Principles of Indian Knowledge System for Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development

Shivangi Dikshit*[1] and Nancy Puri [2]

[1] Research Scholar, International Relations, School of Liberal Arts, Noida International University, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, School of Liberal Arts, Noida International University, Uttar Pradesh, India
shivangidikshitir@gmail.com and nancy.puri@niu.edu.in

Abstract. The United Nations has established 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed at providing solutions and justice across social, ecological, and governance issues. This paper will explore the Indian Knowledge System and its application in the Sustainable Development Goals by analysing principles such as *Dharma, Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Gram Swaraj, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. These principles of the Indian Knowledge System are profoundly connected to the Sustainable Development Goals and present insights into how Indian philosophy complements and can be applied to modern development models in areas including environmental protection, social justice, inclusive governance, and global partnerships. This study will employ the qualitative methodology for an in-depth examination of these principles. This study will investigate how these principles, while being deeply embedded in ancient philosophical traditions, present an adaptable and context-driven framework that can address the emerging global challenges. The analysis of these principles underlines that by integrating the Indian Knowledge System into national and global development goals, a culturally grounded and ethically robust development can be achieved. This study concludes that the union of the principles of the Indian Knowledge System with the Sustainable Development Goals may reinforce global sustainability efforts by embedding ethics, community participation, and non-violence into the contemporary world order.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, Sustainable Development Goals, *Dharma, Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Gram Swaraj and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

1 Introduction

For years, the world has been facing numerous challenges such as inequality, hunger, poverty, inefficient use of natural resources; further poor governance systems reinforces these challenges. This creates burden on the global community by affecting the world peace and development. To address these challenges, in 2015 the United Nations has announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) can contribute to achieving these goals. Before

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understanding the role of IKS in attains the SDGs, it is essential to discuss the scope and structure of these goals (United Nations, n.d.; Grosset & Sharmiladevi, 2019).

1.1 Sustainable Development Goals

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development) outlined the meaning of sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The SDGs take inspiration from the principles of the Brundtland Report (United Nations, n.d.; Grosset & Sharmiladevi, 2019). In 1992, in the Rio Earth Summit, recognized that all global challenges are interconnected and require collective action and participation from all the sections of the global community to attain sustainable development (Grosset & Sharmiladevi, 2019). It was during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, that the process of developing these goals was started (Grosset & Sharmiladevi, 2019). The SDGs are an evolution of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that were eight development goals established by the UN in 2000 and were to be achieved by 2015. After the end of the MDGs, the SDGs were adopted (Chakradhar & Pisupati, 2018).

In 2015, the UN adopted 17 SDGs that set several targets that we have to achieve by 2030. Since then, these goals have been a global priority. The SDG lay down a road map that aims to accomplish a sustainable future for the planet. Together, the SDGs deal with the utmost global issues. Each of the seventeen goals are dedicated to a specific global issue, further these goals are divided into sub-goals, giving a clear breakdown of the targets that need to be achieved. While the SDGs are global agenda, their success depends on localized and community-driven initiatives (Chakradhar & Pisupati, 2018). All the signatories are supposed to coordinate, monitor, and conduct regular assessment of the policies that would aid in achieving SDGs. Subsequently, several countries have reassessed their policies and reallocated these funds to attain the SDGs (Medina-Hernández et al., 2023).

Table 1. List of Sustainable Development Goals

No. of the SDG	Goal
SDG 1	No Poverty
SDG 2	Zero Hunger
SDG 3	Good Health and Well-being
SDG 4	Quality Education
SDG 5	Gender Equality
SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation
SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy
SDG 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities

SDG 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption and Production
SDG 13	Climate Action
SDG 14	Life Below Water
SDG 15	Live on Land
SDG 16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals

Source- https://sdgs.un.org/goals

John Galtung explains the relationship between peace and sustainability and describe them as mutually reinforcing. He explains the concepts of negative peace (absence of direct conflict) and positive peace (presence of justice, equality, stable institutions and governance). It is well established that for peace to sustain there is a need to address issues of inequality, corruption, weak governance and resource scarcity. For peace to sustain and reduce conflicts, it is essential to have an equitable distribution of resources, gender empowerment, mitigation of climate change and reforms to reduce poverty and hunger. Therefore, attaining the SDGs will promote peace and establish a stable global society (Adkins, 2025).

For instance, an ongoing conflict may destabilize the progress made in reducing poverty, expanding educational opportunities, increasing health facilities and protecting the environment. This reflects that peace is necessary for achieving development goals. It is necessary to mention that any development plans that are indifferent to social inequalities, local grievances and lack government efficiency can generate instability in the society (Bradford, 2019; Adkins, 2025; Uexkull & Buhaug, 2025).

