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Indian Knowledge Systems in Historical Perspective: Continuity, Transformation, and Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract:

Indian Knowledge Systems encompass the intellectual, scientific, philosophical, artistic, ecological, and social traditions developed across the Indian subcontinent over centuries. This study examines their historical evolution through the interconnected processes of continuity, transformation, and adaptation. It argues that these traditions were never static; rather, they responded creatively to changing political, cultural, technological, and institutional contexts. Knowledge in fields such as philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, agriculture, linguistics, architecture, and environmental management was preserved through texts, oral transmission, apprenticeship, and community practice. Colonial rule disrupted many indigenous institutions while also generating new forms of reinterpretation and reform. In the contemporary period, renewed interest in Indian Knowledge Systems offers opportunities for educational innovation, cultural confidence, sustainability, and interdisciplinary research. However, meaningful revival requires critical scholarship, verifiable evidence, social inclusiveness, and openness to scientific evaluation. Concludes that their relevance today lies in responsible adaptation rather than uncritical glorification or simple historical restoration.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems; Historical Continuity; Knowledge Transformation; Evidence-Based Revival; Sustainable Development



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1. Introduction

Indian Knowledge Systems, commonly abbreviated as IKS, represent the diverse intellectual, scientific, philosophical, artistic, ecological, medical and educational traditions that developed across the Indian subcontinent. These traditions were not produced within a single historical period or by one social group. They emerged through sustained observation, reasoning, experimentation, reflection, dialogue and practical engagement with human life and the natural environment. Indian Knowledge Systems should therefore be understood as dynamic and evolving traditions rather than as an unchanging body of ancient information (Kumar, 2024; Mahesh, 2023). Indian Knowledge Systems may be defined as the accumulated bodies of knowledge, practices, methods and values developed and transmitted by Indian communities over successive generations. Their scope includes philosophy, logic, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, architecture, metallurgy, governance, ethics, literature, music, performing arts, environmental management and spiritual inquiry. IKS thus includes both classical textual traditions and the practical knowledge preserved by local, tribal, occupational and rural communities (Mahesh, 2023; Mishra & Aithal, 2023). IKS is indigenous because it emerged from the historical experiences, languages, environments and social needs of communities within the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, it is multidisciplinary because traditional scholars rarely separated philosophy, science, ethics, health, art and social responsibility into completely isolated subjects. For example, Ayurveda combined medical observation with diet, psychology, ecology and ethics, while architectural traditions connected geometry, materials, aesthetics and environmental conditions. This interconnectedness remains one of the most significant characteristics of IKS (Kumar, 2024; Mahesh, 2023). Knowledge in the Indian tradition was closely related to culture and everyday social life. Agricultural practices, medicinal knowledge, festivals, oral narratives, crafts and community customs frequently served as vehicles for transmitting experience from one generation to another. Knowledge was therefore not confined to formal institutions or written texts; it was also preserved through families, communities, temples, monasteries,

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workshops and occupational groups. However, access to learning was not always equal, and caste, gender, political authority and economic position influenced who could participate in particular forms of education. A balanced study of IKS must recognize both its intellectual achievements and its historical social limitations (Bhat & Javaid, 2024; Hossain, 2023).

1.2 Objectives

1. To the philosophical concepts, epistemological traditions and intellectual foundations underlying Indian Knowledge Systems.
2. To trace the continuity, interaction and transformation of Indian knowledge traditions from the Vedic period to the postcolonial era.
3. To traditional institutions and methods of knowledge transmission and evaluate their relevance to contemporary education and society.

2. Philosophical Foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems

Indian Knowledge Systems are founded on the belief that knowledge must contribute not only to intellectual development but also to ethical conduct, disciplined living and a deeper understanding of the self and society. Indian philosophical traditions developed systematic explanations of reality, consciousness, valid knowledge, human suffering and liberation. Although these traditions differed considerably, they shared a sustained concern with how knowledge is acquired, tested and applied in life (Bhat & Javaid, 2024; Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

2.1 Concept of Knowledge in Indian Thought

2.1.1 Meaning of Jnana, Vidya, and Prajna

The term jnana generally refers to knowledge, cognition or understanding. It may denote ordinary awareness as well as deeper philosophical knowledge. Vidya refers to organized learning, education or a discipline through which knowledge is acquired. Prajna indicates mature wisdom or penetrating insight that goes beyond the mechanical collection of information. Together, these concepts suggest that genuine education should develop information, understanding and wise judgement rather than mere memorization (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

2.1.2 Para Vidya and Apra Vidya

The Upanishadic distinction between para vidya and apra vidya presents knowledge at two interconnected levels. Apra vidya concerns languages, texts, rituals, empirical disciplines and knowledge of the observable world. Para vidya refers to higher knowledge through which the enduring nature of reality and the self is understood. The distinction does not necessarily reject worldly learning; rather, it proposes that technical and intellectual abilities should be guided by ethical and spiritual understanding (Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

2.1.3 Knowledge as a Means of Self-Realization

In several Indian philosophical traditions, knowledge is transformative. Its purpose is not merely to secure employment, status or material success but to overcome ignorance and develop self-control, moral responsibility and freedom from suffering. Education was consequently connected with reflection, discipline and character formation. This understanding continues to inform contemporary discussions of value-based and holistic education (Isser et al., 2024).

