



Diaspora and Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany: Global Transmission, Adaptation, and Negotiated Challenges

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Abstract

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) emerge from lived experience, everyday practices, and shared community traditions. When this knowledge forms travels with people across borders, it does not remain unchanged; instead, it is reshaped through new encounters and contexts. This paper reflects on how IKS is experienced, practised, and adapted among Indian diaspora communities in Germany, drawing on observations and interactions across different regions of the country. In Germany, IKS remains present in both formal and informal spaces, such as temples, gurudwaras, yoga centres, and Indian grocery stores. These spaces function not only as cultural hubs but also as sites where knowledge is actively lived and transmitted. Practices such as rituals, storytelling, collective recitation, seva, music, and food habits play an important role in carrying cultural memory and values forward across generations. In a secular, highly structured environment like Germany, many aspects of IKS are reinterpreted to make them more accessible and acceptable—for instance, through the language of wellness, therapy, or cultural activity. While this helps increase visibility, it also leads to certain elements being simplified or detached from their deeper philosophical context. The paper also pays attention to second-generation members of the diaspora, for whom engagement with IKS is not automatic but involves choice, negotiation, and reinterpretation. These knowledge systems become part of an ongoing process of identity formation rather than something simply inherited. Overall, the paper argues that diasporic spaces in Germany should be understood as dynamic environments where IKS systems are continuously adapted and lived in new ways.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, Diaspora, Cultural practices in Germany

1. Introduction

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are closely connected to everyday life. They are shaped by what people do, experience, and learn from one another in their communities. Much of this knowledge is not written down but is passed on through rituals, oral traditions, daily practices, and shared social life. People learn by observing others, participating in activities, and repeating what they see. In this sense, knowledge is not separate from action but grows out of lived experience (Connerton 1989; Smith 2012). This makes IKS different from systems that rely mainly on written texts or formal instruction.

This study is based on my own experiences with Indian diaspora communities in Germany. During my visits, I interacted with people in various settings, including temples, gurudwaras, cultural organisations, yoga centres, and Indian grocery stores. These were not formal research spaces, but everyday environments where knowledge was actively practised and shared. What I noticed was that knowledge was not simply preserved in these places; it was constantly interpreted, adjusted, and sometimes even questioned.

Germany offers a useful context for understanding how knowledge moves across cultures. It is a highly organised and largely secular society where public practices often need to fit within institutional and social expectations. In this environment, Indian practices are often explained using terms such as “wellness,” “health,” or “culture.” For example, yoga is frequently presented as a form of physical exercise, and festivals are sometimes described as cultural events. While this makes these practices more accessible, it can also change how they are understood and reduce their original depth (UNESCO 2022).

Another important aspect that was observed was the role of generational differences. Older members of the diaspora often try to maintain traditions as they remember them from India. In contrast, younger members engage with these practices more selectively. For them, Indian Knowledge Systems are not always inherited unquestioningly, but are explored and adopted based on personal interest. Practices such as language use, food habits, and ritual participation become part of how they understand their identity in a new cultural setting (Hall

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1990; Vertovec 2009). Based on these observations, this paper views diaspora not as a space of loss but as one of change and continuity. Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany are not fixed; they are constantly reshaped through everyday interactions and experiences. By focusing on lived practices, this study aims to show how knowledge persists and evolves across diverse cultural contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the idea that knowledge is not only something people possess but something they actively do. In the case of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), knowledge is closely linked to everyday practice. It is learned through participation, observation, and repetition rather than through formal instruction alone (Connerton 1989; Smith 2012). Because of this, IKS cannot be understood only through written texts or institutional frameworks. Instead, it exists in lived experiences, shared activities, and social interactions.

In many Indian contexts, knowing and doing are closely connected. For example, people learn how to celebrate festivals, prepare food, or participate in rituals by observing others and taking part in these activities. Learning happens through the body and the senses, not just through explanation. This form of learning continues even when people move to new places. During my observations in Germany, I found that spaces such as temples, gurudwaras, and community gatherings continue to play an important role in sharing this kind of knowledge. Another key concept in this study is cultural memory. Cultural memory helps communities stay connected to their past while also adapting to present conditions. From what I observed, traditions are not simply repeated in the same way. Instead, people remember certain practices, modify them, and sometimes simplify them to fit their current situation. In this sense, cultural memory is not fixed; it is continuously recreated (Assmann 2011).

