

Reconceptualizing Indian Education Through Panchagni Vidya: A Dialectical Analysis of Privatization, Knowledge Hierarchies, And Epistemic Fragmentation

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ABSTRACT

The education system is not a static factor rather objectively it is based on continuous evolution and progress as the human history progresses. This study critically examines the transformation of the Indian education system in the post-liberalization era, with particular attention to privatization, the dominance of STEM disciplines, and the marginalization of arts and humanities. It argues that contemporary discourse is shaped by two parallel tendencies: the commodification of education through market logic and the mythologization of ancient knowledge systems through exaggerated claims of scientific completeness. Using a qualitative and dialectical methodology, the study engages Panchagni Vidya from the Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads as a process-oriented epistemological framework. The analysis demonstrates that the current crisis in Indian education is not merely structural but epistemic, rooted in fragmentation and loss of relational knowledge systems. The paper proposes that Panchagni Vidya offers a conceptual model for integrating scientific, philosophical, and ethical dimensions of learning. The study contributes to contemporary debates by presenting an alternative framework for holistic and interdisciplinary education grounded in Indian knowledge traditions without reducing them to technological claims.

Keywords: Commodification; Dialectics; Epistemology; Fragmentation; Holistic Education; Panchagni Vidya; Privatization; Transformation

INTRODUCTION

As we don't have enough information how the education system during Indus valley civilization, the Vedic corpus enunciates the social order and its economic requirements of the then social development and human needs. The highlighting framework which represents the literary development of mantra and other Vedic components is certainly left its diligent mark in India society. The transformation of the Indian education system in the contemporary period cannot be adequately understood without situating it within the broader socio-economic reconfiguration that followed the liberalization of 1991. This phase marks not merely a policy shift but a structural reorientation in which education increasingly came to be embedded within the logic of market rationality, global competitiveness, and technological instrumentalism. As state capacity encountered fiscal and administrative limits, private actors expanded rapidly, reconstituting education as a domain governed by efficiency, employability, and measurable outputs. This transition has profoundly altered the hierarchy of knowledge: STEM disciplines have come to dominate institutional priorities, while arts, humanities, and social sciences—once central to intellectual and civic formation, have been progressively marginalized. The resulting system is characterized by fragmentation, specialization, and a utilitarian orientation that often sidelines ethical, historical, and philosophical inquiry. This shift has not only altered institutional structures but also reshaped epistemic priorities, privileging measurable outputs over reflective and critical inquiry

Especially how the social media and digital platforms disseminate information without rational approach, without rational approach that throws the real Vedic epistemology, its history and the social necessity of the then Indian subcontinent put a dark layer than promoting its wisdom, However, alongside this structural transformation, another parallel phenomenon has gained prominence within the contemporary social and

ideological landscape: the reinterpretation and often misrepresentation of Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge systems in exaggerated, anachronistic terms. A growing discourse, both popular and political assertion that ancient Indian texts already contained fully विकसित (fully developed) forms of modern scientific and technological knowledge, which introduce a serious distortion into both historical understanding and educational discourse. In some narratives, it is further claimed that Western scientific advancements are merely appropriations or rediscoveries of this supposedly complete ancient knowledge base. Contemporary digital platforms frequently circulate decontextualized and unverified interpretations of Vedic knowledge systems. These representations often present symbolic, philosophical, or metaphysical insights as equivalent to fully developed modern scientific disciplines. In doing so, complex epistemological traditions are simplified into technological claims without methodological or historical grounding

