "Policy Mapping." You are looking for the intersection of traditional wisdom and modern legislative language.

- **NEP 2020 as a Catalyst:** Analyse how the policy shifts the education focus from "What to Think" to "How to Think" by introducing Indian logic (*Tarka*) and linguistics (*Linguistics*).
- **The "Ayush-Grid":** Evaluate the digitizing of traditional medical records and the integration of Ayurveda into the National Health Mission.

- **Environmental Governance:** Look at the Mission Life (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative. It's a prime example of a global policy rooted in the IKS principle of *Maitri* (friendship with all elements of nature).

3. Assessing Impacts and Externalities

- **Impact Metrics:** How do we measure the success of IKS? Suggest metrics like the Gross Environmental Product (GEP) or "Community Resilience Scores" rather than just GDP.
- **The "Pseudoscience" Challenge:** Address the risk of *Anachronism*—the tendency to claim modern inventions (like the internet) existed in ancient times. Your paper should advocate for Scientific Temper within IKS integration.
- **Intellectual Property (IPR):** Discuss the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) and the fight against "bio-piracy" (e.g., the patenting of Turmeric or Neem).

4. Future Goals: Globalization and Standardization

The final objective is to move from "Indian" knowledge to "Global" knowledge.

- **Standardization (The "ISO" of IKS):** Propose the creation of standardized protocols for IKS-based products and services to ensure quality control in global markets.
- **Glocalization:** How can IKS principles be adapted for other cultures? For example, applying Indian water-management techniques to drought-prone regions in Africa.
- **Digital Integration:** Utilizing AI and Big Data to analyse ancient texts (like the *Artha Shastra*) to find patterns for modern economic crisis management.

IKS and Public Policy Framework

The core of this research explores how IKS transforms the "Public Policy Framework." A standard policy framework involves problem identification, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Integrating IKS alters this cycle by introducing a new epistemological lens.

a) The Philosophical Shift: From Utilitarianism to Dharma

Modern policy is often utilitarian—aiming for the "greatest good for the greatest number" often measured in economic terms (GDP). IKS introduces the concept of Dharma (duty/righteousness) and Antyodaya (upliftment of the last person). An IKS-based policy framework prioritizes *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all), expanding the stakeholder list to include the environment and future generations, not just current voters or shareholders.

b) Education Policy: The NEP 2020 Paradigm

The most visible integration of IKS is in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

- **Curriculum Redesign:** The policy mandates the inclusion of tribal knowledge, indigenous mathematics, and classical literature, moving away from a purely Eurocentric history.
- **Pedagogy:** It emphasizes *Pancha Kosha* development (holistic development of body, mind, intellect, energy, and bliss) rather than just cognitive data retention.
- **Language:** Recognizing the cognitive benefits of mother-tongue instruction, a core tenet of IKS transmission.

c) Health Policy: Integrative Healthcare

The creation of the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy) marks a structural shift in health policy.

- **Preventative vs. Curative:** Modern policy funds disease treatment. IKS policy funds wellness. The framework creates "Wellness Centres" aiming to reduce the burden on hospitals.
- **Public Policy Response to Pandemics:** During COVID-19, the government issued guidelines based on IKS for immunity boosting, showcasing a hybrid policy framework where modern vaccines and traditional prophylaxis co-existed.

d) Agricultural and Environmental Policy

- **Vrikshayurveda (Plant Science):** Modern agriculture policy pushed chemical fertilizers (Green Revolution). The IKS framework advocates for *Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)* and organic practices found in ancient texts.

- **Water Management:** Policies are shifting toward reviving traditional water bodies (Kalyanis, Kunds) rather than relying solely on large dams and pipes. This respects the local ecology and hydrology.

e) Governance and Statecraft (Arthashastra)

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* offers a robust framework for public finance, foreign policy, and disaster management.

- **Rajamandala Theory:** Used in analyzing foreign relations and geopolitical balances in the South Asian region.
- **Welfare State:** The concept that "In the happiness of the subjects lies the happiness of the King" serves as a guiding metric for administrative accountability, moving beyond bureaucratic rigidity to citizen-centric governance.

Positive Impacts

1. Environmental Sustainability & Ethics

Traditional Indian philosophy views nature as an extension of the self rather than a resource to be exploited.

- **Regenerative Practices:** Policies incorporating IKS promote "Panchamahabhuta" (the five elements) balance, leading to better water management and organic farming initiatives like ZBNF (Zero Budget Natural Farming).
- **Climate Resilience:** Ancient architectural principles (Vastu Shastra) and water harvesting techniques (like Step wells or *Baolis*) offer low-energy solutions for urban cooling and water scarcity.

2. Holistic Healthcare & Wellness

Public policy is increasingly moving toward an "Integrative Medicine" model.

- **Preventative Care:** The inclusion of Ayurveda and Yoga in public health missions (like AYUSH) focuses on lifestyle and prevention, potentially reducing the long-term burden on the tertiary healthcare system.
- **Mental Health:** IKS-rooted practices such as mindfulness and meditation are being framed as low-cost, high-impact tools for public mental health policy.

3. Education & Pedagogy (NEP 2020)

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is perhaps the most significant policy shift driven by IKS.

