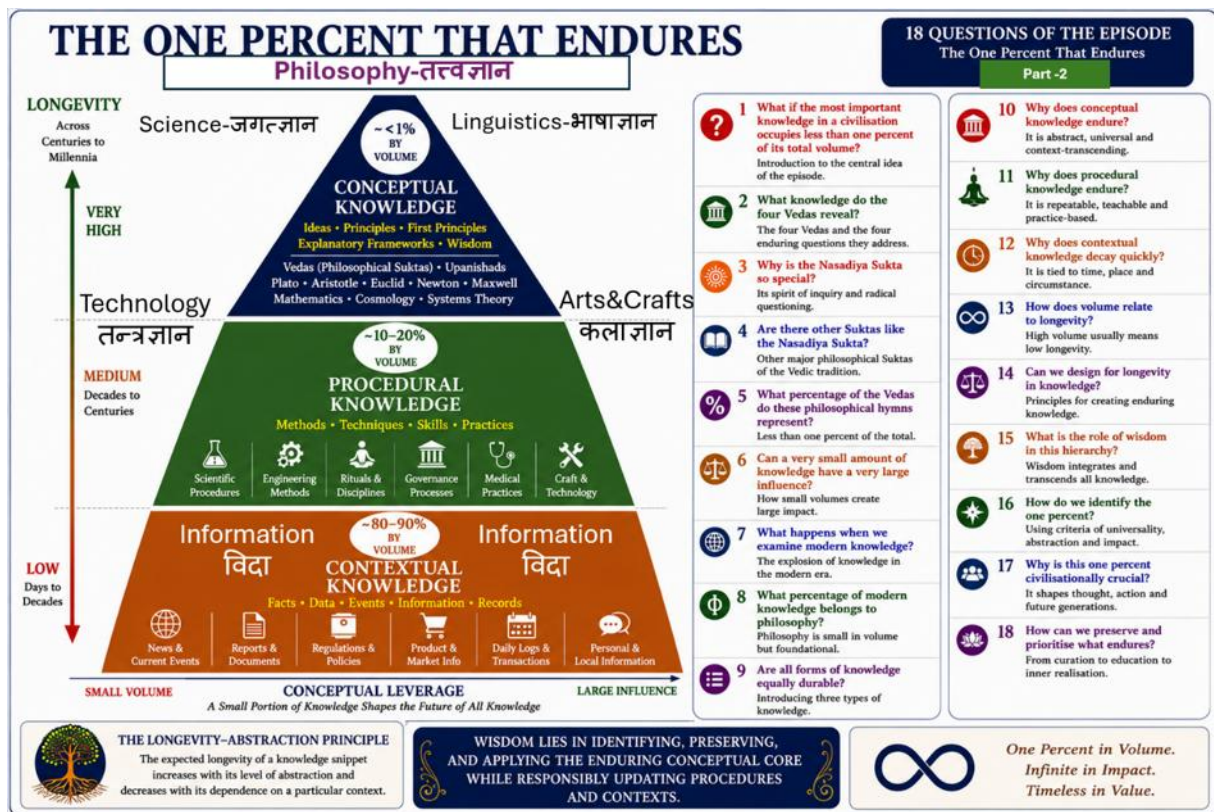


## Only One Percent?

Knowledge, Longevity, and the Wisdemics of Civilisations

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*A civilisation may produce oceans of information, yet its destiny may be shaped by less than one percent of its knowledge.*



### Abstract

Human civilisations generate enormous quantities of knowledge. Most of this knowledge serves immediate needs and addresses specific contexts. Administrative records, commercial transactions, technical procedures, regulations, and contemporary news are indispensable to daily life, yet they often possess limited longevity. In contrast, a very small fraction of knowledge survives across centuries and even millennia. This enduring core consists primarily of concepts, principles, explanatory frameworks, and foundational questions. Although it occupies only a tiny proportion of a civilisation's total intellectual output, it frequently exerts a disproportionately large influence on future generations.