2.2 Major Philosophical Traditions

2.2.1 Nyaya and Vaisheshika

Nyaya developed a systematic tradition of logic, argumentation and epistemology. It examined valid means of knowledge, including perception, inference, comparison and reliable testimony. It also analysed doubt, error and defective reasoning. Vaisheshika investigated the basic categories of existence, such as substance, quality, action, generality and particularity. Together, the two traditions encouraged careful observation, classification and rational debate, demonstrating the analytical character of Indian philosophy (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

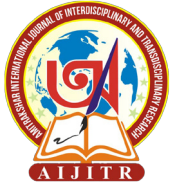
2.2.2 Samkhya and Yoga

Samkhya explains existence through the distinction between purusha, or consciousness, and prakriti, the material and psychological source of the experienced world. Human suffering arises when pure consciousness is incorrectly identified with mental and material processes. Yoga translates related philosophical insights into a disciplined practice involving ethical conduct, bodily regulation, concentration and meditation. Samkhya supplies an analytical framework, while Yoga provides a practical path for transforming awareness (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

2.2.3 Mimamsa and Vedanta

Mimamsa developed sophisticated methods for interpreting Vedic statements, resolving textual contradictions and establishing the authority and meaning of language. It made important contributions to hermeneutics, linguistics and theories of knowledge. Vedanta concentrated on the relationship among the individual self, ultimate reality and the world. Although its schools offered different interpretations, Vedanta generally regarded freedom from ignorance as a central goal of philosophical inquiry (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

2.3 Heterodox Traditions



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2.3.1 Buddhist Epistemology

Buddhist philosophy questioned the existence of an unchanging self and emphasized impermanence, dependent origination and the causes of suffering. Buddhist thinkers developed detailed analyses of perception, inference, consciousness and language. Knowledge was valued when it corrected attachment and misunderstanding and contributed to compassion and liberation. Monastic debate further encouraged rigorous reasoning and the defence of philosophical positions (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

2.3.2 Jain Philosophy and Anekantavada

Jain philosophy maintains that reality is complex and cannot be completely represented from one limited standpoint. The doctrine of anekantavada, or many-sidedness, encourages recognition of the partial character of individual claims. Its associated methods of conditional expression promote intellectual caution rather than simple relativism. The tradition therefore offers an important framework for dialogue, non-dogmatism and the respectful examination of alternative viewpoints (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

2.3.3 Charvaka Materialism

Charvaka, also known as Lokayata, represents the materialist and sceptical current of Indian philosophy. It questioned Vedic authority, ritualism, the afterlife and metaphysical claims that could not be supported by experience. Charvaka thinkers gave primary importance to perception and challenged the unrestricted use of inference. Their presence demonstrates that Indian intellectual history included scepticism, disagreement and materialism alongside religious and spiritual traditions.

3. Historical Development of Indian Knowledge Systems

Indian Knowledge Systems developed through processes of continuity, debate, migration, translation and cultural interaction. Knowledge was repeatedly reinterpreted as political structures, languages, religions and institutions changed. Indian intellectual history should therefore not be represented as a simple movement from an ideal ancient period to later decline. It reflects both preservation and continuous transformation (Hossain, 2023; Mahesh, 2023).

3.1 Vedic Period

3.1.1 The Vedas as Sources of Knowledge

The Vedas are among the earliest surviving sources of Indian religious, linguistic, philosophical and social thought. Preserved through carefully regulated oral recitation, they contain hymns, ritual formulations, reflections on nature and questions concerning human and cosmic order. Their preservation also stimulated developments in phonetics, grammar, metre, etymology and astronomy required for accurate interpretation and ritual performance (Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

3.1.2 Development of Ritual, Philosophy, and Social Thought

Early Vedic knowledge was closely connected with sacrificial practices and the maintenance of cosmic and social order. Over time, reflection on ritual action encouraged broader questions about duty, causation, existence, social organization and the relationship between human beings and nature. Knowledge gradually expanded from the correct performance of ritual to the interpretation of its symbolic, ethical and philosophical significance (Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

3.1.3 Role of the Upanishads

The Upanishads marked an important development from predominantly external ritual toward inward philosophical inquiry. They explored consciousness, the self, ultimate reality, death and liberation. Their characteristic use of dialogue and questioning made philosophical understanding an active process of reflection rather than passive acceptance. The Upanishadic emphasis on self-knowledge became highly influential in later Vedantic and educational traditions.

3.2 Classical Period

3.2.1 Growth of Systematic Sciences

During the classical period, knowledge became increasingly organized into specialized disciplines. Important developments occurred in grammar, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, political thought, poetics, architecture and metallurgy. Scholars developed classifications, technical vocabularies and methods of demonstration. This period reveals that intellectual life included both philosophical reflection and sustained engagement with practical and empirical problems (Mahesh, 2023; Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

3.2.2 Development of Universities and Scholarly Traditions

Major centres such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi and later Vikramashila attracted learners and teachers from different regions. These centres were not identical to modern universities, but they supported advanced study, scholarly communities, residential learning and intellectual exchange. Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain institutions created overlapping networks through which texts, teachers and ideas circulated (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

3.2.3 Production of Texts and Commentaries

The composition of sutras, treatises, commentaries and sub-commentaries became a central feature of classical scholarship. Concise foundational texts were explained, defended and revised by later commentators. Commentary was not merely repetition; it was an intellectual method through which scholars resolved ambiguities, challenged opponents and adapted older teachings to new circumstances. This practice enabled continuity without preventing innovation.

