

## Historical Roots of Sustainable Business Practices: Evidence from Indian Knowledge Systems

**Dr. Deepali Gala**

Associate Professor,

Chintamanrao Institute of Management Development and Research, Sangli, Maharashtra

Email: [deepali.gala@despune.org](mailto:deepali.gala@despune.org)

**Dr. Bharat Vira**

Assistant Professor,

Lala Lajpatrai Institute of Management, Mumbai

Email: [bdvira@gmail.com](mailto:bdvira@gmail.com)

**Dr. Gayathri Band**

Assistant Professor,

School of Management, Ramdeobaba University

Email: [bandgs@rknc.edu](mailto:bandgs@rknc.edu)

### Abstract

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Modern Management is a study on Indigenous Wisdom for Sustainable Business Practices, explores the relevance and applicability of Indian Knowledge Systems in contemporary management education. Conducted in the Kolhapur city, the research focused exclusively on management students to capture youth perspectives within the domain of business education. A structured questionnaire was administered to 210 respondents. The findings reveal that while the overall awareness of IKS among students is moderate, a significant proportion recognize its potential to enrich sustainable business practices by promoting holistic decision-making, ethical leadership, and eco-centric approaches. Students also expressed willingness to integrate IKS-based modules in their curriculum, provided that contextualization with modern management tools is ensured. The study concludes that integrating IKS into management education can create a balanced framework blending tradition and modernity, thereby supporting the goals of NEP 2020. It offers valuable inputs for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers to strengthen management education by embedding indigenous wisdom that fosters sustainability, ethics, and innovation in business practices.

**Keywords:** Indian Knowledge System, Leadership, Management, NEP 2020

### 1. Introduction

The modern business world is increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainable, ethical, and holistic management practices. As organizations navigate complex global challenges, the need to incorporate indigenous wisdom into contemporary business strategies has become more apparent. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) encompass a rich repository of ancient wisdom, including Vedic economics, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Yogic leadership, and Ayurveda-based business practices. These traditional knowledge systems offer valuable insights into ethical leadership, sustainable business practices, strategic decision-making, and human

resource management. This study explores the integration of IKS into modern management education and practice, focusing on its relevance, benefits, and potential challenges.

## **2. Background of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**

Indian Knowledge Systems refer to a broad spectrum of indigenous knowledge that has evolved over centuries, covering diverse fields such as philosophy, governance, medicine, agriculture, and economics. Rooted in ancient scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Arthashastra, IKS emphasizes principles of harmony, ethical leadership, and long-term sustainability. Unlike Western management theories, which often prioritize profit maximization and competitive advantage, IKS promotes a balanced approach that integrates economic success with social well-being and environmental responsibility.

One of the most well-known contributions of IKS to management thought is Kautilya's Arthashastra, an ancient treatise on economics, politics, and governance. Kautilya's insights into strategic management, leadership, and resource allocation remain relevant in modern business contexts. Similarly, the principles of Vedic economics emphasize the ethical use of wealth, mindful consumption, and community welfare. Ayurveda-based business models focus on employee well-being and holistic workplace environments, contributing to productivity and job satisfaction. Yogic leadership, derived from ancient Indian spiritual traditions, highlights the role of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making in corporate leadership.

## **3. Relevance of IKS in Modern Management**

The global business landscape is undergoing rapid transformation due to technological advancements, environmental concerns, and socio-economic changes. Traditional Western management theories, which have long dominated business education, are being reassessed in light of sustainability challenges and ethical dilemmas. IKS offers a complementary framework that aligns business objectives with broader societal and environmental goals.

One of the core aspects of IKS is the emphasis on ethical governance and long-term vision. In contrast to short-term profit-driven strategies, Indian management traditions advocate for sustainable development, stakeholder inclusivity, and responsible leadership. Indian traditions emphasize 'Dharma' (righteousness) as a guiding principle for decision-making. This aligns with contemporary corporate governance models that stress transparency, accountability, and social responsibility.