As the SDG address the issues of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and encourage peace and partnership, they indirectly prevent the factors/grievances that may lead to conflict and instability in the world (Carius et al., 2018). Any progress made in attaining the SDGs will also influence the global geopolitics. For example, the adoption of green and clean energy, will affect the energy geopolitics. Moreover, sharing and sustainable use of transboundary natural resources may promote cooperation and reduce conflict over natural resources (Carius et al., 2018). Therefore, the SDGs closely align to geopolitical issues of peace, stability and global cooperation. Further, the SDGs recognize that any development must create a balance among three interconnected pillars i.e. economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity (Grosset & Sharmiladevi, 2019; Bhagat, n.d.).

In spite of global commitment to the SDGs, the progress made in achieving these goals has been uneven, fragmented and culturally disconnected. This fragmentation I visible in India's domestic SDG performance. The NITI Aayog India Index 2023-24 reveals a significant gap in the composite SDG scores between the highest-performing state (Uttarakhand and Kerala, 79 points) and the lower-performing state (Bihar, 57 points). This difference is visible despite both the states operating under the same national policy framework (NITI Aayog, 2024; Sharma et al., 2025). State that rank

highest, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, are those with long tradition of community-based governance, ecological stewardship and participatory institutions rooted in IKS. This suggests that the gap in SDG performance is not merely a resource or infrastructure questions, but also a cultural and governance one (Sharma et al., 2025).

Democratic institutions and participatory governance play a significant role in achieving the goals, while mere administrative projects lead to lower rate in SDG outcomes (Glass & Newig, 2019). Fragmented approach towards SDGs often undermine long-term outcomes, whereas, integrated and participatory improve SDG performance (Sorooshian, 2024). Sustainable development is not a purely administrative and technical project but also embedded in governance culture, institutional responsibility, and social responsibility as well as participation (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Gupta, 2025). This indicates that traditional knowledge systems, which have sustained communities for decades can also support in achieving the SDGs. For years, the traditional knowledge have integrated governance, social welfare, and environment under a single roof. The IKS is one such repository of wisdom that can provide us with several means to achieve SDGs. The IKS presents a framework that aligns traditional practices with the global agenda of creating resilience, equity and sustainability (Sharma et al., 2025, Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025).

The knowledge, practices, principles and traditions that emerged out of Indian sub-continent are together known as IKS. The IKS includes various disciples including philosophy, spirituality, science, and arts. Due to its integrated approach, the IKS is significant for achieving the SDG. As the IKS is interdisciplinary in nature, it can be meaningful in addressing issues in the field of healthcare, environment protection, promotion of peace and justice, and in encouraging sustainable development (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025).

1.2 Research Methodology

Given the holistic nature of IKS and the interconnected challenges addressed by SDGs, the objective of this paper is to examine the relevance of IKS to development and sustainability. This paper will therefore analyse the application of the principles of IKS such as *Dharma, Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Gram Swaraj and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* that provide guidance for ethical and sustainable life. The paper will employ a qualitative methodology. The paper will rely on secondary data such as academic literature, policy briefs, UN reports, think tank publications and other web resources. This approach will allow for a comprehensive synthesis of policy perspectives and academic debates. To achieve its objectives the paper will answer the following research question:

- How can the Indian Knowledge System contribute to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals?

The paper will further answer two sub-questions:

- What is the relationship between peace and sustainable development?
- What local practices exist in India that help in localizing the SDGs?

The paper will also discuss examples from India where we can see the principles of IKS being adopted in promoting peace and sustainable development. In the end, this paper will provide a deeper understanding of IKS relevance to the contemporary challenges.

2 Indian Knowledge System

The IKS is rooted in Vedic literature, the Upanishads, Philosophical Schools, and diverse spiritual practices. An interdisciplinary approach includes domains like philosophy, science, mathematics, music and literature. Hence, it is a pluralist system where multiple school of thoughts and practices co-exists. The IKS is cyclical in nature, meaning that time, knowledge, and order are reoccurring and regenerative. In IKS, knowledge is both reflective and experiential. The IKS recognizes that there can be multiple sources of knowledge including perception, inference, and authoritative testimony (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025).

Within IKS, knowledge (Jnana) is living, diffused and evolving. The IKS includes both theoretical disciplines and applied arts, there are 18 Vidayas and 64 Kalas, and knowledge is both reflective and functional assuring that learning reinforces intellectual refinement and possesses social utility. The IKS includes a vast range of knowledge and traditions including Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vastu Shastra (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairanar, 2025). In IKS knowledge spreads through oral teaching system, where knowledge is disseminates through mnemonic and dialogical practices. This has permitted continuity, flexibility in interpretation, and inter-generational transmission (Kapoor 2005; Khainar, 2025).