3.3 Medieval Period



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3.3.1 Interaction with Islamic and Persian Traditions

The medieval period witnessed sustained interaction among Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and regional intellectual traditions. Translation, royal patronage, commercial exchange and scholarly movement facilitated the circulation of knowledge in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, administration, literature and philosophy. Indo-Persian culture emerged from such interactions, showing that Indian knowledge developed through exchange as well as through internal continuity.

3.3.2 Bhakti and Sufi Contributions

Bhakti and Sufi teachers expanded the social and linguistic reach of religious and ethical knowledge. Many communicated through poetry, songs, stories and public gatherings rather than through highly specialized scholastic texts. Their teachings emphasized devotion, love, equality, personal experience and criticism of empty ritualism. These movements made knowledge emotionally accessible and connected philosophical ideas with everyday human relationships.

3.3.3 Regional-Language Knowledge Traditions

The growth of Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam and other regional literary traditions broadened knowledge production. Medical practices, devotional teachings, agricultural experience, local histories and artistic conventions were recorded or transmitted through regional languages. This development reduced the exclusive dependence on Sanskrit or Persian and enabled communities to express knowledge within their own cultural environments.

3.4 Colonial and Postcolonial Periods

3.4.1 Introduction of Western Education

Colonial rule introduced and expanded English-medium institutions, printed textbooks, standardized curricula, formal examinations and European disciplinary classifications. These institutions created access to modern science, law and administration, but they also established Western knowledge as the principal standard of intellectual legitimacy. Indigenous education was increasingly judged through categories created by the colonial state (Hossain, 2023).

3.4.2 Marginalization of Indigenous Institutions

Pathshalas, tols, craft networks, community schools and other local institutions lost patronage and authority under changing economic and administrative conditions. English education became closely associated with government employment and social advancement. Indigenous institutions did not disappear completely, but many were weakened, informalized or represented as outdated. Colonial transformation therefore involved both institutional displacement and the restructuring of cultural authority (Hossain, 2023).

3.4.3 Revival and Reinterpretation After Independence

After independence, scholars and institutions renewed interest in Indian philosophy, classical languages, traditional medicine, arts and local knowledge. More recently, universities have introduced IKS courses, research centres and interdisciplinary programmes. Nevertheless, revival should not mean the uncritical glorification of every inherited claim. Contemporary relevance depends on accurate translation, historical evidence, scientific testing where appropriate and respect for constitutional principles of equality and inclusion (Kumar, 2024; Isser et al., 2024).

4. Institutions and Methods of Knowledge Transmission

Indian knowledge was transmitted through a wide range of formal and informal institutions. Teaching occurred in residential schools, monasteries, temples, village institutions, households, workshops and occupational communities. Different institutions served different subjects and social groups, making the educational landscape more diverse than the idea of one uniform “ancient Indian education system” suggests (Hossain, 2023; Shanwal, 2023).

4.1 Traditional Educational Institutions

4.1.1 Gurukula System

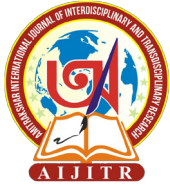
In the Gurukula system, learners generally lived with or near the teacher and participated in a disciplined educational environment. Instruction included texts, practical responsibilities, ethical behaviour and life skills. Close contact enabled the teacher to adapt learning to the learner’s ability and conduct. However, historical access varied according to period, community, gender and social position (Shanwal, 2023; Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

4.1.2 Pathshalas, Tols, and Agraharas

Pathshalas commonly provided elementary or community-based instruction, while tols became associated particularly with advanced Sanskrit learning. Agraharas were settlements or grants supporting Brahmanical teachers and scholarship. These institutions taught subjects such as language, literature, logic, law, ritual, mathematics and accounting, although their organization differed considerably across regions (Hossain, 2023).

4.1.3 Buddhist Viharas and Jain Centres

Buddhist viharas developed into residential centres for religious, philosophical and linguistic education. Some attracted international students and supported libraries, debates and translation. Jain temples, monasteries and manuscript repositories similarly preserved philosophy, logic, literature, mathematics and commercial knowledge. These institutions contributed to multilingual and interregional scholarly networks (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).



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4.2 Major Centres of Learning

4.2.1 Takshashila

Takshashila functioned as an important centre where individual teachers offered advanced instruction in areas such as medicine, governance, military studies, language and philosophy. It appears to have operated as a network of teachers and learners rather than as one centrally administered university. Its reputation illustrates the movement of students across political and regional boundaries.

4.2.2 Nalanda

Nalanda became a major residential and monastic centre associated especially with Buddhist learning. Its curriculum also included logic, grammar, medicine, philosophy and other subjects. Scholarly debate, access to manuscripts and the presence of teachers and students from different regions made it an influential centre of intellectual exchange (Bhat & Javaid, 2024).

4.2.3 Vikramashila and Vallabhi

Vikramashila became known for advanced Buddhist scholarship, debate and the training of teachers and translators. Vallabhi was associated with Buddhist and Jain learning as well as subjects related to administration and public life. Their development demonstrates that major educational centres possessed distinct intellectual specializations rather than following one standardized curriculum.

4.3 Pedagogical Methods

4.3.1 Oral Transmission and Memorization

Oral transmission was essential in periods when manuscripts were expensive and limited. Listening, repetition and rhythmic recitation enabled learners to preserve large bodies of material accurately. Memorization was not necessarily the final goal; it provided a stable foundation for interpretation, reflection and application. Oral traditions also allowed communities without formal literacy to maintain practical knowledge (Mahesh, 2023).