This essay explores the proposition that the most important knowledge of a civilisation may occupy less than one percent of its total volume. Using examples from the Vedas, Greek civilisation, science, mathematics, and modern knowledge systems, we examine the relationship between conceptual depth and longevity. We distinguish among conceptual, procedural, and contextual knowledge and argue that longevity tends to increase with

abstraction and decrease with dependence on particular circumstances. The essay concludes by introducing the Pragma-Sophic concept of the Longevity–Abstraction Principle and discusses its implications for the preservation and evaluation of knowledge.

## Introduction

When we think of a great civilisation, we often imagine vast libraries, monumental literature, extensive records, and immense stores of accumulated knowledge. Ancient India produced the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Darshanas, epics, commentaries, and countless regional traditions. Ancient Greece produced philosophy, mathematics, political theory, literature, and science. Modern civilisation generates scientific journals, engineering reports, software repositories, digital archives, government databases, and a continuous stream of information on a scale unprecedented in human history.

Yet an intriguing question arises. What if the most important knowledge contained within these vast collections occupies only a tiny fraction of their total volume? What if the ideas that survive for centuries represent less than one percent of everything that was produced? And what if that one percent exerts more influence than the remaining ninety-nine percent combined?

At first glance such a proposition appears implausible. We tend to assume that importance correlates with volume. A larger body of knowledge appears more significant than a smaller one. However, the history of ideas suggests otherwise. A few pages of Euclid's axioms transformed mathematics. A handful of Newton's laws transformed physics. Maxwell's equations transformed technology. Likewise, a small collection of philosophical hymns within the Vedas helped shape the intellectual trajectory of Indian civilisation for more than three millennia.

This observation invites a deeper investigation into the nature of knowledge itself. Are all forms of knowledge equally durable? Do all forms contribute equally to the long-term development of civilisation? Or does knowledge possess an internal hierarchy in which a small conceptual core supports a much larger body of practical and contextual information?

The Pragma-Sophic perspective suggests that knowledge exists in multiple layers. Some knowledge explains reality. Some knowledge guides action. Some knowledge merely records circumstances. These layers differ dramatically in their longevity and influence. Understanding this distinction is essential if societies wish to preserve what is most valuable from their intellectual heritage.

## The Three Civilisational Responses

Whenever a civilisation encounters its own past, three characteristic responses emerge.

*The first response is rejection.* This group observes that much ancient knowledge is tied to obsolete technologies, outdated social structures, forgotten institutions, and historical circumstances that no longer exist. They conclude that the entire inheritance has become irrelevant. In rejecting the procedural and contextual elements, however, they often discard the conceptual core as well. The timeless questions disappear together with the temporary answers.

*The second response is restoration.* This group seeks to preserve everything. Ancient procedures are revived. Ancient institutions are defended. Ancient contexts are treated as if they remain universally applicable. Valuable concepts are preserved, but so are practices whose original conditions have vanished. The result is often an attempt to transplant the past directly into the present without sufficient adaptation.

*The third response is discernment.* This group distinguishes between the timeless and the temporary. It recognises that some ideas possess enduring value while others served specific historical circumstances. It preserves the conceptual core, modifies procedural knowledge where necessary, and allows obsolete contextual knowledge to remain part of history rather than contemporary practice. This approach neither rejects tradition nor becomes imprisoned by it. Instead, it seeks continuity through intelligent adaptation.

The first group destroys the seed. The second preserves the husk. The third cultivates the living tree.

## **The Vedas and the One Percent Hypothesis**

The Vedas provide an illuminating example. Collectively, the four Vedas contain thousands of verses covering rituals, chants, procedures, invocations, social concerns, governance, health, and cosmological reflections. Yet among this vast corpus exists a remarkably small collection of deeply philosophical hymns.

