
**Repositioning Indian Knowledge Systems in Global English Studies:
A Decolonial Epistemic Intervention**

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Abstract:

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) constitutes a complex intellectual tradition encompassing aesthetics, linguistics, ethics, ecology, and metaphysics. Colonial education policies systematically marginalized these epistemologies by institutionalizing Western paradigms through English-language instruction. However, in the contemporary global academy, English functions as a transnational medium capable of articulating non-Western intellectual traditions. This paper discusses on how English Language and Literature can serve as a site of epistemic recovery and intercultural dialogue rather than colonial residue. Drawing upon Indian aesthetic theory (Rasa and Dhvani), postcolonial and decolonial thought, and contemporary Indian writing in English, the study proposes a methodological reorientation within literary studies. It demonstrates that integrating IKS into English Studies challenges Eurocentric critical dominance and advances epistemic plurality in global humanities discourse.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, Decolonial Theory, English Studies, Comparative, Poetics, Epistemic Justice, Postcolonial Humanities

Introduction:

The global humanities remain deeply shaped by Eurocentric epistemological hierarchies. Colonial education systems privileged Western philosophical and literary traditions while marginalizing indigenous knowledge formations (Said, 1978). In

India, Macaulay's Minute (1835) institutionalized English education, constructing a class "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste," thereby displacing classical Indian epistemologies from formal academic discourse. Yet the contemporary academic landscape presents a paradox: English, once a colonial instrument, now serves as the dominant medium of global scholarship. This transformation raises a crucial question - can English function as a platform for epistemic recovery and intercultural dialogue?

This article argues that English Language and Literature can be repositioned as a transformative site for articulating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Rather than framing English solely as a colonial imposition, this study conceptualizes it as a discursive space where indigenous epistemologies can engage global theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Framework: Decoloniality and Epistemic Justice

Decolonial theorists emphasize dismantling coloniality not merely as political domination but as epistemic control (Mignolo, 2011). Coloniality persists through knowledge hierarchies that privilege Western rationality while marginalizing indigenous modes of knowing.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) identifies language as central to cultural sovereignty. However, complete linguistic rejection of English may not be feasible within a globalized academic economy. Instead, this paper adopts Pratt's (1991) notion of the "contact zone," viewing English as a site of negotiation rather than unilateral domination.

Epistemic justice involves recognizing historically marginalized knowledge systems as legitimate contributors to global theory. Incorporating IKS into English Studies thus represents not cultural nationalism but epistemological diversification.

Indian Aesthetic Theory as Global Literary Theory

1. Rasa and Aesthetic Experience

Bharata's Natya Shastra conceptualizes aesthetic experience through Rasa, defined as the distilled emotional essence relished by the spectator (Bharata, trans. Ghosh, 1951). Abhinavagupta expands this framework into a sophisticated psychological theory of aesthetic universality.

Unlike Aristotelian catharsis, which emphasizes purgation, Rasa foregrounds contemplative relishing. Comparative analysis reveals that Rasa theory offers an alternative model of aesthetic engagement that can expand global literary criticism beyond Greco-Roman paradigms.

2. Dhvani and Interpretive Plurality

Anandavardhana's Dhvanyaloka introduces Dhvani (suggestion) as the central principle of poetic meaning (Anandavardhana, trans. Ingalls et al., 1990). Dhvani anticipates structuralist and post-structuralist notions of layered textuality and deferred meaning.

Recognizing Dhvani as theoretical discourse rather than "traditional commentary" challenges the chronology that positions modern Western theory as the origin of literary criticism.

English as a Medium of Indigenous Re-articulation

Contemporary Indian English literature demonstrates how English can articulate indigenous epistemologies within global circuits.

Amitav Ghosh (2016) critiques climate modernity while implicitly drawing on ecological interdependence embedded in Indian cosmology. Similarly, Girish Karnad reinterprets mythic narratives to interrogate modern identity and politics. These writers exemplify epistemic translation where indigenous frameworks are neither diluted nor essentialized but critically re-contextualized.

Translation, Power, and Knowledge Circulation

Translation mediates the global transmission of IKS. However, translation is never neutral. As Said (1978) argues, interpretive frameworks may encode orientalist assumptions.

To avoid epistemic reductionism, translation must retain conceptual specificity. Terms such as Rasa, Dharma, or Shringara resist simplistic equivalence. Their strategic retention within English discourse reflects epistemic assertion rather than linguistic inadequacy.

Methodological Implications for Global English Studies

Repositioning IKS within English Studies requires methodological shifts:

Comparative Poetics – Juxtaposing Sanskrit aesthetics with Western theory without hierarchical ordering.

Interdisciplinary Humanities – Integrating philosophy, ecology, and literary studies.

Decolonial Curriculum Reform – Expanding syllabi beyond canonical Eurocentric frameworks.

Conceptual Bilingualism – Allowing Sanskrit terminology within English academic writing.

Such interventions foster epistemic plurality in global literary scholarship.

Challenges and Critical Cautions

The integration of IKS must avoid:

Cultural essentialism

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Romantic revivalism

Nationalist instrumentalization

Uncritical homogenization of “Indian tradition”

Critical rigor demands acknowledging internal diversity and historical transformations within Indian knowledge traditions.

Conclusion:

English Language and Literature need not remain confined within colonial genealogies. When reappropriated critically, English becomes a medium of epistemic reconstruction and intercultural dialogue. Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into global English Studies advances epistemic justice and expands the theoretical horizons of the humanities.

The future of global literary scholarship depends not on replacing one canon with another but on fostering dialogic pluralism where knowledge traditions engage one another on equal intellectual footing.

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