

Indian Knowledge Systems on Foods: A Holistic Philosophy that connects Mind, Body and Environment Sustainability

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Abstract: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide a holistic approach to food by integrating physical health, mental well-being, spiritual values, and environmental sustainability. Unlike conventional nutritional perspectives, IKS considers food as a sacred and life-supporting element that nurtures the body, mind, and ecological balance. This study adopts a descriptive research design based on secondary data collected from books, peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and publications on Ayurveda and Indian Knowledge Systems. The study examines traditional dietary principles such as Sattvic food, Mitahara (moderation in eating), seasonal and local food consumption, and ethical food practices. The findings reveal that these principles promote preventive healthcare, biodiversity conservation, responsible consumption, and sustainable food systems while supporting cultural preservation and holistic well-being. The study concludes that integrating Indian food philosophy with contemporary nutritional science and sustainability practices can contribute significantly to achieving healthier lifestyles, environmental conservation, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research highlights the continuing relevance of indigenous food knowledge in addressing present-day global health and environmental challenges.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Holistic Food Philosophy, Ayurveda, Environmental Sustainability, Sustainable Food Systems.

1. Introduction

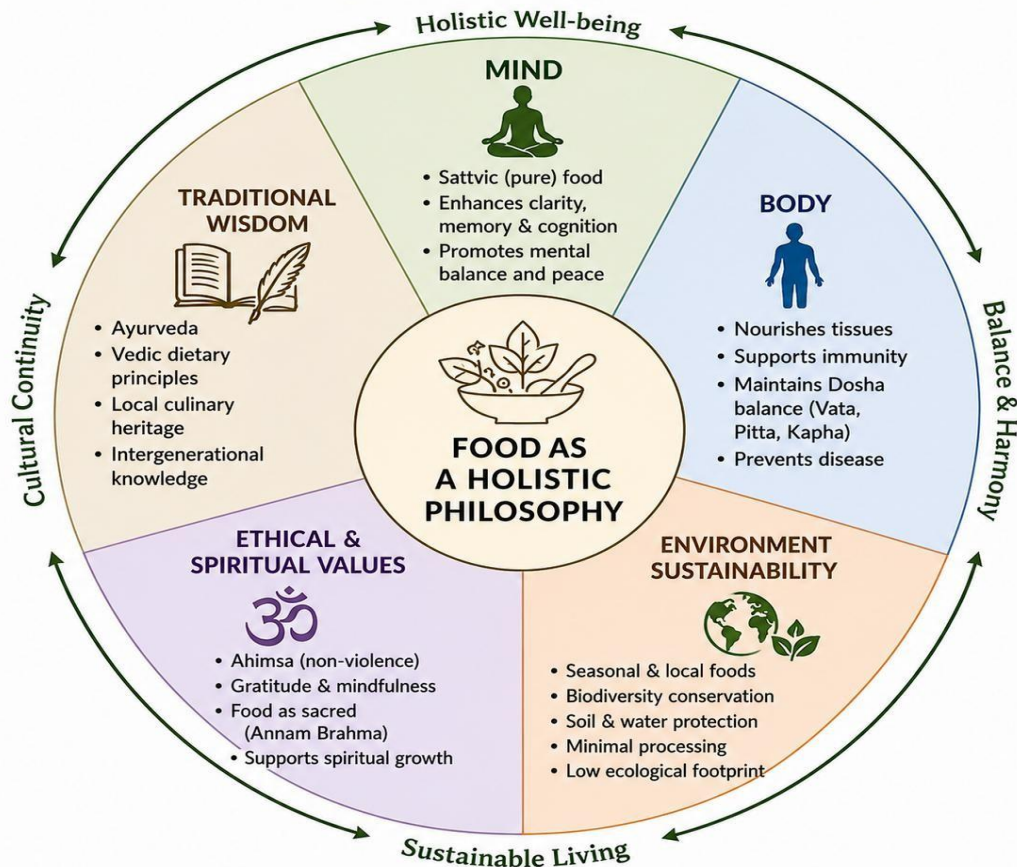
Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer a comprehensive and time-tested framework for understanding food as more than a source of nutrition. Rooted in ancient philosophical traditions such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda, Bhagavad Gita, and classical agricultural practices, IKS views food as a fundamental element that nurtures physical health, mental well-being, spiritual growth, and ecological harmony. Unlike contemporary reductionist approaches that primarily emphasize nutrients, calories, and biochemical composition, the Indian perspective recognizes food as a living entity interconnected with human consciousness, ethical values, seasonal rhythms, cultural traditions, and environmental sustainability. The concept of Ahara in Ayurveda emphasizes that the quality, preparation, timing, quantity, and mindful consumption of food significantly influence bodily functions, emotional balance, immunity, and cognitive performance. Traditional Indian dietary principles such as Sattvic Ahara (pure and balanced food), Mitahara (moderation in eating), and Pathya Ahara (wholesome diet) advocate disciplined eating habits that support preventive healthcare and holistic wellness. Furthermore, Indian food traditions encourage the consumption of locally available, seasonal, and biodiversity-rich foods while discouraging excessive processing and food wastage. These practices promote sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, soil fertility, water conservation, and efficient utilization of natural resources, thereby reducing ecological footprints. Ethical principles such as Ahimsa (non-violence), gratitude towards nature, mindful eating, and considering food as Annam Brahma (food is divine) foster responsible