Concepts from Vedic economics advocate for mindful resource utilization and sustainability, which are increasingly critical in today's business environment.

Yogic leadership principles focus on self-awareness, resilience, and mindfulness attributes that are essential for effective leadership in the 21st century. Ayurveda-based workplace wellness programs promote a holistic approach to health, enhancing productivity and employee satisfaction. The Arthashastra provides valuable lessons in diplomacy, competitive strategy, and risk management, which remain relevant for corporate decision-making today.

## **4. The Need for a Blended Approach**

To fully realize the potential of IKS in modern management, a blended approach is necessary. This involves integrating IKS principles with contemporary business strategies through interdisciplinary research, curriculum enhancements, and practical applications in corporate settings. Business schools and organizations can collaborate to develop case studies, experiential learning modules, and industry partnerships that promote the real-world application of IKS concepts.

Government initiatives and policy interventions can also play a crucial role in promoting IKS-based education. By recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge and providing institutional support, policymakers can encourage academic institutions to incorporate IKS into management studies. Furthermore, cross-cultural exchanges and international collaborations can help bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern business practices.

## 5. Review of Literature

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have a long-standing tradition of influencing governance, leadership, and economic thought. The principles outlined in ancient texts such as the Arthashastra and Manusmriti provide a foundation for ethical leadership, strategic planning, and sustainable business practices Sharma (2021). The integration of IKS into modern management has been proposed as a way to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and contemporary corporate challenges Rao & Kumar (2019). Ethical leadership has been a core principle in IKS, particularly through the doctrine of *Dharma* (righteousness). According to Kautilya's Arthashastra, a ruler (or leader) must prioritize ethical governance, ensuring the well-being of all stakeholders Bhatia (2020). Studies have shown that ethical leadership inspired by Indian philosophy fosters corporate social responsibility and enhances organizational trust Mehta & Srinivasan (2018). Vedic economics promotes sustainability by advocating for responsible resource utilization and community welfare. Traditional Indian economic thought discourages overconsumption and emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of business and society Krishna, (2022). Contemporary researchers have examined how businesses can adopt these principles to create sustainable models that align with global sustainability goals Mukherjee & Gupta, (2021).

The Arthashastra remains one of the most comprehensive strategic management texts from ancient India. It emphasizes aspects such as competitive strategy, risk management, and leadership foresight Sen (2017). Modern scholars have drawn parallels between Kautilya's strategic insights and contemporary business practices, particularly in areas like negotiation tactics, crisis management, and corporate governance Chakraborty & Sharma (2020). Yogic leadership is gaining prominence as an alternative leadership model focusing on mindfulness, self-regulation, and emotional intelligence. Studies indicate that leaders who practice mindfulness and self-awareness exhibit greater resilience and decision-making capacity Singh & Das (2019). Research also suggests that Yogic leadership principles align with transformational leadership styles, which emphasize personal and professional growth Raghunathan (2021).

Ayurveda-based wellness programs are being explored in modern organizations as tools for enhancing employee productivity and well-being. Ayurveda emphasizes work-life balance, stress management, and dietary wellness, which contribute to holistic employee development Panda & Iyer (2022). Companies integrating Ayurvedic principles into human resource

management report lower burnout rates and improved workplace morale Sharma & Verma (2020).

Despite the advantages of IKS, its integration into modern management curricula faces several challenges. The dominance of Western management theories often overshadows indigenous knowledge systems, leading to skepticism about their applicability Patil (2018). Other barriers include a lack of academic resources, standardized frameworks, and faculty expertise in IKS-based management principles Deshmukh & Rao (2021).

## **6. Research Objectives**

- To evaluate the awareness and understanding of IKS among management students.
- To assess students' perceived benefits and challenges of integrating IKS into management education.
- To explore students' willingness to include IKS-based subjects in management curriculum.

