



# Basics of Human Rights and Indian Knowledge System

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## Abstract

Human rights are universally acknowledged as fundamental rights and liberties important for dignity and advancement of every individual. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted in 1948, gave the contemporary idea of human rights, but its origins may be found in ancient Indian cultures. Profound concepts about human dignity, equality, fairness, compassion, non-violence, and social welfare may be found in one of the world's oldest intellectual and spiritual traditions, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The ethical underpinnings contained in ancient Indian scriptures including the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Buddhist Tripitaka, Jain Agamas, Arthashastra, and the teachings of Bhakti and Sufi saints strongly align with contemporary human rights ideals. This article explores the fundamentals of human rights within the Indian Knowledge System with an emphasis on philosophical foundation, moral obligations, equality, governance, social justice, and general welfare. It also explores how these old ideas are to modern society and constitutional democracy applicable. The article makes the case that by integrating rights with duties, morality, and spiritual duty, the Indian Knowledge System provides a holistic understanding of human rights.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Constitution, Dharma, Human Rights, Indian Philosophy, and Indian Knowledge System.

## 1. Introduction

Human Rights are the fundamental freedoms and rights that every person is entitled to just by virtue of being human. These are indivisible, unalienable, and universal rights. The civic, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights that uphold human freedom and dignity are among them. Human rights are now safeguarded by international agreements, democratic institutions, and constitutional clauses. Human rights, however, are not a wholly contemporary idea. Justice, equality, compassion, and social duty were the focal points of the ethical and philosophical systems that ancient societies created. With its rich intellectual and spiritual legacy, India made a substantial contribution to concepts that are in line with modern human rights ideals.

The collected knowledge of Indian civilization in areas like philosophy, spirituality, ethics, government, education, medicine, mathematics, and social organization is embodied in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Vedic literature, Upanishads, Smritis, epics, Buddhist and Jain doctrines, Arthashastra, and later

Sufi and Bhakti traditions are all included. Together, these customs supported moral responsibility, non-violence, human welfare, peaceful cooperation, and respect for life. The strictly legalistic Western view of human rights is not the same as the Indian concept. The Indian tradition strikes a balance between rights and duties and moral obligations, whereas contemporary human rights rhetoric places an emphasis on individual entitlements. Dharma is a key concept in upholding social justice and peace. Therefore, Indian philosophy offers a comprehensive framework for comprehending societal welfare and human dignity.

Human rights are the inalienable rights of every human being, irrespective of caste, race, religion, nationality, gender, language, or socioeconomic standing. These rights shield people against oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and injustice. Universality, Equality, Inalienability, Freedom, dignity, justice, protection of individual personality are common characteristics of human rights. The Human Rights were acknowledged worldwide in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Indian traditions have previously established moral and spiritual precepts that represented the substance of these rights long before contemporary statements.

India was one of the ancient civilizations with strong traditions that upheld justice, equality, human dignity, and moral obligations. Human rights are reflected in philosophical, spiritual, social, and ethical principles found in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Values like compassion, non-violence, respect for all living things, and societal peace were emphasized in ancient Indian texts including the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Buddhist and Jain teachings, Arthashastra, and the teachings of saints and reformers. The fundamentals of human rights in the Indian Knowledge System, its philosophical underpinnings, historical origins, and applicability in contemporary society are all covered in this assignment.

## 2. Objective

The objectives of the current study is to understand the idea of human rights within the context of the Indian Knowledge System and assess its applicability in modern society. The main objectives of the study are

1. To understand human rights within the framework of Indian intellectual traditions.
2. To analyse how ancient Indian writings interpreted the principles like equality, justice, human dignity, and nonviolence.
3. To assess the applicability of Indian Knowledge System's to the advancement of contemporary human rights and constitutional principles.

## Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and descriptive research approach. Secondary sources of data are collected from books, research papers, journals, ancient Indian scriptures, constitutional documents, and published academic literature about human rights and the Indian Knowledge System are the main sources of data used in this study.

The study also uses an analytical methodology to examine the ethical and philosophical foundation of human rights that are ingrained in Indian customs.

### **The Indian Knowledge System**

The traditional knowledge that has been established in India over thousands of years by philosophical investigation, spiritual practices, scientific findings, and social experiences is referred to as the Indian Knowledge System. It consists of The Vedas, The Upanishads, Puranas, Epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, Jain and Buddhist literature Arthashastra, Dharmashastras, Ayurveda and yoga, Sufi and Bhakti customs.

