

Epistemic Plurality and Dialogue: A Comparative Philosophical Analysis of Indian and Western Knowledge Systems for Decolonising Knowledge

Kriti Shrivastava

Research Scholar

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University

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Kriti Shrivastava

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Abstract

This paper examines the comparative foundations of Indian and Western knowledge systems within the broader discourse of decolonising knowledge. It argues that modern global academia has been predominantly shaped by Western intellectual traditions, often marginalising indigenous knowledge systems during the colonial period. Rather than positioning these traditions in opposition, the study seeks to explore their philosophical underpinnings and assess the potential for meaningful dialogue between them.

The analysis is structured around four key dimensions: ontology, epistemology, the purpose of knowledge, and the relationship between humans and nature. Indian knowledge systems, particularly those influenced by Advaita Vedānta, emphasise a holistic and interconnected understanding of reality, plural epistemologies, and the pursuit of self-realisation. In contrast, Western traditions, shaped by Cartesian dualism and the Enlightenment, tend to prioritise analytical reasoning, empirical validation, and the instrumental use of knowledge to control and transform the natural world.

The paper further situates this comparison within the historical context of colonialism, highlighting processes of epistemic colonisation that privileged Western frameworks while marginalising indigenous traditions. Drawing on scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Ngig) wa Thiong'o, Walter Dignolo, and Ashis Nandy, it critiques the hierarchical structuring of knowledge and calls for epistemic plurality.

The findings suggest that both knowledge systems are internally diverse and intellectually robust, challenging reductive stereotypes. The

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study concludes that the future of knowledge lies not in privileging one system over another, but in fostering dialogue and integration. Such an approach can contribute to more holistic, inclusive, and sustainable frameworks, particularly in fields such as education, environmental ethics, and healthcare.

Keywords: *Decolonising Knowledge; Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS); Knowledge Plurality; Interdisciplinary Dialogue.*

Background & Research Problem

While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks an important step toward recognising the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), its implementation raises critical conceptual and epistemological questions. If knowledge is to be understood as plural and contextually grounded, then it becomes necessary to interrogate how different knowledge traditions conceptualise reality, validate truth, and define the purpose of learning. Simply incorporating selected elements of IKS into existing curricula—without engaging with their underlying philosophical foundations—risks reducing them to tokenistic inclusions rather than enabling a genuine epistemic shift.

Moreover, the historical legacy of colonial education continues to shape contemporary academic hierarchies. The privileging of Western epistemology as the benchmark of “scientific” knowledge has led to the marginalisation of alternative ways of knowing. This raises an important concern: can meaningful integration occur without first addressing the deeper structures of epistemic inequality? In other words, the challenge is not merely additive (including more content), but transformative (rethinking what counts as knowledge itself).

It is within this context that a comparative analysis of Indian and Western knowledge systems becomes both necessary and timely. Such a comparison allows us to move beyond simplistic binaries—such as “traditional vs. modern” or “spiritual vs. scientific”—and instead examine the internal complexity, philosophical depth, and methodological diversity within each system. It also opens up the possibility of dialogue, where different knowledge traditions can inform and enrich one another.

Coloniality of Knowledge and Epistemic Violence

The historical legacy of colonialism has left a more enduring impact than political domination alone. It has shaped the very structure of what counts as legitimate knowledge in the modern academy. This phenomenon is best understood through the concept of **coloniality of knowledge** — the ongoing pattern by which Western ways of knowing are universalised while non-Western knowledge systems are particularised, inferiorised, or rendered invisible (Mignolo, 2011).

Frantz Fanon (1961/2004) described this process as a form of **epistemic violence** that attacks the colonised subject’s sense of self and reality. Colonial education did not merely impose new content; it systematically delegitimised indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, producing a fractured consciousness in which the colonised internalise the superiority of Western frameworks. In the Indian context, this manifested through the establishment of English-medium education that privileged Western science, rationality, and historiography while dismissing Indian philosophical, medical, and ecological traditions as superstitious or pre-modern.

Ashis Nandy (1983) further illuminates this internal colonisation. He argues that colonialism created an “intimate enemy” — a psychological split within the colonised mind whereby even

nationalist elites began to evaluate their own culture using Western criteria of progress, rationality, and objectivity. This has resulted in a persistent hierarchy in which Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are positioned as “traditional,” “alternative,” or “cultural” resources rather than as robust, living epistemologies capable of engaging with contemporary challenges on equal terms.