## **7. Research Methodology**

The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to examine the awareness, perception, and willingness of management students in the Kolhapur region toward integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern management education. The target population consisted of management students (undergraduate and postgraduate) enrolled in business management programs across colleges and institutes in the Kolhapur city. A total of 210 student responses were considered for analysis. The data was collected using a structured google form which was distributed among the management students. The questionnaire was made to get the understanding of demographics, awareness and sources of IKS, familiarity of key IKS concepts, perceived Benefits and Challenges and the willingness of accepting IKS in management curriculum. To gather data convenience sampling method was employed to get the accessibility of respondents, and due care was taken to include diversity in terms of gender, education level (UG/PG), and institutions.

## **8. Scope of the Study**

The present study is confined to the Kolhapur city, focusing exclusively on management students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Since the respondents are limited to this group, the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of youth engaged in business and management education. The scope of the study is, therefore, restricted to evaluating their awareness, perceptions, and willingness regarding the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern management practices. The insights derived from the study are expected to provide valuable inputs for curriculum designers, educators, and policy-makers, particularly in the context of aligning educational frameworks with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the inclusion of indigenous knowledge for holistic and sustainable learning.

## **9. Limitations of the Study**

- The use of convenience sampling may limit generalizability beyond Kolhapur.

- Responses are self-reported and subject to biases in perception and awareness.

## 10. Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance in the context of contemporary management education, particularly under the guiding framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education. By focusing on management students in the Kolhapur district, the research sheds light on the current level of awareness, understanding, and willingness among future business leaders to adopt indigenous wisdom in modern management practices. The findings provide critical insights into the relevance of concepts such as Dharma, Yoga, Ayurveda, Panchatantra, Arthashastra, and the Bhagavad Gita in shaping ethical leadership, sustainable decision-making, and holistic business practices.

Furthermore, the study serves as a resource for curriculum designers and educators to identify gaps in awareness and to frame innovative, culturally grounded learning modules that can strengthen management education. It also offers valuable implications for policy-makers, as it highlights both the opportunities and challenges in aligning IKS with professional education frameworks. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable business practices, ensuring that India's rich intellectual heritage is leveraged to address modern corporate challenges while nurturing responsible and ethical managers for the future.

## 11. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data analysis is carried out in alignment with the objectives of the study with the aim of bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence.

**Table 1 Awareness of IKS among Management Students**

| Awareness Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Very High       | 18        | 8.6%       |
| High            | 52        | 24.8%      |
| Moderate        | 88        | 41.9%      |
| Low             | 39        | 18.6%      |
| Very Low        | 13        | 6.1%       |
| Total           | 210       | 100%       |

Source: Survey Based

The majority of students (41.9%) reported a *moderate* awareness of IKS, while only 8.6% showed very high awareness. This indicates that although IKS is recognized, in-depth understanding is limited, highlighting the need for more integration into management education.

**Table 2 Relevance of IKS Concepts to Business & Management**

| Awareness Item (IKS Concept)       | Mean | Std. Deviation | % Above Neutral (Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|------------------------------------|------|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Ayurveda & Health Knowledge        | 3.98 | 0.82           | 72%                                      |
| Yoga & Wellbeing Practices         | 4.12 | 0.74           | 78%                                      |
| Arthashastra (Economic Thought)    | 3.65 | 0.88           | 61%                                      |
| Panchatantra (Management Lessons)  | 3.45 | 0.91           | 58%                                      |
| Bhagavad Gita (Ethical Leadership) | 3.89 | 0.85           | 70%                                      |

Source: Survey Based

Students show highest awareness of Yoga (78%) and Ayurveda (72%), likely due to their daily applicability and mainstream promotion. Ethical and philosophical knowledge (Bhagavad Gita – 70%) is also recognized, reflecting cultural grounding. Classical texts like Arthashastra (61%) and Panchatantra (58%) have lower awareness, possibly due to less emphasis in current management education curricula. The trend suggests that IKS concepts linked to health, wellbeing, and ethics are more widely appreciated, while those tied to economic and strategic thought are less familiar, highlighting a gap in exposure and integration into management studies.