Diaspora theory also helps in understanding this process. Migration is not only about moving from one place to another; it also involves adjusting to new cultural environments. People living in diaspora often navigate between different cultural expectations. As a result, their practices reflect a mix of influences (Hall 1990; Vertovec 2009). In the German context, the observations indicate that Indian Knowledge Systems often exist in an “in-between” space. They are neither completely unchanged nor fully transformed, but show elements of both continuity and adaptation. The idea of translation is also important here. When Indian practices are presented in a new cultural setting, they are often explained using familiar terms such as “health,” “mindfulness,” or “culture.” This makes them easier for others to understand. However, this process can also reduce their original meaning (UNESCO 2022). For example, yoga is often presented mainly as a physical activity, while its philosophical aspects receive less attention. This shows how knowledge can change when it moves across contexts.

Finally, this study takes a reflexive approach. My observations are shaped by my own background and familiarity with Indian practices. Instead of treating this as a limitation, I consider it an important part of the research (Smith 2012). My experiences allowed me to notice changes, similarities, and tensions in the way knowledge is practised in Germany. Together, these ideas, such as practice-based knowledge, cultural memory, diaspora, translation, and reflexivity, provide a way to understand Indian Knowledge Systems as flexible and context-dependent. They help explain how knowledge persists and evolves in new environments rather than remaining fixed or disappearing.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, experience-based approach to understand how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are practised within the Indian diaspora in Germany. Instead of using structured interviews or survey methods, I relied on observation, participation, and informal conversations. This approach was chosen because IKS is often transmitted through everyday practices and social interaction rather than through formal instruction.

During my approximately two-week stay in Germany, I visited cities such as Berlin and Munich. I visited around five to six different locations, including temples, gurudwaras, yoga centres, cultural gatherings, and Indian grocery stores. These spaces allowed me to observe how knowledge is shared in both formal and informal settings. I also interacted with around 10 to 15 individuals from different age groups. These conversations were informal and took place naturally during visits and gatherings. As a result, participants were able to speak freely about their experiences without the pressure of structured questioning.

In these settings, I observed that knowledge was expressed through a variety of practices. These included rituals, group activities, language use, food preparation, music, and everyday behaviour. For example, during a visit to a temple, I noticed how participants followed shared patterns of behaviour such as collective prayer and respectful silence. In a grocery store, I observed conversations about ingredients and cooking practices, which reflected shared cultural knowledge (Smith 2012). My role in this study can be described as that of an observer-participant. I did not remain a distant observer, but took part in activities, attended gatherings, and engaged in conversations. This allowed me to experience these practices directly. Observations were recorded through field notes written soon after each visit, along with reflective notes about my own responses and impressions.

Reflexivity is an important part of this study. My background and familiarity with Indian practices influenced how I interpreted what I observed. Instead of trying to remove this influence, I used it to better understand the changes and continuities present in diaspora settings (Smith 2012). At times, I noticed practices that felt familiar; at other times, I observed differences reflecting adaptation to a new environment. Generational differences were also

considered in the analysis. Through informal discussions, I observed that first-generation migrants often focused on preserving traditions, while second-generation members engaged with these practices in more selective and personal ways. These differences were not treated as fixed categories, but as patterns that helped in understanding variation within the diaspora.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. Since the research was based on informal interactions, no personal identities were disclosed. The focus is on general observations and patterns rather than individual cases. The aim is to understand how knowledge is practised and experienced, not to evaluate or judge behaviour. Overall, this methodology aligns with the study's focus on lived experience and everyday practice. It allows Indian Knowledge Systems to be understood in context, as they are performed and adapted in real-life situations.

4. Sites of Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany

During my visit to Germany, Indian Knowledge Systems appeared not as abstract ideas but as part of everyday life in different community spaces. I observed that knowledge was not stored in one place but practised across multiple settings. These spaces functioned as environments where people remembered, performed, and adapted their traditions through regular interaction.

4.1 Religious Spaces: Temples and Gurudwaras

Temples and gurudwaras were among the most visible and active spaces where Indian Knowledge Systems were practised. These places were not limited to religious worship; they also functioned as centres of community interaction and learning. Through rituals, group prayers, recitation, and seva, people engaged in practices that conveyed values such as discipline, respect, and collective responsibility. During my visits, I noticed that these institutions often adapted to local conditions in Germany. For example, prayer times were adjusted to accommodate work schedules, and gatherings were organised more systematically. Even with these changes, the core practices remained meaningful because people continued to participate actively (Connerton 1989). Language also played an important role, with a mix of Indian languages, English, and sometimes German being used during interactions.