Walter Mignolo (2011) extends this critique by distinguishing between colonialism (a historical period) and colonality (a persistent logic). According to him, the modern/colonial world-system operates by making Eurocentric epistemology the invisible norm against which all other knowledges are judged. This colonality of knowledge actively suppresses epistemic plurality and enforces a universalist claim that marginalises relational, experiential, and context-specific ways of knowing characteristic of Indian traditions.

Ngig wa Thiong’o (1986) highlights another critical dimension — the colonisation of language and imagination. The dominance of English as the language of serious academic discourse in India continues to limit the full expression and validation of IKS concepts deeply rooted in Sanskrit, Tamil, and other regional languages and worldviews.

In the context of NEP 2020, these insights are particularly relevant. While the policy recognises the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, genuine decolonisation cannot be achieved through mere curricular addition. Without critically engaging with the structures of colonality that continue to shape academic validation, funding priorities, and publication standards, IKS risks being assimilated into the existing Western-dominated framework rather than transforming it.

This paper, therefore, adopts a comparative approach not to create new hierarchies but to expose existing ones and open pathways toward epistemic dialogue and plurality.

Research Problem

Colonial history has created enduring hierarchies in knowledge production by privileging Western epistemological frameworks as universal and scientific, while marginalising indigenous knowledge systems as traditional or inferior. This has led to a fragmented understanding of knowledge, with alternative epistemologies remaining underexplored or inadequately integrated into mainstream academia.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

1. Examine how Indian and Western knowledge systems differ in their philosophical foundations, particularly in terms of ontology, epistemology, and the purpose of knowledge.
2. Analyse the impact of colonialism on the marginalisation and restructuring of indigenous knowledge traditions.
3. Explore whether a dialogue between these systems can contribute to more holistic, inclusive, and sustainable frameworks of knowledge.

Research Questions

1. How do Indian and Western knowledge systems differ in their understanding of reality, knowledge, and its purpose?

2. In what ways has colonial epistemology contributed to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge traditions?
3. Can a meaningful dialogue between these systems generate more integrative and context-sensitive approaches to knowledge in the contemporary world?

Transition to Conceptual Framework

To address these questions, the paper adopts a comparative framework based on four key dimensions—ontology, epistemology, the purpose of knowledge, and the relationship between humans and nature. These dimensions provide a structured lens for critically examining the similarities, differences, and potential complementarities between Indian and Western knowledge systems.

1. Ontology: The Nature of Reality

Ontology, derived from the Greek word *ontos* (being), refers to the philosophical study of the nature of reality and existence. It seeks to answer fundamental questions such as: *What is real? What exists? What is the nature of being?* In any knowledge system, ontology forms the foundational layer upon which all epistemological and methodological frameworks are built. How a tradition understands reality directly shapes its approach to knowledge, inquiry, and truth.

At its core, ontology is concerned with whether reality is singular or multiple, material or immaterial, independent or interconnected, and whether the observer is separate from or embedded within the world being observed. These questions are central to understanding the differences between Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Western Knowledge Systems (WKS).

In many Indian philosophical traditions, ontology is fundamentally **holistic and non-dualistic**. Schools such as Advaita Vedānta conceptualise reality as an interconnected and unified whole, in which the apparent distinctions between subject and object, self and world are ultimately illusory (*maya*) (Radhakrishnan, 1923). The underlying reality, often described as *Brahman*, is seen as indivisible and all-encompassing (Deutsch, 1969). This perspective emphasises **interconnectedness**, suggesting that all forms of existence are part of a larger cosmic order. Consequently, the knower is not separate from the known; rather, knowledge involves a realisation of this unity. Even in pluralistic schools, there remains a strong emphasis on relationality and embeddedness within a larger metaphysical framework.

In contrast, Western ontology—particularly since the influence of René Descartes and the Scientific Revolution—has often been characterised by a **dualistic understanding of reality**. Cartesian dualism posits a clear separation between mind and body, subject and object, and observer and observed (Descartes, 1641/1996). This framework laid the groundwork for modern scientific inquiry, treating the external world as an objective reality that can be studied independently of the observer. Such an ontological stance enables analytical precision and systematic investigation, but it also reinforces a separation between humans and the natural world.

These differing ontological assumptions have significant implications. A holistic ontology, as seen in IKS, tends to foster integrative and relational approaches to knowledge, where understanding is not merely about analysing parts but recognising patterns of interdependence. On the other hand, a dualistic ontology, as seen in much of WKS, supports reductionist and analytical methods that break complex phenomena into smaller, measurable components.