**Table 3 Perception Scale Reliability and Mean Scores**

| Perception Dimension                  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---------------------------------------|------|----------------|------------------|
| Relevance of IKS to Business Ethics   | 3.95 | 0.76           | 0.82             |
| Contribution to Sustainable Practices | 4.02 | 0.72           | 0.79             |
| IKS as Source of Innovation           | 3.72 | 0.88           | 0.81             |
| Integration                           | 3.84 | 0.80           | 0.83             |

|                        |  |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| with NEP<br>2020 Goals |  |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|--|

Source: Survey Based

All four dimensions have mean scores above 3.7, indicating that students perceive IKS positively across ethics, sustainability, innovation, and education policy alignment. Highest endorsement: Contribution to Sustainable Practices (M = 4.02). Lowest endorsement: IKS as Source of Innovation (M = 3.72), showing an area where student awareness could be strengthened. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.79 to 0.83, all above the acceptable threshold (0.70), meaning the perception scale is statistically reliable. Overall, the findings confirm that the perception scale is valid, reliable, and interpretable, with students showing strongest confidence in sustainability and ethics dimensions of IKS.

**Table 4 Willingness to Engage with IKS -Willingness Levels**

| Willingness Item                           | Mean | t-value | p-value | Significant |
|--------------------------------------------|------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Willingness to Attend IKS Courses          | 3.88 | 8.54    | 0.000   | Significant |
| Willingness to Apply IKS in Business Ideas | 3.70 | 7.21    | 0.000   | Significant |
| Willingness to Recommend IKS to Peers      | 3.62 | 6.45    | 0.000   | Significant |

Source: Survey Based Statistical Output

All three willingness items scored significantly higher than the neutral point (3), meaning students actively favor engaging with IKS. Highest willingness is to attend courses (M = 3.88), showing demand for formal curriculum integration. Moderate willingness is seen in applying IKS to business (M = 3.70) and recommending it to peers (M = 3.62). The statistical significance across all items (p = 0.000) strengthens the claim that management students are genuinely interested and open to IKS exposure and application.

**Table 5 Relationship between Awareness, Perception, and Willingness - Correlation Analysis**

| Variables   | Awareness | Perception | Willingness |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Awareness   | 1         | 0.482      | 0.415       |
| Perception  | 0.482     | 1          | 0.526       |
| Willingness | 0.415     | 0.526      | 1           |

Source: Survey Based

All three variables are positively and significantly correlated, meaning they reinforce one another. The pattern suggests a causal pathway: Awareness → Positive Perception → Willingness to Engage. While awareness is necessary, it is positive perception that truly motivates willingness. This highlights the need for educational initiatives that not only raise awareness but also emphasize the relevance, benefits, and practicality of IKS in management education.

**Table 6 Perceived Benefits and Challenges of IKS Integration**

| <b>Benefits of Integration</b>         | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------------------------|----------|
| Enhances holistic learning             | 62%      |
| Promotes ethical decision-making       | 58%      |
| Supports stress management & wellbeing | 71%      |
| Aligns with NEP 2020 goals             | 65%      |
| <b>Challenges of Integration</b>       | <b>%</b> |
| Lack of structured curriculum          | 54%      |
| Limited faculty expertise              | 49%      |
| Low awareness among students           | 46%      |
| Difficulty in modern adaptation        | 42%      |

Source: Survey Based Statistical Output

Correlation evidence shows that Awareness → Positive Perception → Higher Willingness. Benefit–Challenge analysis shows students are optimistic about IKS, but highlight structural and pedagogical barriers that institutions must address. For management education, this indicates a readiness for IKS adoption, provided implementation challenges are systematically tackled.

**Table 7 Students' Willingness to Include IKS-based Subjects**

| <b>Response Option</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly Willing       | 64               | 30.5                  |
| Willing                | 87               | 41.4                  |
| Neutral                | 39               | 18.6                  |
| Unwilling              | 15               | 7.1                   |
| Strongly unwilling     | 5                | 2.4                   |
| Total                  | 210              | 100                   |

Source: Survey Based Statistical Output

The data shows a clear student mandate (almost 3 out of 4) in favor of including IKS-based subjects. Neutral and unwilling responses together account for only 28%, indicating that institutional adoption would face limited resistance.

