



Mediating Tradition: The Role of Indian Media in Disseminating Indian Knowledge Systems from Colonial Legacy to Digital Modernity

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), encompassing a vast repository of Indigenous Sciences, philosophies, languages, and ecological wisdom, represents the civilizational core of India's cultural and intellectual heritage. In recent decades, the role of media in preserving, promoting, and recontextualizing this system has become increasingly significant. This study critically examines the historical trajectory and contemporary relevance of media in disseminating IKS from the pre-independence era to the digital era. The analysis traces media's transformative role from the nationalist vernacular press and state-sponsored radio broadcasts of the 20th Century to the rise of Doordarshan's educational programs and the explosion of digital platforms in the 21st Century. This study focuses on the different means by which television documentaries, podcasts, MOOCs, YouTube Channels, and social media have revitalized IKS in public consciousness and educational setting. The Media-IKS combination presents its own unique opportunities and challenges.

This study indicates that there is an imperative to develop a more sustainable, credible, and policy-based media model in order to protect indigenous intellectual traditions in India given the narrative of global media sources and our current techno, cultural change.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge System, Cultural Sustainability, Media-Indigenous Interface, Digital Knowledge Platforms, Traditional Knowledge Transmission.*

Introduction

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) reflects the collective intellectual and Cultural heritage of the world's oldest Civilizations. IKS embraces areas like Philosophy, Science, medicine, language, art, agriculture, and governance and influenced India's societal values, ethics, and identity. However, through Colonial disruption, globalization, and modern educational scales, we see significant

marginalization of these Knowledge systems, in public and academic spaces as well. In recent decades, media, both traditional and digital, have emerged as a powerful conduit for the rediscovery, preservation, and dissemination of IKS. This paper critically analyzes the role of Indian media in facilitating the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge from Pre-independence times to the digital age. Media is viewed not just as a technological tool but as a cultural medium that frames, filters, and fashions the way Knowledge is perceived and consumed. From print newspapers that supported freedom fighters to educational TV broadcasts and multilingual digital repositories, the media have consistently shaped the narrative around Indian traditions.

The objective of this research is threefold:

1. To trace the historical trajectory of media's engagement with IKS.
2. To evaluate the benefits and Challenges of this Synergy
3. To propose a policy-oriented, culturally rooted framework for the future dissemination of IKS.

The methodology includes a historical review, content analysis of case Studies and application of Communication and Cultural theory that examines how Culture shapes communication patterns and how communication, in turn, creates and maintains Cultural identities and practices. In doing so, the article highlights both the potential and pitfalls of current trends in mediating tradition.

Media and Indian Knowledge Systems: A Historical Overview

1. Pre-Independence Era: Colonial Constraints and Vernacular Resistance

- The Colonial era represented a dual perambulation confronting the intellectual and epistemological terrain of India. The efforts of British education policy and the missionary movement worked simultaneously to marginalize Indian epistemologies and replace them with English, Western rationality and Eurocentric Sciences through formal education and the press. On the other hand, nationalist thinkers and regional leaders used print media to counter this hegemony and revive traditional Knowledge.
- The function of Vernacular Press- Newspapers such as *keshari* (Marathi), *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Bengali), and *The Hindu* (English) not only served political purposes but also carried discussions of ayurvedic healing, Vedic Cosmology and indigenous ethical principles. The Vernacular newspapers acted as archives of local stories and oral histories and were a repository of folk wisdom. Vernacular newspapers frequently serialized indigenous spiritual texts and folk stories while engaging with Dharma and Karma in an accessible manner.
- Numerous figures associated with the Swadeshi movement including Bal Gangadhar Tilak and M.K. Gandhi, used print media as an instrument for Cultural education. Gandhi's *Harijan* newspaper often included mention of local village industries, Crafts, and religious practices, which bridged moral conversations with indigenous economies.
- Even with these initiatives, Colonial Censorship laws (e.g. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878) and a predominance of English education limited access to IKS on a broader scale. Most formal media cast a cloud of discredit upon native traditions, labelling them as unscientific or superstitious, leading to epistemic erasure and an internalized feeling of inferiority towards indigenous Systems.