The IKS offers a holistic framework of understanding reality, human life, and cosmos. The principles of IKS aim to create a balance between material and spiritual aspects of life, as well as between individual development and social responsibility. IKS teaches ways to preserve the nature and gives community-driven solutions (Timane & Wandhe, 2024; Dubey, 2025). IKS gives a framework for individual conduct and governance structure. The main goal of IKS is achieving liberation of self from one's own limitations and achieve power over oneself. It consists of psychological foundations like Mahakosh and Trigunas, ethical frameworks Purusharthas, and structured knowledge systems like Para Vidya and Apara Vidya (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025). The IKS is a union of symbolic and non-hierarchical relationship between classical texts (Shastra) and folk traditions (Loka Parampara). The IKS functions on the principle of wellbeing of all or Lokasamgraha, which sees the

human, ecological and spiritual spheres, are deeply interconnected. The traditional Indian practices embeds a lifestyle that is in tune with the environment. For instance, the cow dung is upcycled and used as fertilizer and a source of fuel, creating zero waste. This resonates with SDG 12 promoting responsible consumption and production (Sheikh, 2025).

The IKS does not compartmentalize social goals but considers justice, welfare, and harmony as interdependent. As IKS includes both theories and practices; its teachings can be applied to achieve the SDGs such as eradication of poverty, offering good health, promoting inclusive growth (Kapoor, 2005; Sheikh, 2024; Timane &Wadhe, 2024). Further, the mutual relationship between peace and sustainable development necessitates a need for not treating each of the SDGs as separate goals. For instance, peace, intersects with gender equality, inclusive growth, and institutional accountability, it stresses that peace functions across all SDGs and is necessary for achieving the SGDs by 2030 (Bradford, 2019; Adkins, 2025; Uexkull & Buhaug, 2025; Timane & Wandhe, 2024). Pramanick and Mete (2024), analysed the contribution of IKS in achieving the SDGs. They focused on SDG 1 and SDG 3. They argued in their paper that, traditional practices like organic farming, handicrafts, handloom weaving, and community-based economic models promote self-reliance and help in reducing poverty (Pramanick & Mete, 2024).

2.1 Integration of Indian Knowledge System and Sustainable Development Goals

The teachings of Indian scholars such as Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore found their roots in the IKS. The teachings of both the scholars resonates with the framework of SDGs. Swami Vivekananda preached divinity and equality of all individuals, which aligns with SDG 10 dedicated to reducing inequalities, SDG 16 that promotes peace among the global communities. He also emphasized education that is dedicated to build consciousness and emancipation of the larger masses (Das & Bag, 2025). The teachings of Rabindranath Tagore promoted humanistic internationalism and global cooperation. He further promoted nature-based education that preaches sustainability and ecological consciousness among all (Das & Bag, 2025). Together, their teachings reflect that sustainability living has been embedded in Indian culture for decades.

Among the vast reservoir of wisdom in IKS, there are five principles namely, Dharma, Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Gram Swaraj, and Vasdhaiya Kutumbakam, that can provide us with a framework to achieve the SDGs. These principles integrate values such as moral responsibility, inclusive welfare, ecological restrain, participatory governance, and global cooperation. Together, these principles present an operational framework for sustainable development.

Across India, there are several ways and practices through which these principles of IKS are applied in the daily lives and livelihood. After the launch of SDGs in 2015,

India has embedded the 2030 Agenda into its governance and development models. The NITI Aayog is the main coordinating body in India that is dedicated to aligning and monitor government efforts with the SDGs at national, state, and local level. India also releases SDG India Index and National Indicator Framework to track and monitor progress to make results transparent and comparable, encouraging a healthy competition across the country (Gupta, 2025).

Table 2. Four Pillars of SDG Localisation in India

Pillar	**IKS Principle**
Creating Institutional Ownership	Dharma and Gram Swaraj
Establishing a Robust Review and Monitoring System	Dharma and Gram Swaraj
Developing Capacities for Integrating SDGs in Planning and Monitoring	Sarvodaya and Ahimsa
Promoting a "Whole-of-Society" Approach	Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Sarvodaya

Source - The Indian Model of SDG Localisation, NITI Aayog, 2022.

The 2022 report of the NITI Aayog, *The Indian Model of SDG Localisation*, presents a four-pillar. These pillars provide the structural foundation of India's approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda. These pillars collectively reflect the mechanisms through which global goals are translated into local action. These pillars align with the principles of IKS. This suggests that India's SDG architecture draws implicitly from civilisational traditions. Some of the IKS traditions have been into practice for decades, others have been modernized to adapt to contemporary challenges. The core principles of SDGs such as balance, inclusivity and well-being are indispensable part of IKS. The paper will now discuss some of the traditions that practiced and can support in achieving the SDGs.

