

Sources of Indian Knowledge System: Chaturdash Vidhyasthanams

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast, intricate, and evolving body of knowledge that has developed over millennia in the Indian subcontinent. It encompasses a wide spectrum of disciplines, including philosophy, science, medicine, mathematics, linguistics, art, architecture, education, and spirituality. Rooted in both written scriptures and rich oral traditions, IKS offers a unique, holistic worldview that emphasizes the interconnectedness of life, nature, and consciousness. This paper explores the key sources that form the foundation of IKS, including the Vedas, Vedanga, Upangas, Upavedas. These texts and systems reflect a profound understanding of the universe and human existence, integrating empirical knowledge with metaphysical insights. By revisiting and reinterpreting these classical sources, the present paper aims to illuminate the enduring relevance of IKS in addressing contemporary global challenges and fostering sustainable, inclusive development.

Keywords: *Vedas, Vedanga, Upangas, Upavedas*

India has one of the oldest and richest knowledge traditions in the world. For thousands of years, people in India have explored various aspects of life such as health, education, philosophy, mathematics, art, music, and spirituality. These ideas and practices have developed into a broad and deep system of knowledge known today as the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). More than just a collection of texts or beliefs, IKS represents a holistic worldview where the material, moral, and metaphysical dimensions of life are intricately interlinked. The sources of this system are vast and varied, emerging from ancient texts, oral traditions, regional practices, and evolving through centuries of intercultural exchange. These sources collectively contribute to a unique worldview that integrates material, moral, and metaphysical dimensions of life. At the heart of the Indian Knowledge System lie its foundational scriptures the Vedas, considered the earliest literary records of Indian civilization. Divided into Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda, these texts encompass spiritual hymns, rituals, philosophy, and early scientific ideas. Complementing the Vedas are the Upanishads, which delve into metaphysical questions and form the basis of Indian philosophical thought. These texts emphasize inner realization, the nature of consciousness, and the unity of existence, reflecting a sophisticated approach to knowledge that transcends mere intellectualism. Today, as the world looks for more sustainable, inclusive, and balanced ways of living, there is growing interest in learning from

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ancient systems like IKS. Understanding the sources of Indian Knowledge not only helps us connect with our roots but also gives us useful ideas to face modern challenges in health, education, environment, and personal well-being.

Chaturdash Vidhyasthanams

Vidya traditionally means knowledge. There are some fourteen abodes or authorities of knowledge or vidyasthanam. There are-four vedas (Rig, yajur, sama and Atharva veda). Six angas or limbs of the vedas called vedanga (shiksha, kalpa, vyakarara, nirukta, chandas and jyotisha) and four Upangas (mimansa, nyaya, puranas and dharmashastra). In other places sometimes 4 upavedas namely Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda and Shilpaveda are also added to the list taking the total to 18 (Astadasa).

1. Vedas: Epicentre of knowledge or crown. It is well known that the vedas are the oldest surviving literacy work in the whole world. These ancient scriptures were not mere collections of words, they were considered revelations handed down by divine forces to enlightened sages during periods of deep meditation. Rishi veda vyas compiled the veda (Rig, yajur, samaveda) while Rishi angera tharva and atharva compiled mantras of athurvaveda. Vedas are said to consists of samhita, Brahmana, aranyaka and upnishad. Vedas are called Apaurusheya because they are unauthored by a particular writer; they were grasped by rishis during deep meditation by divine sources (authorless). This is the knowledge of entire cosmos that was orally passed down from a Guru to his shishya (student).

- i) **Rig Veda:** The Sanskrit word ‘Rig’ means to praise and veda refers to knowledge. It is the most ancient of all vedic scriptures. Divided into 10 books or mandalas, it consists of 1028 hymns and 10600 verses as well as the famous Gayatri Mantra. The Rig Veda, as a scripture, contains details about the origin of the universe, the purpose of human existence, the way of life and attempts to answer deep existential questions that are rarely addressed.
- ii) **Sama Veda:** It comprises 1549 verses. This scripture, also known as the ‘Book of Songs,’ adds a musical touch to the hymns chanted from the Rig Veda. This veda also specifies the rules and regulations for playing ancient musical instruments like the veena or harmonium.
- iii) **Yajur Veda:** It is a compilation of the correct methods of chanting mantras and performing religious rituals. Due to its practical application, yajur veda is the most followed of the four vedic scriptures and is still used by Hindu priests during religious ceremonies. In comparison to Rig Veda, Yajur veda is new and is written in a simpler language.
- iv) **Atharva Veda:** The final of the four vedas is the Atharva veda, also known as the “Veda of Magical Formulas.” It teaches a variety of spells,prayers and hymns that are used to treat and heal various illnesses, extend one’s lifespan and ward off evil spirits with black magic. It is divided into 20 books and contains one of the earliest speculations on medicine and surgery, as well as 730 hymns and 6000 mantras. Dentistry, embryology, plastic surgery, fracture treatment, and the use of herbal medicines were among the many disciplines studied.

2. Veda-angas

Vedanga can be literally translated as “the limbs of the vedas.” These six limbs can together support the study, preservation and interpretation of the vedas. The six vedangas are:

- i) **Shiksha:** The study of phonology, phonetics and pronunciation. This focuses on the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, as well as the way that words are combined and expressed in a vedic recitation.
- ii) **Kalpa:** The focus on ritual instructions. This field looks at procedures described for rites of passage, weddings, births and other rituals associated with life events. It also explores concepts of individual duty and proper conduct.
- iii) **Vyakarana:** The analysis of grammar and linguistics, in order to establish the precise way in which words and sentences were constructed to express ideas.
- iv) **Nirukta:** The study of etymology, particularly with regard to explaining the meaning of words that are archaic.
- v) **Chandas:** The study of prosody, which looks at poetic meter. This incorporates analysing the number of syllables per verse, and any fixed patterns within them.
- vi) **Jyothisha:** The study of auspicious times, which draws on the vedic practice of using astrology and astronomy to guide rituals and timekeeping.