4.2 Cultural Associations and Community Organisations

Cultural organisations provided another important space for sharing Indian Knowledge Systems. These groups organised festivals, performances, storytelling sessions, and language classes (Assmann 2011). Unlike religious spaces, these activities were often presented in a more structured, explanatory way so they could be understood by a wider audience. I attended a cultural event featuring traditional music and dance. The organisers explained the meaning behind each performance in simple terms. This made the event accessible to younger participants and even to those unfamiliar with Indian traditions. At the same time, I felt that some practices were simplified to fit the event format, which sometimes reduced their depth.

4.3 Yoga and Meditation Centres

Yoga and meditation centres showed a different kind of adaptation. While the practices themselves were similar to those in India, the way they were explained had changed. In most cases, yoga was presented as a form of physical exercise or stress relief rather than as part of a broader philosophical system (UNESCO 2022). During one session I attended, the instructor focused mainly on breathing techniques and relaxation. There was little discussion about the traditional concepts associated with yoga. This made the practice easy to follow, especially for people from different backgrounds, but it also removed some of its original context.

4.4 Everyday Spaces: Food, Language, and Informal Interaction

Some of the most meaningful observations came from everyday spaces such as kitchens, grocery stores, and informal gatherings. In these places, knowledge was shared naturally through conversation and daily activities. For example, in an Indian grocery store, I heard people discussing recipes and ingredients. These conversations reflected shared knowledge about food and cultural practices. Similarly, during informal gatherings, cooking and eating together became ways of passing on traditions. Language use was also interesting, as people often switched between English, German, and Indian languages depending on the situation.

4.5 Generational Engagement with Knowledge Sites

I also observed differences in how different generations engaged with these spaces. Older members of the diaspora often viewed these places as important for preserving traditions. They participated regularly and emphasised continuity. In contrast, younger members engaged more selectively. They chose certain practices—such as yoga, music, or food—that were meaningful to them. Their involvement was more personal and often influenced by their everyday life in Germany. This showed that Indian Knowledge Systems are not simply passed down unchanged, but are reshaped across generations (Bhabha 1994; Vertovec 2009). Taken together, these observations show that Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany are spread across different spaces rather than located in a single institution. These spaces are connected through everyday practice and interaction. They demonstrate that diaspora is not a place where knowledge is lost, but a setting where it continues to evolve.

5. Adaptation and Negotiation of Indian Knowledge Systems

From what I observed in Germany, Indian Knowledge Systems do not remain unchanged; they are constantly adjusted to fit new social and cultural conditions. These changes are influenced by institutional rules, public

expectations, and the everyday realities of living in a different country. In this sense, adaptation is not simply a loss of tradition, but an active process through which knowledge continues to exist in new forms.

One of the most visible forms of adaptation is the way Indian practices are explained in public settings. I noticed that terms such as “wellness,” “mindfulness,” and “self-development” are often used to describe practices that originated in deeper philosophical and spiritual traditions. This makes these practices easier to understand and more acceptable in places such as educational institutions, workplaces, and community programmes. For example, yoga and meditation are widely practised, but they are often presented mainly as techniques for physical health or stress relief. Many participants engage in these practices because they help them feel better, rather than because of their philosophical meaning. While this makes the practices more accessible, it also changes how they are understood. The broader context of Indian Knowledge Systems is sometimes reduced to a set of practical activities.

This process also reflects differences in which kinds of knowledge are more readily accepted. Practices that can be explained in terms of health or personal benefit are more widely accepted, while ritualistic or philosophical aspects receive less attention. I observed this clearly in yoga centres, where physical practice was emphasised, but deeper concepts were rarely discussed. This shows how knowledge can be reshaped when it moves into a new cultural environment. At the same time, adaptation is not only shaped by external conditions but also by the diaspora community itself. First-generation migrants often try to maintain traditions as they remember them. However, practical factors such as time constraints, work schedules, and legal requirements influence how these traditions are practised. For instance, rituals may be shortened, and community events are carefully planned around available time. These changes are not necessarily intentional compromises, but practical adjustments to everyday life.