However, it is important to avoid oversimplification. Western thought is not uniformly dualistic; traditions such as phenomenology and ecological philosophy challenge strict subject-object divisions (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Similarly, Indian philosophy is not monolithic, encompassing both non-dualistic and dualistic schools such as SâCkhya (Larson, 1979). Recognising this internal diversity is essential to moving beyond rigid binaries.

In a comparative perspective, ontology reveals that the differences between Indian and Western knowledge systems are not merely methodological but deeply philosophical. While IKS tends to emphasise unity, interconnection, and embeddedness, WKS has historically prioritised distinction, separation, and objectivity. Rather than viewing these as opposing, they can be understood as complementary orientations—one offering depth of relational insight, and the other precision of analytical clarity. A dialogue between these ontological perspectives may thus provide a more comprehensive understanding of reality, particularly in addressing complex global challenges that require both systemic thinking and empirical rigour.

2. Epistemology: The Nature and Sources of Knowledge

Epistemology, derived from the Greek word *epistēmē* (knowledge), refers to the philosophical study of the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge. It addresses fundamental questions such as: *What is knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? What counts as valid knowledge?* (Audi, 2011). While ontology concerns what exists, epistemology concerns how we come to know what exists. Together, they form the core philosophical foundations of any knowledge system.

A key concern of epistemology is the criteria for truth and validity. Different traditions propose different means of acquiring knowledge—such as perception, reason, testimony, or intuition—and assign varying degrees of legitimacy to each. These differences are particularly evident when comparing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Western Knowledge Systems (WKS).

In Indian philosophical traditions, epistemology is characterised by pluralism and inclusivity. Classical schools such as Nyâya identify multiple valid means of knowledge (*pramâGas*), including perception (*pratyakca*), inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), and verbal testimony (*śabda*) (Matilal, 1986). Other traditions, such as Advaita Vedānta, further incorporate intuitive and experiential knowledge, particularly in the context of self-realisation (Deutsch, 1969). Knowledge is not restricted to empirical observation or logical deduction but includes inner experience, consciousness, and spiritual insight as legitimate sources. Importantly, knowledge in IKS is often seen as transformative—it is not merely informational but leads to self-realisation and liberation (*moksha*) (Radhakrishnan, 1923).

In contrast, Western epistemology—especially since the Enlightenment—has largely emphasised empiricism and rationalism as the primary sources of knowledge. Thinkers such as John Locke and David Hume foregrounded sensory experience as the basis of knowledge, while René Descartes emphasised reason and doubt as foundational methods (Audi, 2011). Modern scientific epistemology builds upon these traditions, privileging observation, experimentation, and verification as the criteria for truth (Chalmers, 1999). This approach has led to remarkable advancements in science and technology, but it also tends to marginalise subjective, intuitive, or non-quantifiable forms of knowledge.

Another key difference lies in the role of the subject (knower). In IKS, the knower is deeply involved in the process of knowing; self-discipline, ethical conduct, and mental refinement are often considered prerequisites for valid knowledge. Knowledge is thus situated and embodied. In contrast, Western epistemology has often aspired to objectivity by minimising the influence of the observer, promoting the ideal of a detached, neutral knower (Daston & Galison, 2007). While this has strengthened methodological rigour, it has also been critiqued for ignoring the situated and value-laden nature of knowledge production.

However, as with ontology, these distinctions should not be overstated. Western philosophy also includes traditions—such as phenomenology and constructivism—that recognise the role of subjectivity and lived experience in shaping knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Similarly, Indian epistemology includes rigorous logical traditions, particularly in Nyâya, that emphasise debate, reasoning, and systematic analysis.

In a comparative perspective, epistemology highlights a fundamental divergence: IKS tends to embrace multiple pathways to knowledge, integrating empirical, rational, and experiential modes, whereas WKS has historically prioritised empirical and rational verification as the most reliable means of knowing. Rather than viewing one as superior, these approaches can be seen as complementary. Integrating the methodological rigour of Western epistemology with the experiential depth and plurality of Indian traditions may offer a more holistic understanding of knowledge—one that is both scientifically robust and existentially meaningful.

3. Purpose of Knowledge: Instrumentality and Self-Realisation

Beyond questions of what exists (ontology) and how we know (epistemology), all knowledge systems are guided by an underlying question: *What is knowledge for?* The purpose of knowledge is a crucial yet often implicit dimension that shapes educational systems, intellectual traditions, and societal priorities. It determines whether knowledge is pursued for practical utility, personal transformation, social organisation, or spiritual fulfilment.

In Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), the purpose of knowledge is traditionally understood as **transformative and liberatory**. Knowledge is not merely an accumulation of information or a tool for external control; rather, it is a means of self-realisation and inner awakening. Philosophical traditions such as Advaita Vedânta emphasise *jnana* (knowledge) as the path to *moksha* (liberation), where the ultimate goal is the realisation of the unity between the self (*âtman*) and ultimate reality (*Brahman*) (Radhakrishnan, 1923; Deutsch, 1969). In this framework, knowledge has an **ethical and spiritual dimension**, requiring discipline, reflection, and self-cultivation. It is inherently linked with the development of wisdom, not just intellectual proficiency.

Moreover, knowledge in IKS is often integrated with life practices. Disciplines such as yoga, Ayurveda, and classical arts do not separate theory from practice; instead, they emphasise lived experience and embodiment. Knowledge is thus **holistic**, encompassing intellectual, ethical, physical, and spiritual dimensions. This orientation fosters a view of education as a process of cultivating the whole person, rather than merely preparing individuals for economic productivity (Altekar, 1944).

In contrast, Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) have, particularly since the Enlightenment, largely emphasised the **instrumental and utilitarian purpose of knowledge**. Knowledge is often

valued for its capacity to explain, predict, and control the natural world. Thinkers such as Francis Bacon famously articulated the idea that “knowledge is power,” underscoring its role in technological advancement and material progress (Bacon, 1620/2000). This orientation has been central to the development of modern science, industry, and governance, in which knowledge is applied to solve problems, improve efficiency, and drive innovation.

Modern educational systems influenced by Western traditions tend to prioritise specialised knowledge, measurable outcomes, and practical applicability. While this has led to significant advancements, it can also result in a **fragmented understanding of knowledge**, sidelining its ethical, philosophical, and existential dimensions. Critics have argued that such an approach risks reducing knowledge to mere utility, neglecting its potential for deeper human development (Nussbaum, 2010).

Another key distinction lies in the relationship between knowledge and values. In IKS, knowledge is rarely value-neutral; it is embedded within a broader ethical and cosmic order (*dharma*). The pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from questions of right living and moral responsibility. In contrast, Western traditions—particularly in their scientific form—have often aspired to value-neutrality, separating facts from values in the interest of objectivity (Weber, 1949). While this distinction has methodological advantages, it has also been critiqued for ignoring the ethical implications of knowledge production and application.

However, as with ontology and epistemology, these differences are not absolute. Western philosophy also contains rich traditions that emphasise ethical and contemplative dimensions of knowledge, such as Aristotelian notions of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and contemporary humanistic approaches to education. Similarly, Indian traditions have long engaged with practical and material concerns, including statecraft, medicine, and logic.

In a comparative perspective, the purpose of knowledge in IKS can be seen as **inward, transformative, and integrative**, while in WKS it has often been **outward, instrumental, and application-oriented**. Rather than viewing these orientations as mutually exclusive, a synthesis of the two may be particularly valuable in the contemporary world. Integrating the ethical and transformative depth of IKS with the practical and innovative strengths of WKS could lead to a more balanced conception of knowledge—one that not only advances society materially but also enriches human consciousness and well-being.

4. Relationship Between Humans and Nature: Interconnectedness and Control

The relationship between humans and nature constitutes a crucial dimension of any knowledge system, shaping not only environmental practices but also broader ethical, philosophical, and civilisational orientations. It reflects how humans perceive their place within the natural world—whether as integral participants in a larger ecological order or as external agents capable of controlling and transforming it. This distinction has profound implications for sustainability, especially in the context of contemporary ecological crises.

In Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), the human–nature relationship is typically understood as one of **interdependence and sacred interconnectedness**. Nature is not viewed as a passive

resource, but as a living, dynamic entity imbued with intrinsic value. Philosophical and cultural traditions emphasise the unity of all existence, where humans, animals, plants, and even inanimate elements are part of a shared cosmic order (*Ita* or *dharma*) (Radhakrishnan, 1923). This worldview fosters an ethic of respect, restraint, and responsibility toward the environment.

Classical texts and practices further illustrate this orientation. For instance, many indigenous and traditional practices in India—ranging from sacred groves to seasonal agricultural cycles—are based on a deep understanding of local ecosystems and their regenerative capacities (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). Knowledge is thus **context-specific and ecologically embedded**, evolving in close interaction with particular landscapes and climates. This aligns with the idea that sustainability cannot be universalised in a one-size-fits-all model; rather, each ecological context generates its own rhythms of growth, healing, and even destruction.

