

Viksit Bharat @2047 and Indian Knowledge System: Civilizational Foundations of India's Development Vision

Gaurav Upadhyay*
Sumit Joshi**

Abstract

The vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 represents India's aspiration to emerge as a developed, inclusive, and globally influential nation by the centenary of Independence. This paper explores how the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a civilizational foundation for shaping this developmental trajectory. Drawing upon classical intellectual traditions reflected in texts such as the Arthashastra and the Upanishads, the study highlights how Indian thought historically integrated governance, ethics, economy, and ecological balance within a holistic worldview. It argues that concepts such as Dharma, Sarvodaya, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offer normative guidance for contemporary policy debates on inclusive growth, sustainable development, and responsible governance. By examining recent policy initiatives including the National Education Policy 2020, the paper demonstrates how renewed engagement with indigenous knowledge traditions can enrich modern development discourse. It contends that integrating civilizational wisdom with technological innovation can provide India with a distinctive and ethically grounded model of development for the 21st century.

Keywords: Viksit Bharat @2047, Indian Knowledge System, Civilizational Development, Ethical Governance, Sustainable Development, Cultural Foundations, Inclusive Growth.

* Assistant Professor (AC), Department of Public Administration , Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani-Nainital.

** Research Scholar, School of Journalism and Liberal Art, Devbhoomi Uttarakhand University, Dehradun.

Introduction

India is often described as one of the world's oldest living civilizations. The phrase may sound familiar, yet it carries a certain truth that is difficult to ignore. Long before modern universities emerged in Europe, intellectual traditions were already flourishing in the Indian subcontinent. Peters (2019) articulates that compared to its counterparts in the ancient West, the educational institutions of ancient India have a more illustrious past. Several centuries before the universities of Alexandria, Athens, and Constantinople, at least one of them i.e. Takshashila, was thriving. Additionally, the teaching and research programs of ancient Indian universities were more spectacular. Scholars of great distinction and reputation gave talks in the sacred precincts of Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramashila (Peters, 2019).

Philosophical debates were recorded in the Upanishads, medical knowledge was systematized in Ayurveda, and texts such as the Arthashastra reflected sophisticated thinking on governance and economics. In other words, knowledge in India was never confined to a single discipline. It moved freely across philosophy, science, ethics, politics, and everyday social life.

Kumar (2024) underlines that IKS or Bharatiya Gyan Parampara covers a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, and ecology, as well as a multitude of behaviors, innovations, and information accumulated over centuries throughout India. Despite their potential to significantly advance modern science, these knowledge systems have frequently been overlooked in the Indian educational system (Kumar, 2024).

IKS represents a civilizational framework that integrates ethical, social, and ecological balance through principles such as Dharma, Sarvodaya, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. This holistic vision resonates with Viksit Bharat @2047, which seeks to combine economic growth, social inclusion, technological advancement, and cultural confidence through development that is both modern and rooted.

As noted by Gopalkrishnan (2023), the multidisciplinary vision of India's new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 draws inspiration from ancient IKS, marking a departure from the prevailing secular-

scientific approach to education. This policy shift seeks to revive indigenous knowledge while exploring its relevance for contemporary challenges, including sustainability, ethical governance, and social harmony.

IKS: Concept, evolution and core principles

Although the term IKS has gained recent academic prominence, the traditions it encompasses have evolved over millennia through continuous dialogue, debate, and reinterpretation. Rooted in the intellectual and cultural history of the Indian subcontinent, IKS comprises diverse bodies of knowledge preserved through texts, oral traditions, and educational institutions, including the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Dharmashastra*, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, and significant contributions to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, and linguistics.

What is striking, however, is the way these diverse domains were often interconnected. Knowledge was rarely compartmentalized. Philosophical inquiry could influence political thought, while ethical principles might shape economic activity. In many classical texts, governance was not merely a technical matter of administration. It was closely linked with moral responsibility and social welfare. The idea of *Rajadharma*, for example, emphasized that rulers carried ethical obligations toward their subjects. The prosperity of the state, in this view, depended not only on revenue or military strength but also on justice and public well-being.

