

Indian Knowledge Systems and Ballads in Contemporary Contexts: Preserving Tradition Amidst Modern Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Since the colonial period, the English language in India has often been linked with elitism and urban privilege, even though post-independence educational policy has consistently emphasised inclusivity and equal access. In such a context, there is an urgent need to rethink existing structures of knowledge dissemination and to make the Indian Knowledge System accessible to all sections of society, thereby enabling individuals to benefit from both local traditions and global opportunities. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), including oral traditions such as ballads, constitute a vast reservoir of inherited wisdom encompassing diverse fields such as philosophy, medicine, arts, ecology, linguistics, and science. These systems preserve not only intellectual traditions but also collective memory, ethical values, and community-based modes of learning. This research paper examines the ways in which Indian Knowledge Systems, with special reference to ballad traditions, retain their foundational integrity while adapting to contemporary contexts. It further explores the linguistic and terminological dimensions embedded within IKS, demonstrating how language functions as a carrier of cultural knowledge and social identity. By analysing the interaction between traditional practices and modern methodologies, the paper seeks to highlight the dynamic, adaptive, and resilient character of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. It aims to establish the continuing relevance of IKS in the present age and to investigate the processes through which these systems preserve their essential principles while responding creatively to the changing demands of modern society.

Keywords:

Culture; English for Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS); Teaching; Vocabulary; Textbooks.

ABSTRAKS

Sejak periode kolonial, bahasa Inggris di India sering dikaitkan dengan elitisme dan hak istimewa perkotaan, meskipun kebijakan pendidikan pasca-kemerdekaan secara konsisten menekankan inklusivitas dan akses yang setara. Dalam konteks seperti itu, ada kebutuhan mendesak untuk memikirkan kembali struktur penyebaran pengetahuan yang ada dan untuk membuat Sistem Pengetahuan India dapat diakses oleh semua lapisan masyarakat, sehingga memungkinkan individu untuk memperoleh manfaat dari tradisi lokal dan peluang global. Sistem Pengetahuan India (IKS), termasuk tradisi lisan seperti balada, merupakan reservoir kearifan warisan yang luas yang mencakup berbagai bidang seperti filsafat, kedokteran, seni, ekologi, linguistik, dan sains. Sistem ini tidak hanya melestarikan tradisi intelektual tetapi juga memori kolektif, nilai-nilai etika, dan mode pembelajaran berbasis komunitas. Makalah penelitian ini mengkaji cara-cara di mana Sistem Pengetahuan India, dengan referensi khusus pada tradisi balada, mempertahankan integritas dasarnya sambil beradaptasi dengan konteks kontemporer. Lebih lanjut, makalah ini mengeksplorasi dimensi linguistik dan terminologis yang tertanam dalam IKS, menunjukkan bagaimana bahasa berfungsi sebagai pembawa pengetahuan budaya dan identitas sosial. Dengan menganalisis interaksi antara praktik tradisional dan metodologi modern, makalah ini berupaya menyoroti karakter dinamis, adaptif, dan tangguh dari Sistem Pengetahuan Adat. Tujuannya adalah untuk menetapkan relevansi berkelanjutan dari Sistem Pengetahuan Adat di zaman sekarang dan untuk menyelidiki proses-proses di mana sistem-sistem ini melestarikan prinsip-prinsip esensialnya sambil secara kreatif menanggapi tuntutan masyarakat modern yang terus berubah.

Kata Kunci:

Budaya; Bahasa Inggris untuk Sistem Pengetahuan India (IKS); Buku Teks; Pengajaran; Kosakata.

1. Introduction

Indian civilisation has historically placed exceptional value on the pursuit, preservation, and transmission of knowledge, as reflected in its vast corpus of intellectual literature and one of the world's largest collections of manuscripts (Raghavan et al. 45). This immense repository covers an extraordinary range of subjects and bears witness to a long-standing commitment to learning across multiple branches of human inquiry. Over several millennia, India cultivated a sophisticated tradition of textual production sustained by scholars, teachers, monastic centres, gurukulas, universities, courts, and community institutions. According to the study conducted by Dr. Mohan Raghavan and colleagues in 2023, this legacy embraces disciplines such as philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, arts, and governance, demonstrating remarkable intellectual breadth and depth (Raghavan et al. 45). The reverence accorded to knowledge in Indian culture has not remained confined to the past; it continues to shape contemporary educational, ethical, and cultural practices, thereby affirming the enduring vitality of its intellectual heritage.