In contrast, Western Knowledge Systems (WKS), particularly since the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, have often conceptualised nature in **instrumental and mechanistic terms**. Influenced by thinkers such as Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, nature came to be seen as a system governed by universal laws that could be studied, predicted, and controlled (Merchant, 1980). This perspective facilitated significant scientific and technological advancements but also contributed to an extractive relationship with the environment, treating nature primarily as a resource for human use.

This ontological and epistemological orientation has historically supported industrialisation and economic growth, but it has also been linked to environmental degradation and ecological imbalance. Critics argue that the separation of humans from nature—rooted in Cartesian dualism—has enabled exploitative practices by removing ethical constraints on the use of nature (White, 1967).

However, it is important to recognise that Western traditions are not monolithic. Contemporary developments such as environmental ethics, deep ecology, and sustainability studies increasingly challenge earlier mechanistic views and advocate for a more integrated understanding of human–nature relationships (Naess, 1973). Similarly, Indian traditions are diverse and have also engaged with resource use, statecraft, and material development in complex ways.

In a comparative perspective, IKS tends to emphasise **coexistence, balance, and reverence**, while WKS has historically prioritised **control, utilisation, and transformation** of nature. However, amid global environmental crises, there is growing recognition that purely instrumental approaches are insufficient. The ecological sensitivity embedded in indigenous knowledge systems offers valuable insights into sustainable living, while the analytical and technological strengths of Western systems remain indispensable for addressing large-scale challenges.

A meaningful synthesis of these perspectives—combining ecological wisdom with scientific innovation—may provide a more sustainable and ethically grounded framework for the future. In this regard, the emphasis of NEP 2020 on integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems is particularly significant, as it opens up possibilities for reimagining education in ways that are both locally rooted and globally relevant.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) across the four dimensions—ontology, epistemology, purpose of knowledge, and the human–nature relationship—reveals both deep philosophical divergences and meaningful areas of convergence. Rather than reinforcing a rigid binary, the findings highlight the internal complexity of each system and the potential for constructive dialogue.

At the ontological level, IKS predominantly advances a **holistic, interconnected view of reality, in which** distinctions between subject and object are ultimately transcended. In contrast, WKS has historically been shaped by **dualistic and analytical frameworks** that emphasise separation and categorisation. This ontological divergence lays the foundation for broader differences in how knowledge is conceptualised and pursued.

Epistemologically, IKS demonstrates a **pluralistic approach**, recognising multiple valid means of knowledge, including perception, inference, and experiential or intuitive insight. Knowledge is often seen as transformative and embodied. WKS, on the other hand, has largely privileged **empiricism and rationalism**, emphasising objectivity, verification, and methodological rigour. While this has enabled scientific advancement, it has also tended to marginalise subjective and experiential forms of knowing.

The purpose of knowledge further underscores this contrast. In IKS, knowledge is fundamentally **liberatory and self-transformative**, aimed at self-realisation and ethical living. In WKS, knowledge has often been **instrumental and utilitarian**, oriented toward control, application, and material progress. However, this distinction is not absolute; both traditions contain strands that engage with ethical, practical, and philosophical dimensions of knowledge.

Finally, the human–nature relationship highlights that the comparison is perhaps the most pertinent in contemporary relevance. IKS emphasises **interdependence, balance, and ecological sensitivity**, rooted in a worldview that sees humans as part of a larger cosmic order. WKS, particularly in its modern scientific form, has historically promoted a **mechanistic and utilitarian view of nature**, enabling technological progress but also contributing to ecological crises. Recent developments in Western thought, however, indicate a shift toward more integrated and sustainable perspectives.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the differences between IKS and WKS are not merely oppositional but **complementary**. IKS offers depth in relational, ethical, and experiential understanding, while WKS contributes analytical precision, methodological clarity, and technological innovation. A synthesis of these approaches—rather than the dominance of one over the other—can enable a more holistic and context-sensitive framework of knowledge.

In the context of NEP 2020, this synthesis becomes particularly significant. The policy’s emphasis on integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems should not be reduced to curricular inclusion alone; rather, it calls for a deeper epistemic shift that recognises plurality, contextuality, and dialogue. Such an approach has the potential to reshape not only education but also broader approaches to sustainability, development, and global knowledge production.

