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From Translation to Transmission:

Sanskrit, Bengali, & the Recovery of
Indian Knowledge Systems in School
Education

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Executive Summary

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has been transmitted for millennia through indigenous languages that encode its conceptual architecture. Colonial education policy severed this linguistic foundation by installing English as the dominant medium of intellectual and institutional learning and forcing classical Indian concepts into Western categorical frameworks. The result is a persistent gap: stakeholders recognise the value of IKS, yet schools lack the resources, trained teachers, and assessment structures to teach it through the languages that carry its meanings. This study argues that this gap is not a lack of conviction but a lack of institutional architecture, and that it can be addressed through educational redesign.

Drawing on textual analysis of Sanskrit and Bengali sources, policy documents including the National Education Policy 2020, and qualitative survey data from students and academic professionals, the study traces how English-mediated interpretation produces conceptual distortion and how indigenous languages function not merely as communicative tools but as epistemic media that shape modes of reasoning and interpretation. A comparative perspective on China's maintenance of classical Chinese as a compulsory scholarly medium illustrates the institutional conditions under which linguistic continuity sustains intellectual tradition.

The study proposes a three-tier school-level model: comprising indigenous-language teaching resources in Bengali and Sanskrit, teacher-training programmes that bridge linguistic competence with IKS scholarship, and assessment reform that rewards interpretation, conceptual understanding, and multilingual engagement over rote memorisation and exclusive English-medium fluency.

The study concludes that IKS can be meaningfully integrated into school education only when indigenous languages move from informal pedagogical aids to the formal curricular core of knowledge transmission.



Introduction

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) constitute a vast and diverse intellectual heritage that has developed in the Indian subcontinent over many centuries. These traditions encompass a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, education, ecology, medicine, ethics, and social thought (Mahana, 2025).

While many contemporary knowledge systems are usually structured in a highly compartmentalized form, Indian Knowledge Systems emerged based on an integrative understanding of nature, society, and human life. Transmission of knowledge took place not only via literature but also through pedagogy and other aspects of culture.

Crucially, these traditions were articulated and preserved through indigenous languages such as Sanskrit and various regional languages, including Bengali (Ramakrishna and Naripalli, 2025; Kumar, 2025). These languages carried within them distinctive conceptual vocabularies, philosophical categories, and modes of reasoning that shaped how knowledge was interpreted and transmitted across generations (Mahana, 2025; Kapoor, 2020).

Despite the richness of this intellectual heritage, the modern understanding of Indian Knowledge Systems has been significantly influenced by Western academic frameworks (CISINDUS, 2025). During the colonial period, British administrators and Anglicist scholars deliberately restructured indigenous education, privileging English as the sole medium of scholarship and institutional learning. As a consequence, Indian philosophical traditions were increasingly analysed through Eurocentric interpretive lenses - most notably positivist historiography and Christian theological categories (Nikam, 2025).



Classical concepts such as dharma were rendered as "religion," moksha as "salvation," and darshana as "philosophy," thereby forcing integrative Indian thought into compartmentalised Western disciplinary boxes (Chaudhary, 2007).

Although these translations increased global visibility, they produced what Spivak (1988) terms epistemic violence: the systematic simplification of complex, context-dependent knowledge into alien taxonomies (Nikam, 2025).

While Spivak (1988) originally theorised epistemic violence in the context of subaltern representation, this study extends the concept to describe the systematic distortion of indigenous knowledge through colonial linguistic and categorical frameworks. Because colonial pedagogy devalued indigenous languages as vessels of serious thought, the conceptual vocabularies embedded in Sanskrit, Bengali, and other regional languages were progressively severed from their epistemological roots.

This rupture created a lasting disconnect between Indian knowledge traditions and the linguistic environments in which they were originally developed, a gap that contemporary school education, as this study argues, must actively repair by reinstating indigenous languages as legitimate media of intellectual discourse.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly called for the reinterpretation of Indian knowledge texts through indigenous linguistic frameworks rather than colonial interpretive categories (Kapoor, 2020; CISINDUS, 2025)..



The scale of this textual heritage is formidable: India preserves millions of Sanskrit manuscripts, with Bengal alone housing substantial collections, including approximately 6,000 ancient manuscripts spanning literature, grammar, philosophy, and logic, recently digitised by the Howrah Sanskrit Sahitya Samaj in collaboration with the Bhaktivedanta Research Centre (The Hindu, 2024)

These indigenous languages encode conceptual vocabularies that resist adequate translation into English; as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2011) notes, terms such as *jñāna* and *pramāṇa* carry epistemological assumptions distinct from Western philosophical categories, while the highly inflected grammar and polysemous nature of Sanskrit terms such as *dharma* and *moksha* render their full semantic range accessible only through the original linguistic matrices (India Foundation, 2024). Consequently, engaging with Indian Knowledge Systems through indigenous languages is not merely an exercise in linguistic preservation but an epistemological necessity for restoring interpretive fidelity.

This reclamation acquires particular urgency in the context of school education. Cummins's (1979) interdependence hypothesis and subsequent UNICEF (2024) research demonstrate that early instruction in the mother tongue significantly enhances cognitive academic language proficiency, critical thinking, and the capacity to navigate abstract concepts. The National Education Policy 2020 explicitly mandates mother-tongue or regional-language instruction until at least Grade 5, recognising that indigenous languages serve as primary vehicles for culturally rooted, inclusive pedagogy (Kumar, 2025).



When students encounter Indian Knowledge Systems through their native languages, they are able to forge meaningful connections between textual traditions and lived experience, thereby bridging the epistemic gap between colonial educational structures and indigenous intellectual heritage.

Against this background, this study examines how Indian Knowledge Systems can be reinterpreted and integrated into school education through indigenous languages. While existing scholarship has documented the growing relevance of IKS in educational discourse (Khan, 2024; Boro, 2025) and the policy emphasis on indigenous languages under the National Education Policy 2020 (Kumar, 2025), the intersection of these two domains, specifically, the deployment of Sanskrit and Bengali as active interpretive media for IKS at the school level, remains insufficiently explored.

This study addresses that lacuna by investigating how Sanskrit and Bengali, as distinct yet complementary linguistic resources, can function as epistemologically grounded frameworks for engaging with IKS in classroom contexts (Kapoor, 2020). Drawing on curriculum documents, policy texts, and practitioner perspectives, the research aims to contribute to debates on curriculum reform, language policy, and culturally grounded pedagogy in India (Khan, 2024).