consumption and strengthen the relationship between humans and the environment. Such indigenous knowledge systems emphasize harmony between individuals, society, and nature, creating resilient and sustainable food cultures. These traditional principles closely align with contemporary global priorities, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), and Climate Action (SDG 13). In the face of increasing lifestyle disorders, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity, revisiting Indian Knowledge Systems offers valuable insights for developing resilient and sustainable food philosophies. Integrating indigenous food wisdom with contemporary nutritional science, environmental management, and public health policies can contribute to healthier populations, sustainable food systems, and ecological resilience. Therefore, Indian Knowledge Systems provide a holistic paradigm that connects the mind, body, and environment, making them highly relevant for achieving long-term human well-being, environmental sustainability, and global food security in the twenty-first century.

2. Food as a Holistic Philosophy in Indian Knowledge Systems

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1. Food as a Holistic Philosophy

Food occupies a central place in Indian Knowledge Systems, where it is regarded as a source of nourishment for the body, mind, and soul. Rather than focusing only on nutritional value, the holistic approach considers food as a means to achieve physical health, mental peace, spiritual growth, and harmony with nature. This philosophy promotes balanced living and sustainable food practices.

2. Mind

The concept of Sattvic food in Indian Knowledge Systems emphasizes foods that enhance mental clarity, concentration, memory, and emotional stability. Fresh, natural, and minimally processed foods are believed to improve

cognitive functioning while reducing stress and anxiety. Thus, food plays a significant role in maintaining psychological well-being and positive thinking.

3. *Body*

Indian dietary principles emphasize balanced nutrition for maintaining physical health and strengthening the immune system. According to Ayurveda, a proper diet helps maintain the equilibrium of the three Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—which is essential for preventing diseases. Healthy eating habits also improve digestion, energy levels, and overall quality of life.

4. *Environment Sustainability*

Indian food traditions encourage the consumption of seasonal, locally available, and naturally grown foods. Such practices support biodiversity, reduce environmental pollution, conserve natural resources, and minimize food waste. Sustainable agricultural methods ensure ecological balance while providing healthy food for present and future generations.

5. *Ethical and Spiritual Values*

Food is considered sacred in Indian culture and is closely associated with ethical principles such as Ahimsa (non-violence), gratitude, and mindful consumption. Sharing food, avoiding wastage, and respecting all forms of life reflect the spiritual dimensions of Indian food philosophy. These values encourage responsible and compassionate living.

6. *Traditional Wisdom*

Traditional knowledge passed down through generations includes Ayurvedic dietary principles, Vedic food practices, and indigenous cooking methods. This accumulated wisdom promotes the use of natural ingredients, balanced diets, and culturally significant food habits that contribute to both human health and environmental sustainability.

