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ARTICLE

From the Indian Knowledge System to the Plural Knowledge Systems of India

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Abstract

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its project of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) have been trying to cast a sanitized and monolithic understanding of Indian culture, centered on high-caste Vedic Hinduism. In the name of curricular and pedagogical innovations, BJP is promoting myths as realities, pseudo-sciences as sciences, and erasing selective histories. This article elaborates on how the idea of "Indian tradition" is being distorted, fictionalized, and cherry-picked to align it with the high-caste Hindu ideological foundations of the BJP. Such an approach has generated problematic frameworks of sanitized knowledge-making mechanisms. The article also proposes that the Plural Knowledge Systems of India can be considered an alternative knowledge system to address the challenges posed by the IKS.

Keywords: BJP; Indian Knowledge System; knowledge traditions; Plural Knowledge Systems of India; Vedic Hinduism

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing political party in India founded on high-caste Hindu beliefs and practices, initiated the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) scheme on July 29, 2020 as part of the Ministry of Education's National Education Policy (NEP 2020). The aim of IKS is to revive and mainstream India's traditional knowledge system by "integrating it into the fabric" of the contemporary Indian education ecosystem and to bridge the gap between "traditional Indian Knowledge Systems and contemporary knowledge systems" so that a knowledge tradition can be fostered in India that "inspires the development of future innovators and scholars" who are premised on the Indian traditions of "knowledge generation and transmission."[1]

The IKS seeks to realize these aims and visions through three core principles: embracing the "rich heritage and lineage of Indian Knowledge Systems," combining "traditional wisdom with modern knowledge," and highlighting the "practical utility of the Indian Knowledge System to solve current and emerging problems of India and the world."[2] These principles are applied through organizing research centers, internship programs for undergraduate students, faculty development programs, workshops, documentation projects, a dedicated

[1] Indian Knowledge System 2020.
[2] Indian Knowledge System 2020.

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Wiki portal for publishing articles in various Indian languages, and community outreach activities being established across public and private higher education institutions.

IKS initiatives need to be critically questioned because of their high-caste Hindu bias, Islamophobic approaches, and distortions of facts. The IKS not only restricts the idea of Indian knowledge within the high-caste Hindu knowledge systems but also tarnishes the idea of traditional knowledge by enforcing myths as realities, erasing histories, and promoting pseudo-science.

1. High-caste bias in the Indian Knowledge System

The Indian Knowledge System policy pledges to rejuvenate interest in "the unbroken knowledge traditions" of India across schools and higher education systems, which were destroyed by Muslim invaders.[3] In reality, the term "unbroken" refers exclusively to the high-caste Hindu knowledge systems, which are synonymous with the BJP's idea of Indian tradition and glorified in this policy as unquestionable and the only authentic traditional knowledge in India. Jagdeep Dhankar, who was the Vice-President of India between 2022 and 2025, stated during a public address about the necessity of IKS: "The Islamic invasion of India caused the first interlude in the glorious journey of *Bharatiya Vidya Parampara* [भारतीय विद्या परंपरा, "unbroken Indian knowledge traditions"]. Instead of embrace and assimilation, there was contempt and destruction."[4] To prevent further destruction, according to the BJP, the *vidya paramparas*, or unbroken Indian knowledge traditions, must be retrieved through IKS.

According to the caste system, which is central to BJP ideology, the Hindu community is divided into four *varnas* (categories): the highest are the Brahmins, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. The *varna* system serves as the bedrock of the caste system in India, which is a product of Vedic traditions and has effectively normalized caste hierarchies in India. High-caste Hindus consider the knowledge systems of the Vedic traditions to be the only authentic forms of knowledge, while the rest are inferior.[5]

IKS claims that the "rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought" has been its guiding light, referring to India's knowledge traditions of science, technology, and medicine.[6] However, IKS identifies only those ancient educational institutions, mostly run by high-caste Hindu communities and a few by Buddhists—such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Vallabhi, universities that were established in India during the Vedic era—as representatives of the "highest standards of multidisciplinary teaching and research" in ancient India.[7] It is only the high-caste Brahmin philosophers, such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, and others, who are identified by the IKS as the seminal contributors to India's various traditional knowledge disciplines.

[3] Indian Knowledge System 2020.

[4] Press Bureau of India 2025.