4.3.2 Dialogue, Debate, and Questioning

Dialogue and structured debate trained students to formulate arguments, identify contradictions and respond to competing interpretations. Philosophical traditions developed procedures for presenting a proposition, supplying reasons and examining objections. Questioning was therefore not regarded simply as disobedience.

5. Contributions to Science, Mathematics, and Technology

5.1 Mathematics

5.1.1 Development of Zero and the Decimal System

One of India's most influential mathematical contributions was the systematic development of the decimal place-value system. Indian mathematicians treated zero not merely as an empty position but increasingly as a number that could be used in calculations. This combination of nine numerals, zero, and positional notation made complex arithmetic more efficient and later travelled through Arabic scholarly networks to Europe (Dani, 2012; Divakaran, 2016; Jaouiche, 1998).

5.1.2 Algebra, Geometry, and Arithmetic

Indian mathematics developed through practical and theoretical problems involving trade, taxation, construction, astronomy, inheritance, and ritual geometry. Scholars formulated procedures for fractions, square and cube roots, linear and quadratic equations, permutations, progressions, and indeterminate equations. The Śulbasūtras demonstrated sophisticated geometrical understanding, while later texts presented mathematical rules in concise verses supported by worked examples (Dutta, 2002; Divakaran, 2016).

5.1.3 Contributions of Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, and Bhaskaracharya

Aryabhata made important contributions to arithmetic, trigonometry, astronomical calculation, and approximations of π . Brahmagupta formulated rules for calculating with zero, negative numbers, quadratic equations, and indeterminate equations. Bhaskaracharya, particularly through the *Līlāvati* and *Bījagaṇita*, refined algebraic methods, numerical problems, cyclic methods, and ideas resembling instantaneous motion and rates of change (Dani, 2012; Divakaran, 2016).

5.2 Astronomy

5.2.1 Planetary Calculations

Indian astronomers constructed mathematical models to calculate the positions of the Sun, Moon, and visible planets. Their procedures used mean and corrected planetary positions, trigonometric tables, cycles, and geometric adjustments. These calculations were important for predicting celestial events and preparing calendars rather than being based solely on religious speculation (Dani, 2012; Kapoor, 2021).

5.2.2 Calendrical Systems and Time Measurement

Calendrical knowledge connected lunar months, solar movement, seasons, and intercalary months. Units ranging from extremely brief intervals to days, months, and longer cosmic cycles reflected sustained interest in time measurement. Regional calendars varied, yet they generally attempted to reconcile lunar and solar cycles for agriculture, festivals, and civil life (Kapoor, 2021).



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5.2.3 Observation of Eclipses and Celestial Movements

Indian astronomical texts increasingly explained eclipses through the relative positions of the Sun, Earth, and Moon. Mathematical procedures were developed to estimate their timing, duration, and magnitude. Although mythological accounts continued in cultural practice, technical astronomy provided computational explanations of eclipses and planetary movements (Kapoor, 2021).

5.3 Metallurgy and Material Sciences

5.3.1 Iron and Steel Production

Indian metallurgists produced high-quality iron and crucible steel, including the material commonly associated with wootz steel. Control over carbon content, heating, forging, and cooling enabled the production of strong cutting implements and trade materials. Studies of surviving objects demonstrate that this achievement resulted from accumulated empirical knowledge of ores, furnaces, and thermal treatment (Verhoeven et al., 1998).

5.3.2 Zinc Extraction and Metal Casting

The zinc-production centres of Rajasthan demonstrate early mastery of high-temperature distillation. Because zinc vaporises easily, its extraction required specially designed retorts and controlled condensation. Indian craftspeople also employed lost-wax casting, alloying, soldering, and mould technologies for producing coins, vessels, tools, sculptures, and ritual objects (Kharakwal & Gurjar, 2006).

5.3.3 Construction Technologies and Corrosion Resistance

The Delhi Iron Pillar illustrates the durability achievable through traditional forging and material selection. Its resistance to serious corrosion has been associated with the composition of the iron, environmental conditions, and the formation of a protective surface layer. It should therefore be understood as an outcome of skilled production rather than as an unexplained technological mystery (Balasubramaniam, 2000).

5.4 Engineering and Architecture

5.4.1 Town Planning and Drainage Systems

Harappan settlements displayed planned streets, standardised bricks, wells, bathing spaces, covered drains, and systems for managing household wastewater. These features indicate organised civic labour and an understanding of sanitation, measurement, and urban coordination.

5.4.2 Temple and Structural Architecture

Indian temple architecture combined geometry, structural engineering, sculpture, ritual movement, and regional craftsmanship. Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara traditions were not fixed formulas; builders continually modified layouts, towers, halls, entrances, and decorative programmes according to available materials and local patronage (Hardy, 2001).

5.4.3 Water-Harvesting and Irrigation Technologies

Reservoirs, tanks, stepwells, canals, embankments, and village ponds were developed in response to India's uneven monsoon conditions. Their maintenance commonly depended on cooperation among rulers, cultivators, artisans, and local communities. These systems demonstrate how engineering knowledge was adapted to particular landscapes rather than imposed through a single universal design.

