

# ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS TO PRESERVE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Khushveer Kaur

Academician, Sacred College of Education, Barnala (Punjab).  
Contact No. 9115844058, Email id - Gillkhushveerkaur580@gmail.com

## Abstract

*The term indigenous refers to when something is local or native to a particular group of people in a society. Knowledge on the other hand refers to cognition, skills, and information learnt or experienced which an individual makes use of in tackling issues. Knowledge is a dynamic human process of justifying personal beliefs towards the truth Culture can be defined as the sum total of values beliefs, practices habits and norms of a particular group of people inherited, learnt and acquired which is passed down from generation to generation. The distinctive culture of a people is stored in individuals' minds and passed on from generation to generation. The loss of traditional knowledge and no proper records of knowledge have resulted to mass migration to more developed communities which eventually may lead to total extinction of knowledge. Preservation of cultural heritage is first and foremost organized to maintain and enhance cultural values, though numbers of studies have demonstrated positive economic benefits of cultural heritage preservation. Preservation of cultural heritage enhances import substitution, revival of city centers, heritage tourism, influences increase in property values. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role of libraries and museums to preserve indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. The author will discuss its need, challenges and significance in the development which is the need of the hour.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, libraries, museums, challenges, significance, development

## INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in social capital of the poor. It is their main quality to invest in the struggle for shelter, food and survival. Most of the indigenous knowledge disappears because of the invasion of foreign technologies and development concepts that assure for short-term solutions to troubles without being capable of sustaining them. The term indigenous refers to when something is local to a specific group of people in a society. Knowledge refers to skills, cognition, skills, and knowledge learnt or gained by experience experienced which can be useful for tackling issues. It is an active human process of justifying personal thinking towards the truth (Nonaka, 2006). Therefore, indigenous knowledge refers to distinct ways and ideas of doing things, skills and local occupation in an ethnic group and particular territory. Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that is developed by a particular set of people who live in a society and such knowledge provides sustainable development and improvement (Sarkhel, 2016). Indigenous knowledge also known as traditional knowledge and local knowledge which refers to the common ability of a particular group of people in a civilization mostly in rural areas who have a common history including food preparation, health care, occupation and social life.

Traditional Knowledge is different from scientific knowledge, Scientific knowledge is generated by research institutions and universities which is well acknowledged while Traditional knowledge is developed outside the educational institutions (Kaniki, 2002). IK is exceptional to a particular society and such knowledge found in that community is used as an identity of that community such knowledge is learnt through replication. IK can either be explicit or tacit (Sen, 2005). Culture can be defined as the sum total of beliefs, norms, practices and habit of a particular group of people which is learnt and acquired which is passed down from generation to generation. The distinctive culture of a people is stored in individuals' minds and passed on from generation to generation. Examples of cultural heritage of a community include rituals, songs, traditional dances, festivals, customs, beliefs peculiar to a particular community. (Ndovu 2015) asserts that IK and culture are collectively owned, not by a single individual. A society or community is different from other societies due to its unique cultural heritage and traditional knowledge knowledge which are abide by the people of that society. Culture is the way of life of a group of people living together having similar ways of feelings, thinking and acting which is passed on from generation to generation. Culture can be imbibed through teaching and immersion.

## NEED FOR PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The advent of western colonization has made the indigenous knowledge to appear inferior to the modern ways of doing things. Cultural heritage, ideas and values of a particular place are being forgotten. There is a need to preserve IK so that the indigenous knowledge and ideas can be kept safe for coming generations. It is a known fact that, before the introduction of western knowledge and educational system communities lived sustainably.

Presently there is a risk that traditional knowledge and cultural heritage of the local communities will be lost (Nakashima, 2000). Indigenous knowledge is very essential in the development of an individual, society and thenation. (Oyeronke 2012) affirms that access to information is crucial for educational advancement and individual development and cooperation. Theatres are very important because it is impossible for local people to survive without them. The loss of traditional knowledge cultural heritage have resulted to migration to more developed communities which may lead to total extinction of knowledge and heritage. Due to this, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage would not pass from generation to generation. Moreover, the western culture has negatively affected the transmission of local knowledge. For instance, traditional clothes which is a source of income for those people who produce them is being replaced by European dresses like suits, shirts, ties. Other examples include communities producing pottery, pots and other utensils, and locally made shoes and bags woven baskets .Most of the local communities in African countries depend on those foods which are produced with traditional methods of farming.

### THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS IN PRESERVING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Libraries hold play a crucial role in preserving indigenous knowledge, facts, ideas, and innovation useful for the development of a society and nation. The library provides a platform where information can be collected which can be very beneficial for the users. The main difficulty affecting the local or traditional knowledge is the failure of libraries and other information centers to identify that it is vital source of information for national development. Library is the source of the knowledge and culture which can be passed from generation to generation. The library preserves such knowledge for future generations to come. Library has a key role in managing in local knowledge, that serves as collectors, organizers, depositories and distributors of indigenous knowledge. The library makes such knowledge and information available for the users (Nakata, 2002).The library should be ICT compliant so as to ease organization, preservation and visibility of indigenous knowledge and heritage. A well organized and preserved knowledge would be available for use for future generations. (Plockey 2014) opined that digitizing information makes it easier to preserve and share so it acts as a protector for the community's collective memory. A digitized document would be available for all users anywhere instead of having to be physically present. (Breytenbach 2013) is of the view that traditional resources would become wiped out in future if those are not digitized. Through the use of ICT, there would be a proper accessibility and dissemination of indigenous knowledge to people which would bring about a paradigm shift of local people from being consumers of information and knowledge to producers (Tjiek, 2006). As a result, it improves the standard of living of such people and beneficial for the development of the economy of a nation. In a conference of African Union (AU) heads of states, a declaration was made that, African countries should prioritize ICT so that digitizing of traditional knowledge would be made possible. A well digitized knowledge would bring about knowledge sharing which is important for the development of societies in Africa (Chisenga, 2002). ICT is important to local knowledge in this present period because the chief platform for information access is through the ICT amenities like computers, internet and so on

There is not much accessible literature on the role of community libraries in preserving IK. However, there is an international effort to know the role of libraries in enhancing access to indigenous materials. IFLA Quantitative and Qualitative and Methods in Libraries has in place an Indigenous Matters Section, which aims "to support the provision of culturally responsive and effective services to indigenous communities throughout the world. Its main aim to promote international collaboration in the fields of culture, information, library, knowledge to native education and training and research unities that meet their community, cultural, intergenerational and language needs and to encourage indigenous leadership within the sector, exchange of experience in all aspects of this subject" (IFLA, 2018). Such international recognition creates a global voice for librarians to come and work together for local knowledge and heritage so that they can escape from erosion. According to Okore, et al. (2009), libraries and museums have made progress in preserving usual knowledge in digital as well as paper format. (Okore, et al. 2009) further assert that libraries provide strong platforms to promote access to IK through creation of favourable environments that accept face to face interactions for community members to discuss relevant cultural issues. (Sithole 2007) proposes documentation of traditional language and heritage in languages that are understood by other communities when its particular identity is being lost. This is something that a number of community libraries can hold in high regard and promote robust IK preservation strategies. Further still, libraries play a significant role for promoting the rights of those who create and use traditional language as well as solve copyright issues in local communities (Owiny, Mehta & Maretzki, 2014). (Lor 2004) notes that libraries should play a Key role in the organization discovery and promotion of its use and recognition of local communities that produce it. In this sense, community libraries should play a major role in preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage and maintain for future generations. Digital libraries and museums are playing the most important role for protecting and safeguarding of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. With the appearance of new communication technologies libraries and museums have embraced modern tools and techniques to their organizations. These tools have helped them to preserve, reuse, access and promotion of local knowledge and cultural heritage in many ways. Social media tools such as

Instagram, facebook and YouTube have helped to preserve and share TK and TCEs by providing opportunities to preserve the knowledge for development and research in major ways. In the other hand museums and libraries should keep close contacts with the communities by way of organizing exhibitions and workshops to educate the community on the significance of safeguarding TK and TCEs. (Torsen and Anderson 2010) describes that just as communities are asserting themselves as lawful rights holders who should be enthusiastically in control of how they are represented, a number of cultural institutions at global level see themselves increasingly owners and custodians of their collections. Through this shift, artistic institutions seek more direct relationships with local communities, keenly engaging with indigenous individuals with expertise, to promote new cross-cultural partnerships that could enhance cultural preservation work and profit for traditional societies.