Furthermore, the study advances a three-tiered analytical framework comprising: policy-level strategies for integrating indigenous languages into national education frameworks; institution-level measures for teacher capacity building and curriculum implementation; and technological support mechanisms to facilitate digital access and resource development for these languages (Das, 2022).



Chapter 1

Indigenous Languages and the Understanding of Indian Knowledge Systems

Indigenous languages in India do not simply carry words; they carry worlds. From the phonetic architecture of Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī to the devotional registers of Bengali Vaiṣṇava poetry, these linguistic traditions have preserved conceptual frameworks that English-mediated scholarship consistently flattens or mistranslates. This chapter argues that recovering Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) for contemporary school education requires more than curricular inclusion.

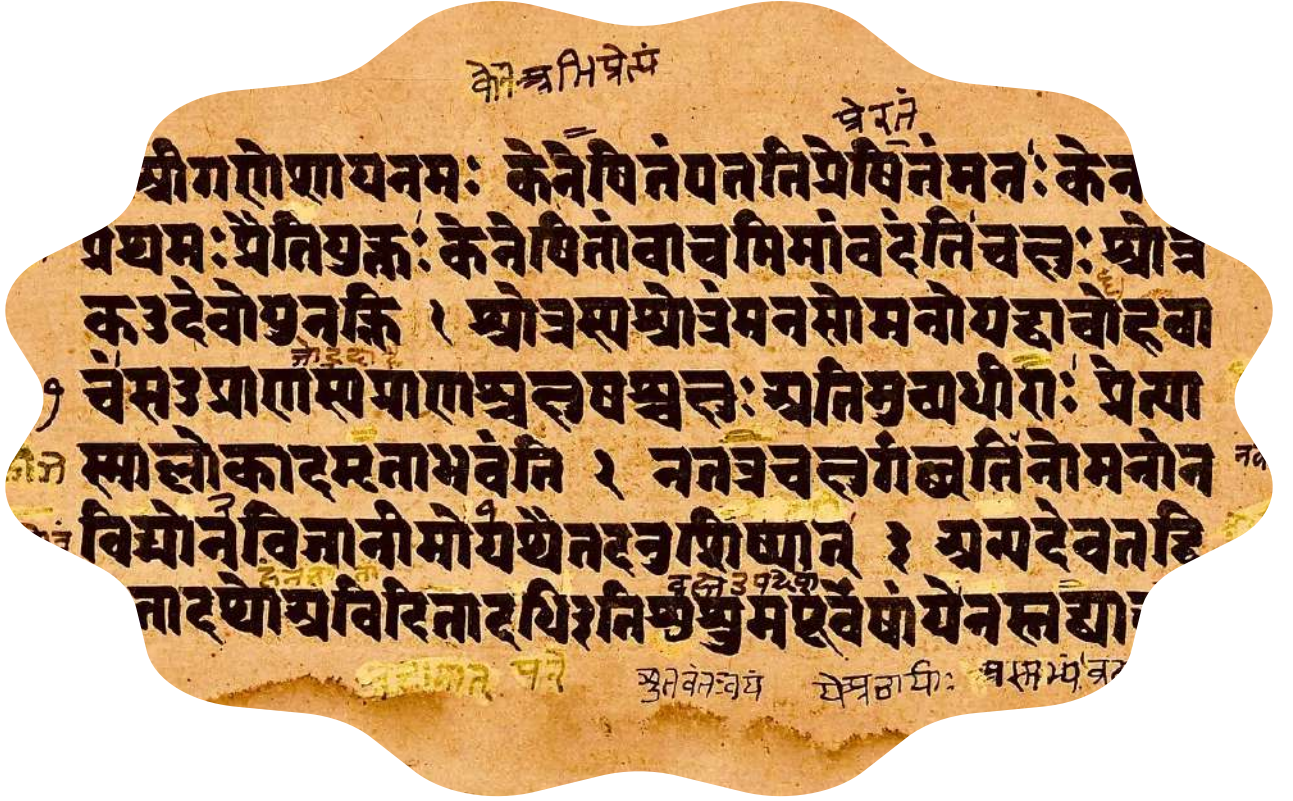
It demands a fundamental re-centering of indigenous languages as active interpretive media. The discussion that follows traces how Sanskrit and Bengali function as complementary epistemic resources, examines the colonial rupture that severed these languages from institutional knowledge production, and assesses what their revitalisation means for the classroom under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

1.1 Language as Structure of Thought

Language is never a neutral vessel. It is an architecture of cognition, a framework that determines what can be thought and how knowledge is organised.

This is not abstract theory; it is observable in the grammatical and conceptual structures of Indian languages themselves. *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* does not merely describe Sanskrit; it demonstrates that language can be a generative system capable of encoding ontological relationships with mathematical precision.





The inflected morphology of Sanskrit, its capacity to mark agency, intention, and epistemic status through verbal roots and case endings; enabled philosophers to construct arguments of a subtlety that English simply cannot replicate (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011).

Consider the term *pramāṇa*. In English, it is often rendered as “proof” or “evidence,” but this translation misses the mark. *Pramāṇa* refers to a valid means of knowledge acquisition, a category that includes perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and testimony (*śabda*). Each of these sub-categories carries epistemological assumptions about how consciousness relates to reality, assumptions embedded in Sanskrit’s semantic architecture (Kapoor, 2020).

When students learn this term through English, they receive a flattened approximation. When they encounter it in Sanskrit, they enter into a living epistemological debate.



Bengali operates differently but with equal conceptual density. The *Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition developed a technical vocabulary, *hlādinī-śakti*, *sambandha-abhidheya-prayojana*, *vraja-prema*, that encodes a theology of divine emotion that is unintelligible outside Bengali textual and ritual contexts (Wong, 2016). These are not poetic metaphors; they are philosophical categories. Rendered into English as “love,” “bliss,” or “devotion,” they lose their specific ontological claims. Dei (2000) makes this point forcefully: indigenous knowledge is rooted in the lived experiences, cultural traditions, and linguistic expressions of local communities. Sever that linguistic root, and the knowledge withers.

