

## Ancient Indian Knowledge System

### Why in news?

Recently Union Minister for Culture and Tourism in a written reply in Lok Sabha, presented the government's focus on preserving intellectual heritage of Ancient Indian Knowledge Centres.

### What are the ancient knowledge systems of India?

- **Ancient systems of knowledge in India** - It basically consists of understanding the mysteries of the universe, human interactions with environment, philosophy of life, development of art etc.
- **Ancient literatures** - Shrutis and Smritis literature, Sutra literature, Jataka tales, Panchatantras, Kathasaritsagara, Thirukural, Athichudi and Vachanas are examples of Indian literary traditions.
- **Indian Philosophical thoughts** - Āstika, Nāstika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Cārvāka, Buddhism and Jainism.

### Ancient knowledge systems

- **Mathematics** - Gaṇita anuyoga, Saṅkhyāna (literally, 'the science of numbers,' meaning arithmetic and astronomy), gaṇana saṅkhyāna
- **Ayurveda** - A holistic health system encompassing all the aspects of well-being — from physical, physiological and psychological to environmental and ecological health.
- **Alchemical traditions** - Rasāyana Śāstra, Rasatantra, Rasakriyā or Rasavidyā
- **Yoga** - It encompasses the different fields of our existence such as physical, psychological, social and spiritual.

- **Ancient knowledge centres** - They are learning institutions developed to provide institutional frameworks for scholarly activities.
- Prominent universities of the Buddhist system were Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Odantapuri and Vallabhi.
- Despite their decline due to invasions, their legacy influenced global education.

### Ancient Knowledge Centers

#### Taxila (Takshashila)

- Situated in present-day Pakistan.
- Believed to have been founded by Kuru prince Duryodhana
- Flourished between the 6<sup>th</sup> BCE and the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.
- It is regarded as one of the earliest universities in the world,
- Notable figures such as the strategist Chanakya (Kautilya), the physician Charaka, and the grammarian Pāṇini were associated with Taxila.

## Nalanda University

- Situated in Bihar
- Founded by Kumaragupta I of the Gupta dynasty.
- Flourished between the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.
- The Chinese traveler Xuanzang documented his studies at Nalanda in the 7th century.

## Vikramashila University

- Situated in Bihar.
- Founded by the Pala emperor Dharmapala
- Flourished between 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century
- It specialized in Vajrayana traditions.

## Odantapuri

- Buddhist learning centre situated in Bihar.
- Founded by the Pala ruler Gopala I.
- Flourished between 8th to 12th century
- Considered the second oldest of India's Mahaviharas.

## Vallabhi

- Located in Bhavnagar, Gujarat.
- Founded by Maitraka kings and patronized Hinayana Buddhism.
- Flourished from 600 AD to 1200 AD.
- Famous for Buddhist philosophy, economics, agriculture, Theology, Medicine and Nithya Shastra (Law)

## How did ancient India's knowledge survive destruction?

- **Oral tradition and guru-shishya parampara** - Knowledge was transmitted orally from teachers to students to ensure its continuity even without or destruction of formal institutions.
- **Migration of scholars** - When institutions like Nalanda and Vikramashila were attacked, scholars fled to different regions, taking their knowledge with them.
- Many migrated to South India, Tibet, China, and Southeast Asia, ensuring that their teachings were preserved and spread.
- **Religious institutions and monasteries** - Buddhist and Hindu monasteries, along with temples, functioned as secondary knowledge centers of learning, which preserved ancient texts.
- Monks and scholars continued their work in secret or in other safe locations.
- For instance, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries preserved Indian texts and traditions when Buddhism declined in India.
- **Foreign translations and records** - While invaders destroyed libraries, travellers like Xuanzang and Al-Biruni documented and translated Indian knowledge into Chinese and Arabic languages.
- **Underground libraries** - Some scholars hid manuscripts in remote locations or underground repositories.
- **Resurgence of learning** - New centers of knowledge like Varanasi and Kanchipuram emerged, and continued intellectual traditions.
- **Integration into other cultures** - Indian mathematical, scientific, and philosophical

knowledge was absorbed by Islamic and European scholars.

- Concepts like the decimal system and Ayurveda found their way into global civilizations, ensuring their survival despite institutional destruction.
- Thus, while ancient knowledge centers were physically attacked, their intellectual and cultural legacy endured through resilience, adaptation, and the widespread dissemination of knowledge.

## What are the Initiatives taken by IGNCA to restore ancient Indian knowledge systems and centers?

*The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was established in 1987 under the Department of Culture, as a centre for research, academic pursuit and dissemination in the field of the arts.*

- **Vedic Heritage Portal** - Launched in 2023, It aims at preserving and disseminating the rich heritage of the Vedas.
- It features transcriptions of ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Vedangas, Upavedas, and details of Vedic rituals in both audio-visual formats.
- **Project 'Mausam'** - It is a multidisciplinary initiative to revive and strengthen ancient historical maritime cultural and economic ties among countries along the Indian Ocean.
- **Academic programs and research** - IGNCA offers postgraduate diploma courses and conducts research on India's traditional knowledge systems, to understand and revive ancient practices.
- **Indian knowledge systems (IKS) initiative** - IGCCA supports the IKS division of Ministry of Education.
- IKS focuses on integrating traditional Indian knowledge into contemporary education by incorporating subjects like Vedic mathematics, Ayurveda, yoga, and ancient Indian sciences into university curricula.

### IGNCA's divisions on India's cultural heritage

- **Kalanidhi** - Serves as a repository of research and reference materials in humanities and the arts, amassing a vast collection of textual, visual, and auditory data to support scholarly research.
- **Kalakosa** - Engages in research and publication, investigating intellectual traditions across multiple disciplines, thereby enriching the understanding of ancient knowledge systems.
- **Janapada Sampada** - Dedicated to lifestyle studies, this division conducts systematic research on tribal and folk arts, facilitating live presentations and fostering a deeper appreciation of indigenous knowledge.
- **Kaladarsana** - Transforms research findings into visible forms through exhibitions, making ancient knowledge accessible to the public and encouraging further scholarly inquiry.
- **Cultural Informatics Laboratory** - Applies technology tools for cultural preservation and propagation, including the development of 'Kalāsampadā', a digital repository encompassing rare archival collections.

## Reference

[PIB | Ancient Indian Knowledge Centres](#)

