

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: A NEW PATH FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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Abstract

India's villages are rich in traditional skills, natural resources, and wisdom. In recent years, many people in rural areas have started small businesses to improve their income and standard of living. At the same time, India has a valuable treasure of traditional knowledge, known as the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). This includes old farming methods, herbal medicine, handicrafts, and eco-friendly living. This paper explores how combining IKS with rural entrepreneurship can help build a stronger, self-reliant, and sustainable rural economy. It explains the importance of both concepts, highlights real-life case studies from across India including Maharashtra, and suggests how the government and society can support this movement. By using what we already know from our traditions, rural India can become a hub of innovation, culture, and progress.

1. Introduction

More than 65% of Indians live in villages. These rural areas are full of skilled people, hardworking farmers, artisans, and traditional healers. However, many villagers still face problems like unemployment, poverty, lack of education, and migration to cities.

Rural entrepreneurship offers a solution. It means starting small businesses in rural areas. These businesses can create jobs, increase income, and reduce dependence on cities. At the same time, India has a long history of traditional knowledge systems—ways of living and working passed down through generations. This is known as the **Indian Knowledge System (IKS)**.

When we mix rural entrepreneurship with IKS, we get a powerful model for growth. It is sustainable, environment-friendly, and rooted in Indian culture.

2. What is the Indian Knowledge System (IKS)?

The Indian Knowledge System is made up of traditional practices, skills, and ideas that have been used in India for thousands of years. This knowledge is often based on experience, observation, and nature.

Main Areas of IKS:

- **Agriculture:** Organic farming, crop rotation, natural fertilizers like cow dung and neem.
- **Health:** Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, and home remedies using herbs like tulsi, turmeric, and neem.
- **Crafts:** Handicrafts, weaving, pottery, wood carving, and embroidery passed on through families.
- **Environment:** Rainwater harvesting, community forest management, sacred groves.
- **Ethics and Values:** Harmony with nature, non-violence, honesty in business, and spiritual well-being.

IKS is still alive in many Indian villages, though it is slowly disappearing. Reviving and using it can make rural businesses more unique, eco-friendly, and culturally rich.

3. What is Rural Entrepreneurship?

Rural entrepreneurship means setting up and running businesses in villages or rural areas. These businesses use local resources and skills to produce goods or offer services.

Types of Rural Businesses:

- Farming and organic produce
- Food processing (jams, pickles, papad)
- Animal husbandry (dairy, poultry, beekeeping)
- Handicrafts and handmade products
- Agri-tourism and eco-tourism
- Herbal and wellness products

Benefits of Rural Entrepreneurship:

- Provides jobs in rural areas
- Reduces migration to cities
- Encourages use of local resources
- Empowers women and youth
- Supports traditional knowledge and culture

Challenges Faced:

- Lack of capital and loans
- Poor infrastructure (roads, electricity, internet)
- Limited training and education
- Difficulty in marketing and selling products

Despite these problems, rural entrepreneurship is growing—especially when it is supported by IKS.

4. How IKS Supports Rural Entrepreneurship

Villages already use traditional knowledge in farming, healing, and crafts. This knowledge can become the foundation for modern businesses.

4.1. Traditional Farming as a Business

- Use of cow dung, organic manure, and neem oil as natural fertilizers.
- Growing organic vegetables, pulses, and grains.
- Selling directly to consumers or through farmers' markets and online platforms.

4.2. Handicrafts and Traditional Art

- Products made from bamboo, clay, cotton, wool, or jute.
- Local art forms like Warli painting (Maharashtra), Madhubani (Bihar), Pattachitra (Odisha).
- Selling through exhibitions, online stores, and export.

4.3. Herbal and Wellness Products

- Ayurvedic oils, soaps, syrups, and herbal teas.
- Yoga retreats, massage centers, and wellness tourism.
- Training youth in Ayurveda and Yoga for job creation.

4.4. Eco-Tourism and Agri-Tourism

- Village homestays with local food and culture.
- Workshops in farming, pottery, and cooking.
- Attracts tourists seeking authentic Indian rural experiences.

5. Case Studies**Hiware Bazar – Model Village from Maharashtra**

Hiware Bazar, in Ahmednagar district, is a shining example of how traditional knowledge and rural entrepreneurship can transform a village.

Problems Faced:

- Drought and water scarcity
- Unemployment and migration
- Alcoholism and poverty

Transformation Steps:

- Water conservation through traditional methods (check dams, contour trenches)
- Ban on borewells and liquor
- Organic farming and dairy farming
- Promoted collective farming and entrepreneurship

Results:

- Per capita income increased 30 times
- 60+ villagers became lakhpatis (millionaires in rupees)
- Youth returned to the village to start businesses
- Hiware Bazar is now a model of self-reliance and IKS-based development

6. Government Support for Rural Entrepreneurship and IKS**6.1. Important Schemes:**

- **Startup India:** Encourages new businesses with financial and training help.
- **PMEGP:** Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme—loans and subsidies.
- **MUDRA Loans:** Small loans for farmers, artisans, and small businesses.
- **ODOP:** One District One Product—promotes unique local products.

6.2. IKS Promotion:

- **NEP 2020:** Includes Indian traditions in school education.
- **IKS Division (AICTE):** Supports research and awareness about traditional knowledge.
- **Skill India:** Offers training in local crafts, farming, and services.

7. Suggestions for the Future

To grow rural entrepreneurship based on IKS, we need:

1. **Education in Schools and Colleges** – Add IKS and entrepreneurship in school syllabi.
2. **Training Centers in Villages** – Skill development hubs for youth and women.
3. **Technology Access** – Provide internet and digital tools for online selling.
4. **Support for Women Entrepreneurs** – Financial and moral support for women-led businesses.
5. **Branding and GI Tags** – Promote unique products like Paithani sarees, Warli art, Kolhapuri chappals.
6. **Legal Protection for IKS** – Prevent misuse and protect traditional knowledge.
7. **Public-Private Partnerships** – Encourage companies and NGOs to work with rural communities.

8. Conclusion

India's future lies in its villages. By combining rural entrepreneurship with traditional Indian knowledge, we can create jobs, save our environment, and keep our culture alive. Villagers already have the skills and wisdom—they just need support and opportunity.

Whether it's natural farming, herbal healing, or handcrafted goods, the Indian Knowledge System offers powerful tools for rural progress. If used properly, it can lead to self-reliant villages that are rich not just in money, but in culture, dignity, and purpose.

It's time we stop looking outside for answers. The solutions have always been within us—in our soil, in our stories, and in our villages.

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