Indian culture saw knowledge as a way to achieve moral behaviour, spiritual growth, and societal peace rather than only as intellectual information. The interdependence of people, society, the natural world, and the cosmos was stressed in the Indian worldview. As a result, the well-being of all living things became a primary goal. The well-known Sanskrit phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which translates to "the whole world is one family," captures the humanistic and global spirit of Indian culture. Likewise, the prayer "May all be happy, may all be free from illness" (Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah) shows respect for human dignity and universal wellbeing. Similarly, the prayer "May all be happy, may all be free from illness" (Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah) demonstrates concern for everyone's welfare and human dignity.

Even though Indian customs upheld high values, ancient civilization still had social issues including gender inequity, caste discrimination, and untouchability. As a result, it's critical to distinguish between real social actions and intellectual goals.

Through social movements, legislative changes, and education, modern India is still striving for justice and equality. To end prejudice and guarantee everyone's dignity, human rights knowledge is crucial.

### **Human Rights in Vedas**

One of the world's oldest literary and intellectual works is the Vedas. The moral, social, and spiritual lessons they offer uphold the fundamentals of human rights.

Unity and Equality. The Rig Veda places a strong emphasis on collaboration and social cohesion. As Samgacchadhvam Samvadadhvam means move and speak together.

This poem encourages respect for one another, unity, and group responsibility. Humanity is interrelated, according to Vedic philosophy. Instead of fighting and dominating one another, humans were urged to cooperate for the benefit of everyone. Every person's independence, dignity, and personal growth depend on human rights. Mutual respect and societal peace are encouraged by this teaching. They preached that each person had the same divine soul. This concept opposes discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, or class. All people are spiritually equal, according to the ideas of Atman (soul) and Brahman (universal reality). Rich concepts like equality, fairness, compassion, nonviolence, and universal welfare may be found in the Indian Knowledge System. The preservation of human values was aided by political philosophers, Buddhist and Jain teachings, Bhakti and Sufi traditions, and ancient texts. The humanitarian ethos of Indian culture is shown in ideas like Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Ahimsa, Dharma, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. In India, these lessons still serve as an inspiration for contemporary democratic ideals and constitutional rights.

The Indian Knowledge System provides important lessons for fostering social harmony, environmental preservation, tolerance, and peace in the modern world. Building a just, inclusive, and compassionate society thus requires a grasp of the fundamentals of human rights in the Indian Knowledge System. The Indian tradition shows respect for Human Dignity.

According to this tradition all people possess a divine nature, according to the Vedic religion. Since the soul was seen to be precious, every human being was respected. This spiritual equality encouraged moral responsibility for others and opposed extreme discrimination.

It also believes liberty of thought. The Vedas promoted discussion and scholarly investigation. Questioning and debate were never prohibited in Indian philosophy. Truth-seeking freedom was highly prized. Freedom of thought and speech is largely based on this intellectual openness.

### **Human Rights in the Upanishads**

The Upanishads also extended intellectual foundation of universalism and equality. According to the Upanishads Spiritual Equality implies, all living things have the same universal spirit. Human spiritual oneness is established by the notions of Atman and Brahman. The assertion Tat Tvam Asi (You are that) humanity. This ideology opposes discrimination on the basis of caste, class, gender, or place of birth and promotes equality.

The Upanishads emphasized self-realization and human dignity, which means spiritual liberation, self-awareness, and self-respect. Through education and moral behavior, people were urged to reach their full potential and achieve emancipation.

It was believed that wisdom and education were crucial for human growth. The goal of dharma was to create social justice and peace. It was expected of kings and rulers to govern based on morality and fairness. It was mentioned in the Mahabharata that Those who defend Dharma are protected by Dharma. This illustrates the idea that morality and justice are necessary for maintaining societal order

The ancient corpus of knowledge created in India over thousands of years is known as the Indian Knowledge System. Philosophy, literature, medicine, ethics, spirituality, science, government, and social values are all included. Indian customs have always placed a strong emphasis on human wellbeing and harmonious cohabitation. "The entire world is one family" is the meaning of the well-known Sanskrit phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam." This concept embodies the equality and fraternity of all people. "May all beings be happy" is also the meaning of the prayer "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah." These lessons demonstrate how Indian philosophy prioritized human dignity and the well-being of the group. According to Indian philosophy, every living thing has heavenly attributes. As a result, injustice, violence, and prejudice were viewed as immoral.

### **Dharma and Human Rights**

The concept of Dharma is essential to Indian philosophy. Dharma refers to morality, justice, ethics, and righteousness. It directs people to have moral and peaceful lives in society.

Due to the relationship between obligations and rights, the idea of Dharma and human rights are intimately interconnected. Ancient Indian philosophers held that when people carry out their responsibilities honestly, other people's rights are inevitably upheld.

