

# Visual Narratives of India: Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems in Communication Design

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India's rich cultural heritage offers communication designers a diverse range of traditional visual elements for inspiration. This paper explores the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)—motifs, folk arts, and symbols—into design, arguing that IKS enhances storytelling, relevance, inclusivity, and ethics. Through case studies, trends, and education, it demonstrates how IKS can transform visual communication and improve design outcomes in academic and professional contexts.

**Keywords:** Visual Narratives, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Communication Design, Cultural Heritage, Folk Arts, Motifs, Inclusivity, Storytelling, Ethics, Design Education, Madhubani, Warli, Patta Chitra, Collaboration, Sustainable Design, Cultural Appropriation, Traditional Significance, Interactive Workshops, Regional Identity, National Education Policy 2020

## Abstract

Visual stories rooted in IKS, such as folk arts and symbolic motifs, connect ancient knowledge to modern communication design. Using patterns such as Madhubani and Warli helps designers create content that feels culturally relevant and supports inclusivity and identity. A key case study that exemplifies this integration is the collaboration between student designers and Patta Chitra artisans in Odisha for a branding project. In this project, design students partnered with local artists to develop sustainable packaging for regional handloom products, incorporating authentic Patta Chitra motifs and narratives directly into the visual identity. The process involved workshops hosted by artisans, hands-on motif adaptation, and iterative feedback sessions that ensured both cultural fidelity and contemporary appeal. This collaboration not only enriched the students' understanding of the traditional significance behind each motif but also resulted in packaging that effectively communicated regional identity and supported local artisans economically. Such case studies illustrate how integrating IKS into design education equips future professionals to apply traditional motifs in current commercial contexts while fostering cultural awareness and ethical practice.

## Introduction

Communication design in India is increasingly using IKS to create meaningful visual stories, especially as the world becomes more connected. Traditional motifs, from Indus Valley seals to regional arts like Kolam and Kalamkari, carry deep philosophical and spiritual meanings. Adding these motifs to modern branding and digital media makes designs feel more authentic and helps people connect emotionally. (V & H., 2024) However, designers have a responsibility to adopt ethical design approaches when integrating these elements. This includes conducting thorough research to understand the historical and cultural significance of motifs, seeking informed consent and input from source communities, and ensuring transparent attribution of cultural origins. Engaging in ongoing dialogue with tradition bearers and adhering to mutually agreed guidelines can help prevent cultural appropriation and promote respectful collaboration. By prioritizing these practices, visual storytelling can maintain ethical integrity and respect for cultural heritage.

The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the importance of incorporating IKS into school and college curricula, influencing the emergence of new design trends. To address this context, the paper first outlines the historical and theoretical foundations of IKS, then analyses specific contemporary design applications and educational initiatives through data visualizations and case studies. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of how IKS is integrated into modern communication design, supported by relevant examples and empirical evidence.

## Indian Knowledge Systems Overview

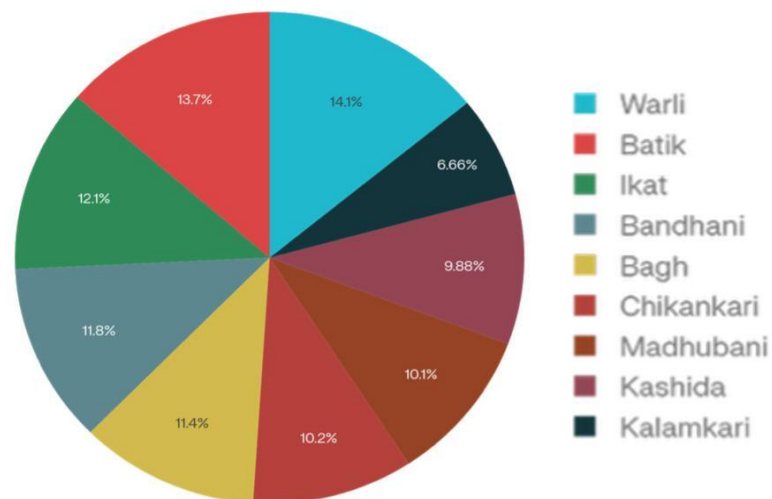
IKS is a broad body of knowledge from Vedic texts, covering arts, sciences, and philosophies passed down through generations. (Introduction to Indian Knowledge Systems, 2025) Important ideas like interconnectedness and ethics are useful in design. (Sharma, 2023) In visual design, IKS appears in motifs and folk arts such as Madhubani (Bihar), Warli (Maharashtra), and Patta Chitra (Odisha), which tell stories about myths and daily life. (Nikumbh et al., 2023)

## Visual Narratives in Indian Tradition

India's tradition of visual storytelling goes back long before digital media, as seen in Bhimbetka cave paintings and temple carvings. (Gandhi, 2023) Dravidian temples feature motifs such as Yali guardians and reliefs depicting deities from epics. (Sharma, 2025) Textiles such as Kanchipuram silk feature peacock and floral motifs to convey spiritual meanings. (Popular Motifs in Kanchipuram Silk Sarees and What They Mean, 2025) <https://www.memeraki.com/blogs/posts/the-evolution-of-motifs-from-ancient-symbols-to-modern-interpretation-in-indian-art>

These stories use symbols, like Om or Gandhi's spectacles, to build trust and strengthen identity. <https://www.granthaalayahpublication.org/journals/granthaalayah/article/view/6339>

Distribution of Traditional Indian Art Images in TIAD Dataset



The included pie chart (see: indian\_art\_pie.png) illustrates the distribution of images across nine traditional Indian art forms in the TIAD dataset. Directly analyzing the chart reveals that Warli and Batik art forms account for the largest proportions of integrated images, thereby empirically demonstrating their dominant role in current design practices. By quantifying the presence of each art style, this visual not only substantiates the discussion of ongoing trends in the adoption of Indian Knowledge Systems but also clearly indicates which traditional art forms are most frequently selected by contemporary communication designers.