3. Review of Literature

- **Abraham et al. (2025)** reviewed the utilization of Ayurvedic by-products in sustainable food applications. The study highlighted the potential of converting herbal processing waste into functional food ingredients, thereby reducing waste generation and supporting circular economy practices. The authors concluded that integrating Ayurvedic knowledge with modern food technology can promote sustainable food systems and environmental conservation.
- **Bhawna and Tripathi (2025)** explored the concept of Yogic Ahar through Indian Knowledge Systems and contemporary nutrition science. Their study emphasized Sattvic food, moderation (Mitahara), and mindful eating as essential components for improving mental clarity, emotional balance, and physical health. The research also demonstrated the compatibility of traditional dietary wisdom with modern nutritional principles.
- **Kamble (2025)** examined the contribution of Indian Knowledge Systems to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The review highlighted that traditional food systems, Ayurveda, water conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices significantly contribute to food security, environmental sustainability, and public health. The study recommended greater integration of indigenous knowledge into policy frameworks.
- **Kotecha and Pandey (2025)** investigated the relevance of Vrikshayurveda in promoting sustainable agriculture and ecological conservation. The study emphasized nature-based agricultural practices, biodiversity conservation, and environmentally responsible food production. The authors concluded that ancient agricultural knowledge can effectively support climate-resilient and sustainable food systems.
- **Pan and Das (2026)** provided a comprehensive analysis of Ayurveda within the broader framework of Indian Knowledge Systems. The study discussed concepts such as Tridosha, Panchamahabhuta, preventive healthcare, and ecological ethics. The authors argued that Ayurveda offers an integrated model connecting physical health, mental well-being, and environmental sustainability.

- **Singh (2025)** reviewed the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into contemporary education and sustainable development. The study emphasized that IKS promotes ethical reasoning, cultural preservation, ecological awareness, and holistic thinking. The review suggested that incorporating traditional food knowledge into educational curricula can strengthen sustainable lifestyle practices among future generations.
- **Adhikary (2025)** discussed the practical relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems in addressing modern global challenges. The study highlighted that IKS integrates philosophy, ethics, health, and sustainability into a unified framework. It concluded that traditional dietary wisdom contributes significantly to holistic health, environmental responsibility, and social well-being.
- Suresh, D., et al. (2022) conducted a narrative review on indigenous foods consumed by tribal and indigenous communities in India. The study demonstrated that traditional foods possess high nutritional value, rich micronutrient content, and significant biodiversity benefits. The authors emphasized that indigenous dietary practices contribute to sustainable nutrition and long-term food security.
- **Verma and Sharma (2025)** analyzed the relationship between Indian Knowledge Systems and sustainable development under environmental, social, and economic (ESE) dimensions. The study found that traditional Indian food practices support responsible consumption, ecological balance, and community well-being while contributing to national sustainability goals.
- **Yadav and Sharma (2025)** examined the growing relevance of Ayurveda-based dietary practices in contemporary nutrition. The review emphasized preventive healthcare, personalized nutrition, and the integration of traditional food wisdom with scientific evidence. The authors concluded that Ayurveda-based food systems can improve health outcomes while promoting sustainable dietary behavior.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the principles of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) on food and their role in promoting holistic well-being by integrating physical health, mental wellness, and spiritual balance.
2. To analyze the contribution of traditional Indian food practices toward environmental sustainability through responsible consumption, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices.

4. Conceptual Framework

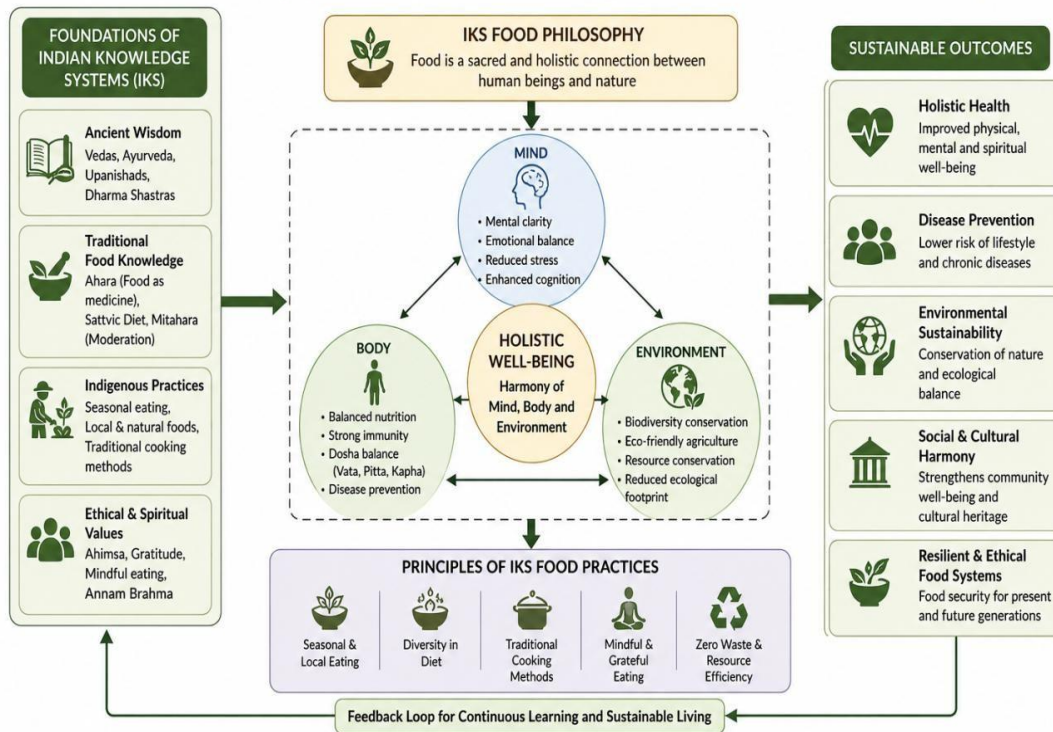
1. Foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