India's knowledge tradition may be described as ancient, continuous, and regenerative, comparable to the ceaseless flow of the river Ganga. Knowledge, often understood through concepts such as *jnana*, has occupied a central place in rational reflection, spiritual inquiry, and practical wisdom from the earliest texts to modern philosophical writings (Radhakrishnan 12). The intellectual history of India is distinguished not only by antiquity, but also by continuity and plurality. The Vedas, composed roughly between 1500 and 500 BCE, form the foundational basis of many Indian knowledge systems, encompassing cosmology, ritual practice, ethics, language, and metaphysical speculation (Sharma 28). The Upanishads, composed approximately between 800 and 200 BCE, mark a movement towards introspective and philosophical inquiry, especially concerning Brahman, Atman, and the nature of reality (Radhakrishnan 55).

During the classical period, multiple schools of thought emerged, including Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, Jainism, and Buddhism (Dasgupta 67). These traditions developed rigorous methods of logic, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and liberation. Thinkers such as Adi Shankaracharya, Nagarjuna, and Patanjali made lasting contributions to philosophical reasoning and spiritual discourse (Dasgupta 102). The medieval period witnessed the rise of Bhakti and Sufi movements, both of which emphasised devotion, experiential wisdom, poetic expression, and ethical fellowship. These traditions expanded knowledge beyond scholastic institutions and brought it into vernacular languages and popular practice (Eck 88).

In the modern period, intellectual figures such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo reinterpreted classical ideas in relation to nationalism, education, humanism, and global modernity (Sen 133). Core features of Indian philosophy include the search for ultimate truth, the integration of reason with intuition, and the close relationship between thought and ethical conduct, as exemplified in the Bhagavad Gita (Radhakrishnan 214). Indian philosophical concepts have received global recognition and have influenced fields such as psychology, wellness studies, ecological thought, and spirituality (Nanda 74).

Traditional knowledge systems continue to inform present-day education, healthcare, agriculture, environmental conservation, and community life in India. Practices related to Ayurveda, yoga, water management, sustainable agriculture, oral epics, and local ecological knowledge remain relevant in addressing contemporary challenges (Gupta 59). This civilisational tradition, marked by depth, diversity, adaptability, and continuity, remains a living and evolving force. It offers valuable insights and practical resources for confronting modern concerns while preserving cultural identity and intellectual self-confidence (Raghavan et al. 45).

2. Literature Review

Linguistic Foundations and Classical Languages

Indian Knowledge Systems constitute a sophisticated and profound body of learning that has evolved over several millennia. Rooted in long-standing intellectual traditions, these systems

encompass diverse branches of knowledge including philosophy, medicine, ethics, linguistics, mathematics, aesthetics, spirituality, and ecological practices. They are deeply connected with classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil, which have historically functioned as major vehicles for the preservation and transmission of knowledge in the Indian subcontinent (Jha 2024). Through these linguistic traditions, India developed complex modes of inquiry that continue to influence contemporary thought and practice (Ardiansyah, 2024; Izza, Fahmi, Istikomah, & Widiana, 2024; Sianipar, 2026).

According to Jha, the foundations of much of Indian scholarly vocabulary may be traced to ancient languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil, each of which contributed significantly to the intellectual history of the region (Jha 2024). Sanskrit, often regarded as a sacred and scholarly language in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, is renowned for its extensive literary and philosophical corpus. This includes the Vedas, Upanishads, and epic compositions such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, as well as numerous treatises on grammar, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and metaphysics. Sanskrit became a highly refined medium through which intellectual discourse and scientific reasoning were systematically articulated (Aprienty, Arofah, & Lestari, 2025; Izah, Mahyabella, Widodo, & Arfisa, 2025; Nadia, Hidayanti, Juliyaniti, & Arlinda, 2025; Nisa, Awalia, Khusna, Haliza, & Fitriyani, 2025).