As human history progresses it as well faces odds and difficulties. Every generation either in India or elsewhere they exchange knowledge and information through different means, It is an historical process and demonstrate how the human society progresses. Knowledge systems evolve through cumulative processes of transmission, adaptation, and reinterpretation across generations. This continuity reflects the dynamic nature of education as both a historical and social process. The teaching and learning are older platforms since human history begins despite its content and form and methods are changing from time to time. That what we called as education system. and A critical examination reveals that this mode of interpretation conflates symbolic, philosophical, and proto-scientific insights found in Vedic and Upanishadic texts with fully developed empirical sciences. In reality the knowledge is not geographical confine and one time science rather it is an evolutionary and cumulative seeking, development and transfer of knowledge from ancient to date that fosters the mankind to stand them as what we are now and at which threshold. For instance, cosmological reflections in texts like the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad indeed demonstrate sophisticated metaphysical inquiry into the nature of reality, causation, and the cosmos. Yet these should not be retroactively equated with modern disciplines such as aerospace engineering or digital computation, which are products of cumulative experimental methodologies, technological infrastructures, and institutionalized scientific practices developed over centuries. The Upanishadic tradition operates within a fundamentally different epistemological framework, one that privileges introspection, relationality, and ontological inquiry over empirical verification and technological application. Nothing as evolved or invented in a short period of time or a generation or to say a specific civilization like Vedic civilization. Nothing wrong in aspiring and expressing the great wisdom of Vedic corpus both as a seminal work of our ancient history and culture.

The misrepresentation of these traditions serves a dual ideological function. On one hand, it attempts to construct a narrative of civilizational completeness, suggesting that all forms of knowledge already existed in the past and therefore require only recovery rather than innovation. On the other, it aligns paradoxically with the same instrumental rationality that dominates the current education system: ancient texts are valued not for their philosophical depth or ethical insights but for their supposed utility as precursors to modern technology. In this sense, both the market-driven prioritization of STEM and the exaggerated claims about ancient scientific supremacy converge in reducing knowledge to technological output, albeit through different ideological routes. Thus, both tendencies converge in reducing knowledge to instrumental value, obscuring its philosophical and critical dimensions

This convergence produces a deeper dialectical contradiction within the Indian education system. This contradiction reflects a systemic imbalance between epistemic depth and institutional priorities. While the present institutional framework marginalizes arts and humanities in favor of technical disciplines, the cultural discourse simultaneously invokes classical texts as repositories of ultimate knowledge yet often strips them of their original philosophical context. The result is neither a genuine integration of traditional and modern knowledge systems nor a faithful preservation of either; instead, it creates a hybrid narrative that is both historically inaccurate and pedagogically unproductive.

In the early Vedic period, education was primarily informal, oral, and embedded within clan-based social structures. Knowledge transmission occurred through memorization of hymns, ritual practices, and practical skills relevant to a pastoral-agrarian society. The exchange of knowledge and education evolved through daily life and clan based and then proceed further through Gurukul and Asrama systems and in early days it was being

imparted to all the clan as it was the social necessity. While the civilization advances in the later phase of Rigvedic period the social system was transformed into varna system which was the base for the restriction of knowledge transformation to a limited varnas and varna hierarchy evolved and progressed therefrom.

As a part of social progress and historical requirement the Upanishad period open the vistas for Indian epistemology. It is precisely here that Panchāgni Vidyā, as articulated in the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, assumes critical relevance. Rather than viewing knowledge as a static repository of facts whether ancient or modern it conceptualizes existence itself as a dynamic, cyclical process of transformation. The emphasis is not on technological mastery but on understanding the interdependence of processes that connect the cosmic, natural, and human realms. When interpreted in this light, Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge systems do not compete with modern science; they operate in a different epistemic register that can complement contemporary education by restoring its lost dimensions of holism, ethical reflection, and relational understanding. Here we must note a parallel that the Panchāgni Vidyā was teacher King Pravahana Jaivali (A khatriya) to Brahmins Uddlaka Aruni and his son Swetha Ketu. This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for reinterpreting Panchagni Vidya within contemporary educational discourse

Therefore, the challenge before the Indian education system is not merely to balance STEM and the humanities, nor to assert civilizational pride through uncritical glorification of the past, but to develop a nuanced epistemological framework that recognizes the distinct contributions of different knowledge traditions. Such a framework would resist both the commodification of education and the mythologization of ancient knowledge, instead fostering a genuinely integrative approach in which scientific inquiry and philosophical reflection coexist within a coherent and critically grounded educational structure.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELATED STUDIES