2. Post-Independence Era: Nation-Building and State-Led Media

- After Independence in 1947, India faced the daunting task of integrating its Cultural plurality with the goals of modernization. Media became a state-led apparatus for both national integration and cultural education.
- AIR, established in 1936 but nationalized after Independence, played a pivotal role in disseminating traditional Knowledge. Rural radio programs broadcast folk tales, Ayurvedic health tips, and agricultural wisdom to village Communities. Special segments like "Krishi Darshan" focused on traditional farming practices combined with modern methods.
- With the advent of television, Doordarshan became the visual voice of Indian Culture. Series such as "Bharat Ek Khoj", "Mahabharat", and "Ramayan" not only dramatized epics but subtly embedded the philosophical underpinnings of IKS, i.e., ethics, duty, cosmology, and social order. Educational TV programmes were launched in collaboration with the University Grants Commission (UGC), introducing Indian philosophical and linguistic content to urban audiences.
- The state recognized the media's role in literacy campaigns, language preservation, and value education. Institutions like the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) utilized media to teach classical languages such as Sanskrit and Pali.
- However, the monopolization of media by the State also led to selective representation. Many indigenous traditions from tribal, dalit, and Oral Cultures remained excluded due to hierarchical and Centralized content curation.

3. Liberalization and The Rise of Private and Digital Media

- The 1990s marked India's entry into economic liberalization, which led to a media bloom with the arrival of private television channels, satellite Channels, and later, internet-based content.
- Channels like "Asha", "Sanskar", and other devotional networks proliferated, often commercializing Spirituality and simplifying complex IKS concepts into consumer-friendly formats. While visibility increased, authenticity and critical depth often declined.
- YouTube, blogs, and digital apps like "Bharatvani", "Sanskrit Dictionary," and "Ayush Sanjivani" have allowed a new generation to access traditional content directly. Projects like SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) provide free online courses on Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedic Mathematics.
- The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) explicitly advocates for IKS integration into Curricula. Media Campaigns backed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education promote awareness through infographics, multilingual videos, and digital archives.

Case Studies in Media-IKS Synergy

This section explores concrete examples of media platforms that have successfully facilitated the dissemination of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) across various domains such as education, health, language, Culture, and ecology. These Case Studies illustrate the evolving methods, audiences, and impacts of such dissemination.



- All India Radio (AIR) – Founded in 1936, AIR has been one of India’s most powerful state-run media institutions. Post-independence, it assumed an educational and cultural role. “Krishi Darshan” broadcasts agricultural advice by integrating modern methods with traditional ecological Knowledge. “Health Capsules” segments on Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani Systems in regional languages helped in spreading health literacy grounded in traditional medical epistemologies. AIR stations often recorded and broadcasted local bhajans, stories, and Oral histories, preserving and legitimizing intangible cultural heritage.
- Doordarshan- As India’s public service broadcaster since 1959, Doordarshan has an unparalleled reach in rural and urban households. Adaptations of the epics (Ramayan and Mahabharat) not only boosted TV penetration but also popularized Vedic ethical frameworks. Based on Nehru’s “Discovery of India”, “Bharat Ek Khoj” is a series narrating India’s Civilizational journey through cultural and philosophical lenses.
- Bharatvani portal- Launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, Bharatvani is a digital initiative aimed at promoting content in over 120 Indian languages. It provides digital dictionaries, ancient texts, glossaries, and traditional scripts. It also hosts IKS-related content on Yoga, Ayurveda, and classical philosophy in accessible formats.
- SWAYAM Platforms- SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) is India’s national Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform. It offers courses in Vedic Mathematics, Sanskrit poetics, and Classical Indian logic. Developed by IITs, IGNOU, and other premier institutions, ensuring academic rigour. Courses in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, and other regional languages decentralize Knowledge access.
- YouTube and New Media Influencers- The digital media ecosystem, particularly platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook Live, and Podcasts, has played a transformative role in making the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) not only accessible but also engaging for the tech-savvy generation. Unlike the state-led, centralized media of earlier decades, new media is decentralized, participatory, and often grassroot-driven, making it a powerful democratizing force in the dissemination of IKS. YouTube has allowed non-institutional Knowledge bearers like spiritual leaders, traditional healers, Sanskrit scholars, rural teachers, and Culture enthusiasts to directly reach millions without needing state endorsement or academic gatekeepers. This fosters accessibility, interactivity, and customization. Short, animated explainers, infographic videos, and story-driven content make complex subjects like Ayurveda, Natyashastra, or Vedanta easier to understand. These platforms utilize audio-visual literacy to teach what used to be esoteric or orally transmitted Knowledge, bridging generational and educational divides. Many tribal storytellers, folk musicians, and regional historians use new media to narrate ecological wisdom, ethical tales, and healing rituals that are part of Oral IKS. For instance, YouTube series like “The Storyteller’s Hut” or “Tribal India Archive” digitalize Baul songs, Bhil fables, and Gond myths that were previously undocumented. This revival gives legitimacy to non-textual Subaltern Knowledge Systems, often ignored in mainstream academia or broadcast media. In platforms like Spotify, Kuku FM, and Apple Podcasts, IKS Content Creators curate long-form lectures and storytelling