Cummins (1979) offers a complementary insight from educational linguistics. His research on cognitive academic language proficiency demonstrates that children develop deeper conceptual understanding when they learn through languages that encode their cultural and cognitive heritage. A student thinking about *dharma* in Bengali or *mokṣa* in Sanskrit is not merely translating; they are activating conceptual scaffolds that English lacks. McCarty (2003), in her comparative study of indigenous language revitalisation, warns that when indigenous languages lose their pedagogical function, the knowledge systems they carry become inert museum pieces rather than living intellectual resources. The implication is stark: knowledge systems are best understood in the languages in which they evolved because those languages are the knowledge system.

1.2 Limitations of Western and English-Mediated Interpretations

The modern study of Indian Knowledge Systems has been decisively shaped by colonial interpretive frameworks. Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 did not merely promote English; it installed a new epistemological hierarchy in which indigenous languages were declared unfit for serious intellectual labour (Macaulay, 1835).



Viswanathan (1989) demonstrates that this was a calculated cultural strategy: by making English the sole language of higher education, British rule severed the generational transmission of Sanskrit and Bengali scholarly traditions. Dharampal's (1983) archival recovery of pre-colonial *pathśālās* reveals that indigenous education in the eighteenth century was linguistically sophisticated, operating through regional languages and Sanskrit with remarkable curricular breadth. Colonial policy dismantled this system not because it was ineffective, but because it was politically inconvenient.

The interpretive consequences persist. When classical Indian texts are read through Western categories, the damage is not merely linguistic; it is conceptual. *Dharma* becomes "religion" or "law," imposing a Christian-European distinction between the sacred and the secular that Sanskrit does not recognise (India Foundation, 2024). *Mokṣa* becomes "salvation," importing a theology of sin and redemption alien to Indian thought.

Karma is reduced to a mechanistic calculus of reward and punishment, stripping away its complex relationship with intention (*cetanā*) and cosmic order (*ṛta*) (CISINDUS, 2025). These are not innocent mistranslations; they are conceptual reductions that make Indian thought comprehensible to Western audiences only by making it something it is not.



Nikam (2025) argues that this process constitutes a form of cultural misreading in which indigenous intellectual traditions are measured against external academic standards and found wanting. Chaudhary (2007) adds an economic dimension, showing that colonial education policy deliberately devalued local knowledge systems to establish the cultural legitimacy of British rule. The result is what Miranda Fricker calls '*hermeneutical injustice*': the systematic exclusion of certain groups from the interpretive resources needed to make their experience intelligible (Fricker, 2007).

Indian students today frequently encounter their own heritage through English translations that flatten conceptual nuance, while the languages that originally articulated these ideas have been relegated to "cultural" subjects rather than recognised as legitimate media of philosophical inquiry.

1.3 Role of Indigenous Languages in Recovering Conceptual Integrity

If English-mediated interpretation has produced distortion, indigenous languages offer the path back to conceptual integrity. Sanskrit and Bengali function as distinct yet complementary epistemic resources in this recovery. Sanskrit remains the classical *śāstric* language - the medium in which India's foundational philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic systems were theorised. Paninian grammar, Nyāya epistemology, Sāṃkhya cosmology, and Āyurvedic medicine were all articulated through Sanskrit's highly inflected grammatical architecture.

The commentarial tradition - *bhāṣya*, *ṭīkā*, and *vārttika* - ensured that knowledge remained dynamic, with successive generations refining conceptual categories within the language itself (Kapoor, 2020). For school education, Sanskrit offers direct access to the terminological precision of Indian intellectual traditions.



The NEP 2020 recognises this by mandating Sanskrit as an option at all school levels, though critics warn that the policy risks reducing the language to symbolic nationalism rather than active intellectual engagement (Oxford Education South Asia, 2021).

The scale of this heritage is material, not merely theoretical. A single institution in Howrah recently digitised 6,000 ancient Sanskrit manuscripts spanning literature, grammar, philosophy, and logic, demonstrating that Bengal remains a critical node in India's textual ecosystem (The Hindu, 2024). These manuscripts are not dead relics; they are the raw material of an ongoing interpretive tradition.

Bengali, by contrast, operates as a mother tongue and vernacular intellectual medium. Its significance lies not in *śāstric* abstraction but in cultural translation and lived philosophy. The *Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition, systematised by the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana and disseminated through Bengali hagiographies such as Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, transformed Sanskrit theological categories into emotionally and socially accessible forms (Bhaktivedanta Research Centre, 2022). Beyond Vaiṣṇavism, Bengali preserved Tantric *sādhana*, Baul mystical songs, and the reformist literature of the Bengal Renaissance - all of which reinterpreted classical knowledge for contemporary social contexts. Sukumar Sen's recovery of premodern Bengali manuscripts demonstrated that this vernacular tradition was not derivative but possessed its own conceptual vocabulary and literary conventions (Asian News Network, 2025).

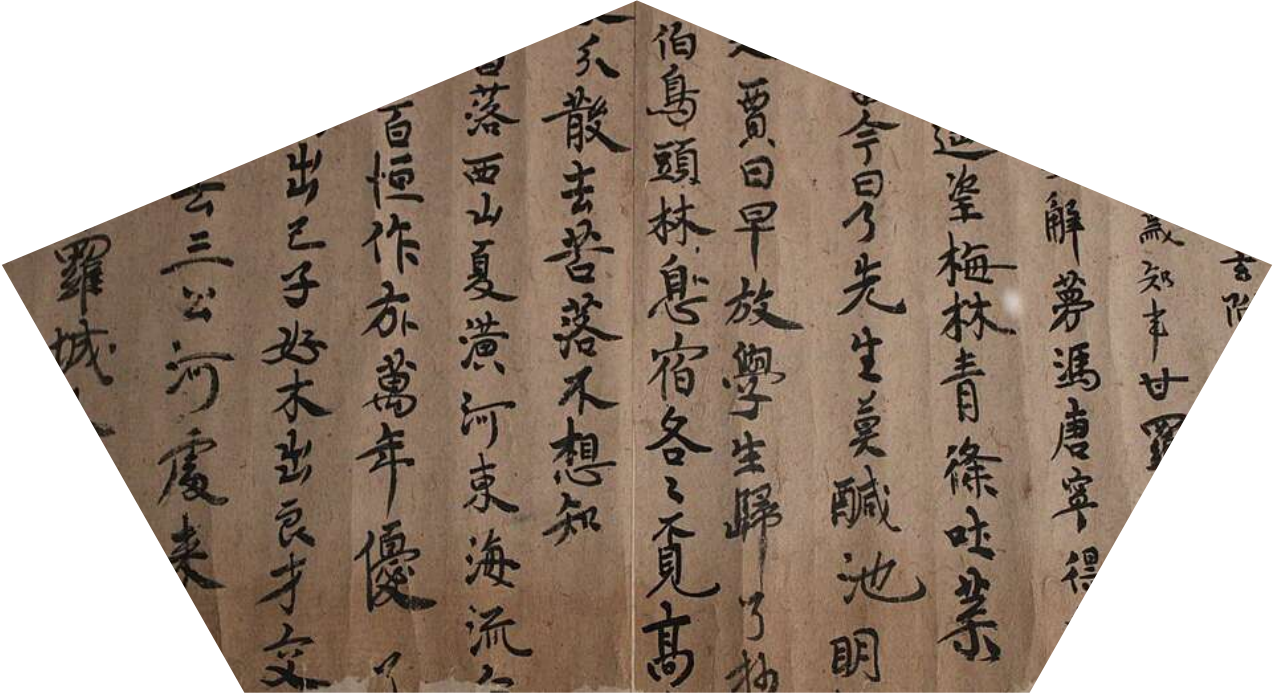
The complementarity is pedagogically significant. Sanskrit provides the architectural precision of Indian epistemology; Bengali provides the cultural and emotional infrastructure through which that epistemology enters everyday life.