As the Panchagni Vidya elaborates the cyclical approach in its analogy and its epistemic model which can contribute the present-day education system which preoccupies with STEM education especially the private sector Education in India, can give out schema to promote holistic education and can integrate the Arts education with equal importance. The available literature on ancient Indian education emphasizes its holistic orientation, wherein the Gurukula system aimed at self-realization (moksha), character formation, and integrated development through processes such as *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* (Biswas, n.d.; Lal, 2024; Chakma, 2025). However, historical analysis also indicate that this system was shaped by social hierarchies and restricted access, contributing to early forms of epistemic stratification (OER Document, 2021). Further, reinterpretations of Vedic pedagogies highlight their dialogical, reflective, and experiential nature, integrating ethics with cognitive development (Shah, 2024).

In addition to classical educational structures, Upanishadic concepts such as Panchāgni Vidya offer deeper epistemological insights into relational and process-oriented knowledge systems. Within this framework, Panchagni Vidya emerges as a key Upanishadic concept explaining cosmic cycles of creation and rebirth through the doctrine of five fires, linking macrocosm and microcosm (Singha, 2025a; Singha, 2025b). It is interpreted not merely as ritual knowledge but as a meditative and philosophical model of interconnected existence (Panchagni Vidya, n.d.). Additionally, studies on figures like Aryabhata reflect the empirical rigor of ancient Indian knowledge systems, demonstrating the integration of scientific and philosophical inquiry (Aryabhata Study, n.d.).

Taken together, the literature reveals that ancient Indian education and epistemology were characterized by an integrative paradigm that combined metaphysical inquiry, experiential learning, and scientific reasoning; however, contemporary educational structures often lack this holistic synthesis, resulting in fragmented knowledge hierarchies and a diminished engagement with indigenous epistemic frameworks.

Despite significant scholarship on both ancient Indian education and contemporary educational transformation, there is limited work that systematically integrates these domains through a coherent epistemological framework. In particular, Panchagni Vidya remains underexplored as a conceptual model for addressing the fragmentation of modern education. This study seeks to bridge this gap

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and dialectical research design. It integrates textual analysis of primary Upanishadic sources, particularly the Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads, with thematic analysis of secondary literature on Indian education and privatization. The objective is to examine Panchāgni Vidyā as an epistemological framework and relate it to contemporary educational transformations.

The analytical framework follows a dialectical approach involving three stages: (1) identification of structural contradictions within the Indian education system, such as privatization and disciplinary fragmentation; (2) interpretative engagement with Panchagni Vidya as a relational and process-oriented model; and (3) conceptual synthesis to propose an integrative educational framework.

The study has certain methodological limitations. It primarily relies on secondary sources, including classical texts, interpretative essays, and contemporary scholarly writings, which may involve variations in translation, interpretation, and contextual framing of Vedic and Upanishadic concepts. The absence of primary empirical data restricts the ability to validate theoretical claims within present-day educational settings. Additionally, the philosophical and metaphysical nature of Panchagni Vidya poses challenges for operationalization and measurement in conventional research frameworks. The study is also limited by selective textual engagement, which may not fully capture the diversity of interpretations across different schools of Indian thought. Consequently, the findings should be understood as interpretative and conceptual rather than empirically generalizable.

RESULTS AND ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

Present Education system In India both in Public and Private sectors.

Before 1980s the Indian education continues impart both technical such as STEM courses and Arts . Many private affiliated colleges and Govt run colleges used to offer both engineering and arts education at undergraduate and post graduate levels. At University level they used to impart more arts courses at post graduate level. The expansion of private sector participation in Indian education must be interpreted as a historically conditioned and structurally necessary development rather than a contingent policy choice. The post-1991 economic reforms redefined the role of the state, shifting it from a direct provider of education to a facilitator and regulator. This transition occurred in response to multiple pressures: rapid population growth, increased demand for higher education, fiscal constraints on public expenditure, and the imperatives of integrating into a globalized economy. In this context, private capital entered the educational domain as both a solution and a transformative force.