- **Multidisciplinary Learning:** Moving away from rigid silos (Arts vs. Science) mimics the ancient *Gurukul* system where knowledge was seen as a seamless whole.
- **Linguistic Pride:** Promoting mother-tongue instruction in early years improves cognitive development and ensures that rural populations aren't marginalized by language barriers.

4. Sustainable Economics (Dharmic Capitalism)

IKS-driven policy emphasizes *Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu* (the well-being of all).

- **Circular Economy:** Traditional practices of "reduce, reuse, and recycle" are deeply embedded in Indian households. Policy frameworks are now formalizing these into "Circular Economy" roadmaps.
- **Ethical Governance:** Concepts of *Dharma* (duty/righteousness) in administration encourage transparency and a service-oriented mind-set among civil servants.

Negative Impacts and Challenges

Integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into modern public policy is a complex endeavour. While it aims to reclaim cultural heritage and provide sustainable, indigenous solutions to modern problems, it faces significant structural, ideological, and practical hurdles. The challenges can be categorized into structural/operational barriers and ideological/systemic risks.

1. Structural and Operational Challenges

These represent the "how-to" problems—the logistical difficulties in moving ancient or oral knowledge into a modern, bureaucratic policy framework.

- **Oral Tradition vs. Documentation:** Much of IKS (especially in tribal or rural sectors) has been transmitted orally. This lack of standardized, written records makes it difficult to create consistent policy guidelines or academic curricula.
- **Scientific Validation and "Data-fiction":** There is a persistent "epistemic gap" between IKS and modern science. Policy often demands empirical, replicable data. When IKS is forced to fit these modern metrics, it

can lead to "data-fiction"—where the deeper context and spiritual or social significance of a practice are lost in favour of isolated "data points."

- **Capacity and Training Gaps:** There is a severe shortage of experts who are equally well-versed in both traditional knowledge and modern policy/governance. Current administrators and educators often lack the training to implement these systems effectively.
- **Language Barriers:** Authentic IKS texts are often in Sanskrit, Pali, or regional dialects. Translating these into a language compatible with modern administrative "policy-speak" without losing nuance is a massive undertaking.

2. Negative Impacts and Systemic Risks

These involve the potential "side effects" or deeper societal concerns regarding how IKS is integrated.

Intellectual Property and Bio piracy

Traditional knowledge is often held collectively by a community over generations. Modern Intellectual Property (IP) laws are designed for individual or corporate ownership and are time-bound.

- **The Risk:** Without "sui generis" (unique) legal frameworks, integrating IKS into policy can lead to bio piracy, where private entities patent community knowledge (e.g., the historical attempts to patent Turmeric or Neem) without equitable benefit-sharing.

Risk of "Tokenism" and Ideological Bias

Critics argue that if not handled with care, IKS integration can become a tool for ideological indoctrination rather than genuine knowledge expansion.

- **The Risk:** A focus on a single, privileged mode of knowing (e.g., purely Sanskrit or Vedic traditions) may systematically marginalize other heterodox traditions like Buddhist, Jain, or Charka schools, as well as the significant contributions of Muslim scholars to India's scientific history.

Erosion of "Scientific Temper"

Public policy in India is constitutionally mandated to develop a "scientific temper."

- **The Risk:** If IKS is integrated uncritically—accepting traditional claims without rigorous scrutiny or debate—it risks creating an "epistemic crisis" where faith-based or anecdotal claims replace evidence-based policy, potentially hindering innovation.

Marginalization of Living Indigenous Groups

Ironically, the push for IKS can sometimes prioritize "ancient texts" over the "living knowledge" of modern tribal (Adivasi) and Dalit communities.

- **The Risk:** Policy might favour classical Sanskrit-based systems while ignoring the practical, ecological wisdom of tribal groups, further excluding those who have been the primary custodians of India's biodiversity.

FUTURE GOALS

To ensure the successful integration of IKS into public policy, the following goals must be set for the next decade:

1. **Codification and Digitization:** All scattered manuscripts and oral traditions must be digitized (e.g., Traditional Knowledge Digital Library - TKDL) to prevent bio-piracy and enable research.
2. **Evidence-Based Policy Making:** Establishing dedicated research institutes that subject IKS claims to modern scientific double-blind testing. Policy should only adopt what passes this rigor.
3. **AI and IKS Integration:** Using Artificial Intelligence to decipher ancient scripts and pattern-match historical weather/agricultural data with modern climate models.
4. **Global Certification Standards:** India must lead the creation of ISO-style standards for Yoga, Ayurveda, and Vastu to ensure these services are exportable and trusted globally.
5. **Interdisciplinary Education:** Creating a new cadre of "Policy Engineers" who are fluent in both modern law/economics and Sanskrit/IKS, bridging the gap between the two worlds.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into public policy frameworks represents a vital corrective step in the history of governance. It challenges the hegemony of Western universalism, proposing instead a pluralistic world where ancient wisdom informs modern innovation.

The research indicates that while the intent behind policies like NEP 2020 is transformative, the success lies in the execution. The framework must evolve from "revivalism" (blindly adopting the past) to "renaissance" (adapting the past for the future). If India can successfully navigate the challenges of standardization and scientific validation, the IKS public policy framework can serve as a model for the Global South—demonstrating how to modernize without westernizing, and how to progress without destroying the planet.

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