- Dharma

The principle of Dharma refers to a practice that maintains social harmony and moral responsibility. It includes fulfilment of duty, maintaining justice and righteousness, and ethical conduct. The principle of Dharma not only provides a framework for individual conduct but also a governing code for the society. As a value-based approach, IKS teaches that material advancement (Arth) must be complemented by ethical responsibility (Dharma) and align with collective welfare of the society (Timane & Wandhe, 2024; Dubey, 2025). The principle of Dharma teaches balance and restrains in the pursuit of material goals and positions development as a moral and social obligation. Hence, Dharma aligns with SDG 16 and SDG 12 making sustainable development a moral and social responsibility (Mehrotra, 20205).

A concrete example of this principle is visible in the practice of preserving the scared groves. The scared groves are community-protected forests preserved and protected through religious and cultural norms. The protection of these trees is not any enforced law but through moral and ecological responsibility of the community (Bhagat, n.d.; Xess & Nayyar, 2025). The preservation of groves shows Dharma's emphasis on righteous actions and sustained conduct. This practice based on Dharma also aligns with SDG 15 and SDG 13 as it encourages protection of life on and below earth. Here, protection of environment comes from social responsibility and has become a life practice. By framing protection as a moral duty Dharma, ensure that natural resources are wisely managed and rooted in accountability and restrain (Bhagat, n.d.; Nayyar, 2025).

Further, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandates the integration of IKS into Indian education system. According to NEP, IKS needs to be integrated in schools and higher education curriculum. This includes integration in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, and environmental ethics. The NEP encourages interdisciplinary studies and research to promote IKS. This policy aligns with SDG 4 with its emphasis on inclusive, culturally relevant, and lifelong learning systems. The integration of IKS in curriculum encourages duty, moral reasoning, and responsible citizenship. Hence, education is used to embed social obligation and accountability (Dutta 2025; Xess & Nayar, 2025; Kumar, 2025).

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's initiative, Dharma Life, highlights practices where Dharma can be implemented in modern life and can help in attaining multiple SDGs. For example, in the state of Uttarakhand, female farmers receive solar dryers. Farmers use these dryers to process turmeric, rosemary and lemongrass. This way the farmers are able to sell a new product through a sustainable processing system. Through this system, the farmers are able to expand their profits and gain higher returns. This practice thoroughly aligns with SDG 1 and SDG 8. Similarly, women are being trained to use solar lanterns and other solar products instead of kerosene-based products. By promoting the use of solar energy, the community practices SDG 7 and SDG 13 (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy).

Another example where Dharma is applied is of Khadur Sahib. The Nishan-e-Sikhi Charitable Trust and Sikh Human Rights Groups mobilize communities to plant thousands of tresses and protect the environment. The group also spreads awareness.

- Sarvodaya

The principle of Sarvodaya means welfare of all. Mahatma Gandhi propagated this principle. Sarvodaya propagates universal progress. As Mahatma Gandhi promotes Sarvodaya, his idea takes inspiration from both Vedic and Jain-Buddhist traditions. Sarvodaya aligns with SDG 1 and SDG 10. As Sarvodaya promotes community-based economies and social justice, the principle also promotes SDG 8 and SDG 11. According to the principle of Sarvodaya, progress must be measured by evaluating the improvement in the lives of the weakest section of society. This way Sarvodaya

supports inclusive development and assures availability of resources for all (Wanden-Berghe, 2021; C.H. Kumar & Shiju, 2022).

In India, women have traditionally been custodian of seed preservation, herbal medicines, and marinating local biodiversity. As women were custodian of agricultural practices and medical knowledge, it ensured intergenerational transfer of sustainable techniques (Xess & Nayyar, 2025). Ancient scholars including Gargi and Maitreyi reflect that in ancient India women played a leading role in society, these traditional practices align with SDG 5 that supports gender equality.

Another example of fusion of IKS and SDG is in the efforts of IIT Roorkee. The institution works in parallel with the Centre for Indian Knowledge System and the AMRUT Centre of Urban Planning. The Centre for IKS conducts research in areas of Indian architecture, traditional settlement, and systematizing indigenous knowledge. Whereas the AMRUT Centre works on advance urban planning, creating water-sensitive urban design, blue-green infrastructure, and climate resilient planning. The work of these institutions aligns to multiple SDGs such as SDG 6, SDG 11, and SDG 13. The work of these institutions promotes nature-based solutions and systems where traditional practices are not merely replicated but conceptually applied according to present-day challenges. This shows how principles of IKS can be applied to SDG (AMRUT Centre of Urban Planning, n.d.).