A student encountering *mokṣa* first through the Sanskrit *Bhagavad-gītā* and then through the Bengali *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* gains not a redundant definition but a layered understanding - one that encompasses both the technical philosophical claim and its devotional and social embodiment. This is how indigenous languages preserve not merely the content of IKS but its intent, interpretation, explanation, and social transmission.

1.4 Comparative Perspective: Language and Knowledge Transmission in China

The relationship between language and intellectual continuity is not unique to India. China offers an instructive parallel: a civilisation that maintained a classical written language - *wenyan* - as a living scholarly medium for over two millennia, even as spoken Chinese diversified into mutually unintelligible regional forms.



Classical Chinese originated during the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 BCE) and remained the formal written language until the early twentieth century (ACTA, 2019). During this period, spoken language evolved considerably, but the written classical form changed relatively little.



This stability enabled a continuous scholarly tradition: a literate person in the Qing dynasty could read Han dynasty texts with minimal difficulty, creating an unbroken chain of textual interpretation that sustained Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist philosophical discourse (Gao, 2019).

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 disrupted this continuity. Intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu advocated replacing *wenyan* with *baihua*, written vernacular Chinese - as part of a broader project of cultural modernisation (Gao, 2019). The Beijing Ministry of Education mandated vernacular textbooks for primary schools in 1919, and by 1922, *baihua* had supplanted classical Chinese in most curricula. The reformers argued that classical Chinese impeded literacy and progress. Yet critics like Qian Mu contended that this rupture severed generational access to millennia of literary and philosophical heritage, undermining the disciplined intellectual rigour that classical composition demanded.

Lin Yutang proposed a hybrid “discursive classical” (*yuti wen*) to retain classical grammar’s precision while incorporating vernacular vocabulary, warning that unmitigated *baihua* risked diluting the expressive depth and aesthetic subtlety inherent in classical structures.

What is striking for the Indian context is China’s subsequent policy reversal. Today, Chinese schools require students to learn classical Chinese from elementary school through high school. Approximately 30% of elementary Chinese textbooks consist of classical texts, rising to over 50% in middle school, where students analyse classical grammar and interpret historical texts (ACTA, 2019; SCMP, 2023). A qualified high school graduate is expected to understand texts from the last 700 years clearly, most texts up to 200 BCE, and the main ideas of even earlier works.



This is not antiquarianism; it is an institutional commitment to maintaining classical language as a vehicle of intellectual continuity.

China's approach to minority languages also offers a further point of comparison (Huang, 2006). The Chinese state has established *minzu* schools and universities across autonomous regions, offering bilingual education that combines Putonghua with minority languages such as Tibetan, Uyghur, and Mongolian (Melbourne Asia Review, 2022; World Humanities Report, 2024). While these policies are contested and vary significantly in implementation, particularly in Xinjiang, where bilingual models have shifted toward Putonghua dominance, they nonetheless represent a state-level recognition that language policy is inseparable from knowledge transmission (Feng and Adamson, 2009).

The 2001 Law on the Common State Language and Script explicitly guarantees ethnic minorities the freedom to use and develop their own languages while promoting Putonghua as the national *lingua franca* (World Humanities Report, 2024). Overall, China's policy reversal clearly demonstrates that classical language maintenance requires examination stakes and compulsory curricular weight, precisely what NEP 2020 lacks for Sanskrit. India's 'option' model cannot produce the same intellectual continuity as China's compulsory classical Chinese.



1.5 Lessons for India: Language as a Vehicle of Intellectual Continuity, Not Mere Cultural Identity

The Chinese experience yields two lessons directly relevant to India. First, classical languages can be maintained as active intellectual resources rather than allowed to atrophy into cultural symbols. China's reinstatement of classical Chinese in compulsory education demonstrates that a classical language need not become a "dead language" if the state treats it as a living medium of philosophical and historical inquiry. India's NEP 2020 makes a similar gesture toward Sanskrit, but without the curricular weight or examination stakes that China assigns to classical Chinese, Sanskrit risks remaining an elective frill rather than an epistemological foundation (Oxford Education South Asia, 2021).

Second, language policy must serve intellectual continuity, not merely cultural identity. China's minority language education, despite its political complexities, operates on the premise that linguistic diversity is a resource for knowledge production, not merely a marker of ethnic difference. In India, the NEP 2020 mandates mother-tongue instruction until Grade-5 and encourages multilingualism through the three-language formula (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ramakrishna and Naripalli, 2025). Yet implementation remains weak. As the Language and Learning Foundation (2025) notes, vague qualifiers such as "wherever possible" give states broad discretion, while resource constraints and parental preference for English continue to undermine indigenous language instruction.

The deeper lesson is epistemological. Cummins (1979) demonstrates that mother-tongue instruction enhances cognitive academic language proficiency, the ability to handle abstract concepts, make intertextual connections, and engage in critical reasoning.