6. Medicine, Health, and Environmental Knowledge

6.1 Ayurveda

6.1.1 Concepts of Tridosha and Prakriti

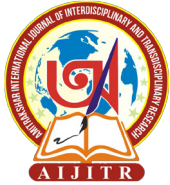
Ayurveda understands health through the dynamic relationship among the body, mind, behaviour, environment, and constitution. The three doshas—vata, pitta, and kapha—function as organising concepts for physiological tendencies. Prakriti refers to an individual's relatively stable constitution and is used to explain why people may differ in digestion, temperament, disease vulnerability, and response to treatment (Dey & Pahwa, 2014). These concepts should not be treated as direct substitutes for modern anatomical or biochemical categories. Their contemporary value lies mainly in their personalised and systems-oriented approach, which can be scientifically investigated without assuming that every traditional explanation has already been validated.

6.1.2 Preventive and Curative Healthcare

Ayurvedic healthcare gives considerable importance to prevention through daily routines, seasonal adjustment, diet, sleep, hygiene, physical activity, and emotional balance. Curative treatment may include dietary regulation, plant-based preparations, external therapies, purification procedures, and changes in behaviour. This approach views the patient's lifestyle and surroundings as relevant to both illness and recovery (Patwardhan et al., 2005).

6.1.3 Contributions of Charaka and Sushruta

The Charaka Samhitā is especially associated with internal medicine, diagnosis, pharmacology, digestion, medical reasoning, and professional ethics. The Sushruta Samhitā presents detailed discussions of anatomy, surgical instruments, wound care, fractures, obstetric procedures, and reconstructive operations. Sushruta's descriptions of nasal reconstruction are frequently



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discussed in the history of plastic surgery (Champaneria et al., 2014).

6.2 Yoga and Mental Well-Being

6.2.1 Eightfold Path of Yoga

The classical eightfold path consists of yama or ethical restraints, niyama or personal disciplines, asana or posture, pranayama or breath regulation, pratyahara or withdrawal of the senses, dharana or concentration, dhyana or meditation, and samadhi or deep absorption. Thus, yoga is broader than physical flexibility or exercise.

6.2.2 Relationship Between Body, Mind, and Consciousness

Yoga treats bodily posture, breathing, attention, emotions, conduct, and consciousness as interconnected. Regular practice seeks to reduce mental distraction and develop disciplined awareness. Its holistic orientation explains why yoga has been interpreted simultaneously as a philosophical discipline, contemplative practice, health activity, and method of self-regulation.

6.2.3 Contemporary Therapeutic Applications

Modern research has examined yoga in relation to stress, anxiety, quality of life, blood pressure, chronic pain, occupational exhaustion, and rehabilitation. Evidence suggests potential benefits, particularly for stress reduction, but results differ according to the population, yoga style, duration, and research design. Yoga is therefore most responsibly used as a complementary practice rather than an automatic replacement for necessary medical or psychological care (Pascoe et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2023).

6.3 Traditional Environmental Knowledge

6.3.1 Sacred Groves and Biodiversity Conservation

Sacred groves are forest patches protected through religious belief, customary restrictions, and community responsibility. In several regions, they preserve mature trees, medicinal plants, water sources, and habitats that have disappeared from surrounding landscapes. Their effectiveness, however, depends on continuing community participation and protection from commercial encroachment (Bhagwat & Rutte, 2006; Bhagwat et al., 2005).

6.3.2 Community-Based Water Management

Traditional water management included village tanks, johads, ahars, pynes, kuhls, bamboo channels, stepwells, and locally maintained irrigation networks. Such systems distributed both benefits and maintenance responsibilities among users. Their history shows that successful water governance depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on social cooperation and locally accepted rules.

6.3.3 Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Communities developed seasonal restrictions, rotational harvesting, grazing rules, mixed-use forests, and customary limits on extraction. These practices were not always perfectly egalitarian or environmentally harmless, but many encouraged restraint and long-term resource availability. Their relevance lies in adaptation to particular ecosystems and in community knowledge accumulated across generations (Singh & Sureja, 2008).

6.4 Agriculture and Food Systems

6.4.1 Indigenous Farming Practices

Indigenous agriculture included mixed cropping, crop rotation, farmyard manure, green manure, livestock integration, natural pest management, and cultivation suited to local rainfall and soils. These practices spread risk across crops and helped households respond to climatic uncertainty (Singh & Sureja, 2008).

6.4.2 Seed Preservation and Crop Diversity

Farmers traditionally selected and preserved seeds according to taste, yield, drought resistance, maturity period, storage quality, and cultural preference. Community exchange sustained locally adapted varieties of rice, millet, pulses, vegetables, and oilseeds. Protecting this diversity remains important for climate resilience and food sovereignty.

6.4.3 Traditional Dietary and Nutritional Knowledge

Indian dietary traditions connect food with season, age, digestion, occupation, geography, and health condition. Fermentation, sprouting, sun-drying, pickling, and spice combinations improve preservation, flavour, and dietary variety. Contemporary use requires nutritional evaluation, because traditional status alone does not guarantee that every food practice is suitable for every person (Sarkar et al., 2015).

7. Language, Literature, Arts, and Cultural Knowledge

7.1 Linguistic Traditions

7.1.1 Sanskrit Grammar and Panini

Panini's Aṣṭādhyāyī represents one of the most systematic grammatical achievements of the ancient world. Its concise rules analyse sounds, word formation, compounds, inflection, and sentence construction through an organised metalanguage. The rules operate through ordered relationships, exceptions, and transformations, making the work important not only to linguistics but also to modern discussions of formal systems and computational language analysis (Kiparsky, 2009).