Another example is of Johads and Baolis ancient water harvesting structures that were developed in semi-arid regions like Rajasthan and Gujarat. They were constructed to collect rainwater. These stepwells allowed groundwater recharge and assured that there is access to water even during dry seasons. These infrastructures were maintained by local communities presenting an integrated approach towards ecology and society. The system of Johads and Baolis align with SDG 6 and SDG 11, highlighting ways of community-based practices and participatory governance model for water-management. Such examples show that in IKS, sustainability is an embedded practice, assuring that resources are managed and equally distributed (Ray et. al., 2026; Kumar, 2025; Bhagat, n.d.; Xess & Nayyar, 2025).

In Nasik Maharashtra, the PRAYAS organization for Sustainable Development shows the principle of Sarvodaya through its initiatives. Since, 1997, the organization runs multiple initiative in areas of healthcare, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and environmental initiatives. Its women collectiveness that highlights the principle of welfare for all. Through its initiatives that strengthen women's economic agency and social leadership, the organization practices SDG 5 and SDG 6. All these practices show that SDG can be achieved and continued in long-term when they are locally designed and inclusive (Prayas, n.d.).

- Ahimsa

Mahatma Gandhi spread the principle of Ahimsa or non-violence during the struggle of Indian independence from the British rule. In IKS, the principle of IKS moves

beyond the idea of avoidance of physical violence and includes no harm in the form of thought, speech, and actions. Ahimsa relates to multiple SDGs like SDG 3, SDG 13, SDG 15, and SDG 16. This principle not only teaches the conduct among individuals but also promotes restrain in consumption and respect for biodiversity (C.H. Kumar & Shiju, 2022). In India, there are several practices, which reflect the principle of Ahimsa and reflect how Ahimsa promotes peace and co-existence.

One such incident is the Chipko Movement. This movement shows how Ahimsa is practiced addressing present-day issues. The movement protested to prevent deforestation in a non-violent manner. The rural communities led the Chipko Movement, particularly the women. The people protested against the discriminate use of forest resources that would cause a high environmental impact. The movement was non-violent and practiced Ahimsa as the people prevented the cutting of forests. It demonstrated that the idea of peaceful co-existence applies to both humans and environment (Prasanthi, 2025; Shroff, 2025).

In Meghalaya, the communities living in Khasi and Jaintia have constructed "living root bridges" (Jingkieng Jri) with aerial roots of the Ficus elastica trees across the rivers and streams. In this practice, for over 15-30 years, the roots are interwoven and strengthened to form functional and self-reinforcing bridges that can withstand harsh weather. This practice is an ecological engineering rooted in long-term environmental conservation. Here, local communities have collaborated with the ecosystem to develop infrastructure. Through this practice, knowledge of root growth, soil conditions and seasonal cycles is passed through generation. The nature has become a part of the system rather than being an object of exploitation (United Nations Development Programme, 2024).

The Vrishaurveda attributed to Surapala (1000 C.E.), a classical Indian text on science of plant life. The teachings of this text can be applied into contemporary sustainability practice. The Vrikshayurveda offers guidance on seed selection, organic fertilizers, soil fertilization, irrigation techniques, and plant disease management. Recently, efforts have been made to adopt these practices into modern farming system. In Uttarakhand, the application of these techniques reduced dependence on chemical fertilizers, the soil texture improved and enhanced crop yield. This aligns with SDG 2, SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 15 (Kumar, 2019; Kotecha & Pandey, 2025). In both these cases environment is treated as a partner rather than a resource that is meant to be exploited.

- Gram Swaraj

Mahatma Gandhi also promoted the principle of Gram Swaraj or village-level governance. It is a framework for decentralized democracy in which the power to make decisions lies at the grass root level. This principle promotes participatory decision-making, economic autonomy, trusteeship and cooperation among the communities. The principles of Dharma and Sarvodaya also incorporates with Gram Swaraj. This system aligns with SDG 6, SDG 11, and SDG 12 (Vispute, 2025).

In India, the ground-level application of SDGs can be seen in the Gram Panchayat. The institution of Gram Panchayat was constitutionally mandated part of rural self-governance under 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The Gram Panchayat is an implementation agency of the government and a planning body that is responsible for economic development and social justice at rural level. The Gram Panchayat through the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDG) makes the development plans. These plans are supposed to include local priorities with available financial resource and ensures that the development planning are not just top-down directives but priorities the need of the rural communities (Chakradhar & Pisupati, 2018).