The framework begins with the Foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems, which represent the traditional knowledge base that guides Indian food philosophy. Ancient wisdom from the Vedas, Ayurveda, Upanishads, and Dharma Shastras provides scientific and ethical principles for healthy living. Traditional food knowledge emphasizes the concept of Ahara (food as medicine), Sattvic diet, and Mitahara (moderation in eating). Indigenous food practices such as seasonal eating, local food consumption, and traditional cooking methods promote health while preserving biodiversity. Ethical and spiritual values like Ahimsa (non-violence), gratitude, mindful eating, and Annam Brahma (food is sacred) encourage responsible consumption and respect for nature.

Conceptual Framework

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2. IKS Food Philosophy

The second component presents the Indian Knowledge Systems Food Philosophy, which considers food as a sacred link between human beings and nature. It emphasizes that food is not merely a source of nutrition but also a means of achieving physical health, mental balance, spiritual growth, and environmental sustainability. This philosophy forms the conceptual foundation that integrates all dimensions of holistic well-being.

3. Holistic Well-being (Core Component)

At the center of the framework is Holistic Well-being, which represents the harmonious interaction among the Mind, Body, and Environment. The three dimensions are interdependent, indicating that improvements in one dimension positively influence the others.

Mind: Healthy dietary practices enhance mental clarity, emotional stability, cognitive functioning, and stress management.

Body: Balanced nutrition strengthens immunity, maintains the balance of the three Doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), and helps prevent diseases.

Environment: Sustainable food practices conserve biodiversity, encourage eco-friendly agriculture, reduce ecological footprints, and protect natural resources.

4. Principles of Indian Food Practices

Based on the interaction between mind, body, and environment, Indian Knowledge Systems promote several sustainable food practices. These include seasonal and local eating, dietary diversity, traditional cooking methods, mindful and grateful eating, and zero-waste resource management. These principles encourage healthy lifestyles while minimizing environmental degradation and preserving cultural heritage.

5. Sustainable Outcomes

The adoption of Indian food principles leads to several positive outcomes. These include holistic health, improved physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, disease prevention through healthy dietary habits, environmental sustainability by conserving natural resources and biodiversity, social and cultural harmony through the preservation of traditional food practices, and the development of resilient and ethical food systems that ensure food security for present and future generations.

6. Feedback Loop

The feedback loop at the bottom of the framework indicates that sustainable outcomes reinforce traditional knowledge and food practices. As individuals experience improved health and environmental benefits, they continue to adopt and transmit Indian food traditions to future generations. This continuous cycle strengthens cultural preservation, ecological sustainability, and holistic well-being.

5. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design based entirely on secondary data to examine the role of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) on foods as a holistic philosophy connecting the mind, body, and environmental sustainability. A descriptive approach is appropriate because it systematically describes and interprets the concepts, principles, and practices of Indian food traditions without manipulating any variables. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how traditional Indian food knowledge contributes to holistic health and sustainable development.

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data collected from authentic and credible academic resources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, books on Ayurveda and Indian Knowledge Systems, government publications, reports of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of AYUSH, documents from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), research reports, conference proceedings, policy documents, and other reliable online databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories.

The collected literature was systematically reviewed and organized using thematic content analysis. Information relating to the principles of Indian food philosophy, Ayurvedic dietary concepts, traditional food practices, ethical values, environmental sustainability, and holistic well-being was classified into meaningful themes. The data were interpreted through qualitative analysis to identify the interrelationship between food, mental health, physical health, spiritual values, and ecological conservation.