7.1.2 Prakrit, Pali, and Regional Languages



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Indian intellectual history was never expressed through Sanskrit alone. Pali became central to Theravada Buddhist literature, while different Prakrits were used in Jain texts, inscriptions, drama, poetry, and everyday communication. Tamil and other regional languages developed rich classical and vernacular traditions. Continuous interaction among these languages produced a multilingual literary culture rather than completely isolated linguistic communities (Orsini, 2012).

7.1.3 Oral and Textual Traditions

Orality and writing functioned together. Precise recitation protected sacred and scholarly texts, while storytellers, performers, teachers, and community specialists reshaped narratives for new audiences. Manuscripts preserved selected versions, but performance allowed knowledge to remain responsive to local memory, language, and social change (Blackburn, 2001).

7.2 Literary Knowledge

7.2.1 Epics and Puranic Literature

The Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranic traditions communicate ethical dilemmas, political ideals, kinship conflicts, cosmology, pilgrimage geography, and models of duty. They should not be read as simple historical chronicles. Their importance lies in the many ways communities have interpreted, translated, performed, questioned, and regionalised them.

7.2.2 Classical Poetry and Drama

Classical poetry and drama developed refined conventions of metre, imagery, character, suggestion, and emotional experience. Authors such as Kalidasa connected human emotion with landscape, season, love, duty, and political life. Dramatic literature combined speech, gesture, costume, music, and movement, demonstrating the integrated character of Indian artistic knowledge.

7.2.3 Folk Narratives and Regional Literature

Folk tales, ballads, oral epics, devotional poetry, legends, and regional narratives preserved experiences that elite texts often neglected. Women, pastoral groups, artisans, tribal communities, and local religious performers used narrative to express memory, dissent, identity, and moral instruction. Oral epics remain living traditions because performers adapt them to their audience (Blackburn, 2001).

7.3 Performing Arts

7.3.1 Music and the Theory of Raga

A raga is not merely a musical scale. It includes characteristic ascending and descending movements, emphasised notes, melodic phrases, ornamentation, mood, and conventions of performance. Raga knowledge is therefore transmitted through both theory and prolonged listening and practice under a teacher.

7.3.2 Classical and Folk Dance Traditions

Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Manipuri, and other classical traditions combine rhythm, gesture, facial expression, narrative, and bodily discipline. Folk and community dances connect performance with agriculture, festivals, marriage, worship, labour, and regional identity. Both classical and folk forms have changed through patronage, institutions, cinema, tourism, and modern stages.

7.3.3 Theatre and the Natyashastra

The Natyashastra presents theatre as a composite art involving acting, music, dance, poetry, architecture, costume, stagecraft, and audience response. Its treatment of gesture and emotion influenced later performance traditions. Nevertheless, present-day theatre and dance also reflect regional innovation and cannot be reduced to one Sanskrit treatise.

7.4 Visual Arts and Aesthetics

7.4.1 Painting and Sculpture

Indian painting and sculpture developed through courtly, monastic, temple, household, and community settings. Murals, manuscripts, bronzes, stone sculpture, textiles, and folk paintings combined technical skill with narrative and symbolic knowledge. Styles changed as artists responded to new patrons, materials, religions, and regional contacts.

7.4.2 Temple Iconography

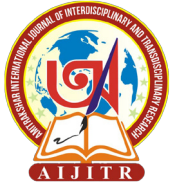
Temple images communicate philosophical and narrative meanings through posture, gesture, attributes, proportion, placement, and association with other figures. Iconographic manuals guided craftspeople, but regional workshops also exercised creativity. Architecture and sculpture together shaped the devotee's movement and experience within sacred space (Hardy, 2001).

7.4.3 Concepts of Rasa and Beauty

The concept of rasa explains aesthetic experience as the cultivated enjoyment of an emotional mood. Love, heroism, compassion, wonder, humour, fear, anger, disgust, and tranquillity could be artistically developed through performance. Beauty was therefore understood not only as attractive form but as a shared transformation of represented emotion into aesthetic experience. India's linguistic and artistic traditions survived through interaction among oral transmission, manuscript culture, regional languages, institutions, and performance communities. They demonstrate continuity, but they also reveal repeated reinterpretation rather than unchanged preservation (Orsini, 2012; Pollock, 2001).

8. Continuity and Transformation of Indian Knowledge Systems

8.1 Elements of Continuity



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8.1.1 Survival Through Oral Traditions

Oral transmission has been central to the continuity of Indian knowledge. Recitation systems preserved pronunciation, rhythm, sequence, and interpretation, while stories, songs, genealogies, medical practices, and ecological observations were transmitted through repeated performance. Orality was not simply a substitute for writing; it involved specialised methods of memory, correction, and instruction (Blackburn, 2001).

8.1.2 Preservation by Families and Communities

Families of physicians, musicians, craftspeople, farmers, priests, performers, metalworkers, and builders preserved specialised knowledge through apprenticeship. Communities also maintained sacred groves, water systems, local festivals, seed varieties, and customary institutions. Such preservation allowed knowledge to survive even when royal courts, monasteries, or formal schools declined.

