

The Role of Language in Indian Knowledge Systems

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Abstract

This paper examines the intimate relationship between Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the role of languages in Preservation, Transmission, and Renewal. IKS a diverse set of intellectual, philosophical, scientific, agricultural, medicinal, and artisanal practices indigenous are to the encoded by classical, regional, and rich oral literary languages. The study was synthesizes for understanding interdependence, surveys classical and vernacular channels of transmission and analyses contemporary challenges of opportunities like language shift, digitization, curricular integration, and knowledge democratization. The paper suggests that textual analysis of qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, policy review, and illustrative case studies (Sanskritic textual traditions, Dravidian literary-oral continuums, and oral epistemic practices), pathways for conserving IKS through l documentation, community-led archiving, and education policy reforms. The conclusion highlights through linguistic pluralis policy recommendations and research directions for sustaining living knowledge.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems(IKS), languages, multilingualism, oral traditions, documentation, digitization, education policy

1. Introduction

The centuries-old epistemic traditions in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, linguistics, agriculture, craft technologies, law, performing arts, and ethical thoughts by IKS. These systems are embedded in practices, rituals, vocabularies, pedagogies, institutional arrangements, classical (written) or vernacular (spoken and written) and elite or community-based. IKS must consider that how language known, who can know and how evolves.

2. Conceptual Framework: Knowledge, Language, and Transmission

Three interlinked concepts guide the analysis:

i. Embodied Knowledge and Linguistic Encoding: Knowledge is often per formative acts (ritual, medicine, craft) and encoded in specialized terminology, metaphors, and narrative genres.

ii. Register and Gatekeeping: They delineate expert communities like Specialized registers, transmission pathways (gurukula, apprenticeship, community elders), and access hierarchies.

iii. Multimodal Transmission: Language interacts with these modes textual manuscripts, oral pedagogy, material culture, spatial sites (temples, gurukulas), and audio-visual performances in allowing translation modes into a particular media.

3. Historical Overview: Historically, several linguistic strata have served IKS:

a. Classical Scholarly Languages: In many periods, a learned lingua franca preserved technical knowledge, Classical languages (written and codified) in dense terminologies and commentarial traditions.

b. Regional and Vernacular Languages: Vernacular literatures and oral forms localized making it accessible to practitioner on agriculture, local medical recipes, folk songs, and craft instructions were often composed by local idioms.

c. Oral Registers: Folk epistemologies healer lineages, ritual specialists, artisans preserved techniques, formulaic speech, and apprenticeship subtle codified in texts.

4. Case Studies

4.1 Classical Textual Knowledge and Technical Vernaculars: Classical textual corpora encoded by dense terminologies with specialized sciences and layered commentary traditions. Yet, they required literary language, hermeneutic techniques occurred through vernacular translations, paraphrases and oral instruction. This bilingual or diglossic movement was essential for canonical scientific or medical knowledge rendered into local practice terms for healers.

4.2 Dravidian Literary and Oral Continuums: In several Dravidian-language regions, temple records, ritual manuals, and artisan guild songs formed parallel repositories of technical knowledge in Oral lineages preserved weaving patterns, and cylindrical advice.

4.3 Oral Epistemic Practices: Healers, Artisans, and Ecological Knowledge: Local ecological knowledge (seasonal indicators, seed varieties, soil heuristics) is communicated in local lexica, storytelling frameworks

decline modes of knowledge transmission break down leading to practical losses in biodiversity management and craft quality.

5. Contemporary Challenges

5.1. Language Shift, Knowledge Erosion, and Documentation Barriers: Rapid urbanization, migration, dominance of formal schooling in majority language within many communities, leading to declining fluency and media-driven cultural homogenization in local languages. This erosion of linguistic competence directly disrupts intergenerational transmission of IKS, weakening everyday practices, oral traditions. Simultaneously, significant documentation gaps persist as numerous manuscripts remain un catalogued or un translated, and oral knowledge is rarely archived. Existing documentation initiatives often privilege to dominant languages, overlooking local registers, vernacular expressions and lived knowledge practices together preservation, accessibility, and revitalization of IKS.