UNICEF (2024) reinforces this, noting that children taught in their first language show stronger comprehension and retention. For Indian students, this means that engaging with IKS through Bengali or Sanskrit is not a cultural luxury but a cognitive imperative. When a student learns *dharma* through the semantic range of Sanskrit or encounters *prema-bhakti* through the cadences of Bengali, they are not memorising definitions; they are entering distinct ways of reasoning about ethics, emotion, and existence.

Ultimately, indigenous languages must be understood as vehicles of intellectual continuity. They are not museum pieces to be displayed on cultural days; they are the living media through which Indian civilization has thought, argued, and transmitted knowledge for millennia.

Recovering them in the classroom is not about returning to the past. It is about ensuring that the conceptual foundations of Indian thought remain accessible, rigorous, and capable of generating new knowledge in the present.



Chapter 2

Voices from the Ground: Stakeholder Perspectives on Indigenous Language Use in Schooling

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 established that Indian Knowledge Systems require indigenous languages to retain epistemic precision. Yet theory does not automatically reshape classrooms. Indigenous languages occupy a structurally marginalised but symbolically present position in everyday schooling, present in policy but fragmented in practice, shaped by institutional norms and practical constraints.

This chapter moves from the archive to the classroom. Its purpose is to examine how theoretical arguments for indigenous language education are experienced, resisted, or diluted by those who inhabit schools daily. Teachers filter curriculum through their own linguistic biographies; students bring language attitudes shaped by home and peer culture; institutions mediate between national vision and local feasibility. As McCarty (2011) demonstrates, insiders' positions reveal the ideological and implementational spaces where change actually occurs.



The survey respondents broadly recognise IKS as central to cultural identity and associate indigenous languages with knowledge preservation. At the same time, they accept English as the practical gateway to higher education and professional mobility. Very few advocate its exclusion. Instead, they describe a split economy of knowledge: indigenous languages for foundational and cultural learning, English for vertical advancement. This tension between cultural value and pragmatic utility is not hypocrisy; it is structural reality. Stakeholders navigate a system where English carries institutional prestige while indigenous languages carry epistemic value, and this gap shapes every classroom decision that follows.

The analysis is organised around four thematic clusters: teachers' experiences of curriculum planning, time allocation, and assessment; institutional considerations of pedagogical comfort, training, and resources; student engagement through interest, comprehension, and relevance; and the overarching challenges that bind these domains together. The respondents were drawn primarily from students and academic professionals, with a smaller representation from parents. This yields a learner-oriented, practitioner-informed perspective that captures the everyday realities that policy frameworks must eventually confront.

2.2 Teachers' Experiences: Classroom Realities and Pedagogical Constraints

Teachers occupy a unique position in the language-policy chain. Lipsky (1980) describes them as street-level bureaucrats - the final interpreters who decide, lesson by lesson, whether a policy lives or dies.

In the context of indigenous language education, this mediating role becomes decisive because teachers must navigate not only pedagogical content but also the emotional economy of language prestige within their own institutions.



2.2.1 Indigenous Languages as Informal Pedagogical Tools

The survey responses expose a consistent pattern: indigenous languages such as Bengali and Sanskrit function primarily as informal pedagogical aids rather than as formal mediums of instruction. Teachers use them to clarify difficult passages, but the formal architecture of the classroom - syllabus delivery, written assessment, board examinations - remains anchored in English. As one respondent noted, indigenous languages are *“not much used since good quality textbooks remain unavailable.”*

This structural deficit restricts the possibility of integrating these languages into formal IKS pedagogy, regardless of their acknowledged cognitive value (Kapoor, 2020).



2.2.2 Teacher Shortages and Training Deficits

Beneath the textbook gap lies a more fundamental crisis: the shortage of teachers qualified to teach indigenous languages as living intellectual media. Young Lives India (2016) found severe shortages in secondary schools, with language teachers among the most difficult posts to fill. The situation is compounded by inadequate pre-service training.



2.2.3 Curriculum and Examination Pressures

While NEP 2020 mandates the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into teacher education (Ministry of Education, 2020), B.Ed. curricula remain dominated by generic methodologies, and few institutions offer specialised training in teaching IKS content through indigenous languages. A teacher who knows Bengali as a mother tongue is not automatically equipped to teach Sanskrit epistemology or *Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava* theology.

Consequently, the incorporation of indigenous languages into IKS teaching remains contingent upon individual initiative rather than systemic design. The pedagogical potential of these languages is underutilised not because teachers reject them, but because the system offers neither the manpower, the materials, nor the training to teach them otherwise.

2.3 The IKS Pedagogical Gap: How Indigenous Languages Are Used and Sidestepped

The survey responses reveal that indigenous languages function as informal channels for IKS transmission while remaining structurally excluded from its formal study. Respondents noted that teachers explain IKS concepts - such as the nuances of *dharma* or the emotional theology of *prema-bhakti*- through Bengali paraphrase to aid comprehension, yet the formal curriculum, assessments, and prescribed texts for IKS modules remain in English. As one participant observed, “teachers tell in Bengali but write in English,” exposing a pedagogical split where the conceptual depth of IKS is orally acknowledged but institutionally denied (Kapoor, 2020; CISINDUS, 2025).

This hierarchy is most visible in the curricular status of Sanskrit. Rather than being positioned as the primary linguistic gateway to IKS, it is treated as an optional add-on.



One respondent noted that Sanskrit lacks the standing of a “dedicated main subject” and is perceived as an “obsolete addition,” despite its centrality to the conceptual vocabulary of Indian philosophy and science (Ministry of Education, 2020). In English-medium institutions, IKS content is typically delivered through translated summaries that flatten epistemological nuance, while Bengali-medium schools retain closer access to regional IKS traditions but still lack standardised materials that connect language competence with philosophical inquiry.

Consequently, students encounter IKS as a cultural anecdote rather than as a structured knowledge system, and indigenous languages remain pedagogical supports rather than the epistemic media through which IKS is formally transmitted.



2.4 Institutional Considerations: Structural Constraints and Systemic Gaps

Educational institutions play a decisive role in determining whether Indian Knowledge Systems survive as living intellectual traditions or fade into ceremonial residue. Yet the responses suggest that schools are not uniformly equipped to support IKS transmission through indigenous languages, revealing a fragmented institutional landscape. When participants were asked whether their institutions foster such engagement, the dominant answer was blunt: “No” or “*not really.*” This widespread lack of confidence points to a deeper crisis, not merely the absence of resources, but the absence of institutional will.