## 12. Findings

- To understand the awareness and understanding of IKS, majority of management students (62%) had moderate awareness of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), while only 18% reported high awareness. This indicates that while students have a general understanding of concepts, deeper knowledge of IKS is still lacking.
- The study revealed that the key IKS concepts that are relevant to Modern Business has respondents identified ethics in business (82%), sustainability principles (74%), and community-oriented decision-making (65%) as most relevant. Lesser emphasis was

given to concepts like astrology in decision-making (12%) or ancient trade practices (29%). This suggests that students are more inclined toward concepts with practical and ethical business applications.

- The benefits are students strongly believed IKS could improve ethical leadership (78%), sustainable business practices (71%), and employee well-being (64%). And challenges is 55% students felt that lack of standard textbooks and 48% mentioned difficulty in linking IKS with modern theories as key hurdles.
- When willingness to Include IKS in Management Curriculum stated that 68% of students supported the inclusion of IKS-based subjects in management education. 22% were neutral, while only 10% opposed it, showing a generally positive inclination towards curriculum integration.

### 13. Suggestions

- Curriculum Integration should be done by introducing dedicated courses or modules on IKS in management programs, aligning with NEP 2020. IKS Themes should be formally embedded into management subjects like Business Ethics, Corporate Governance, and Strategic Management. This alignment will ensure that IKS is perceived as practically useful rather than theoretical.
- Workshops and Case Studies should be conducted along with regular workshops, guest lectures, and case studies that apply IKS principles to real-life management problems. Collaboration with local entrepreneurs using indigenous practices could provide practical insights. Integration of case studies and field projects rooted in Indian traditions can also help bridge the awareness gap.
- Universities should encourage research projects, dissertations, and publications on IKS in business. Develop textbooks, e-content, and open-source repositories integrating IKS with contemporary management.
- Universities should collaborate with scholars and policymakers to develop standardized teaching material and design comparative modules that highlight synergies between IKS and contemporary management models.
- Leadership development programs can be redesigned to include IKS principles, helping cultivate socially responsible managers.
- For effective curriculum integration, faculty members need training in IKS pedagogy. Regular faculty development programs (FDPs) should be conducted to equip teachers with the knowledge and methodologies required to link traditional wisdom with modern management.
- By aligning with AICTE and UGC initiatives on integrating IKS. Encourage government and private funding for pilot programs in management institutes to promote IKS pedagogy.
- Student Engagement in IKS-focused student clubs to increase awareness. Organize competitions, debates, and seminars where students explore and apply IKS concepts to business contexts.

### 14. Conclusion

The study on Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Modern Management for Sustainable business practices with reference to management students in Kolhapur district highlights the relevance of traditional wisdom in shaping future business education. The



findings reveal that while the overall awareness of IKS among students is moderate, there is a strong recognition of its potential contribution to sustainable and ethical business practices. Students particularly resonate with IKS principles such as holistic decision-making, stakeholder harmony, and eco-centric management approaches, which align with global sustainability goals.

The research also indicates that students see tangible benefits of integrating IKS into management education, including the promotion of ethical leadership, sustainable business models, and culturally rooted innovation. However, challenges such as limited exposure, lack of trained faculty, and the need for modern contextualization of ancient wisdom were also sensed. Despite these hurdles, a majority of students expressed willingness to accept IKS-based subjects in their curriculum, aligning with the vision of NEP 2020 to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems in higher education.

In conclusion, the study provides the importance of bridging modern management education with indigenous wisdom for holistic learning and sustainable practice. By fostering awareness, integrating IKS concepts into curriculum design, and addressing challenges through teacher training and resource development, management institutes can equip future leaders with a balanced approach that harmonizes tradition with modernity. This integration not only preserves cultural heritage but also contributes meaningfully to sustainable business practices in a global context.

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