episodes like “The Musafir Stories” and “Bharatiya Parampara”. These formats recreate the traditional Oral-aural learning environment, which is similar to the ancient Shravana (listening) tradition in Vedic education. Many influencers create multilingual content, reaching not just domestic but global audiences, especially the Indian Diaspora interested in reconnecting with their roots. Channels like “Indic Today” and “Dharmic Dialogue” provide English medium lectures on ancient legal Systems, epistemology, and metaphysics. Diaspora viewers often use such content to educate children abroad or to supplement Western education with Indian values. Platforms like “Vedflix”, “Indica Academy”, and “Advaita Academy” act as digital gurukuls offering structured, certificate-based learning in IKS. Some Creators even integrate live webinars, masterclasses, and community groups via WhatsApp or Telegram for peer learning and question-answer sessions. This form of peer-to-peer learning and digital satang emulates the old ashram-style model of knowledge immersion.

Media-IKS Synergy: Key Benefits and Opportunities

The integration of media and IKS has led to unprecedented benefits in terms of accessibility, preservation, education, and cultural resurgence. This Synergy empowers not only scholars and policy makers but also laypersons, students, and indigenous practitioners.

- **Democratization of Knowledge Access-** Media platforms, especially digital ones, have removed traditional barriers to Knowledge dissemination. Texts and teachings once confined to temples, gurukuls, or Oral lineages are now globally accessible. The "Bharatvani" portal provides digitalized IKS texts in over 120 languages, empowering diverse linguistic Communities.
- **Preservation of Endangered Traditions -** Media archives traditional practices, dialects, and oral narratives that are at risk of extinction due to globalization and modernization. YouTube Channels like "Indian Tribal Culture" document Baiga medicine, Santhal Songs, and Bhil Cosmologies, ensuring Cultural continuity for future generations.
- **Curriculum Integration and Pedagogical Innovation-** Interactive media is being used to supplement or build IKS-based Curriculum, in both school and higher education settings. SWAYAM's online courses in Vedic Mathematics, Yoga philosophy, and Ayurveda are integrated into NEP 2020's competency-based learning modules.
- **Reinstatement of Cultural Confidence-** Centuries of Colonial suppression led to epistemic inferiority. Media helps reclaim Cultural pride by validating indigenous epistemes. Web series like “Bharat Ek Khoj” and “Raaj Darbari” frame Indian history and literature from an insider's lens, countering Eurocentric narratives.
- **Engagement of Youth and Diaspora Communities -**New Media appeals to younger generations and global Indians who often feel culturally alienated or disconnected. Instagram reels and YouTube shorts by influencers like “Sanskrit Gyan” teach mantras, festivals, and rituals in short, attractive clips with subtitles.
- **Empowerment of Indigenous Practitioners-** IKS custodians such as tribal healers, astrologers, and Sanskrit teachers can bypass institutions to teach directly to global audiences. Podcasts hosted by tribal elders in Odisha and Assam are now streamed on Spotify and All India Radio under the Tribal Knowledge Systems initiative.

- Synergy with Public Health and Sustainability Goals- IKS, especially Ayurveda, Yoga, and ecological wisdom, support India's Climate goals and public health narratives. Media Campaigns during COVID-19 promoted traditional immunity practices via AYUSH guidelines in 12 Indian languages.
- Stimulus to Research and Policy Advocacy- Open-access media archives and crowdsourced data from IKS practitioners contribute to research and policy design in education, agriculture, and health. "The National Digital Library of India" hosts research on tribal medicine and climate resilience.

Persistent Challenges in the Media-IKS Nexus

While the Synergy between media and IKS offers tremendous opportunities, it is also fraught with complex Challenges. These stem from institutional, cultural, epistemic, and infrastructural gaps that hinder equitable dissemination and authentic representation of IKS.