[5] Gudavarthy 2018. Vedic traditions began during the Vedic era. The time period between 1500 and 500 BCE is regarded as the Vedic era. The word "Vedic" comes from the *Vedas*. This period is referred to as "Vedic" because the principles that founded the high-caste Hindu socioreligious order, called the *Vedas*, were developed during this period. The *Vedas* comprise philosophical, scientific, medicinal, culinary, and other principles that high-caste Hindus are expected to follow to maintain their purity and superiority. Also, the sociocultural principles outlined in the *Vedas* are considered by Brahmins to be the most ethical and authentic.

[6] Indian Knowledge System 2020.

[7] Indian Knowledge System 2020.

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When the IKS was launched in 2020, the education ministry and panel members of the NEP 2020 justified its launch as a way to decolonize India's education system by reviving the country's traditional knowledge systems.[8] Even though India has a vast historical and cultural legacy of multicultural and multicommunal knowledge traditions associated with different castes, religions, and geographies, their definitions of decolonization and revival were strictly restricted to high-caste Hindu knowledge systems.[9] The NEP policy, through the IKS, argues that India's traditional knowledge systems are rooted solely in the high-caste Hindu Vedic traditions and, in the name of revival, aims to legitimize myths as realities, erase history, and promote pseudoscience as science.[10]

2. Myths as realities

As a justification for the scientific relevance of the IKS, myths are presented as reality. The BJP has cited a mythical chariot, the Pushpak Vimana, to claim that the first airplane was built in India.[11] According to the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, the Pushpaka Vimana was a flying chariot built in the Vedic era and used by Ravana to abduct Sita.[12] A mythical object cannot be considered scientifically real.

The BJP has also claimed that the first drones and war missiles were invented in India during the Vedic era.[13] The BJP argues that Brahmastra, a mythical weapon mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, is identical to a modern missile or drone.[14] Based on this narrative, many BJP ideologues promote that Brahmastra is the first known war missile and therefore India is the inventor of war missiles.[15]

The BJP has further showcased Lord Ganesha as the first example of cosmetic surgery in India. According to Vedic myths, Ganesha has an elephant head and a human body and is regarded as the god of good luck and fortune. While addressing a group of medical science practitioners in New Delhi in October 2014, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, claimed that "there must be some plastic surgeon at that time who got an elephant's head on the body of a human being and began the practice of plastic surgery."[16] Again, this argument lacks a scientific basis and is based solely on imagination.

3. Erasing histories

In 2023, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) removed Mughal history from school textbooks.[17] They also removed the event of communal riots caused by the Hindus against the Muslims in Gujarat (2002), which happened when Narendra

[8] Philip 2026.
[9] Gudavarthy 2018.
[10] Indian Knowledge System 2020.
[11] TNN 2025.
[12] A Hindu Epic written between the 4th and 5th centuries BCE. Both Ravana and Sita are mythical characters from the *Ramayana*. Ravana was the principal antagonist in *Ramayana*, and Sita was the queen of Ayodhya. Ayodhya is a city located in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.
[13] Safi 2018.
[14] A Hindu epic written between the 4th century BCE and the 4th century CE.
[15] Purkayastha 2023.
[16] Modi cited in Rahman 2014.
[17] NCERT is an autonomous organization established under the leadership of India's Ministry of Education. Its primary responsibilities are to publish school textbooks, train school teachers, and ensure the implementation of intellectually efficient curricula and pedagogies in schools across India.

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Modi (the current Prime Minister) was the Chief Minister. The history of the Moplah Rebellion (1921) in Malabar, which was led by the Muslims against the high-caste Hindu landlords and the British colonizers, has also been erased.[18] These erasures of selective narratives involving Muslims were justified as a means of removing historical narratives associated with foreign communities.[19] Histories related to Muslims are considered foreign because the community did not originate in India.[20] Since the IKS is focused on traditional Indian Knowledge Systems, there is no place for histories associated with foreign communities.

The BJP designates any narrative that does not comply with the high-caste Hindu ideologies and tarnishes their vision of Hindu nationalism as foreign.[21] This is why, besides erasing selective Muslim histories, the BJP also erased references to "Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to Hindu nationalism" from the school textbooks.[22] Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to the partition of India into Pakistan and Bangladesh on religious grounds.[23] Such a narrative is a threat to the high-caste Hindu, religiously fractured knowledge systems of the BJP. The erasures of selective histories allow the BJP to impose its cherry-picked narratives.