Pali, the canonical language of Theravada Buddhism, has preserved a vast body of Buddhist teachings, monastic codes, ethical reflections, and philosophical debates. The Pali canon remains one of the most significant textual repositories for understanding Buddhist thought and early South Asian intellectual culture. Through Pali literature, traditions of mindfulness, logic, compassion, and social ethics were codified and transmitted across generations (Maria & Hussain, 2026; Sharma & McLean, 2025).

Tamil, one of the world's oldest continuously used languages, possesses a rich literary heritage that has deeply shaped the cultural and intellectual life of South India. Its classical Sangam literature reflects sophisticated reflections on ethics, polity, love, war, landscape, and human values. Tamil intellectual traditions also contributed to devotional movements, grammar, poetics, and social philosophy. Together, Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil demonstrate that Indian Knowledge Systems emerged not from a single source, but from multiple linguistic and cultural streams whose interactions produced a remarkably diverse and enduring civilisational legacy.

3. Methodology

This research adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that combines historical analysis, textual interpretation, and contemporary case studies. By engaging with both primary sources and relevant secondary scholarship, the study seeks to examine the continuity, transformation, and adaptive processes within Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Such an approach enables a deeper understanding of how traditional bodies of knowledge have evolved across different historical periods while responding to changing social, cultural, and technological contexts. Furthermore, the integration of textual and case-based analysis helps to illuminate the enduring relevance of IKS in the modern world and the ways in which these systems continue to negotiate preservation with innovation. Shri Arbindo has mentioned:

“The three terms are closely connected in all discussions of knowledge in the Indian intellectual tradition: darśana, jñāna, and vidyā. Darśana, often translated as philosophy, refers to the “system” or point of view that provides the framework or perspective for understanding and interpreting reality. It is the theoretical foundation that leads to the acquisition of jñāna, which means knowledge. Jñāna represents the understanding or insight that arises from engaging with the philosophical system, or darśana. When this knowledge is collected, organised, and systematised for purposes such as reflection, teaching, and learning, it is referred to as vidyā. Vidyā thus signifies a “discipline,” an established body of knowledge within a particular domain that is structured for academic and pedagogical purposes” (76).

Following vocabulary, which has played a crucial role in spreading information in many domains including Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedanta, and traditional Indian music and dance. The terminology used in Ayurveda, the ancient system of Indian medicine, such as "dosha," "panchakarma," and "rasayana," represents intricate medical ideas and practices that have been down through centuries. Yoga, originating from ancient Indian spiritual traditions, use terminology such as "asana," "pranayama," and "samadhi" to denote physical poses, breathing exercises, and states of contemplative awareness, respectively. Vedanta, a prominent branch of Indian philosophy, utilises a distinct lexicon that encompasses terminology such as "Brahman," "Atman," and "Moksha," in order to articulate fundamental metaphysical ideas. Classical Indian music and dance styles, including Bharatanatyam and Kathak, use distinct terminology to delineate rhythms, melodies, and expressive gestures. The vocabulary not only safeguards the ancient wisdom ingrained in these many domains, but it also enables the uninterrupted progression and development of indigenous knowledge systems. By condensing complex topics into succinct phrases, it facilitates the dissemination of these ideas across different generations and geographical regions. The linguistic continuity guarantees that the fundamental aspects of Indian knowledge systems stay unchanged, even as they adjust to modern circumstances. Vocabulary is essential in enabling modern researchers and practitioners to access traditional information in today's world. With India's renewed fascination in its ancient knowledge, there is an increasing need to comprehend and use these old terminology in academic and practical contexts. Incorporating language into contemporary educational curriculum, research, and practice guarantees the enduring significance and impact of the deep insights and methodology of Indian knowledge systems. The vocabulary serves as a means of preserving India's cultural and intellectual heritage by establishing a link between the past and the present. It serves as a dynamic connection that links modern society with its rich historical and cultural legacy. The preservation of this continuity is crucial in cultivating a strong feeling of identification and pride among Indians, while also facilitating a more profound comprehension of the nation's intellectual traditions on a worldwide scale. As the world increasingly acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge systems, the function of vocabulary becomes even more crucial in maintaining and promoting India's contribution to global knowledge and cultural diversity.