- Digital Divide and Access Inequality- Access to the internet, Smartphones, and digital literacy is still skewed in rural and tribal areas, where the richest IKS traditions survive. As per the 2021 Internet and Mobile Association of India report, only 37% of rural households have reliable digital access.
- Authenticity and Epistemic Dilution- IKS is based on deeply rooted experiential Knowledge and multi-generational transmission. However, much of the content in media is curated without scholarly rigour or proper lineage validation, leading to dilution, distortion, or even misrepresentation.
- Commercialization of Sacred Knowledge- Media incentivizes popularity over authenticity, resulting in the commodification of sacred rituals and teachings. The spiritual or ethical core of IKS sometimes gets lost in the race of monetization. Tantric rituals, yogic poses, and mantras are marketed as lifestyle accessories rather than spiritual or holistic practices.
- Linguistic and Regional Disparities- Most media content promoting IKS is in English, Hindi, or a few dominant languages, while marginalized, lesser-known Tribal, Dravidian, and Pahari Knowledge Systems.
- Lack of Institutional Integration- Although NEP 2020 recommends integrating IKS into education, most media platforms work in silos, without alignment with school or university curriculum. This creates a gap between informal learning (via YouTube or MOOCs) and formal recognition (in schools and universities).
- Cultural Stereotyping and Tokenism- The Media often essentializes Indian Culture into narrow tropes (like yoga, Sanskrit, or Ayurveda) while neglecting dynamic, evolving, and diverse practices. Mainstream media seldom features living traditions like tribal farming Calendars or folk pedagogies.
- Algorithmic and platform biases – Digital platforms prioritize sensational or trending content. Subtle or complex IKS Content often receives lower visibility due to algorithmic design. A viral astrology meme may reach millions, while a detailed lecture on Mimamsa philosophy might remain obscure due to fewer clicks.



- Threat of Cultural Appropriation- IKS is sometimes used by commercial media or global platforms without acknowledgement of its Cultural origin or the communities it belongs to. Yoga is often marketed abroad as a secular fitness routine, stripping it of its philosophical and ethical roots in Indian Spiritual texts.
- Fragmentation of Discourse- Without unified guidelines or thematic Coherence, media representations of IKS tend to be fragmented, sometimes even contradictory, leading to public confusion. Different YouTube Channels may give conflicting explanations of the same mantra or ritual, eroding epistemic clarity.

To address these Challenges, a multi-pronged approach is needed, involving policymakers, scholars, media professionals, and community custodians. Regulatory bodies for content quality, inclusion of marginalized Knowledge Systems, and stronger integration between informal media and formal pedagogy are vital.

Conclusion

The advancement of media has drastically changed how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are stored, shares, and understood. From Oral traditions to print media to YouTube channels, and AI platforms, media has enabled an unprecedented democratization of wise Knowledge. This has not only revived dormant traditions but also created pathways for inter-program learning, national integration, and global recognition of India's epistemic wealth. Still, the digital divide, authenticity of Knowledge, epistemic dilution, and algorithm bias are challenges that need to be addressed in a systematic manner. If the synergy is to develop meaningfully, work needs to extend beyond surface representation of IKS, to deep engagement. The evolution of media has fundamentally transformed how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are preserved, disseminated, and perceived. From Oral traditions and print publications to YouTube Channels and AI-powered platforms, the media have facilitated an unprecedented democratization of ingenious knowledge. This relationship has not only revived dormant traditions but also created avenues for interdisciplinary learning, national integration, and global recognition of India's epistemic wealth. Still, the digital divide, authenticity of Knowledge, epistemic dilution, and algorithm bias are challenges that need to be addressed in a systematic manner. If the synergy is to develop meaningfully, work needs to extend beyond surface representation of IKS, to deep engagement. Collaboration of policymakers, educators, media practitioners, and custodians of community knowledge is the key. As IKS- Media integration is institutionalized, along with some responsible guidelines, policy needs to include regulatory oversight, quality assurance, multilingual accessibility, and authentication of indigenous voices. NEP 2020, SWAYAM, and Bharatvani are commendable starts, but innovation, inclusion, and digital equity will be critical to sustain the impact of IKS as a connected knowledge System.

To conclude, the future of IKS is literally dependent on how responsibly and creatively media is leveraged to India's benefit. Through purposeful mediation, media can ensure that IKS not only survives but thrives as living, evolving, and empowering knowledge for India, and the knowledge community.

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