The most immediate barrier is the shortage of teachers who can actually teach IKS through indigenous languages. It is not enough to appoint a Bengali or Sanskrit instructor; what is needed are educators who can read classical IKS texts in the original or local linguistic register, grasp their contextual and philosophical nuances, and translate that understanding into classroom pedagogy. The survey responses indicate that even where language teachers exist, they often lack training in IKS content, while IKS educators frequently lack the linguistic depth to engage with source materials outside English translations.

One respondent noted that *“we have [teachers], but we have to increase the number,”* while another stressed the need for *“more teachers and a good curriculum.”* But the deficit is qualitative as much as quantitative. There is a shortage of properly trained and qualified teachers who can bridge language competence with IKS scholarship - who can, for instance, unpack the conceptual density of *pramāṇa* or *prema-bhakti* through Bengali or Sanskrit rather than through flattened English approximations.

This staffing crisis is compounded by an institutional mindset that treats IKS transmitted through indigenous languages as unnecessary in the contemporary context. Several respondents described a *“vicious cycle”*: diminishing interest in IKS leads to fewer learners, which produces fewer future teachers, which further erodes the tradition. Another linked the problem directly to *“people’s mindset and current job opportunities,”* noting that professional markets reward English proficiency while offering little recognition for deep competence in Sanskrit or Bengali intellectual traditions. Such perceptions filter downward into institutional priorities, limiting investment in IKS-oriented teacher preparation and curriculum development.



Structural features of the education system intensify these challenges. Curricula are heavily oriented toward English, leaving minimal room for IKS content delivered through indigenous languages. As one participant explained, “a curriculum that is mainly designed in English often limits the inclusion of local languages,” thereby restricting the understanding of IKS. When IKS concepts are forced into English translation, their conceptual integrity is compromised; students encounter *dharma* as “religion” and *mokṣa* as “salvation,” losing the epistemological specificity that makes the knowledge system coherent. Time pressures compound the problem.

Teachers struggle to “*explain concepts in both English and indigenous languages,*” and in an exam-driven system, indigenous language instruction is perceived as time-consuming and therefore impractical.

The examination architecture adds another layer of constraint. Assessment practices prioritise speed, memorisation, and performance within fixed frameworks, often at the expense of conceptual depth. One respondent observed that students “*memorize the topic in whatever language it is available in without actually understanding,*” while another described the curriculum as “*unscientific,*” with excessive content compressed into short time frames. In such a system, engaging with IKS through indigenous languages, an inherently slower, more interpretive process, becomes a liability.

“*It takes more time to write in an indigenous language,*” noted one respondent, capturing how examination logistics actively discourage the very linguistic engagement that IKS demands.



Differences across educational boards further fragment the landscape. Bengali-medium contexts maintain relatively more space for regional IKS traditions, though even here standardised materials connecting language competence with philosophical inquiry are scarce. English-medium schools, by contrast, tend to prioritise Western-oriented curricula in which IKS appears, if at all, as optional cultural content rather than as a rigorous knowledge system. This divergence reflects the absence of a unified institutional approach to IKS, resulting in unequal opportunities for students to encounter their intellectual heritage through the languages that carry its conceptual weight.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the marginalisation of IKS in schools is not the result of a single deficiency but the outcome of interconnected institutional failures. Limitations in teacher training, curriculum design, assessment systems, and broader societal attitudes combine to sever the link between indigenous languages and IKS transmission.



As one respondent forcefully argued, *“Indigenous language is the foundation of our education. We must learn these languages and read the classic literature in those languages to know our country correctly.”* Yet the institutional framework remains insufficient to honour that conviction.



2.5 Students' Engagement: Interest, Comprehension, and Cultural Connection

Student engagement with IKS is neither absent nor automatic; it is conditional on the linguistic medium through which the material is delivered. The responses reveal a sharp distinction between students who encounter IKS as translated English content and those who access it through indigenous languages. When IKS concepts are taught through Bengali or Sanskrit, engagement is immediate and intuitive. When the same content is filtered through English, it becomes abstract, distant, and easily dismissed as examination fodder.

Soumyajit Mondal, a student at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, captured this precisely: *"I don't know how many knowledge systems there are that are preserving their culture, but India's knowledge system is doing that."* This recognition of value exists; the question is whether the classroom allows students to access that value through the languages that carry it. The survey responses suggest that it usually does not. Most participants indicated that their engagement with IKS is occasional rather than sustained, not because they reject the content, but because it is presented in a linguistic register that severs it from their lived experience.

Students engage when IKS is embedded in indigenous linguistic frameworks that connect abstract concepts to familiar cultural contexts. A lesson on *karma* explained through Bengali semantic nuances resonates because it activates conceptual scaffolds the student already possesses.

The same lesson delivered through English translation requires the student to first master a foreign conceptual vocabulary, then map it onto an alien epistemological framework, and then find personal relevance.



That is not pedagogy; it is linguistic obstacle-running. Unsurprisingly, many respondents marked their engagement as conditional, “sometimes”-indicating that interest flares when the material is linguistically accessible and fades when it is not.

This ambivalence is not a rejection of IKS; it is a rational response to how IKS is taught. Students operate within an examination system that rewards speed, English proficiency, and memorisation. When IKS appears as an optional add-on in English-medium instruction, they correctly perceive it as supplementary rather than essential. One respondent noted that students “*memorize the topic in whatever language it is available in without actually understanding.*” This is the inevitable outcome of teaching IKS in English: students absorb fragments without entering the conceptual world of the knowledge system.

Student interest cannot be manufactured through token inclusions. It requires teaching IKS through the indigenous languages that encode its meanings, so that comprehension becomes relational rather than mechanical. Until that happens, students will continue to respond with conditional engagement, not because they are indifferent to their intellectual heritage, but because the classroom has not given them the linguistic tools to claim it.



2.6 Conclusion

The stakeholder voices in this chapter confirm what Chapter 1 theorised: the recovery of Indian Knowledge Systems in schools is not primarily a curricular problem but a linguistic one. Teachers, students, and institutions alike recognise the value of IKS, yet they operate within an educational architecture that channels that value through English translations, undertrained faculty, and examination structures hostile to indigenous conceptual vocabularies. The gap is not between belief and apathy but between epistemic conviction and structural feasibility. Until Sanskrit and Bengali are treated not as cultural subjects but as the active media through which IKS is taught, assessed, and examined, the knowledge system will remain visible in policy but inaccessible in practice.