This system of governance aligns with SDG 16. Moreover, the planning system helps in attaining SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 5, and SDG 6. Hence, the Gram Panchayat at local level works as a mechanism to achieve the SDGs. For instance, in Kerala SDGs are localized through Local Self Government Institutions. The Kerala Institute of Local Administration supports these institutions. Based on the needs of the local communities, 10 SDGs are prioritized in Kerala. This allows the Gram Panchayat to meet SDG goals according to the local priorities. The training of elected representatives, along with the use of SDG dashboard for monitoring progress, enables positive outcomes (The Kerala Institute of Local Administration, n.d.).

In Andhra Pradesh, the Apatani Community practices indigenous wet rice cultivation that blends paddy farming with fish rearing in the valley regions. This system uses bamboo and earthen channels of networks that are used to regulate the flow of water throughout the terraced fields. As recycling continues, it naturally makes the land fertile. This system resonates with SDG 12, SDG 13 and SDG 15. It shows that locally grounded practices are resource efficient and can help in achieving the SDGs (Ramakrishnan, 1990).

Similarly, in Tamil Nadu an ancient tank irrigation system is used to improve water management systems (Sheikh, 2024). Even in Karnataka, Biligiri Rangswamy Temmple Wildlife Santury, the Soliga tribe practices-controlled ground burning, shifting cultivation with fallow cycles, and biodiversity conscious food provisions for wildlife. In Ladakh, traditional agriculture depends on crop rotation, livestock integration, and organic manure. All these practices give priority to soil health, water efficiency and long-term productivity. These practices are based on intricate observations and ecological experiences (Nayak & Lonkar, 2024).

- Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

The principle of Vasudhaiya Kutumbakam means, “The world is one family.” This principle blurs the distinction between “mine” and “others” and promotes interconnectedness among all beings. As the principle resonates with SDG 13, SDG 16 and SDG 17, the teachings of this principle are essential in addressing transboundary challenges such as climate change, pandemics and inequalities (Rai, 2025).

When India conducted the G20 event, the motto was One Earth, One Family, One Future. This motto was inspired by the principle of Vasudhaiya Kutumbakam, the world

is one family that promotes ecological balance and welfare for all (Kumar, 2025). Another contribution of IKS to the world is Yoga. The celebration of International Yoga Day highlights that IKS can contribute to global mental and physical health. According to this principle, the world is one large family, including our nature. Therefore, any harm to the environment will impact every living being. Vasudhaiya Kutumbakam resonates with SDG 13, SDG 14, and SDG 15. It makes global cooperation as a moral duty for the global community rather than a strategic necessity (Malik, 2023).

As this principle promotes global cooperation and responsibility for a better world, India has launched the AYUSH Mission to spread Ayurveda-based best practices for better lifestyle and health. Teachings of Ayurveda and Yoga focus on preventive healthcare and holistic well-being. It connects physical health with mental health along with the environmental factors. The insights from Charak Samhita and Sushruta Samitha promotes a balanced diet, hygiene, and mental welfare, reflecting the aims of SDG3 (Kumar, 2023).

Further, the principle of Vasudhaiya Kutumbakam reflects in India's humanitarian assistance during any global crises. During COVID-19 pandemic, under the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative, India supplied medical supplies to several countries. India also provided humanitarian aid and disaster relief during natural calamities around the world (Chawla, 2021). For instance, India conducted Operation Dost in 2023, in this operation India provided humanitrain aid to Turkey-Syria after a disastrous earthquake (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2023). Sri Lanka also received financial aid from India when they were under economic crises. This shows that global engagement is not just a strategic engagement but also involves ethical and social responsibility. The principle promotes peace and solidarity among countries among countries and reduces tensions. India also played a critical role in including African Union in the G20 grouping. It highlighted that India follows the principle of Vasudhaiya Kutumbakam by reducing the global North-South divide and promotes cooperation and peace among distinct parts of the world (Bhattacherjee, 2023). These practices align with SDG 17 by promoting solidarity within the international community. This principle brings the countries together in addressing other issues that need collective action (Das & Bag, 2024).

As visible from the abovementioned cases, IKS is not just a reservoir of traditional practices but also provides governance frameworks, ecological ethics, resource management, and promote community-led responsibility. The IKS promotes sustainability as a part of the social norm and not just as a part of external regulation. Hence, IKS not only aligns with SDGs but also provides a foundational framework to localize the SDGs. Further, as peace is not just absence of conflict but also presence of stability, equality and justice, it can be said that sustainable development and peace are mutually reinforcing rather than distinct policy objectives.