Kamat and Kamat (2021) state that *Rajadharma* envisioned *Rajya* (State) under the leadership of *Raja* (King). The *Dharmasastras* and *Smritis* covered a wide range of topics, including the organization and constitution of *Rajya*, kingship, the process by which the king takes office, a code of conduct for kings, the succession of kingship, the education of young princes, the appointment of the chief justice alongside other judges, the council of ministers, administrative units, and the king's powers and duties. *Dharmasastra* proponents asserted that in order to keep society in a state of *Dharma*, which was necessary for the fulfillment of *Artha* and *Kama*, the King's (the State's) power was absolutely necessary. *Rajadharma*, which established the king's *Dharma*, was extremely significant (Kamat & Kamat, 2021).

Education played an important role in transmitting these ideas.

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The *Gurukul* tradition, often mentioned in discussions of Indian education, represented a distinctive pedagogical model.

Before colonial education took its place, a private educational system known as *Gurukula* (in Sanskrit *Guru* means teacher; *Kula* refers to family) flourished for centuries in pre-colonial South Asia (Jayalakshmi & Rekha, 2022).

Gupta and Maurya (2026) emphasize that Indian educational philosophy, rooted in ancient texts and traditions, was fundamentally shaped by the *Gurukula* system, where students received spiritual, moral, and practical instruction in an ashram environment. The Vedas and Upanishads functioned as key educational resources, while learning through dialogue, observation, and practice aimed at holistic personality development and ethical formation (Gupta & Maurya, 2026).

"*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*," a concept originating in the *Maha Upanishad*, is a recurring principle within Indian intellectual traditions that envisions the world as one family and promotes harmony beyond social and cultural divisions. Its philosophical foundation aligns with contemporary ideas of global citizenship and universal human responsibility, encouraging collective well-being and humanitarian values in an interconnected world (Ramanathan et al., 2025).

The impact of non-Western traditions on social work and social welfare is exemplified by social work in India. In order to establish and sustain societal welfare, ancient India developed the idea of "Kalyan" (welfare). It was seen as people's obligation and, hence, their responsibility to one another. This aligns with the *Sanatana Dharma's* spiritual philosophy (Ramanathan et al., 2025).

Principles such as *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* express the ideal of universal well-being and resonate with contemporary notions of inclusive development. The concept of *Dharma* extends beyond duty to encompass the moral and social order that sustains harmony among individuals, society, and the natural world, while remaining adaptable to changing contexts. Indian knowledge traditions also emphasize the interdependence of humans and nature through practices of environmental stewardship, including conservation and sustainable resource use. Together, these elements characterize IKS as a holistic, ethical, and community-oriented framework that

promotes social responsibility, ecological balance, and sustainable development.

In recent decades, there has been a renewed effort to revisit these traditions within academic and policy circles. Government initiatives supporting research on Indian knowledge traditions, as well as the integration of IKS components within educational curricula, reflect this growing interest. The Ministry of Education (MoE) of the Govt. of India established the Indian Knowledge Systems Division (IKS Division) in October 2020 with the goal of fostering interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research on all facets of IKS, preserving and disseminating an increased awareness and appreciation of IKS for future research, and societal applications. The creation of IKS centers and multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research in IKS are supported and funded by the IKS Division. .

The intention is not simply cultural nostalgia. Rather, there is an increasing recognition that indigenous knowledge systems may contain insights relevant to contemporary challenges. Issues such as environmental sustainability, community participation, and ethical governance cannot always be addressed through technological solutions alone.

The revival of IKS requires critical engagement, as historical ideas must be interpreted within contemporary democratic and social contexts rather than adopted uncritically. Despite this, IKS offers a valuable civilizational framework centered on balance, responsibility, and collective well-being. Many scholars and policymakers view this intellectual heritage as a significant resource for shaping India's future development and the vision of a *Viksit Rashtra*.

Civilizational foundations of development in Indian thought

Blose and Gumbo (2024) argue that integrating indigenous knowledge systems into technological education can strengthen the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Similarly, Matindike and Ramdhany (2024) view IKS as a global priority for promoting equitable and sustainable development, despite challenges in its integration with STEM education. Classical Indian thought complements this perspective by conceiving development as a holistic

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process that interlinks economic prosperity, moral order, and social harmony rather than material progress alone.