According to Dharma, it was the responsibility of leaders to protect people's rights and well-being. At the same time, respecting people and upholding peace were citizens' duties.

It was society's responsibility to safeguard the vulnerable and poor. As a result, the Indian strategy concentrated on both performing obligations and asserting rights.

Gautama Buddha developed Buddhism, which vigorously championed equality and human ideals. Buddha welcomed members of his Sangha (community) from all socioeconomic backgrounds and rejected caste prejudice. Buddhism's core doctrines consist of:

Karuna's compassion, Ahimsa, or non-violence, Parity, Harmony, Honoring every living creature. Every person has the right to exist without pain or exploitation, according to Buddha. He promoted independence from dogmatic ideas and logical thought. Another milestone in the direction of gender equality was the acceptance of women into the Buddhist monastic order.

The Middle Path, a Buddhist concept, encourages harmonious cohabitation and balanced life.

The concept of human rights was also greatly influenced by Jainism. Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the ultimate virtue, according to Lord Mahavira. Respect for all living things, including plants, animals, birds, and insects, is taught in Jain philosophy. Among the key tenets of Jainism are: Ahimsa, or nonviolence Satya (truth), Asteya (not stealing), Aparigraha, or non-possession, Ankantavada (respect for other points of view). Tolerance and respect for differing viewpoints are encouraged by Anekantavada. In contemporary democracies that promote variety and freedom of expression, this idea is extremely pertinent.

### **Arthashastra and Human Rights**

The ancient Indian political theorists also acknowledged significance of justice and wellbeing. The duties of rulers to their subjects were covered in Kautilya's Arthashastra. Kautilya believed that the ruler should prioritize the happiness and well-being of the population.

The Arthashastra highlighted Citizens' protection, Equitable justice, Welfare of the economy, Preventing exploitation, Equitable application of the law. The well-known quote from Arthashastra states: "The king's happiness is found in the happiness of his subjects."

The welfare state notion, which is present in contemporary democracies, is reflected in this concept. Another significant example is Emperor Ashoka. Following the Kalinga War, Ashoka converted to Buddhism and advocated for welfare, religious tolerance, and peace. His decrees promoted justice, compassion, and tolerance for all faiths.

**Bhaktism and Sufism**

Bhakti and Sufi saints emphasized equality, love, and social peace during the Middle Ages. Religious intolerance and caste inequality were condemned by saints like Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Guru Nanak advocated for human equality and disapproved of societal class distinctions. Caste prejudice and religious dogma were both condemned by Kabir. Sufi saints advocated for brotherhood, love, and compassion for all people. These movements significantly contributed to the advancement of social justice and the defense of human dignity.

**Human Rights and the Indian Constitution**

The Indian Knowledge System's principles had a significant impact on both the Constitution and contemporary India. Following its independence, India embraced democratic ideals and ensured that every individual had access to fundamental rights.

The Indian Constitution stipulates the right to equality, the freedom right, the prohibition against exploitation, the right to religious freedom, cultural and educational rights, the right to remedies under the constitution. Additionally, the Directive Principles of State Policy advance public health, education, justice, and social welfare. The primary drafter of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, placed a strong emphasis on liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Indian philosophical traditions are closely linked to these ideals.

**Relevance**

In the contemporary world, the lessons of the Indian Knowledge System are still quite applicable. Violence, prejudice, intolerance, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic inequality are among the issues that modern society must deal with. Indian customs offer moral direction for Encouragement of Peace, Honoring Diversity, Preservation of the Environment, Harmony in Society, Living Ethically. As a result, the Indian Knowledge System may make a substantial contribution to international conversations about human rights.

**Conclusion**

Protecting human dignity, equality, and freedom requires respect for human rights. Even though the twentieth century saw the rise in popularity of contemporary human rights rhetoric, the Indian Knowledge System contains profound and age-old concepts that capture the core of human rights principles. Values like compassion, fairness, equality, non-violence, and universal welfare were stressed in the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhist and Jain teachings, Arthashastra, Bhakti, and Sufi traditions. The ideas of Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Ahimsa, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and Dharma continue to encourage moral behavior and societal peace.

The Indian perspective on human rights is distinct in that it strikes a balance between rights, obligations, and moral obligations. It acknowledges that genuine freedom and justice are only possible in a community built on moral behavior and respect for one another. The Indian Knowledge System provides important direction for building a peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable future in the modern world, when societies deal with violence, intolerance, environmental catastrophes, and inequality. In order to advance world



peace, justice, and human welfare, the study of human rights within the Indian Knowledge System is therefore both academically and socially significant.

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