

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1800
TO BE ANSWERED ON 10.03.2025

RESTORATION OF ANCIENT INDIAN KNOWLEDGE CENTRES

1800. SHRI RAO RAJENDRA SINGH:

Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has information on the ancient knowledge centres that have survived various attempts of destruction by foreign invaders;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the Government has taken any steps to reconstruct/revamp/restore such ancient knowledge centres and to revive ancient knowledge systems in the country;
- (d) if so, the details thereof;
- (e) whether any steps are being taken by the Government to promote research on ancient knowledge systems in the country; and
- (f) if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF CULTURE AND TOURISM
(SHRI GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT)

- (a) Ancient knowledge centers, such as Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, and others, faced & numerous attempts of destruction by foreign invaders. However, despite these attacks, knowledge itself survived through various means:
- (b)

1. Oral Tradition and Guru-Shishya Parampara

Many ancient educational institutions relied heavily on oral transmission of knowledge. Even after physical centers were destroyed, knowledge was preserved by scholars and passed down through direct teacher-student relationships.

2. Migration of Scholars

When institutions like Nalanda and Vikramashila were attacked, scholars fled to different regions, taking their knowledge with them. Many migrated to South India, Tibet, China, and Southeast Asia, ensuring that their teachings were preserved and spread.

3. Religious Institutions and Monasteries

Buddhist and Hindu monasteries, along with temples, acted as secondary knowledge centers. Monks and scholars continued their work in secret or in other safe locations. For instance, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries preserved Indian texts and traditions when Buddhism declined in India.

4. Foreign Translations and Records

While invaders destroyed libraries, foreign travelers such as Xuanzang and Al-Biruni documented much of India's ancient wisdom. Many Indian texts were translated into Chinese, Arabic, and Persian, helping preserve knowledge outside India.

5. Palm Leaf Manuscripts and Underground Libraries

Some scholars hid manuscripts in remote locations or underground repositories. Even today, ancient texts continue to be discovered in temples and private collections.

6. Resurgence of Learning

Even after destruction, India saw multiple revivals of learning. New centers of knowledge emerged, such as Varanasi and Kanchipuram, continuing intellectual traditions.

7. Integration into Other Cultures

Indian mathematical, scientific, and philosophical knowledge was absorbed by Islamic and European scholars. Concepts like the decimal system and Ayurveda found their way into global civilizations, ensuring their survival despite institutional destruction.

Thus, while ancient knowledge centers were physically attacked, their intellectual and cultural legacy endured through resilience, adaptation, and the widespread dissemination of knowledge.

(c) The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has undertaken several initiatives to revive and restore India's ancient knowledge systems and centers:

(d)

1. Vedic Heritage Portal

Launched on March 27, 2023, the Vedic Heritage Portal is a significant project by the IGNCA aimed at preserving and disseminating the rich heritage of the Vedas. The portal offers access to over 550 hours of audio-visual content, including more than 18,000 Vedic mantras. It features transcriptions of ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Vedangas, Upavedas, and details of Vedic rituals in both audio-visual formats. This initiative ensures that traditional Vedic knowledge is accessible to scholars, practitioners, and the general public, thereby aiding in its preservation and propagation.

2. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Initiative

In alignment with the National Education Policy 2020, the IGNCA supports the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) initiative under the Ministry of Education. Established in October 2020, the IKS division focuses on integrating traditional Indian knowledge into contemporary education. This includes incorporating subjects like Vedic mathematics, Ayurveda, yoga, and ancient Indian sciences into university curricula. Collaborations with institutions such as IITs have led to the introduction of courses and research programs that explore the therapeutic values of Indian music and other indigenous knowledge systems.

3. Project 'Mausam'

IGNCA's Project 'Mausam' is a multidisciplinary initiative that seeks to revive and strengthen ancient historical maritime cultural and economic ties among countries along the Indian Ocean. By documenting and celebrating shared knowledge systems and ideas that spread along these routes, the project aims to rekindle long-lost connections and promote new avenues of cooperation and exchange.

4. Academic Programs and Research

The IGNCA offers various academic programs, including Postgraduate Diploma courses, that delve into India's arts, culture, and traditional knowledge systems. Through research, publications, and training, the center emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and reviving

ancient practices and philosophies.

Through these initiatives, the IGNCA plays a pivotal role in reconstructing, revamping, and restoring India's ancient knowledge centers and systems, ensuring their relevance and continuity in contemporary times.

(e) The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has undertaken several initiatives to promote research on ancient knowledge systems in India:

(f)

1. Divisional Research Initiatives

IGNCA's organizational structure includes specialized divisions that focus on various aspects of India's cultural heritage:

Kalanidhi: Serves as a repository of research and reference materials in humanities and the arts, amassing a vast collection of textual, visual, and auditory data to support scholarly research.

Kalakosa: Engages in research and publication, investigating intellectual traditions across multiple disciplines, thereby enriching the understanding of ancient knowledge systems.

Janapada Sampada: Dedicated to lifestyle studies, this division conducts systematic research on tribal and folk arts, facilitating live presentations and fostering a deeper appreciation of indigenous knowledge.

Kaladarsana: Transforms research findings into visible forms through exhibitions, making ancient knowledge accessible to the public and encouraging further scholarly inquiry.

Cultural Informatics Laboratory: Applies technology tools for cultural preservation and propagation, including the development of 'Kalāsampadā', a digital repository encompassing rare archival collections.

2. Regional Centers

To decentralize research and promote regional cultural studies, IGNCA has established centers across India, including in Varanasi, Guwahati, Bengaluru, Ranchi, Puducherry, Thrissur, Goa, Vadodara, and Srinagar. These centers focus on local art forms, traditions, and knowledge systems, facilitating region-specific research and preservation efforts.

3. Collaborative Research Projects

IGNCA collaborates with various national and international institutions to conduct interdisciplinary research projects.

4. Publications and Dissemination

The center publishes research findings, glossaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias related to ancient knowledge systems. These publications serve as valuable resources for scholars and researchers worldwide, contributing to the global discourse on India's rich intellectual traditions.

Through these comprehensive initiatives, IGNCA plays a pivotal role in promoting research on ancient knowledge systems, ensuring their preservation and continuity.