The chart shows how images are spread across nine traditional Indian art forms in the TIAD dataset, with Warli and Batik being the most common.

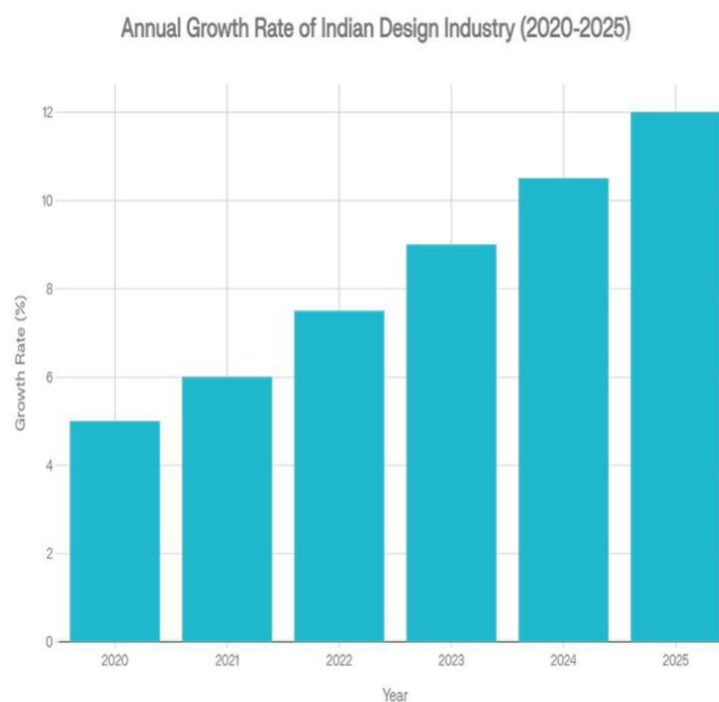
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-56465-9>

## Integration in Modern Communication Design

Today's designers use IKS in branding, like Nicobar's tribal patterns and Hyundai's culturally relevant campaigns. Google India's voter ad used real stories with historical figures. Warli motifs appear in infographics, and Madhubani designs are used in products. IKS aligns well with design thinking, especially empathy and experimentation, and helps revive traditional crafts. (Puri, 2025, pp. 47-53) at Visualization and Trends

The Indian design industry, including communication design, is expected to grow by 5 to 12 per cent each year until 2025, thanks to programs like "Make in India" and a focus on more personalized designs. <https://jdinstitute.ac.in/a-look-inside-the-indian-design-industry-in-2025/>

Yantras inspire today's data visualization tools, helping turn complex information into clear visuals. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/from-vedic-scriptures-silicon-valley-evolution-data-indian-addanki-7xscd>



The generated chart, design\_growth\_bar.png, illustrates projected growth rates peaking at 12 per cent in 2025, emphasizing the increasing demand for design solutions that incorporate cultural elements. <https://jdinstitute.ac.in/a-look-inside-the-indian-design-industry-in-2025/ticles/s41598-Madhubani> in Branding: Brands are integrating Madhubani art into textiles and digital media, which helps support artisans' livelihoods.

**Warli in Campaigns:** Warli art is used in social infographics because it is simple and strongly connected to culture. <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V6ISSUE5/IJRPR46714.pdf>

**Government Initiatives:** NEP 2020 integrates IKS, boosting design education.

Significant challenges persist in integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into modern communication design, particularly the risk that commercialization may dilute or misrepresent authentic cultural motifs. Additionally, adapting intricate traditional designs for digital platforms often leads to the loss of contextual nuance and material texture. (Leveraging Indian Folklore in Modern Media to Build Cultural Enterprises, 2023, pp. 456-472) Critics argue that the drive for mass-market appeal may incentivize superficial applications of traditional elements, potentially severing them from their original meanings.

Furthermore, there exists the counterpoint that excessive standardization through design guidelines can inadvertently stifle local artistic expression and innovation. In response, proponents emphasize the importance of collaborative processes in which designers work closely with artisans and source communities to promote responsible use, coupled with detailed documentation and ongoing dialogue. Technical solutions such as high-resolution scanning and vectorization, alongside active involvement of tradition bearers in digitization, are strategies intended to retain both visual fidelity and cultural narrative. However, it is crucial to recognize that even with these interventions, tensions may remain between authenticity and adaptation. Regular feedback from community representatives before project completion represents one method to navigate these tensions and enhance ethical practice.

There are also opportunities, such as using AI to find motifs and growing the global market for IKS-based designs. (Talati et al., 2025) Support from the University Grants Commission (UGC) helps encourage work across different fields.

## Conclusion

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into communication design enriches visual storytelling and promotes cultural sustainability by fostering meaningful, relevant design. The increasing use of IKS by modern designers underscores the blending of traditional knowledge with innovative methods to craft impactful, inclusive visual narratives. Resources such as the National Museum's online collection, the Bharatavani Digital Library, and the V&A Museum's South Asian art archives provide access to traditional Indian motifs. Visiting local museums and exploring databases such as the Crafts Council of India's Artisan Directory or Google Arts & Culture's Indian Art collections can deepen understanding and inspire creativity. Future research should evaluate the outcomes of these strategies, especially their influence on brand recall and inclusivity, reinforcing that leveraging IKS transforms design and fosters cultural responsibility.

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