The idea of Dharma occupies a central place in this intellectual framework. *Dharma* is a philosophical word, and translating it neatly into English is never easy. It can mean duty, moral order, ethical responsibility, or even the principle that sustains harmony within society. In political thought, this idea took the form of *Rajadharma*, the ethical obligations of rulers toward their people. Classical texts frequently emphasize that power must be exercised with restraint and responsibility. A king, according to these traditions, was expected to ensure justice, maintain social order, and safeguard *Lokamangal* i.e. the welfare of the population. Governance was therefore not simply a technical exercise in administration. It was also a moral enterprise.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* presents an early and systematic framework of governance encompassing public finance, agriculture, law, diplomacy, and state security, while emphasizing that political stability depends upon public welfare. Classical Indian thought similarly viewed economic activity within an ethical framework that balanced wealth creation with social justice. Ayurveda further reflected this holistic worldview by linking human health with environmental and lifestyle balance, highlighting the interconnectedness of governance, economy, and ecology, embodying enduring principles of sustainability, ethical governance, social welfare, and ecological balance, offering a holistic developmental framework that remains highly relevant to India's future trajectory.

IKS and the Vision of Viksit Bharat @2047

The idea of *Viksit Bharat @2047* has gradually become a central theme in contemporary discussions on India's future. The year itself carries symbolic weight. It marks one hundred years of India's Independence. Naturally, expectations are high. Policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike are asking what kind of nation India hopes to become by that time. Economic strength is certainly part of the answer. A developed nation must generate prosperity, create opportunities, and sustain technological innovation. Yet the conversation in India seems to go a little further. Increasingly, there is a sense that development should also reflect the country's civilizational identity.

This is where the IKS begins to enter the picture. Over the past decade, one notices a growing effort to reconnect contemporary policy thinking with indigenous intellectual traditions. Government initiatives in education, cultural preservation, and research have played a role in this process. The aim, as it appears, is not merely to celebrate the past. Rather, it is to rediscover certain conceptual resources that might help shape a development model suited to India's historical and social context.

We can consider the emphasis on inclusive development within the vision of *Viksit Bharat*. The idea that progress must reach the last person in society resonates strongly with older philosophical traditions. Concepts such as *Sarvodaya*, popularized later by thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and *Antyodaya Sarvodaya*, popularized by thinkers like Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay, echo earlier civilizational values that stressed collective welfare. Development, in this view, cannot remain confined to urban elites or industrial sectors alone. It must address rural livelihoods, social justice, and equitable access to resources.

Environmental sustainability represents another area where traditional knowledge may offer valuable insights. India today faces the familiar challenges of climate change, water scarcity, and ecological stress. Interestingly, several indigenous practices developed over centuries demonstrate ways of managing natural resources with considerable restraint. Few examples are-community water harvesting systems in Rajasthan, traditional forest management practices among Himalayan communities, or agricultural methods that adapt to local climatic conditions. These examples suggest that environmental wisdom was embedded within everyday life long before sustainability became a global policy slogan.

The government's recent policy initiatives have increasingly acknowledged this dimension. Programs encouraging research on traditional ecological knowledge, as well as efforts to document local agricultural and medicinal practices, indicate a broader institutional recognition of indigenous knowledge systems. Of course, integrating such traditions with modern science requires careful evaluation. Romanticizing the past would not be helpful. Yet neither would ignoring knowledge that communities have refined over generations.

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Education policy has become an important channel for this intellectual re-engagement. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly recognizes the importance of incorporating Indian knowledge traditions into academic curricula. Kumar (2024) who himself has previously served as Chairperson UGC is of the view that integrating IKS across several subjects in schools and higher educational institutions was a key component of the NEP 2020. IKS-infused education can provide learners with a comprehensive worldview that takes into account many aspects of life. One such instance is IKS's strong emphasis on sustainable living methods. In addition to emphasizing societal resilience and peaceful coexistence with the natural world, these activities center on environmental protection (Kumar, 2024).

One might argue that such initiatives also contribute to a broader cultural renaissance. Nations often draw confidence from their historical experiences and intellectual achievements. For a long time, Indian knowledge traditions were discussed mainly within specialized academic circles. Now, they are gradually entering mainstream educational and policy discourse. This shift, notably, aligns with the aspiration to build a society that is both technologically advanced and culturally self-aware.

The concept of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* i.e. self-reliant India reflects a similar line of thinking. Self-reliance does not necessarily mean isolation from the global economy. Rather, it suggests the development of internal capacities, intellectual as well as industrial. In this context, the IKS can serve as a source of conceptual inspiration. Indigenous approaches to governance, community organization, and ecological management may help shape locally grounded solutions to contemporary problems.