Chapter 3

A Model for Indigenous Language-Based IKS Education

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 ended with a teacher's blunt admission: "*We tell in Bengali but write in English.*" That sentence captures the entire crisis. Indian Knowledge Systems are often experienced through indigenous languages but formally mediated through English, with schools occupying the uncomfortable space between (Groff, 2017). As a result, the epistemic precision discussed in Chapter 1 rarely reaches the written curriculum.

This chapter builds the bridge. It constructs a school-level model that moves indigenous languages from informal aid to formal medium, from oral paraphrase to written text, from cultural supplement to curricular core. The proposed model shall have three tiers: teaching resources in Bengali and Sanskrit, institutional mechanisms to deliver them, and assessment reform to make their use strategically rational. Each tier addresses a specific failure Chapter 2 documented. Together, they propose that the gap between conviction and feasibility is architecturally produced and therefore architecturally reversible.

3.2 Developing Indigenous Language Teaching Resources

The absence of rigorous IKS textbooks in Bengali and Sanskrit emerged in Chapter 2 as the decisive barrier. Teachers explain *prema-bhakti* through paraphrase because no classroom text exists that preserves its conceptual density in an accessible register. The NEP 2020 acknowledges this gap by mandating the development of quality materials in Indian languages, but implementation remains uneven (Ministry of Education, 2020; Kumar, 2025).



The model proposes a staged development process. For the foundational stage (Classes 1–5), oral traditions - folk songs, local ecological narratives, rhymes - build conceptual scaffolds through familiar linguistic registers. For the preparatory stage (Classes 6–8), simplified excerpts from the foundational IKS texts such as the *Bhagavad-gītā* or *Caṇḍīdāsa's Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* are adapted with glossaries and visual supports that preserve nuance without overwhelming young readers. For the secondary stage (Classes 9–12), original passages from classical works in philosophy, polity, medicine, mathematics, and literature, including texts such as the *Arthaśāstra*, *Caraka-saṃhitā*, or *Līlāvatī*, appear in bilingual editions allowing students to move between Bengali comprehension and English academic register.

Adaptation must be an epistemic reframing, not mere translation. Each text passes through philological review for conceptual fidelity, pedagogical restructuring for cognitive development stages, and community validation by Sanskrit scholars and local practitioners who verify that classroom versions do not flatten what they simplify. Pilot testing in actual classrooms drives revision cycles informed by teacher and student feedback. This yields resources that are simultaneously rigorous and usable, directly addressing the stakeholder complaint that indigenous languages lack "*good quality textbooks matching international standards*."

Multimedia complements print. Since much IKS knowledge in Bengal survives through performance rather than text, the model includes audio and video documentation of elder narratives, Baul songs, and local craft demonstrations. These serve as primary texts for language and environmental studies, connecting students to living knowledge traditions rather than fossilised abstractions (Das, 2022).



3.3 Institutional Mechanisms: Policy, Training, and Technological Support

Resources cannot transform classrooms without teachers prepared to use them. Chapter 2 found that even where language teachers exist, they often lack IKS content training, while IKS educators lack the linguistic depth to engage source materials outside English translations. George J. Sefa Dei (2000) demonstrates that policy implementation fails precisely at this point: teachers are the final interpreters who decide whether reform lives or dies.

The proposed model addresses this through mandatory pre-service modules in B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. programmes: IKS epistemology, Bengali and Sanskrit philology for classroom use, and comparative pedagogy drawing on dialogic methods from indigenous educational traditions. A teacher who knows Bengali as their mother tongue requires explicit preparation to teach Sanskrit epistemology. Specialized certification in IKS-Bengali translation should be available for language teachers who wish to lead this integration.

In-service professional development follows a deepening trajectory. Year one provides orientation on IKS philosophy and sample lessons in Bengali. Year two moves to subject-specific integration, showing social science teachers how to engage IKS concepts through Bengali conceptual vocabulary and ethics educators how to use dialogic methods for classroom *saṃvāda* circles.



Year three establishes peer mentorship networks where teachers observe each other's IKS lessons, conduct action research on student outcomes, and refine methods collectively. Teachers complete the three-year certification in IKS-Bengali pedagogical competence, with annual assessments determining progression. The target ratio is one IKS-certified teacher per 30 students at the primary level, and one per 25 students at the secondary level, ensuring manageable caseloads for the interpretive, dialogic methods IKS requires. This translates to approximately 8-10 certified teachers per average-sized school (300-400 students), requiring an initial training cohort of 200 teachers per district in Phase one. This responds directly to the finding that current incorporation remains contingent on individual initiative rather than systemic design.

At the institutional level, the model requires a state-level IKS curriculum cell, perhaps housed within SCERT, to oversee quality control, resource distribution, and monitoring. The cell requires dedicated budgetary allocation from the state education department, covering salaries for five full-time staff: a director with doctoral expertise in IKS, two curriculum developers (Sanskrit and Bengali specialists), one assessment designer, and one digital resource manager. District-level liaison officers (one per 15-20 schools) extend this structure without duplicating it, operating within existing District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) budgets but with specific IKS implementation mandates. District Institutes of Education and Training become implementation nodes, translating state frameworks into local training and community liaison. Schools partner with local *pathśālās*, *kīrtan* groups, and folk practitioners who contribute knowledge that textbooks cannot capture.

Technology supports this through a state-hosted digital repository of Bengali IKS materials, teacher support applications with adaptable lesson plans, and open educational resources subject to academic review.



These tools supplement rather than replace human expertise, addressing resource gaps without creating technological dependency (Das, 2022).

3.4 Cross-Curricular Integration

Chapter 2 found that IKS appears as optional cultural content because it is confined to standalone courses. The proposed model rejects this isolation. IKS concepts should organise subject teaching rather than supplement it, with Bengali and Sanskrit serving as active media of instruction.

In Bengali language classes, Bhakti poetry and *Maṅgala-kāvya* become philosophical texts introducing *dharma*, *bhakti*, and *rasa* through their native conceptual vocabulary. Students recite, analyse metaphors, and compose creative responses in the *pada* tradition, internalising the epistemic style rather than merely reading about it.

In social science, Arthaśāstra governance models and Bengal's traditional water management systems become case studies for comparative analysis with modern institutions, taught through Bengali texts that preserve conceptual nuance. In environmental studies, Caraka 's biodiversity classifications and Sundarbans folk ecology provide frameworks for field observation and community elder interviews, connecting classroom learning to local knowledge surviving in indigenous linguistic registers. In ethics and values education, the dialogic structure of the Bhagavad-gītā becomes a model for classroom saṃvāda circles where students debate ethical dilemmas using indigenous conceptual tools.