4. Result

Linguistic Foundations and Classical Languages Historical Context, Evolution and Classical Foundations

The basis of IKS is built upon ancient scriptures and oral traditions that have been carefully maintained and passed down through centuries. The Vedas, Upanishads, and other ancient books provide a thorough framework for comprehending the cosmos, human life, and the deep interrelations between them. The literature written in Sanskrit are the main sources of ancient Indian knowledge.

Adaptation Through the Ages

Throughout history, IKS has shown an impressive ability to adapt. For example, we have used the ideas of Ayurveda to address novel medical difficulties, and discovered that the philosophical foundations of Vedanta are applicable in many cultural settings. The adaptation of IKS is a clear demonstration of its potential to stay relevant and effective throughout different historical periods.

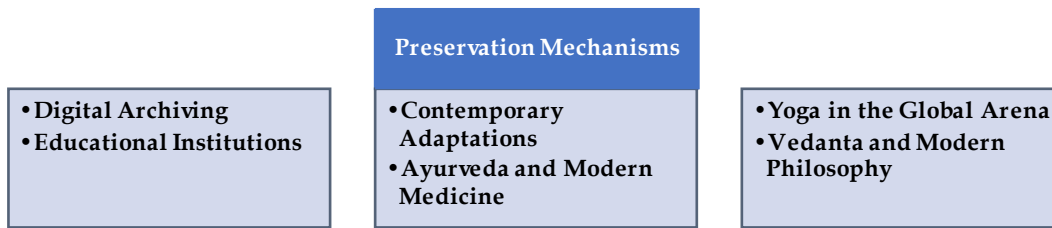


Figure 1. Preservation Mechanisms

Educational Institutions

Over the course of history, IKS has shown a remarkable capacity for adaptation. For instance, we have used the principles of Ayurveda to tackle new medical challenges and found that the philosophical principles of Vedanta are relevant in many cultural contexts. The use of IKS serves as a conspicuous manifestation of its capacity to remain relevant and efficacious throughout many historical epochs.

Digital Archiving

The process of converting manuscripts and texts into digital format has greatly aided in the preservation efforts of the IKS. The National Manuscript Mission and digital libraries have enabled worldwide access to ancient writings, promoting wider involvement and scholarly investigation.

Contemporary Adaptations :

Other potential means of current adaptation include Ayurveda, an ancient Indian medicinal system that has been extensively incorporated into modern medical treatments. The ideas of Ayurveda are being progressively validated by scientific study, which has resulted in the creation of integrative health treatments. This synergy is shown by the integration of Ayurvedic medicines into wellness initiatives on a global scale. Furthermore, yoga, originating from old Indian spiritual traditions, has gained worldwide popularity. The current variations of yoga, such as power yoga and therapeutic yoga, demonstrate how traditional practices may be adjusted to suit modern ways of living. Styles. The International Day of Yoga, observed globally, highlights the widespread recognition and incorporation of this age-old discipline.

Vedanta and Modern Philosophy

The Vedanta school, which is a prominent branch of Indian philosophy, nevertheless has a significant impact on modern thinking. The concepts of this concept have been incorporated into modern philosophical debate, psychology, and management research. Modern self-help literature often incorporates Vedantic themes to highlight the importance of mindfulness and self-awareness.

5. Discussion

Case Studies

Integrative Medicine

Integrative medicine, a discipline that merges standard Western medicine with alternative treatments, often includes the incorporation of Ayurvedic traditions. Medical facilities and wellness establishments worldwide provide treatments that use Ayurvedic diagnostics and therapies, demonstrating the practical implementation of ancient knowledge in modern healthcare. Projects in the field of digital humanities provide a vast range of possibilities. These programs have become a prominent platform for the implementation of Indigenous Knowledge

Systems (IKS). The Digital South Asia Library and online Sanskrit courses demonstrate how digital means may effectively support the conservation and distribution of traditional knowledge.

Challenges and Opportunities Intellectual Property and Ethical Concerns

The application of IKS to modern circumstances prompts significant enquiries about intellectual property and ethical conduct. Ensuring the proper and considerate use of traditional knowledge and distributing its advantages to the communities from which it originated continues to be a crucial concern. However, while adaptation is essential, preserving the authenticity of ancient knowledge is also crucial. Achieving a harmonious equilibrium between maintaining the fundamental nature of IKS and accepting new advancements is a substantial obstacle.