Perhaps that is why discussions around *Viksit Bharat* increasingly include references to civilizational heritage. The intention is not to replace modern science or institutional frameworks. India's development path will undoubtedly rely on technological innovation, industrial growth, and global cooperation. Yet, civilizational knowledge traditions may still offer something valuable. They provide ethical orientation, historical continuity, and a sense of cultural confidence.

If India manages to combine these elements thoughtfully, the vision of Viksit Bharat could evolve into something distinctive. A development model that is economically dynamic, socially inclusive, environmentally responsible, and intellectually rooted in its own civilizational experience. Such a synthesis will not emerge overnight. Still, the renewed engagement with the IKS suggests that the conversation has already begun.

Conclusion

Stepping back from the details of texts, traditions, and policy discussions, one begins to see a broader pattern. India's development debate today is not unfolding in a vacuum. It carries echoes of a much older civilizational conversation. The IKS, with all its philosophical depth and historical layers, offers something more than cultural memory. It provides a framework for thinking about society, governance, and human well being in ways that remain surprisingly relevant.

Kumar (2024) asserts that some may argue that IKS is irrelevant to today's problems and that current scientific understanding is more useful in solving them. This perspective, however, ignores the useful contributions and insights that IKS can provide in addressing contemporary problems. Even though science has come a long way in recent centuries, it would be naive to ignore the amount of information embedded in IKS (Kumar, 2024).

One could argue that modern development discourse has often leaned heavily toward economic indicators such as growth rates, industrial output or infrastructure expansion. These things matter, of course, but a nation aspiring to become developed cannot ignore them. Yet economic prosperity alone rarely defines the quality of a civilization. After all, societies ultimately measure their success by broader criteria with social stability, ethical public life, environmental balance, and cultural confidence. Interestingly, these are precisely the dimensions that Indian intellectual traditions tended to emphasize.

In many ways, the IKS reminds us that development was historically understood as a balanced pursuit. Material prosperity was desirable, certainly. However, it was expected to operate alongside ethical responsibility and social harmony. Concepts such

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as Dharma, Sarvodaya, Antyodaya and the aspiration for collective well being were not abstract philosophical exercises. They shaped how communities thought about governance, economic activity, and the relationship between humans and nature.

The contemporary vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 seems to resonate with this broader understanding of progress. The aspiration is not limited to economic advancement. There is also an evident emphasis on inclusive development, cultural revival, environmental sustainability, and technological innovation. When viewed from this perspective, the renewed interest in Indian knowledge traditions begins to make sense. Policymakers and scholars appear to recognize that a country with such a long intellectual history might reasonably draw upon its own civilizational resources while imagining the future.

Recent initiatives in education and research reflect this shift. The incorporation of IKS components within academic curricula, particularly under the framework of the National Education Policy, signals a growing institutional commitment to engaging with indigenous intellectual traditions. Such efforts are not merely symbolic. They open new spaces for research, dialogue, and reinterpretation. Students and scholars are being encouraged to revisit classical texts, examine traditional practices, and consider their relevance in contemporary contexts.

At the same time, it would be unwise to romanticize the past without reflection. Civilizational traditions, including India's, evolved within specific historical settings. Some ideas translate easily into the present and others require reinterpretation. A mature engagement with the IKS therefore involves both appreciation and critical inquiry. Fortunately, the current academic discourse appears increasingly capable of sustaining such balanced engagement.

Looking ahead, the integration of indigenous knowledge into policy thinking, governance practices, and educational frameworks may contribute to a more grounded development model. Local agricultural knowledge can complement modern sustainability strategies. Traditional ecological insights may enrich environmental policy. Ethical principles embedded within classical texts can continue to inspire discussions on responsible governance. These

possibilities do not replace modern scientific knowledge. Rather, they expand the intellectual toolkit available to policymakers and scholars.

Ultimately, the idea of Viksit Bharat invites a deeper reflection on what kind of development India seeks to pursue. A purely imitative model, borrowed entirely from external contexts, might overlook the country's own intellectual strengths. A development vision informed by civilizational wisdom, on the other hand, carries the potential to be both modern and culturally rooted.

Perhaps that is the central lesson emerging from the present discussion. India's path toward becoming a developed nation may prove most sustainable when economic progress is guided by ethical reflection, social responsibility, and ecological awareness. The IKS, indeed, offers precisely such a philosophical foundation. Drawing thoughtfully from this civilizational heritage could help shape a future that is prosperous, balanced, and deeply connected with the intellectual traditions that have long defined the Bhartiya experience.

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