Interdisciplinary project units ensure structural embedding. A unit on water in Bengal integrates Bhatiali river songs in language class, colonial and traditional irrigation systems in social science, Sundarbans ecology in environmental studies, and water as commons in IKS ethical thought.



The output might be a student-produced documentary in Bengali with English subtitles, demonstrating both conceptual integration and multilingual competence. This directly addresses the stakeholder concern that indigenous languages function as informal aids while formal study remains anchored in English.

3.5 Assessment Reform

The examination architecture emerged in Chapter 2 as the most stubborn barrier. Students memorise topics without understanding because assessment rewards speed and recall. When indigenous language use takes more time and carries no examination advantage, it becomes strategically irrational. Cummins (1979) argues that mother-tongue instruction enhances cognitive academic language proficiency only when assessment systems recognise and reward that competence.

The proposed model restructures assessment to align with IKS epistemic demands. At the primary stage (Classes 1–5), students respond in Bengali across all subjects, with English gradually introduced as a parallel academic register rather than replacement. At the preparatory stage (Classes 6–8), assessment shifts from recall to interpretation: students explain concepts like *ŗtucaryā* or *pramāṇa* in their own terms, demonstrating grasp rather than reproduction. At the secondary stage (Classes 9–12), bilingual competence becomes the goal, but conceptual depth in either language is rewarded over superficial fluency in English.



Specific instruments include: interpretive essays in Bengali evaluating understanding of IKS concepts; comparative analysis tasks placing *Arthaśāstra* welfare provisions in dialogue with contemporary social security frameworks; project work where students design solutions using IKS principles, such as creating a school garden based on *Vṛkṣāyurveda*; and *saṁvāda* circles assessed on the quality of argumentation rather than consensus. Formative tools include reflective journals in Bengali maintained throughout the academic year, and community-engaged projects assessed jointly by teachers and local practitioners.

This directly addresses the finding that students treat indigenous language engagement as supplementary because examinations do not value it. When assessment rewards interpretation over memorisation and application over recall, indigenous language use becomes strategically rational.

3.6 Implementation and Feasibility

The model proposes a phased rollout that manages risk and builds evidence. Phase one spans two years in ten schools across one district, focusing on primary-level Bengali IKS integration with intensive teacher preparation and resource development. Success indicators include teacher readiness, student engagement, and preliminary comprehension outcomes. Phase two expands to all primary and upper-primary schools in the district while piloting secondary-level integration, testing resource adequacy, and assessment reliability. Phase three moves toward statewide coverage over five to seven years, with board examination integration and longitudinal tracking of learning outcomes. This phased approach recognizes practical limitations and is primarily designed for Bengali-medium and parallel-medium schools where indigenous language competence already exists, while English-dominant elite institutions require adapted strategies such as intensive Bengali/Sanskrit immersion before IKS integration.



Its success depends on state-level political will, sustained funding, and availability of trained personnel.

To reduce policy volatility, IKS language requirements are embedded within the permanent NEP 2020 framework through statutory inclusion in state board examination regulations, making repeal politically and administratively difficult. Addressing the shortage of Sanskrit scholars and Bengali pedagogues, Phase one incorporates a parallel teacher recruitment and training pipeline for IKS-Bengali competence.

Funding gradually shifts from full state subsidy in Phase one to a 60:40 state-district model in Phase three, encouraging long-term local ownership. Whether this architecture can be built depends on institutional will and sustained investment. But the design itself demonstrates that the gap between epistemic conviction and structural feasibility is bridgeable - provided the bridge is constructed at the level of schools, where knowledge actually lives or dies.

Conclusion

This study began with a simple observation and traced it to its structural roots. Teachers explain dharma in Bengali; students write about it in English for examinations; yet the conceptual precision that makes the term coherent within Indian thought never reaches the page.

The gap is not between belief and apathy - stakeholders across the board recognise the value of Indian Knowledge Systems, but between epistemic conviction and institutional architecture. Indigenous languages carry the conceptual vocabularies that IKS requires; the educational system channels that capacity into translation, paraphrase, and conceptual dilution.



The findings demonstrate that this marginalization is not accidental. It is produced by interconnected structural failures: the absence of rigorous IKS textbooks in Bengali and Sanskrit; the shortage of teachers who can bridge linguistic competence with philosophical depth; examination systems that reward English-medium speed over indigenous-language interpretation; and curricular designs that confine IKS to optional cultural content rather than integrating it as an epistemic core.

Each failure reinforces the others. Textbooks cannot be written without trained authors; teachers cannot be trained without assessment incentives; assessment cannot be reformed without curricular content worth examining. The model proposed in Chapter 3 addresses these interdependencies simultaneously, proposing that indigenous languages can acquire institutional weight only when resources, training, and assessment are redesigned together.



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Classical Chinese was deliberately maintained as a compulsory scholarly medium, not because it was easier than vernacular alternatives, but because intellectual continuity required it. India faces a parallel choice. Sanskrit and Bengali can be preserved as ceremonial relics, or they can be activated as living media of philosophical and scientific inquiry. The NEP 2020 gestures toward the latter, but gestures are not structures. Without the curricular cell, the teacher pipeline, the bilingual textbook, and the reformed examination that Chapter 3 specifies, the policy will remain visible on paper and invisible in practice.

What is ultimately at stake is not cultural preservation but cognitive justice. When Indian students encounter their own intellectual heritage through English translations that impose Western categorical grids, they are denied the interpretive resources that would allow them to engage with that heritage critically and creatively. They become fluent in a vocabulary that inadequately translates their own traditions. The recovery of indigenous languages in school education is therefore not a retreat from global engagement but a precondition for genuine intellectual self-possession.

The transformation this study calls for is not utopian. It is architecturally specific, phased over five to seven years, and grounded in the constraints that Chapter 2 documented. It demands political will, sustained funding, and a workforce of scholars who can teach IKS through indigenous languages with the rigour that the tradition deserves. These are significant conditions. But they are not impossible. What would be impossible - and what the current system approaches - is the indefinite continuation of a pedagogical arrangement in which Indian students learn about their own knowledge systems in a language that cannot convey their meanings.



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