However, this expansion is marked by a fundamental contradiction. While private institutions have significantly increased access, infrastructure, and diversification of educational offerings, they have simultaneously reoriented education toward market logic. Courses are evaluated primarily in terms of their profitability and employability outcomes, leading to a concentration of resources in fields such as engineering, medicine, management, and information technology. This has resulted in the systematic marginalization of disciplines that do not yield immediate economic returns.

The dialectical nature of this process lies in its dual character: it is both progressive and regressive. It resolves the crisis of access while generating a crisis of epistemic reduction. Education becomes increasingly instrumentalized, producing a workforce aligned with the needs of capital but often lacking the broader intellectual and ethical capacities necessary for societal development. This transformation is not accidental but intrinsic to the logic of privatization, where knowledge is commodified and learning is structured as an investment. Thus, privatization expands access while simultaneously narrowing epistemic diversity

Marginalization of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

As growing demand of STEM courses due to employment opportunities specially in IT sector and Tech Industry, both student and parental aspirations has shifted towards STEM courses which forces the arts education to steer

to its bottom or mostly losing their existence. The declining status of arts and social sciences within Indian education represents a structural outcome of the commodification process rather than a mere shift in student preferences. Historically, disciplines such as history, philosophy, political science, sociology, anthropology, and psychology played a significant role in shaping critical consciousness, cultural continuity, and democratic engagement. In the contemporary system, however, these disciplines are increasingly viewed as economically non-viable, leading to reduced funding, shrinking enrolments, and institutional discontinuation.

This marginalization has profound implications. It weakens the capacity of the education system to produce individuals capable of critical reasoning, ethical judgment, and socio-political awareness. The absence of these disciplines creates a form of intellectual asymmetry, where technical expertise is not complemented by an understanding of its social and ethical consequences. As a result, the system risks producing highly skilled professionals who are insufficiently equipped to engage with the complexities of contemporary society.

In contrast, many Western education systems maintain a commitment to interdisciplinary integration. Liberal arts frameworks, particularly in the United States, emphasize the coexistence of scientific and humanistic knowledge, fostering a more balanced intellectual development. The divergence observed in India reflects deeper structural and ideological differences, including the dominance of market rationality and the absence of sustained institutional support for holistic education. This results in an imbalance where technical expertise is not supported by critical and ethical understanding

Panchagni Vidyā: Textual Depth and Philosophical Structure

As per Vedic and Upanishadic corpus around 28 or so brahma Vidyas the Pancāgni Vidyā which promotes the epistemology and offers a holistic point of view. These are five Agnis rendering various phases of cycle that explains how the human life evolves. Panchagni Vidya, as presented in the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, offers a profound conceptualization of existence as a cyclical and interconnected process. The doctrine describes five “fires” through which reality unfolds: heaven, rain, earth, man, and woman. Each stage represents a transformation of offerings, illustrating a continuous chain linking the cosmic, natural, and human realms. These stages should be understood as relational transformations rather than linear causal processes.

A central passage from the Chandogya Upanishad states:

“tasya etasya agneḥ sraddha hutam... soma raja sambhavati”

(When faith is offered into the cosmic fire, it becomes Soma, initiating a sequence of transformations.). The transformation lies in a dialectical analysis when one Agni offers an Ahuti it causes the emergence of another facet of cosmic position.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad elaborates this process further, describing how subtle elements pass through successive stages to become embodied existence. The emphasis is not on linear causality but on cyclical interdependence, where each stage both transforms and is transformed by others.

This framework represents a radically different epistemology from that of modern science. It does not seek to isolate variables or produce technological outcomes but to understand the relational structure of existence. Knowledge, in this context, is not accumulation but transformation.