The Nasadiya Sukta asks how existence itself emerged and whether anyone can truly know the origin of creation. The Purusha Sukta investigates how unity becomes diversity. The Hiranyagarbha Sukta contemplates the primordial source of reality. The Devi Sukta explores consciousness as a universal power. The Vak Sukta examines the relationship between language and knowledge. The Dirghatamas Hymns investigate truth and plurality. The Vishvakarma Sukta contemplates intelligent order in the cosmos. The Aghamarshana Sukta explores time and cosmic order. The Kama hymns investigate desire as the source of becoming. The Skambha Hymn seeks the ultimate support underlying existence itself.

Together these philosophical hymns occupy only a tiny fraction of the total Vedic corpus. Yet they account for much of the Vedas' enduring philosophical significance. Their influence extends through the Upanishads, the Darshanas, medieval commentaries, and modern philosophical discourse. They exemplify how a small conceptual nucleus can shape an entire civilisation.

## **Conceptual, Procedural, and Contextual Knowledge**

The distinction becomes clearer when knowledge is classified into three categories.

Conceptual knowledge consists of principles, models, explanations, and foundational ideas. Concepts such as Dharma, Karma, Atman, evolution, geometry, causality, and systems theory belong to this category. Their abstraction allows them to survive changing circumstances. They can be reinterpreted and reapplied across generations.

Procedural knowledge concerns methods and techniques. Medical treatments, engineering practices, agricultural methods, manufacturing processes, and research protocols fall into this category. Procedural knowledge generally possesses intermediate longevity. It often survives for decades or centuries before being refined or replaced.

Contextual knowledge concerns particular circumstances. Current events, regulations, market conditions, political arrangements, administrative records, and local customs belong here. Such knowledge is often indispensable in the present but rapidly loses relevance as circumstances change.

An interesting inversion emerges. Contextual knowledge occupies the largest volume but possesses the shortest lifespan. Conceptual knowledge occupies the smallest volume but possesses the greatest longevity. Influence and volume move in opposite directions.

## **Conclusion**

The history of civilisations reveals a recurring pattern. Vast quantities of knowledge are produced, yet only a small fraction survives the passage of centuries. The knowledge that endures is typically conceptual rather than contextual, foundational rather than situational, explanatory rather than descriptive. Its physical volume may be small, but its intellectual influence is immense.

The philosophical Suktas of the Vedas, the dialogues of Plato, the axioms of Euclid, the laws of Newton, and the equations of Maxwell all illustrate the same phenomenon. They belong to what may be called the enduring conceptual core of civilisation. Their significance derives not from their size but from their ability to illuminate reality across generations.

From a Pragma-Sophic perspective, wisdom requires more than the accumulation of information. It requires the capacity to distinguish the enduring from the transient, the foundational from the incidental, and the conceptual from the merely contextual. Civilisations flourish when they preserve their conceptual core while continuously adapting their procedures and contexts to changing realities.

This insight leads to the Longevity–Abstraction Principle:

***The expected longevity of a knowledge-snippet increases with its level of abstraction and decreases with its dependence upon a particular context.***

The challenge before every civilisation is therefore not merely to produce knowledge. It is to recognise, preserve, renew, and apply the enduring one percent hidden within the vast ocean of transient information. That one percent often contains the questions, concepts, and insights that continue to guide humanity long after the circumstances of their origin have disappeared.

## References & Relevance

For the dialogue essay, the references should not merely be a bibliography. Following your preferred format, each reference should be accompanied by a short explanation of its relevance to the discussion. The references below cover the Vedas, Greek philosophy, philosophy of science, knowledge theory, and the longevity of ideas.

### 1. Rigveda

Translated by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. Penguin Classics, 1981.

**Relevance:** The primary source for the Nasadiya Sukta, Purusha Sukta, Hiranyagarbha Sukta, Vak Sukta, Devi Sukta, Vishvakarma Sukta, and the Hymns of Dirghatamas. These hymns formed the starting point of the discussion concerning philosophical knowledge in ancient Bharatiya civilisation.