3 Synthesis of Indian Knowledge System and Sustainable Development Goals: An Analysis

In their study of IKS and sustainable development across India, Sharma et al., observe that the relationship between IKS principles and SDG performance is examined through conceptual and secondary analysis rather than extensive empirical datasets. This reflects the broader nature of the field, where the influence of indigenous knowledge is embedded within cultural practices, community institutions and ecological values (Sharma et al., 2025). Across India, several practices reflect the influence of IKS. For instance, the case of Ralegan Siddhi in Maharastra shows the confluence of principles of Dharma, Sarvodaya, and Gram Swaraj. This village was chronically drought-prone which caused low agricultural productivity which led to people leaving the village for urban areas. But, with the collective efforts of the village community, the Ralegan Siddhi was able to achieve ecological and social renewal (Mishra, n.d.).

Sri. Anna Hazare led this task of addressing the issue of chronic drought. The village community established a watershed management system. This initiative reflected the principle of Dharma as a collective ethical duty and voluntary labour (sharmdan) for water conservation. The decision-making process through the Gram Sabha ensured inclusive participation and accountability showing the principles of Sarvodaya and Gram Swaraj (Sharma, 2025; Mishra, n.d.). This initiative addressed several SDG such as availability of clean water, protection of life on land, zero hunger, and establishment of strong institutions. This case shows that an initiative applying principles of IKS can address several SDGs.

Therefore, the idea of decentralised and community-based governance is based on civilizational principles. The principle of *Sarvodaya* implies collective upliftment resonates with the SDGs dedicated to poverty reduction, inequalities, and sustainable communities. The idea of *Dharma* promotes ethical governance devoted to justice and duty. Hence, when the panchayats priorities the marginalised communities, they ensure equitable distribution of resources and promote social justice. Lastly, the role of Gram Sabha eventually arises from the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj which envisioned self-reliance and self-governing villages where decision-making authority collaborates with the entire community (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025).

On the UN Sustainable Development Report 2025 published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, India ranked 99th among 166 countries with a score of 66.95. This marked India's first entry into the global top 100 highlighting an improvement in its 116th position in 2017 (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2025). At the domestic level, in the report by NITI Aayog SDG Index 2023-2024, recorded an overall growth with the score of 71, growth from the 2018 baseline score of 57, which was the first reference point for India's composite SDG

performance. (NITI Aayog, 2024). This dual improvement at both global and domestic stage can be attributed to the SDG localisation in India.

The SDG India Index 2023-2024 shows a pattern at the national-level performance. At the state level, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu and Goa rank among the top performers on the Indes, while states including Bihar and Jharkhand occupy the bottom positions. These positions correlates with the relative strength of community governance traditions across the country (NITI Aayog, 2024; Sharma et al., 2025). The data from the NITI Aayog report 2023-2024 shows that states with stronger governance systems, higher human development indicators, and superior environmental management have continuously performed better across the sustainability index (Sharma et al., 2025).

In their study, Sharma et al. (2025) used NITI Aayog SDG India index to evaluate the multidimensional sustainability performance across Indian states. Their findings suggests that sustainability outcomes in India are closely related to governance capacity, institutional effectiveness, and development investments. The study also shows that sustainability is multidimensional in nature (Sharma et al., 2025). Hence, progress in one sector is often constrained when environmental, social, or economic weakness persist simultaneously (Sharma et al. 2025). The relationship between IKS and SDG becomes significant when examined through governance and policy implementation. In their study, Sharma et al. link indigenous and traditional practices with contemporary SDG-oriented initiatives. Therefore, this suggests that the sustainability in India is not operating independently of IKS and several components of IKS are already present into contemporary governance systems (Sharma et al., 2025).

In India, peace and sustainability converge at local levels through culturally grounded practices. It is essential to acknowledge that SDG promotes positive peace. The mentioned cases in the paper highlight that when society promotes just governance, equal distribution of resources, environmental balance and practices social responsibility, they contribute towards peacebuilding (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025). The IKS provides the ethical framework that translates the SDG into daily life practices. When the development practices are aligned to the cultural values of a community, they are easy to implement and get larger support of the communities. Thus, the SDG get legitimacy, and the local communities participate in these initiatives voluntarily. The practices in India can be modified and shared with other countries facing similar issues. 16+ (Kapoor, 2005; Pramanick & Mete, 2024; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025)

Further, proper funding system is required for IKS-based plans for achieving the SDGs. The government institutions such as Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Ministry of Rural Development along with Niti Ayog should develop targeted budgets and support for conservation of community led practices. Financial support to culturally rooted practices will create and promote these practices eventually (Shroff, 2025). To integrate IKS and SDG it is essential to utilize digital

technology. Digital tools and applications such as Geographic Information System should be used to observe and monitor biodiversity and weather conditions for farming. Further the indigenous knowledge must be preserved digitally to assure that the ancient wisdom is not only preserved but an also be scaled to address the contemporary challenges (Khan & Gope, 2025).