INTEGRATED ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Panchagni Vidya and the Dialectical Reconfiguration of Education

Building on the analytical findings, this section interprets Panchagni Vidya as a framework for rethinking educational processes. The Panchagni explains how the cosmic circle and life cycles one after one .It contains five fires. When examined through a dialectical-analytical framework, Panchagni Vidya as articulated in the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, yields not merely a philosophical insight but a structurally relevant model for reinterpreting the contemporary Indian education system. The doctrine’s central

premise, that reality unfolds through a series of interconnected “fires” or transformative stages, provides a conceptual grammar for understanding education as a continuous, relational, and process-driven phenomenon rather than a fragmented accumulation of skills. In empirical terms, the current education system in India demonstrates a pronounced disjunction between stages of learning: foundational curiosity is often subordinated to standardized curricula, institutional teaching is oriented toward examination performance, and the application of knowledge is narrowly confined to market-defined employability. This disjunction mirrors a breakdown in what Panchāgni Vidya would describe as the continuity of transformative processes. If the five fires heaven (cosmic potential), rain (transmission), earth (material grounding), man (agency), and woman (creative culmination) are reinterpreted within an educational schema, they correspond to an integrated chain: the emergence of inquiry (sraddha), pedagogical mediation, contextual application, social embodiment, and generative renewal of knowledge. The “result” of such an integrated system is not merely a skilled workforce but a qualitatively transformed human subject capable of ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and intellectual synthesis. The absence of this continuity in the present system explains the observable outcomes: hyper-specialization without contextual awareness, technical competence without ethical grounding, and institutional expansion without epistemic coherence. Thus, Pancāgni Vidyā reveals that the crisis in Indian education is not simply one of policy or infrastructure but of disrupted relationality within the very process of knowledge formation.

To integrate the doctrinal clarity of Panchagni Vidya into your discussion, it is useful to present the five fires as a **processual chain of transformation**, as explained by Pravahana Jaivali to Uddalaka Aruṇi and Svetaketu in the Chandogya Upanishad. The doctrine conceptualizes existence as a sequence of sacrificial transformations, where each *ahuti* (offering) becomes the generative cause of the next stage of life:

Panchagni Vidya as a Processual Model of Knowledge Transformation

Agni (Fire)	Cosmic/Existential Level	Ahuti (Offering)	Transformation (Result)	Next Stage
1. Dyuloka Agni	Heaven (Cosmic realm)	Sraddha (faith/essence)	Produces Soma (Moon)	Becomes offering in next fire
2. Parjanya Agni	Rain/Atmosphere	Soma (Moon)	Produces Rain	Falls to Earth
3. Pṛthivi Agni	Earth	Rain	Produces Food (Anna)	Consumed by humans
4. Puruṣa Agni	Man (Human body)	Food	Produces Seed (Retas)	Transferred to woman
5. Yoni/Sthri Agni	Woman (Womb)	Seed	Produces Human birth (Jiva)	Cycle of life continues

Analytical Integration

This table makes explicit that the doctrine is not merely ritualistic but **epistemologically processual**, it maps how existence unfolds through interconnected transformations across cosmic, ecological, and human domains. As highlighted in your discussion, this knowledge was articulated by a Kṣatriya thinker, Pravahana Jaivali, thereby reinforcing that early Indian epistemology was not confined to Brahmanical authority. Instead, it reflects a **non-linear, dialogical circulation of knowledge**, where even Brahmin learners like Svetaketu are positioned as recipients rather than custodians.

When juxtaposed with later historical developments, this processual and relational model of knowledge stands in contrast to the **rigid varṇa-based hierarchy** that eventually privileged Brahmins as exclusive interpreters of truth. The five-fire schema itself undermines such exclusivity: it situates knowledge within **cosmic interdependence rather than social stratification**, thereby offering a powerful conceptual counterpoint to both traditional hierarchical claims and their contemporary ideological reproductions.