### 2. The Principal Upanishads

Translated by S. Radhakrishnan. HarperCollins, 1994.

**Relevance:** Demonstrates how the speculative questions first appearing in a few Rigvedic hymns evolved into systematic investigations of consciousness, reality, selfhood, and knowledge. The Upanishads provide continuity between Vedic inquiry and later Indian philosophy.

### 3. Atharva Veda

Translated by Maurice Bloomfield. Sacred Books of the East Series.

**Relevance:** Source for the Skambha Hymn and related cosmological reflections. These texts extend the speculative tradition beyond the Rigveda and explore the foundations of existence and cosmic order.

### 4. Plato – The Collected Dialogues

Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton University Press.

**Relevance:** Represents the Greek tradition of philosophical inquiry through dialogue. Plato's method of questioning parallels the exploratory spirit of the Nasadiya Sukta and provides a useful comparison with Bharatiya speculative thought.

### 5. Aristotle – Metaphysics

Translated by W. D. Ross.

**Relevance:** One of the earliest systematic investigations of causality, substance, existence, and first principles. Aristotle's work illustrates how conceptual inquiry became organised into formal philosophical systems.

## 6. Euclid – Elements

Translated by Sir Thomas Heath.

**Relevance:** A classic example of conceptual knowledge with extraordinary longevity. The discussion of enduring knowledge relied heavily on the observation that Euclidean concepts have survived for more than two millennia.

## 7. Karl Popper – Conjectures and Refutations

Routledge, 1963.

**Relevance:** Provides a modern understanding of how scientific knowledge evolves through criticism and testing. Useful for distinguishing conceptual foundations from transient scientific theories.

## 8. Thomas Kuhn – The Structure of Scientific Revolutions

University of Chicago Press, 1962.

**Relevance:** Introduces the concept of paradigm shifts and demonstrates that even scientific knowledge evolves through changing conceptual frameworks. Relevant to the discussion of knowledge longevity.

## 9. Michael Polanyi – Personal Knowledge

University of Chicago Press, 1958.

**Relevance:** A foundational work on tacit and explicit knowledge. Particularly relevant to the distinction between conceptual, procedural, and contextual knowledge.

## 10. Gilbert Ryle – The Concept of Mind

University of Chicago Press, 1949.

**Relevance:** Famous for distinguishing "knowing that" from "knowing how." This distinction directly informed the categorisation of conceptual and procedural knowledge used in the dialogue.

### **11. Daniel Bell – The Coming of Post-Industrial Society**

Basic Books, 1973.

**Relevance:** Examines the transition from industrial economies to knowledge-based societies and highlights the increasing importance of knowledge as a civilisational resource.

### **12. Peter Drucker – Post-Capitalist Society**

Harper Business, 1993.

**Relevance:** Explores the emergence of knowledge workers and the growing significance of knowledge as the primary productive asset of modern civilisation.

### **13. Alfred North Whitehead – Science and the Modern World**

Cambridge University Press, 1925.

**Relevance:** Investigates the philosophical assumptions underlying modern science and supports the argument that philosophy remains foundational even when its textual volume is small.

### **14. Bertrand Russell – History of Western Philosophy**

Routledge, 1945.

**Relevance:** Provides a broad historical perspective on the development of conceptual knowledge in the Western tradition and illustrates the persistence of foundational ideas.

### **15. Will Durant – The Story of Philosophy**

Simon & Schuster, 1926.

**Relevance:** A readable survey of enduring philosophical concepts and their influence across centuries. Useful for understanding why a small body of conceptual knowledge often has disproportionate historical impact.

Collectively, these works support three central conclusions developed in the dialogue:

1. The deepest philosophical content of a civilisation often occupies only a tiny fraction of its total textual volume.
2. Conceptual knowledge generally exhibits much greater longevity than procedural or contextual knowledge.
3. The historical influence of an idea depends more on its generative power than on its size within a knowledge corpus.