3. Upa-angas

- i) **Mimamsa:** Mimamsa is one of the six classical schools (darshanas) of Indian philosophy. It is divided into two main branches: Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa. *Purva Mimamsa:* Also known as Karma Mimamsa, it focuses on the ritualistic aspects of the Vedas. It emphasizes the importance of yajnas (sacrifices) and karma (action), interpreting the Vedic texts as manuals for performing rituals that maintain cosmic order and fulfill human desires. Founded by sage Jaimini, Purva Mimamsa asserts that dharma can be known only through the Vedas. *Uttara Mimamsa:* Also known as Vedanta, this branch delves into the spiritual and philosophical teachings of the Upanishads. It focuses on the nature of the Self (Atman) and Brahman (ultimate reality). Vedanta explores liberation (moksha) and the relationship between the individual and the cosmos.
- ii) **Nyaya-vistara:** Nyaya is another important darshana, often translated as the “School of Logic” or “Law of Reasoning.” It explores the nature of knowledge (pramana), perception, inference, comparison, and testimony as valid means of acquiring truth. Nyaya elaborates on the law of nature and applies rigorous logical analysis, forming the foundation of Indian epistemology. Its inclusion of predicate logic and syllogistic reasoning parallels classical Western logic and has greatly influenced Indian philosophical discourse.
- iii) **Purana:** There are 18 Maha Puranas and 18 Upa Puranas. Mahabharata is the Itihasa. The eighteen Maha Puranas are Matsya, Markandeya, Bhagavata, Bhavishya, Brahma, Brahma Vaivarta, Vishnu Dharmottara, Varaha, Vamana, Siva, Skanda, Narada, Garuda, Padma, Kurma, Linga and Agni Puranas.

Purana is said to speak of five subjects (Panca Lakshana):

1. the creation and dissolution of Universe,
2. evolution,
3. cycle of time,
4. theology,
5. history of kings (human history)

They also speak of the different incarnations of the Supreme Godhead - 51 avatars, then 21 important ones from them, then 10 primary avatars out of them that we call as dashavataaras and 2 as complete incarnations (purnavataaras) which are Rama and Krishna. The remaining are said to be amshavataaras (partial manifestation) in different degrees.

iv) Dharmashastra: Dharma sastras include smritis and the four sutras,

1. Dharma sutras contain the guidelines to live a Dharmic life.
2. Grhya sutras contain specific guidelines to Grhasthas.
3. Srauta sutras contain guidelines for performing rituals.
4. Sulba sutras contain the mathematical principles for construction of various altars.

4. Upavedas

The Upavedas, also known as the secondary Vedas, are traditional texts that elaborate on various applied sciences and arts. Although not part of the core Shruti literature (which includes the Vedas), the Upavedas are generally considered part of the Smriti tradition. Each Upaveda is associated with one of the four Vedas and deals with a specific area of practical knowledge. These texts played a vital role in the development of various disciplines in ancient Indian civilization.

- i) Ayurveda (Medicine): Associated with Atharvaveda:** Ayurveda, meaning "the science of life," is the ancient Indian system of medicine and healing. It is traditionally associated with the Atharvaveda due to its focus on health, wellness, and treatment of diseases using natural methods. Ayurveda emphasizes balance among body, mind, and spirit and includes practices such as herbal medicine, diet, yoga, and detoxification techniques. It is one of the world's oldest healthcare systems and continues to influence holistic health practices globally.
- ii) Dhanurveda (Warfare): Associated with Yajurveda:** Dhanurveda is the science of warfare, archery, and military strategy. Associated with the Yajurveda, it outlines the use of weapons, martial training, and ethics of war. It covers both physical combat and strategic warfare techniques. Dhanurveda was crucial in training warriors and maintaining law and order in ancient times.
- iii) Gandharvaveda (Music and Dance): Associated with Samaveda:** Gandharvaveda, connected to the Samaveda, deals with the performing arts, especially music and dance. Since Samaveda itself is musical in nature, Gandharvaveda expands on melodies, rhythms, musical instruments, and the emotional expression through the arts. It laid the foundation for classical Indian music and dance traditions.
- iv) Shilpaveda (Architecture and Arts): Associated with Rigveda:** Shilpaveda, associated with the Rigveda, is the science of architecture, sculpture, and various crafts. It includes principles of design, construction of temples, idols, homes, and

Sources of Indian Knowledge System: Chaturdash Vidhyasthanams

cities, along with aesthetics and geometry. Shilpaveda contributed to India's rich architectural heritage seen in temples, monuments, and ancient urban planning.

CONCLUSION

The sources of the Indian Knowledge System reflect the depth and diversity of India's intellectual and cultural heritage. From ancient scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishads to epics, Puranas, and classical texts on science, medicine, and arts, these sources form the foundation of Indian thought. These sources played a vital role in preserving and transmitting this knowledge across generations. These varied sources showcase a holistic and interconnected approach to life, blending philosophy, science, and practical wisdom. Understanding these sources not only helps us reconnect with India's roots but also provides valuable insights and sustainable solutions for contemporary global challenges in health, education, and environment.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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