Indian Mind and Indian Knowledge System :

The hierarchical arrangement of its traditional writings, which include a well organised examination of many areas of knowledge, clearly demonstrates the very systematic and categorising characteristic of the Indian intellect. This taxonomic propensity is seen in several ways: Indian literature often use a hierarchical framework, organising knowledge into core and secondary divisions, each with its own subcategories. The Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda, which are the four main writings of the Vedic corpus, each have specific ceremonial and philosophical functions. The divide is further elucidated by supplementary literature such as the Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads, with each tier providing more profound insights and specialised knowledge. The thematic arrangement of writings encompasses all-encompassing facets of a topic. Ayurvedic literature, such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, are organised into parts (samhitas) that cover different areas of medicine, including diagnostics, therapies, surgical procedures, and pharmacology. This methodical methodology guarantees that professionals may effortlessly browse extensive repositories of knowledge to get precise facts. Many traditional Indian writings are composed in the sutra format, which consists of brief aphorisms that condense complex concepts. The sutras are representative. Generally, the sutras adhere to a coherent and all-encompassing structure, where each aphorism builds upon the preceding one in a logical sequence. Anjali, for example, offers a methodical approach to yoga practices and philosophy, providing a well-organised route for spiritual growth. According to the study conducted by Majumdar in 2024, the Indian academic tradition involves thorough cross-referencing and the creation of comments (bhashyas) on fundamental texts. This method not only conserves the original information but also enhances it by incorporating fresh ideas and interpretations. Shankaracharya's comments on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the BrahmaSutras provide a systematic clarification and interpretation of these works, showcasing a methodical analytical approach. The number is 32. Disciplines in Indian knowledge systems are categorised into separate yet related domains. Academics examine the six traditional schools of Hindu philosophy, namely Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta, in order to establish a thorough comprehension of philosophical investigation by considering their interrelationships. Texts often combine pragmatic directives with conceptual frameworks. In the world of music, Sarangadeva's Sangita Ratnakara organises several elements of music theory, performance, and instrumentation in a methodical way. This offers both musicians and researchers a systematic framework to study and practise music. The hierarchical composition of Indian literature facilitates the comprehension of various degrees of complexity, accommodating both novices and proficient students. This is apparent in the understanding of texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, which may be interpreted either as a simple story or as a deep philosophical discourse, depending on the reader's degree of understanding and perception. The highly taxonomic character of the Indian intellect, as seen by the intricate and systematic study of texts,

emphasises a profound dedication to the organisation and spread of information. This careful organisation guarantees that extensive and intricate collections of information may be easily accessed, explored, and systematically expanded, facilitating ongoing intellectual development and preservation throughout generations.

6. Conclusion

It is accurate to say that vocabulary is not only a set of words, but a crucial tool for safeguarding, transmitting, and developing Indian knowledge systems. The extensive linguistic legacy of India, which is deeply connected to classical languages, provides support for a diverse range of disciplines and remains a crucial influence on the country's cultural and intellectual spheres. Conversely, Indian knowledge systems showcase a distinctive fusion of history and modernity, showcasing their capacity to withstand challenges and adjust accordingly. IKS maintains its fundamental ideas while adopting modern approaches, allowing it to provide useful insights and practices that remain applicable in the present day. The continuous incorporation of IKS into other domains underscores their lasting importance and promise for future contributions to worldwide knowledge. This study also distantly asserts that within the Indian tradition, there has been an ongoing and deep contemplation on the essence and qualities of knowledge, with a focus on its intricate and varied nature. Individuals categorise information into diverse subsets depending on its subject matter and its impact on others, rather than seeing it as a single, homogeneous item. This sophisticated approach acknowledges that many forms of information fulfil distinct functions and exert diverse influences on individuals' lives, showing a profound philosophical comprehension of the multiple essence of knowledge.

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*Indian Knowledge Systems and Ballads in Contemporary Contexts: Preserving Tradition
Amidst Modern Adaptation*

Abrar Ahmed, Naresh Rathore

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