These conclusions hold for the Vedic tradition, the Greek tradition, and modern scientific civilisation alike. For inclusion in the Pragma-Sophy corpus, I would additionally add a final "Pragma-Sophic Reference" entry:

**Tilak, V. – Pragma-Sophy Working Notes on Knowledge-Snippets, Living Knowledge Architecture, and Wisdemics (ongoing).**

**Relevance:** Provides the conceptual framework through which the dialogue interprets the Vedas, philosophy, science, and the longevity of knowledge. The notions of knowledge-snippets, wisdemic evaluation, and conceptual leverage are direct extensions of this framework.



**Vocabulary**

English Term	(Devanagari)	Short Description
Aghamarshana Sukta	अघमर्षण सूक्त	Cosmological hymn reflecting on the emergence of truth, order, and time.
Atharvaveda	अथर्ववेद	Veda concerned with practical life, health, governance, and human well-being.
Atman	आत्मन्	The inner self or essential conscious principle of an individual being.
Bharat	भारत	Traditional Sanskrit name for India and its civilisational sphere.
Bharatiya	भारतीय	Pertaining to Bharat, Indian civilisation, or its cultural traditions.
Darshana	दर्शन	A philosophical viewpoint or systematic school of thought.
Devi Sukta	देवी सूक्त	Hymn expressing the cosmic feminine principle and creative intelligence.
Dharma	धर्म	Principle of right order, duty, harmony, and ethical conduct.
Dirghatamas	दीर्घतमस्	Ancient Vedic seer associated with profound philosophical hymns.
Hiranyagarbha Sukta	हिरण्यगर्भ सूक्त	Hymn describing the primordial “Golden Womb” from which creation emerges.

Jnana-Kana (Knowledge-Snippet)	ज्ञान-कण	A compact unit of knowledge representing a specific insight or proposition.
Kama	काम	Desire, aspiration, or the motivating impulse behind becoming and creation.
Karma	कर्म	Action and its consequences within moral and causal frameworks.
Mantra	मन्त्र	Sacred utterance, verse, or formulation used for recitation and reflection.
Nasadiya Sukta	नासदीय सूक्त	Famous creation hymn questioning the origin of existence and the limits of knowledge.
Pramana	प्रमाण	A valid means or method of acquiring reliable knowledge.
Pragma-Sophy	प्रज्ञा-सोफी*	A modern framework integrating knowledge, action, values, and wisdom.
Purusha Sukta	पुरुष सूक्त	Hymn describing the Cosmic Person from whom the universe emerges.
Rishi	ऋषि	Seer or sage who perceives and articulates profound truths.
Rigveda	ऋग्वेद	The oldest Veda containing hymns on existence, nature, and cosmic order.
Rta (Rita)	ऋत	Cosmic order, harmony, and regularity underlying existence.
Samaveda	सामवेद	Veda of sacred chants, music, rhythm, and experiential participation.
Satya	सत्य	Truth or correspondence with reality.
Skambha	स्कम्भ	The cosmic support or foundational principle of existence.
Sukta	सूक्त	A Vedic hymn or well-spoken sacred composition.
Upanishad	उपनिषद्	Philosophical texts exploring consciousness, reality, and ultimate knowledge.
Vak Sukta	वाक् सूक्त	Hymn exploring speech, language, meaning, and knowledge.
Veda	वेद	Literally “knowledge”; the foundational corpus of ancient Bharatiya wisdom.
Verity	सत्यता	Degree to which a statement or model corresponds to reality.
Vishvakarma Sukta	विश्वकर्मा सूक्त	Hymn contemplating the cosmic architect and structure of the universe.
Wisdemics	प्रज्ञामीमांसा*	The pragma-sophic study of wisdom, judgement, and wise action.
Yajurveda	यजुर्वेद	Veda focused on ritual action, procedures, duties, and sacred practice.
Yoga	योग	Discipline of integration, self-development, and harmonisation of body, mind, and consciousness.