Ancient Indian Wisdom and Inventions

Indian knowledge systems, as reflected across literature, show a continuous and cumulative contribution to multiple domains of knowledge rather than isolated “inventions.” From early thinkers like Dirghatamas and Lagadha who systematized time, astronomy, and calendrical science, to Baudhayana and Apastamba who developed geometric principles for altar construction (later foundational to mathematics), and Pingala whose binary-like structures anticipate computational logic, we see a strong mathematical and analytical tradition. Medical sciences were advanced by Caraka and Susruta through clinical observation, surgery, and pharmacology, while Upanishadic thinkers such as Uddalaka Aruṇi and Gargi introduced experimental reasoning and cosmological questioning. Linguistic science reached a high point with Panini’s generative grammar, which later influenced global linguistics and even modern computing structures, and astronomical-mathematical advances continued through Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, and Bhaskara II whose pioneering works shaping trigonometry, algebra, and early astrophysical models. Institutions like Takṣasīla and Nalanda further systematized this knowledge through multidisciplinary and debate-driven education. Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that Indian knowledge systems were deeply empirical, analytical, and interdisciplinary. These developments demonstrate that Indian knowledge systems evolved cumulatively through interdisciplinary engagement rather than isolated invention.

Contemporary Narrative Distortions

At the same time, it is important to distinguish between historically grounded contributions and later exaggerated claims. The epistemic strength of these traditions lies in their gradual development, refinement, and transmission, not in the assertion that all modern technologies (like supercomputers or rockets) were already fully present in the Vedas. Such claims tend to obscure rather than highlight the real intellectual achievements. Vedic knowledge, especially as *Sruti* (orally transmitted), was preserved through rigorous memorization within specific cultural contexts, making the idea of it being “stolen” in a literal sense untenable. What did happen, however, is that elements of Indian mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were transmitted, translated, and sometimes preserved by other civilizations, including the Islamic world and later Europe, especially during periods when institutional continuity weakened in India. Thus, the historical picture is one of exchange, adaptation, and continuity not simple appropriation. Recognizing this allows for a more grounded appreciation of Indian knowledge systems as dynamic, evolving traditions with genuine global impact, rather than as sources of unverified claims.

The twenty-eight Vidyās of the Upanishadic tradition, as explained by Swami Sivananda, collectively present an integrated epistemic vision that contemporary Indian education lacks. From Sat, Bhuma, and Maitreyī Vidya, which affirm non-dual being and the primacy of the Self, to Śaṅḍilya, Dahara, and Vaisvanara Vidya, which connect the inner self with the cosmic order, and further through Pancagni, Udgitha, and Puruṣa Vidya, which interpret existence as a cyclical, sacrificial, and processual reality, these teachings construct knowledge as relational, ethical, and transformative. Complemented by Akṣara, Samvarga, Madhu, and Praṇa Vidya, along with meditative frameworks such as Upakosala, Akṣi, Aditya, Satyakama, Akasa, Bhrigu Varuṇi, Anandamaya, and others, the Vidyās dissolve rigid separations between subject and object, individual and society, and material and spiritual domains. In contrast, the prevailing education system shaped by privatization, instrumental rationality, and hierarchical knowledge production remains fragmented, utilitarian, and disconnected from lived and ecological realities. Re-engaging these Vidyās, particularly through the lens of Pancagni Vidya, enables a dialectical reorientation of education toward interconnectedness, reflexivity, and holistic transformation, addressing the deeper epistemic crisis underlying socio-economic inequalities and knowledge hierarchies. Thus, the issue lies not in the absence of knowledge but in its misinterpretation.

Dialectical Educational Synthesis

The present trends in Education in India show the dominance of Engineering and Technology courses and diminishing or From the standpoint of discussion, this insight opens a critical pathway for dialectical synthesis by situating the current contradictions within a broader transformative horizon. The dominance of STEM disciplines, driven by privatization and market imperatives, represents one pole of the contradiction characterized by efficiency, specialization, and economic utility. The counter-pole is constituted by the

