Ancient Indian Knowledge System

Why in news?

Recently Union Minister for Culture and Tourism in a written reply in Lok Sabha , presented the governments focus on preserving intellectual heritage of Ancient Indian Knowledge Centres.

What are the ancient knowledge systems of India?

- **Ancient systems of knowledge in India** – It basically consist of understanding the mysteries of the universe, human interactions with environment, philosophy of life ,development of art etc.
- **Ancient literatures** – Shruti and Smriti literature, Sutra literature, Jataka tales, Panchtantras, Kathasaritsagara, Thirukural, Athichudi and Vachanas are examples of Indian literary traditions.
- **Indian Philosophical thoughts** – Āstika, Nāstika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāmsā, Vedānta, Cārvāka, Buddhism and Jainism.

Ancient knowledge systems
• **Mathematics** - Gaṇita anuyoga, Saṁkhyāna (literally, 'the science of numbers,' meaning arithmetic and astronomy), gaṇana saṁkhyāna • **Ayurveda** - A holistic health system encompassing all the aspects of well-being — from physical, physiological and psychological to environmental and ecological health. • **Alchemical traditions** - Rasāyana Śāstra, Rasatantra, Rasakriyā or Rasavidyā • **Yoga** - It encompasses the different fields of our existence such as physical, psychological, social and spiritual.

- **Ancient knowledge centres** – They are learning institutions developed to provide institutional frameworks for scholarly activities.
- Prominent universities of Buddhist system were Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Odantapuri and Vallabhi.
- Despite their decline due to invasions, their legacy influenced global education.

Ancient Knowledge Centers
Taxila (Takshashila)
• Situated in present-day Pakistan. • Believed to have been founded by Kuru prince Duryodhana • Flourished between the 6th BCE and the 5th century CE. • It is regarded as one of the earliest universities in the world, • Notable figures such as the strategist Chanakya (Kautilya), the physician Charaka, and the grammarian Pāṇini were associated with Taxila.

Nalanda University
• Situated in Bihar • Founded by Kumaragupta I of the Gupta dynasty. • Flourished between the 5th to the 12th century CE. • The Chinese traveler Xuanzang documented his studies at Nalanda in the 7th century.
Vikramashila University
• Situated in Bihar. • Founded by the Pala emperor Dharmapala • Flourished between 8th to 12th century • It specialized in Vajrayana traditions.
Odantapuri
• Buddhist learning centre situated in Bihar. • Founded by the Pala ruler Gopala I. • Flourished between 8th to 12th century • Considered the second oldest of India's Mahaviharas.
Vallabhi
• Located in Bhavnagar, Gujarat. • Founded by Maitraka kings and patronized Hinayana Buddhism. • Flourished from 600 AD to 1200 AD. • Famous for Buddhist philosophy, economics, agriculture, Theology, Medicine and Nithya Shastra (Law)

How did ancient India's knowledge survive destruction?

- **Oral tradition and guru-shishya parampara** – Knowledge was transmitted orally from teachers to students to ensure its continuity even without or destruction of formal institutions.
- **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.
- **Religious institutions and monasteries** – Buddhist and Hindu monasteries, along with temples, functioned as secondary knowledge centers of learning, which preserved ancient texts.
- 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.
- **Foreign translations and records** – While invaders destroyed libraries, travellers like Xuanzang and Al-Biruni documented and translated Indian knowledge into Chinese and Arabic languages.
- **Underground libraries** – Some scholars hid manuscripts in remote locations or underground repositories.
- **Resurgence of learning** – New centers of knowledge like Varanasi and Kanchipuram emerged, and continued intellectual traditions.
- **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.

What are the Initiatives taken by IGNCA to restore ancient Indian knowledge systems and centers?

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was established in 1987 under the Department of Culture, as a centre for research, academic pursuit and dissemination in the field of the arts.

- **Vedic Heritage Portal** - Launched in 2023, It aims at preserving and disseminating the rich heritage of the Vedas.
- It features transcriptions of ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Vedangas, Upavedas, and details of Vedic rituals in both audio-visual formats.
- **Project 'Mausam'** - It is a multidisciplinary initiative to revive and strengthen ancient historical maritime cultural and economic ties among countries along the Indian Ocean.
- **Academic programs and research** – IGNCA offers postgraduate diploma courses and conducts research on India's traditional knowledge systems, to understand and revive ancient practices.
- **Indian knowledge systems (IKS) initiative** – IGCCA supports the IKS division of Ministry of Education.
- IKS focuses on integrating traditional Indian knowledge into contemporary education by incorporating subjects like Vedic mathematics, Ayurveda, yoga, and ancient Indian sciences into university curricula.

IGNCA's divisions on 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.

Reference

PIB | Ancient Indian Knowledge Centres