8.1.3 Continuing Role of Rituals, Customs, and Practices

Rituals and customs continue to transmit knowledge about calendars, food, kinship, health, music, ecology, and social responsibility. Continuity does not necessarily mean that a practice remains unchanged. Meanings, participants, materials, and settings may alter while communities still understand the practice as part of an inherited tradition.

8.2 Processes of Transformation

8.2.1 Adaptation to Changing Social Conditions

Knowledge traditions adapted to urbanisation, migration, new occupations, social reform, state regulation, and technological change. Yoga moved from specialised lineages into schools, studios, hospitals, and global wellness industries. Classical arts entered universities and public stages, while traditional crafts adjusted to tourism, machine production, and changing markets (Jain, 2012).

8.2.2 Translation and Reinterpretation of Classical Texts

Translation into Persian, Arabic, English, Hindi, and regional languages expanded the audiences of classical texts. Every translation also involved selection and reinterpretation. Modern editions reorganised fluid manuscript traditions into standardised printed works, making knowledge more accessible while sometimes obscuring regional variation and disagreement (Orsini, 2012; Pollock, 2001).

8.2.3 Integration With Modern Scientific Knowledge

Contemporary researchers investigate Ayurveda, agriculture, metallurgy, yoga, linguistics, and ecology through laboratory studies, clinical trials, engineering analysis, and digital documentation. Productive integration requires neither automatic rejection nor unquestioning acceptance. Traditional claims must be clearly defined, ethically documented, and evaluated through appropriate evidence (Agrawal, 1995; Patwardhan et al., 2005).

8.3 Impact of External Interactions

8.3.1 Greek, Persian, Arab, and Central Asian Influences

Indian knowledge developed through exchange with Greek, Persian, Arab, and Central Asian worlds. Astronomy, medicine, mathematics, art, architecture, language, and administration all absorbed and reshaped ideas travelling across regions. Indian numerals and mathematical procedures, in turn, influenced Arabic scholarship and later European learning (Jaouiche, 1998).

8.3.2 Colonial Encounters and Western Modernity

Colonial institutions transformed education by privileging English, printed textbooks, European disciplinary categories, and state examinations. Some traditional institutions and occupational networks weakened, although Indian scholars also used modern printing, universities, archaeology, and scientific methods to recover and reinterpret their intellectual heritage. Colonialism therefore produced both displacement and new forms of intellectual mobilisation.

8.3.3 Global Circulation of Indian Knowledge

Yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, Indian cuisine, mathematics, music, and philosophy now circulate globally. This circulation has increased visibility and encouraged research, but it may detach practices from their historical and ethical contexts. Global popularity therefore creates opportunities for dialogue as well as questions about ownership, attribution, and representation (Jain, 2012).

8.4 Challenges to Continuity

8.4.1 Loss of Manuscripts and Institutions

Manuscripts have been damaged by climate, insects, conflict, neglect, dispersal, and inadequate cataloguing. The disappearance of courts, monasteries, local schools, and patronage networks also weakened the social settings in which texts were interpreted. Digitisation is valuable, but an image of a manuscript cannot replace linguistic training and contextual scholarship.

8.4.2 Decline of Traditional Practitioners

Many practitioners face low income, limited institutional recognition, lack of apprentices, and competition from industrial production. When younger generations leave traditional occupations, embodied skills that were never fully written down may disappear. Preservation must therefore support practitioners, livelihoods, training, and intellectual rights rather than



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documenting products alone.

8.4.3 Commercialisation and Misrepresentation

Commercial markets can transform complex traditions into simplified products, exaggerated health claims, decorative symbols, or nationalist slogans. Popular media may increase awareness but can also romanticise communities and ignore internal diversity. Ethical representation requires accurate attribution, informed consent, benefit-sharing, and distinction between historically documented knowledge and later invention (Karmakar & Pal, 2024). Continuity in Indian knowledge systems is therefore best understood as a living process. Traditions survive because people repeatedly teach, practise, debate, translate, and adapt them—not because they remain isolated from historical change.

9. Contemporary Relevance and Applications

9.1 Relevance to Modern Education

9.1.1 Value-Based and Holistic Learning

Indian educational thought often connects intellectual development with ethical conduct, self-discipline, social responsibility, physical well-being, and reflection. These principles can enrich modern education by encouraging students to consider how knowledge should be used, not merely how information should be reproduced. However, value education must remain inclusive and open to questioning rather than imposing one cultural or religious interpretation.

9.1.2 Multilingual and Interdisciplinary Education

Indian knowledge developed across Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Persian, Tamil, and numerous regional and tribal languages. Multilingual learning can improve access to these sources and help students understand how concepts change through translation. An interdisciplinary approach can connect mathematical texts with astronomy, architecture with ritual, medicine with ecology, and literature with social history (Orsini, 2012).

9.1.3 Inclusion of Indian Knowledge in Curricula

The National Education Policy 2020 encourages the inclusion of Indian knowledge, languages, arts, culture, and local context in education. Meaningful inclusion requires reliable translations, trained teachers, primary-source study, historical context, and critical comparison with contemporary scholarship. It should avoid unsupported claims of ancient priority or scientific achievement, because exaggeration ultimately weakens serious study (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

9.2 Relevance to Sustainable Development

9.2.1 Ecological Balance and Responsible Consumption

Traditional environmental knowledge often treats forests, water, animals, agricultural land, and human communities as interdependent. Sacred groves and customary restrictions demonstrate how cultural values can encourage conservation. These principles can support responsible consumption, although they must be adapted to present population levels, rights, technologies, and environmental pressures (Bhagwat & Rutte, 2006).