To enhance the quality of interpretation, comparative analysis of traditional Indian food practices and contemporary sustainability concepts was also undertaken. The findings are presented in a descriptive manner through conceptual explanations, tables, diagrams, and a conceptual framework to provide a clear understanding of the relationship between Indian Knowledge Systems, food practices, and sustainable development. The study emphasizes the relevance of indigenous knowledge in promoting healthy lifestyles, environmental conservation, and resilient food systems, thereby offering valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, educators, and practitioners interested in sustainable food philosophies.

Findings

1. Indian Knowledge Systems promote holistic well-being: The study found that IKS views food as a means of achieving physical health, mental balance, spiritual growth, and overall well-being rather than merely fulfilling nutritional requirements.
2. Ayurvedic dietary principles support preventive healthcare: Concepts such as Sattvic food, Mitahara (moderation in eating), and the balance of the three Doshas contribute significantly to disease prevention and healthy living.
3. Traditional food practices encourage environmental sustainability: Seasonal and locally available foods, biodiversity conservation, eco-friendly agriculture, and minimal food processing reduce environmental degradation and promote sustainable food systems.
4. Ethical and spiritual values influence responsible food consumption: Principles such as Ahimsa, gratitude, mindful eating, and Annam Brahma encourage ethical consumption, reduce food wastage, and strengthen the relationship between humans and nature.

5. Indigenous knowledge complements modern sustainability goals: The principles of Indian Knowledge Systems closely align with global sustainable development objectives, including responsible consumption, good health, climate action, and environmental conservation.
6. Traditional knowledge strengthens cultural continuity: Indigenous culinary traditions and intergenerational knowledge transfer preserve cultural heritage while promoting healthy dietary practices.
7. Integration of IKS with modern science enhances food security: Combining traditional food wisdom with contemporary nutrition and agricultural science can improve food quality, public health, and long-term sustainability.

Suggestions

1. Educational institutions should incorporate Indian Knowledge Systems and traditional food philosophy into school and higher education curricula to promote awareness of healthy and sustainable dietary practices.
2. Policymakers should encourage the cultivation and consumption of indigenous crops, seasonal foods, and traditional agricultural methods through supportive policies and awareness campaigns.
3. Greater collaboration between Ayurveda, nutrition science, environmental studies, and public health should be promoted to develop evidence-based sustainable food models.
4. Public awareness programmes should emphasize mindful eating, balanced diets, food ethics, and waste reduction to encourage responsible consumption.
5. Scientific research should validate traditional Indian dietary practices using modern nutritional and medical approaches to enhance their global acceptance.
6. Local food systems and traditional culinary knowledge should be preserved through community participation, documentation, and cultural initiatives.
7. Sustainable agricultural practices based on Indian Knowledge Systems should be promoted to improve biodiversity conservation, soil health, and climate resilience.

Future Scope of the Study

1. Future studies may conduct empirical research to examine the relationship between Indian food practices and physical, mental, and emotional well-being using primary data.
2. Comparative studies can be undertaken to evaluate Indian Knowledge Systems alongside other indigenous food systems across different countries.
3. Research may investigate the effectiveness of Ayurvedic dietary practices in preventing lifestyle diseases through clinical and longitudinal studies.
4. Future researchers can explore the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems with modern nutrition, food technology, and sustainable agriculture.
5. Studies may assess the influence of traditional food practices on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to health, responsible consumption, and climate action.
6. Region-specific studies may examine indigenous food traditions across different states of India and their contribution to sustainable development.
7. Interdisciplinary research involving food science, public health, environmental science, sociology, and cultural studies can further strengthen the understanding of Indian food philosophy.

6. Conclusion

Indian Knowledge Systems present a comprehensive and sustainable philosophy of food that integrates physical health, mental well-being, ethical values, spiritual consciousness, and environmental responsibility. Unlike conventional nutritional approaches that primarily focus on dietary components, the Indian perspective recognizes food as a vital element that connects individuals with society, culture, and nature. Traditional concepts such as Sattvic food, Mitahara, seasonal eating, biodiversity conservation, and mindful consumption demonstrate the scientific and

ecological relevance of indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges such as lifestyle diseases, food insecurity, and environmental degradation. The study highlights that the principles of Indian food philosophy are closely aligned with the objectives of sustainable development by promoting responsible consumption, ecological balance, and holistic well-being. Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems with contemporary scientific research and public policy can contribute to healthier populations, resilient food systems, and sustainable environmental management. Therefore, revitalizing and preserving traditional food wisdom is essential for achieving long-term human well-being and sustainable development.

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