5.2 Intellectual Property Risks and Educational Disconnects: The digitization of academic engagement with IKS, while valuable for preservation, can inadvertently expose their communities to misrepresent and loss of control in over culturally sensitive information. In many designs to protect intellectual property rights, recognize customer ownership and ensure equitable benefit-sharing remain underdeveloped community-based knowledge traditions, restricting students' opportunities to engage with and sustain indigenous practices. This curricular disconnect often reinforces the perception of IKS as static or antiquarian heritage rather than as dynamic, living systems of knowledge with ongoing social, ecological, and economic relevance.

6. Opportunities and Pathways for Renewal

6.1 Multilingual Documentation and Annotation : Systematically record oral traditions and indigenous practices in their original languages, complemented by accurate translations and rich cultural meanings are preserved. These efforts must adopt embodied knowledge systems, per formative expressions and lived cultural practices are safeguarded comprehensively, rather than being reduced to written texts alone.

6.2 Community-Led Digital Platforms : The mobile applications should be developed to ensure that local custodians retain authority over the access, management, and long-term stewardship of their cultural knowledge. Such as platforms must be designed with practitioners to easily upload content, assign culturally relevant tags and narrate their own languages, promoting inclusivity,

authenticity and intergenerational transmission while safeguarding intellectual ownership.

6.3 Integrative and Plurilingual Education: IKS meaningfully integrated with bilingual and mother-tongue based learning modules that link local wisdom with modern scientific concepts. Alongside formal instruction should be promoted to enabling elders knowledge to transmit hands-on skills, ecological practices in cultural values directly to younger generations.

6.4 Ethical Protocols and Legal Safeguards : IKS requires the co-development of clear consent, attribution, and benefit-sharing protocols with transparency, and equitable outcomes. At the same time, legal frameworks must be strengthened to protect traditional knowledge from misappropriation balancing cultural rights with research, education and sustainable knowledge exchange.

6.5 Cross-linguistic Scholarship and Translation Ecology : Collaborative translation initiatives should be promoted to produce parallel editions of indigenous, presenting the original language translators with wider audiences. In addition, comprehensive lexical databases should be developed from technical and culturally specific terms while enabling practitioners, educators, learners to engage more effectively with IKS.

7. Methodological Research

IKS recommends the adoption of mixed qualitative methodologies is Ethnography and Participatory Action Research are essential for documenting living practices with knowledge holders. Textual philology and comparative linguistics knowledge transmission pathways across digital creation of multilingual, searchable corpora and layered annotation systems that preserve both oral and written traditions. In addition, policy analysis of IKS researchers must prioritize informed consent, ensure community leadership in defining research objectives and emphasize capacity-building initiatives that empower communities in their own knowledge resources sustainably.

8. Policy Implications and Institutional Roles

The sustainable transmission of IKS policy should be institutionalize mother-tongue-based multilingual education while allocating sustained funding for documentation and revitalization initiatives. Universities and research institutions have a critical role in establish interdisciplinary IKS centres that engage knowledge infrastructures. Libraries and archival institutions must adopt inclusive cataloguing frameworks that recognize vernacular languages under protocols defined by knowledge-holding communities. The technology sector should develop culturally non-Latin scripts,

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function effectively in low-bandwidth environments, and enable participatory metadata creation.

09. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This paper adopts a synthetic and conceptual approach rather than map the current status of specific community languages and their associated with IKS assess the effectiveness of mother-tongue based for multilingual digitization particularly for non-standardized oral knowledge registers. Additionally, legal and economic research is required to uphold customary rights while enabling responsible knowledge dissemination.

10. Conclusion

IKS Contemporary pressures language shift, institutional neglect, and uneven digitization pose real risks, but equally, new technologies, pluralist education models, and community led archives present practicable pathways for renewal. IKS requires commitment to linguistic pluralism: policies and projects that document and revitalize local languages and empower communities to steward their knowledge. Only by treating language and knowledge as co-constitutive for contemporary challenges.

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