Younger members of the diaspora engage with Indian Knowledge Systems differently. Instead of following all traditions, they tend to choose practices that are meaningful to them. They reflect on what they want to continue and what they prefer to change. For example, some may connect strongly with food, music, or yoga, while others may focus on values or ethical ideas. This selective engagement shows that knowledge is not simply inherited but actively shaped. Another important aspect of negotiation is how Indian Knowledge Systems are presented in public spaces. Cultural festivals, workshops, and institutional collaborations often highlight certain aspects of tradition that are easier to present and understand. While this increases visibility, it can also lead to simplified or performative representations. In some cases, knowledge becomes something that is displayed rather than deeply practised.

However, based on my observations, adaptation should not be seen solely as a problem. It also creates new possibilities. In Germany, I saw that Indian Knowledge Systems are being reinterpreted to remain relevant. People are finding new meanings and uses for traditional practices in their everyday lives. Overall, Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany exist in a space of continuous negotiation. They are shaped by a balance between preserving tradition and adapting to new conditions. This process shows that knowledge is not fixed, but flexible and capable of change. Rather than disappearing, it continues to evolve through interaction with new environments.

6. Second-Generation Diaspora and Identity Formation

From my observations, second-generation members of the Indian diaspora engage with Indian Knowledge Systems in ways that differ from those of the first generation. For them, these practices are not always accepted without question. Instead, they approach them more thoughtfully and often choose what feels relevant to their own lives. I noticed that their connection with Indian Knowledge Systems often focused on specific elements such as food, music, yoga, festivals, or certain values (Hall 1990). These practices were not always followed in their original form but were adapted to fit their everyday experiences in Germany. This does not mean rejecting tradition, but rather a different way of engaging with it.

Language also played an important role in this process. Even when fluency in Indian languages was limited, cultural understanding was still expressed through symbols, references, and shared practices. For example, participation in festivals or familiarity with certain customs allowed individuals to maintain a sense of connection. Another important aspect was reflection. Many second-generation participants thought carefully about which practices they wanted to continue and why. They considered whether these practices fit their beliefs, values, and social environment. This shows that they are not passive recipients of tradition but active participants in shaping the ways Indian Knowledge Systems continue in diaspora contexts (Hall 1990; Bhabha 1994).

7. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that diaspora should be understood as an active space where knowledge is continuously shaped, rather than simply preserved or lost (Hall 1990; Vertovec 2009). Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany are influenced by everyday practices, social interactions, and institutional conditions. They do not remain fixed, but change over time. One important point that emerged is the role of practice. Even when meanings change, repeated actions such as cooking, celebrating festivals, or participating in rituals help maintain continuity (Connerton 1989). These practices allow knowledge to persist even when expressed in new ways.

The study also highlights differences in how knowledge is accepted. Practices that can be explained in terms of health, personal development, or culture are more easily accepted in the German context. At the same time, more

complex philosophical or ritual aspects receive less attention. This creates a gap between what is practised and what is fully understood. Another key observation is the role of different generations. While first-generation migrants focus on maintaining traditions, second-generation members engage in reinterpretation. Together, these approaches show that diaspora is not a simple process of preservation or decline, but a combination of continuity and change. Overall, the study shows that Indian Knowledge Systems continue to exist in Germany through adaptation, interaction, and everyday practice. These processes demonstrate that knowledge is flexible and adaptable to new environments (Assmann 2011).

8. Conclusion

This study has explored how Indian Knowledge Systems are practised and adapted within the Indian diaspora in Germany. Focusing on everyday experiences and observations shows that these knowledge systems are not fixed or static. Instead, they continue to evolve in response to new cultural and social contexts. The findings highlight that spaces such as temples, cultural organisations, yoga centres, and everyday social settings all play an important role in maintaining knowledge. In these spaces, knowledge is not only preserved but also reshaped through practice and interaction (Connerton 1989; Assmann 2011).

The study also shows that adaptation should not be seen as a loss of tradition. Rather, it is a way for knowledge to remain relevant in changing environments (Bhabha 1994; Vertovec 2009). At the same time, it is important to be aware that certain aspects of knowledge may be simplified or reduced when presented in new contexts. Second-generation engagement further demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems are continuously reinterpreted. Their selective and reflective approach shows that knowledge is actively shaped across generations (Hall 1990). In conclusion, Indian Knowledge Systems in Germany represent a form of continuity that is flexible rather than fixed. They adapt, change, and remain meaningful in new settings, demonstrating that knowledge can cross borders while retaining its core significance.

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