simultaneous ideological tendency to overstate the scientific completeness of ancient knowledge systems, thereby collapsing philosophical traditions into technological claims. Both poles, despite their apparent opposition, share a common reductionism: they evaluate knowledge primarily in terms of utility and output, either in the present or retroactively in the past. Panchāgni Vidyā intervenes precisely at this juncture by offering a mediating framework that neither rejects modern science nor mythologizes tradition but redefines the ontology of knowledge itself as a cyclical, interdependent, and transformative process. In practical terms, this implies a reconfiguration of the education system wherein arts, humanities, and social sciences are reintegrated as essential mediating domains that sustain the continuity between technical knowledge and human experience. It calls for an institutional shift from linear curricula to integrative learning pathways, from outcome-based metrics to process-oriented evaluation, and from market-driven priorities to socially embedded knowledge production. Such a transformation would not negate the role of private sector participation or technological advancement but would situate them within a broader epistemic ecology guided by continuity, balance, and reflexivity. In this sense, Panchagni Vidya does not merely supplement modern education but fundamentally reorients it, enabling a dialectical resolution in which the tensions between specialization and holism, modernity and tradition, and economy and ethics are not eliminated but harmonized within a dynamic and evolving educational framework.

Vedic thought did not emerge as a fixed or finished system; it evolved alongside changes in society and economy. In the early Rigveda phase, ideas like ṛta (cosmic order) reflected the needs of a largely pastoral and early agrarian society that depended on balance in nature and reciprocity in social life. What later became karma was then more a sense of moral order tied to survival than a rigid doctrine. As settlements expanded and social divisions became sharper in the later Vedic period, especially with the rise of ritual specialists and early kingship, these ideas were gradually formalized. Karma began to serve as a way of explaining and sustaining emerging hierarchies.

By the time of the Upanishads, this framework moved inward, becoming a more philosophical idea about action, consequence, rebirth, and liberation. This shift reflects a society that was no longer just concerned with survival, but also with meaning, inequality, and personal destiny. Later, in the Bhagavad Gita, karma was reinterpreted in a practical way emphasizing duty without attachment which helped reconcile individual responsibility with a structured social order under monarchic systems.

In the Itihasa and Puranic periods, these ideas were carried to the broader population through stories and narratives, making karma part of everyday thinking. At the same time, the earlier, more flexible varna system gradually hardened into caste, and karma theory played a role in justifying this by linking one's social position to past actions. As feudal and hierarchical systems deepened, this belief helped maintain stability but also limited mobility.

Unlike in many Western societies, where similar belief systems were later challenged by scientific and political changes, karma remained embedded in Indian life. Its strength lay in how it connected ethics, psychology, and social order. As a result, it continued to provide both a sense of meaning and resilience, while also reinforcing existing social structures over long periods. This necessitates curricular reforms, interdisciplinary integration, and institutional support for balancing STEM with humanities

Ethical Dimensions of Knowledge Systems

During the time of Jainism and Buddhism, the idea of karma was not rejected but given a different meaning. In Buddhism, especially through the teachings of Gautama Buddha, karma came to be understood mainly as intention rather than ritual action. This was a shift away from Vedic practices like yajnas, animal sacrifices, and soma rituals, which Buddhism saw as unnecessary for spiritual progress. Instead, it emphasized ethical living and mental discipline. Buddhism also questioned caste distinctions by saying that a person's conduct matters more than their birth, and within the sangha there was a more open, less hierarchical structure. However, it did not fully overturn the larger social order; rather, it created an alternative path alongside it. So, rather than being completely opposed to earlier ideas, Buddhism reshaped karma into a more practical and ethical concept while quietly challenging aspects of the existing system.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Indian education system stands at a critical juncture, shaped by the dual forces of privatization and ideological reinterpretation of knowledge traditions. While the expansion of private education has addressed issues of access and infrastructure, it has also introduced a commodified logic that narrows the scope of knowledge. Simultaneously, the misrepresentation of Vedic and Upanishadic traditions as repositories of advanced modern science distorts their philosophical significance and undermines their potential contribution to contemporary thought.

Panchagni Vidya, as articulated in the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, offers a way forward by providing a holistic, process-oriented epistemology that can reconcile these contradictions. By reimagining education as a cyclical and transformative process, it becomes possible to restore balance between technical specialization and humanistic inquiry, between economic relevance and intellectual depth. Such a transformation is not merely desirable but necessary for the long-term sustainability and integrity of the education system in India.

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