The relevance of the IKS in the contemporary world lies in their ability to provide ethical, inclusive and sustainable approaches to development and peacebuilding. Principles of Ahimsa, Dharma, Sarvodaya, and Vasudhaiva Kuumbakam contribute to the achievement of SDG by promoting social harmony, environmental balance, inclusive welfare and international cooperation. The IKS approach focuses on collective well-being, moral responsibility, and harmony between humans and nature. These principles also offer practical contributions to global peacebuilding through non-violent conflict resolution, community participation, and the promotion of justice and cooperation. However, their successful implementation depends upon adapting these traditional philosophies to contemporary political, economic, and global realities.

While IKS provides wisdom that can be applied to address contemporary challenges it is essential that these concepts are principles are applied and customized according to the needs of the present. These ancient principles give a framework that can transform national interests into a collective action for universal welfare. It is essential to adopt an approach where IKS integrates with modern institutions, traditional knowledge with scientific support and local initiatives with ethical foundations. Further, it is essential to integrate IKS modern technology, particularly apply digital technology to achieve SDGs at a desirable pace and monitor the results. This will help in identifying gaps and weaknesses and monitor the overall progress made across the SDGs (Khan & Gope, 2025).

4 Conclusion

This study explored the significance of IKS in achieving SDG by analysing the principles of Dharma, Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Gram Swaraj and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. These principles not only give ethical guidance but also present practical frameworks that can be applied to achieve inclusive governance, social welfare and ecological balance. As a Vishwabandhu, India through its indigenous and traditional systems give the world a pathway to sustainability and peace. The relevance of IKS lies in its principles of cyclicality, embedded governance, and long-term ecological accountability (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Khairnar, 2025). As the IKS, is able to present localised solutions to the challenges in achieving SDG while maintaining their universality. The principles of IKS propagate development as a duty, such progress must prioritise the upliftment of all, promotes non-violence towards all living beings, assures participation even at the grassroot-level, and embed global solidarity (Chakradhar & Pisupati, 2018; Xess & Nayyar, 2025). The application of the principles mentioned in the paper are not the only principles that support SDGs. The vast pool of

IKS has several other concepts and principles that support sustainability and peace. It is essential to continue the research in the application of these principles in the contemporary world.

The study concludes that sustainable development and peace are mutually reinforcing. As IKS is, an integrated focused on the principles of justice, welfare, social responsibility and inclusivity, which are interconnected aspects of a society. This study argues that peace is not just a by-product of development but also a condition that is embedded with ethical, inclusive, participatory and environmental balanced system Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Gupta, 2025). The integration of indigenous principles in the contemporary policies can promote development that is sustainable and peace generating (Bradford, 2019; Adkins, 2025; Uexkull & Buhaug, 2025).

The idea of sustainable development in India is not an imported project. Rather, it is an integral part of civilization's ideas of ethical governance and community welfare, such as the Gram Panchayat becomes a mechanism where indigenous teachings align with global goals (Kapoor, 2005; Dubey, 2025; Gupta, 2025). Further, the integration of IKS under NEP 2020, and revival of traditional ecological practices shows how indigenous practices can support in achieving the SDGs. The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi that were inspired by traditional knowledge of the Indian culture favoured universal brotherhood and solidarity among all. It is essential that the government in India encourages the adaption of SDG through local practices (Wanden-Berghe, 2021; C.H. Kumar & Shiju, 2022).

The government must promote the integration of IKS in achieving SDG, however, for this to be effective it is essential that policies are announced that integrate the principles of IKS. The development policies must ensure that they are designed according to the SDGs. These policies must take inspiration from IKS, and the government must utilize the principle of IKS to publicize its policies (Sharma et al., 2025). Further, all this would require administrative and bureaucratic support that the marginalized section of society guarantees rights and participation. The convergence of IKS and SDG with the legal and constitutional support will produce better outcomes.

As the government applies proper mechanisms to monitor its progress, the data-driven and decentralized approach of India aligns with the ways contemporary challenges must be tackled and offers an ethical lens through which sustainability, justice, and collective welfare can be exercised. The government institutions have a crucial role in assuring that the SDG are encouraged and the principles of IKS are applied in the policies not just as a symbol.

It is essential for India to continue to integrate principles of IKS to achieve SDGs. India's trajectory to achieve SDG shows that sustainable development is most effective when it is rooted in indigenous wisdom. By integrating IKS into development goals, we can achieve culturally suitable resolutions that are designed according to the local needs of the societies. Implementation of IKS will not only resolve the contemporary

challenges but also lead to inclusive growth and welfare and contribute to long-term sustainability. The synthesis of IKS and SDG may present an enduring foundation for achieving both peace and sustainable development in the 21st century.

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