4. Pseudo-science as science

In 2025, in Madhya Pradesh, a group of scientists from the higher educational institutions called the Indian Institute of Technology Indore (IITI), the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), the Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology (MPCST), and the Scientific Council were examining whether a *yajna* could purify the environment.[24] *Yajna* is a fire ceremony during which piles of wood are burnt, prayers are chanted, and offerings—such as water, ghee, fruits, and flower petals—are offered to the fire. Vedic traditions claim that *yajna* wards off evil. However, these ceremonies consume large quantities of wood and pollute the environment. How can an agent of environmental pollution purify the natural environment? The scientists do not yet have an answer.

In 2017, the BJP-affiliated Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Trivendra Singh Rawat, claimed that "one can be cured of TB [tuberculosis] if he or she is near a cow. Our scientists are now certifying these facts."[25] He also claimed that cows are the only animals that inhale and exhale oxygen.[26] However, when asked about the scientific basis of these claims, he was unable to provide a response, except citing this narrative as a Vedic practice.

These instances of justifying pseudo-sciences, myths, and distorted histories demonstrate how the BJP's high-caste Hindu-centered IKS policy is based not on logic but on manipulations and imagination.

[18] Zompa 2021.

[19] Ellis-Peterson 2023.

[20] Titus 1979. Muslims arrived in India through imperialistic invasions and trade in the 7th century CE.

[21] Hindu nationalism is a sociopolitical ideology that centers on high-caste Hindu religious principles, caste hierarchies, and communal divisions to govern a nation, as seen in the case of the BJP.

[22] Ellis-Peterson 2023.

[23] BBC 2017. Gandhi opposed the idea that India should be a predominantly Hindu nation, while the Muslims could migrate to Pakistan and Bangladesh, as promoted by the high-caste Hindu communities and the British.

[24] A state located in central India. Tomar 2025.

[25] A state in northern India. Rawat cited in Scroll Staff 2019.

[26] Scroll Staff 2019.

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5. From IKS to PKSI

IKS has little scientific or logical grounding. The claims and impositions are motivated by high-caste imaginations and sociopolitical propaganda. It de-normalizes facts and normalizes fictions. The IKS envisions a knowledge system that solely fulfills the high-caste Hindu beliefs of the BJP through distortions and erasures. The BJP has reduced the ideas of the "Indian," "tradition," and "knowledge" to a set of fictitious claims and does not acknowledge the historical and scientific contributions of other castes and religions in India. Through IKS, the BJP is seeking to forge a sanitized, exclusionary knowledge-making process that is gradually turning propaganda into truth.

To counter the fraudulence of the IKS, it is essential to envision an alternative knowledge system that can redefine the idea of "Indian knowledge" beyond the high-caste Hindu sociopolitical ideologies of the BJP and encompass the historical and scientific contributions of other communities. This alternative knowledge system can be named the "Plural Knowledge Systems of India" (PKSI).

PKSI conveys the idea of Indian knowledge beyond the monopoly of the high-caste Hindu ideologies of the BJP and restructures the idea of Indian knowledge to recognize the cross-communal and cross-border interactions within India and beyond that have historically shaped India's knowledge systems. There are two key pillars of PKSI.

First, instead of denying and erasing histories that do not fit within the high-caste Hindu ideologies, PKSI recognizes India's history of multicommunal and cross-border knowledge systems that evolved through exchanges with different castes, religions, races, and geographies in the forms of trade, commerce, arts, culture, and education. Besides Hindus, groups including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Afro-Indians, Arab-Indians, and others have contributed to the country's diverse linguistic, culinary, social, cultural, and communal knowledge systems.[27] The sociocultural diversity that India currently demonstrates has not resulted from a single communal entity. Denying this fact is denying the country's history. By acknowledging the communal and cultural diversity of India's history, the idea of "India" and "Indian knowledge" can be freed from the present high-caste Hindu monopoly of the BJP and restructured on the basis of facts, diversity, and difference.

The second pillar of PKSI is that it embraces scientific thoughts over fictitious myths. India has a rich legacy of contributions across metallurgy, agriculture, medicine, and biodiversity conservation.[28] India also contributed to mathematics through the decimal system, the concept of zero, algebra, and trigonometry.[29] These contributions have resulted from interactions between Indian, Arab, African, and philosophers from other parts of the world. These contributions have been proven through evidence in the form of formulae, calculations, and applications. To establish a knowledge system rooted in India's cultural and scientific traditions, these scientific facts and others need to be highlighted over fictitious myths.

From these two pillars, future policymakers can build and sustain a program for the Plural Knowledge Systems of India that prevents further damage to India's rich educational traditions.

[27] Dey 2023.
[28] Bose, Sen, and Subbarayappa 1971.
[29] Babu 2022; Divakaran 2018; Kaye 1915.

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