9.2.2 Sustainable Agriculture and Water Conservation

Mixed cropping, locally adapted seeds, organic soil inputs, rainwater harvesting, tanks, and community irrigation can complement modern agricultural science. Their application may reduce input dependence and improve climate resilience in suitable locations. Nevertheless, effectiveness should be measured through field evidence, and traditional practices should not be assumed to be universally sustainable (Singh & Sureja, 2008).

9.2.3 Community-Centred Development

Local communities possess detailed knowledge of soils, rainfall, forests, crops, animals, and water sources. Development programmes are more likely to succeed when communities participate in identifying problems, evaluating options, and managing resources. Community-centred development also protects knowledge holders from being treated merely as suppliers of information for outside institutions (Agrawal, 1995).

9.3 Relevance to Health and Well-Being

9.3.1 Preventive Healthcare

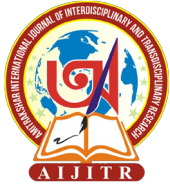
Ayurveda's attention to diet, routine, sleep, activity, season, and individual constitution supports contemporary interest in prevention and lifestyle-based healthcare. Such principles can encourage people to take greater responsibility for daily health. However, preventive advice must be assessed for safety and should not delay diagnosis or evidence-based treatment (Dey & Pahwa, 2014).

9.3.2 Yoga, Meditation, and Stress Management

Yoga and meditation can provide accessible methods of movement, breath awareness, concentration, and relaxation. Systematic reviews suggest potential improvements in perceived stress and quality of life, although the quality of evidence and intervention designs remain variable. Qualified instruction and adaptation are especially important for elderly people and individuals with medical conditions (Pascoe et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2023).

9.3.3 Integrative Approaches to Medicine

Integrative healthcare may combine safe and evidence-supported traditional practices with modern diagnosis, emergency



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care, surgery, pharmaceuticals, and rehabilitation. The aim should not be to declare one system superior but to identify which intervention works, for whom, under what conditions, and with what risks. Quality control, practitioner training, pharmacological testing, and monitoring of adverse effects are essential (Patwardhan et al., 2005).

9.4 Relevance to Innovation and Governance

9.4.1 Traditional Knowledge and Modern Technology

Digital archives, geographic information systems, biotechnology, materials analysis, and artificial intelligence can help document and study traditional knowledge. Grassroots innovators have already combined local experience with modern tools to solve problems in farming, water management, transport, and small-scale production. Innovation policies should recognise knowledge holders and ensure fair benefit-sharing (Gupta, 2006).

9.4.2 Ethical Leadership and Social Responsibility

Indian texts on governance repeatedly discuss duty, restraint, public welfare, justice, accountability, and the dangers of uncontrolled power. These ideas can stimulate ethical reflection in administration and management. They should be interpreted critically, because classical texts also arose within historical hierarchies that cannot simply be transferred to democratic society (Kumar & Rao, 1996).

9.4.3 Local Knowledge in Public Policymaking

Public policy can benefit from local knowledge when dealing with drought, biodiversity, agriculture, disaster preparedness, public health, and livelihood development. Participation must begin before decisions are finalised and should include women, marginalised communities, artisans, cultivators, and traditional practitioners. Local knowledge should be assessed alongside scientific and administrative evidence rather than either romanticised or dismissed (Agrawal, 1995; Gupta, 2006). The contemporary relevance of Indian knowledge systems does not lie in returning unchanged to the past. It lies in building a careful relationship among historical understanding, community experience, scientific evaluation, ethical responsibility, and present-day needs.

10. Conclusion

Indian Knowledge Systems should be understood as living and dynamic traditions rather than fixed inheritances from an idealized past. Their historical development reveals continuous debate, experimentation, regional interaction, translation, and adaptation. Philosophical schools challenged one another, medical practices incorporated observation and experience, and artistic and technical knowledge evolved through communities of practice. This dynamism explains their durability and demonstrates that preservation is most meaningful when traditions remain open to reinterpretation, questioning, and creative application across successive historical periods. The historical continuity of Indian knowledge did not prevent change; instead, continuity was often achieved through transformation. Textual traditions, oral practices, institutions, and everyday customs survived by adjusting to new social, political, religious, and technological conditions. A balanced approach must therefore protect valuable concepts and practices while allowing modification where contemporary evidence, ethics, or public needs demand it. Such balance avoids both cultural rejection and romantic revivalism, creating space for responsible intellectual renewal. The contemporary revival of Indian Knowledge Systems must be grounded in reliable sources, critical methods, and transparent evaluation. Claims concerning medicine, science, technology, ecology, or education should be tested through appropriate historical and scientific evidence. This approach does not diminish indigenous knowledge; it strengthens its credibility and separates demonstrable contributions from exaggeration. Collaboration among traditional practitioners, historians, scientists, and local communities can support documentation, validation, ethical use, and meaningful integration into research and education. When approached critically and inclusively, Indian Knowledge Systems can contribute to a more sustainable and humane future. Their emphasis on interconnectedness, ecological responsibility, preventive health, ethical conduct, community knowledge, and plural ways of understanding offers valuable perspectives for contemporary challenges. Their future relevance, however, depends on ensuring access across caste, gender, class, region, and language. By combining historical wisdom with modern inquiry, India can develop knowledge frameworks that are culturally rooted, socially just, globally relevant.

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