Comparative Summary Table

Dimension	Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)	Western Knowledge Systems (WKS)	Key Insight
Ontology (Nature of Reality)	Holistic, non-dual, interconnected reality; unity of existence	Dualistic, analytical; separation of subject–object	Unity vs. distinction; relational vs. reductionist
Epistemology (Nature of Knowledge)	Pluralistic (<i>pramāṇas</i>); includes experiential, intuitive, and rational knowledge.	Empiricism and rationalism; emphasis on objectivity and verification	Multiple ways of knowing vs. prioritised scientific method
Purpose of Knowledge	Transformative, liberatory (<i>moksha</i>); ethical and spiritual development	Instrumental, utilitarian; control, application, and progress	Self-realisation vs. material and technological advancement
Human–Nature Relationship	Interdependence, ecological balance, sacred view of nature	Mechanistic, utilitarian; nature as resource	Coexistence vs. control
Overall Orientation	Integrative, value-embedded, context-sensitive	Analytical, specialised, universalising	Complementary strengths rather than oppositional

Way Forward: Towards a Dialogic and Integrated Knowledge Paradigm

The comparative analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Western Knowledge Systems (WKS), while differing in their foundational assumptions, need not be viewed as mutually exclusive or hierarchically ordered. Instead, their integration offers the potential to develop a more balanced and sustainable knowledge paradigm—one that is simultaneously **scientifically rigorous, ethically grounded, and ecologically sensitive**.

A key challenge in contemporary discourse has been the tendency to position these systems as binaries—often framed as *spiritual versus scientific*, *traditional versus modern*, or *subjective versus objective*. Such dichotomies, while analytically convenient, are ultimately reductive. They obscure the internal diversity within each tradition and hinder meaningful engagement between them. Rather than reinforcing these binaries, it is more productive to view IKS and WKS as epistemic orientations **along a continuum**, each offering distinct yet complementary insights.

Moving forward, there is a need to cultivate a **dialogic approach to knowledge**, in which multiple traditions are brought into conversation without subsuming one another. This requires a shift from epistemic hierarchy to epistemic plurality—recognising that different systems of knowledge emerge from different historical, cultural, and ecological contexts, and therefore address different dimensions of reality. In such a framework, the strengths of WKS—its analytical precision, methodological rigour, and technological innovation—can be meaningfully complemented by the strengths of IKS—its holistic vision, ethical grounding, and emphasis on experiential understanding.

In practical terms, this integration calls for rethinking educational and research frameworks.

Rather than treating Indigenous Knowledge Systems as supplementary or peripheral, they must be engaged at a conceptual level, influencing how knowledge itself is defined, organised, and transmitted. Interdisciplinary curricula, context-sensitive pedagogy, and the inclusion of diverse epistemologies in research methodologies can serve as important steps in this direction.

At a broader level, such an integrative approach is particularly relevant in addressing global challenges such as climate change, sustainability, and social inequality. These issues are complex and multifaceted, requiring both the technological capabilities associated with WKS and the ecological sensitivity and ethical orientation embedded in IKS. A purely instrumental approach to knowledge is insufficient, just as an exclusively inward or contemplative approach may lack scalability; it is in their **convergence** that more viable solutions can emerge.

Ultimately, the way forward lies not in choosing between IKS and WKS, nor in collapsing one into the other, but in fostering a **mutually enriching dialogue**. By moving beyond rigid binaries and embracing a pluralistic understanding of knowledge, it becomes possible to envision a more inclusive and sustainable intellectual future—one that acknowledges the validity of multiple ways of knowing while striving for coherence, relevance, and shared human flourishing.

Conclusion

This paper examined the differences and complementarities between Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) through the lenses of ontology, epistemology, purpose of knowledge, and the human–nature relationship. It highlighted that IKS is generally holistic, pluralistic, and transformative in orientation, while WKS has historically been analytical, empirical, and instrumental. However, these distinctions are not absolute, as both traditions are internally diverse and evolving.

The study also situated this comparison within the context of colonialism, which privileged Western epistemologies and marginalised indigenous traditions. In this regard, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents an important step toward recognising epistemic plurality, though its success depends on engaging with deeper philosophical foundations rather than mere inclusion.

The key argument of this paper is that IKS and WKS should not be viewed as opposing binaries such as “spiritual versus scientific.” Instead, they should be understood as complementary knowledge traditions capable of meaningful dialogue. Their integration can contribute to a more balanced framework of knowledge—one that is scientifically rigorous, ethically grounded, and ecologically sensitive.

Ultimately, the way forward lies in fostering epistemic dialogue and plurality, enabling knowledge to serve not only as a tool for progress but also as a means of sustainable, holistic human development.

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