Museums can play the role of a mediator to fill the gaps between the generations and to share the community knowledge with different communities and a various visitors. For example, the National Museum, New Delhi, has an extensive collection of Indian textiles of the different states, like bandhani work from Rajasthan, banarasi textiles from Banaras, Pulkari from Punjab, Mochikari from Gujarat, Kanth from Bengal and Chamba rumal from Himachal Pradesh. Currently, these special textiles are produced in living centres for textile arts and crafts in different states of India, such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Banaras, Nathawara, etc. There is some written evidence also available, such as the famous book of “aaine-a- akabari”, which shows that the Mughal emperor Akbar (16th century A.D.) had royal factories for different textile arts in areas such as Lahore (Punjab), Agra, Fatehpur (Uttar Pradesh), Ahamadabad (Gujarat). The National Museum organized an exhibition on Pichhawai<sup>3</sup>. This exhibition, “In Adoration of Krishna- Pichhawai of Shrinathji, held from 8 December 2007 to 20 January 2008, was based on the Tapi Collection. The exhibition curator invited various pichhawai artists from Nathdawara especially for this exhibition and these artists demonstrated the pichhawai art to the wide range of visitors. To reach a wide range of audiences a one-day painting workshop was also organized in the museum compound by traditional artist Piush Sharma<sup>4</sup> from Nathdwara. As per their tradition, before the start of anything new, these pichhawai artists performed rituals to please God. The workshop was also started with proper arti and followed by other religious rituals. This live performance of arti and other rituals imparted to visitors that pichhawai is not just an art for the artists but is very religious work and shows their dedication to art. Sanskriti Museum, New Delhi, and the National Handicrafts and Handloom Museum (Crafts Museum, New Delhi) have collections of different types of social and cultural objects related to the different communities of India. These museums are known for organizing a broad range of programmes on the traditional art of terracotta with traditional potters, to cater to different community members as well as for regular visitors to share in social, cultural and traditional knowledge. The potter and his art have played a considerable role in many conservative societies since ancient times. Almost every village in India has terracotta as a living art. Potters as such also play an important role in many rituals and ceremonies like Chak Poojna. Chak Poojna is a marriage ceremony performed in many north Indian communities, such as the Yadav<sup>5</sup> Community of Haryana, India. In this ceremony the family donates cloths and money to the potters.

- Museums taking action in their local communities, testing new, outgoing ways of collecting information, while involving citizens as “prosumers” (both consumers and producers) of cultural heritage.
- Museums enacting a more democratic model of curation, i.e. documenting past and present from multiple sources from the public and challenging traditional curatorial practices where curators are considered the voices of authority.
- Museums utilizing the latest technologies to preserve, collect, visualize and display cultural assets.
- Museum evolving their practices through the establishment of transnational exchanges between cultural institutions, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and researchers, with a view to alleviate common societal problem.

## PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN PRESERVING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The main difficulty associated with preserving traditional knowledge heritage in libraries is insufficient funding. Information centers generally are lowly funded as government gives low priority to it and it is not considered money generating organization for country. Another difficulty is the problem of illiteracy. Most of the individuals in local communities are not illiterate, this is always a predicament as they don't record discoveries, inventions and ways of doing things. Many local communities are always hesitant to disclose information about the knowledge practices such as medical practices, agricultural practices and so on. They consider revealing such information means revealing secrets things that how they hold them. Such inhabitants prefer to teach their children orally. Furthermore, there is the trouble of insufficient consciousness of the need for local information. Many individuals don't get to appreciate the value of native knowledge. They prefer the modern ways of doing things such as western medicine and other foreign made food and products. Also, most people do not think that native knowledge provide sustainable development and bring about national development for the nation. The distance between the societies and libraries where information about native knowledge is needed is quite far.

Most of the libraries are not located in the isolated areas of the nation, this creates a difficulty of accessing information organized in the library. Means of transportation in most of these restricted communities is mostly by trekking which residents accessibility and availability of essential information and knowledge. Another issue in conserving local knowledge is incompetency of staff. According to (Issak 2009) it is imperative to train staff so as to provide them to meet the information which is crucial for individuals and community at large. Information about documentation, organization, preservation should be given to the staff of libraries and information centers. Also, majority of local, cultural and historic materials are old which can be destroyed due to its life span. The local materials are not properly conserved and as such, they are at risk of deterioration, consequently, it leads to loss of crucial information. Most of the materials are cultural and historic with limited copies of such resources available for accessibility. Other issues related with the maintenance and accessibility include lack of representation of local knowledge in library's collection development policy and insufficiency of indexing policies in the library.

## ROLE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND HERITAGE IN DEVELOPMENT

The following are some of the points made in arguing for the incorporation of IK in development. The contributions to this special issue of Anthropology in Action illustrate several of these points ethnographically.

- Native knowledge enriches understanding of development opportunities. The globe model of science and indigenous-knowledge relations within a cultural context, promoting culturally appropriate interventions relevant to people's needs. (a) Appreciation of local ideas and practices encourages more sustainable development interventions. (b) Indigenous knowledge helps avoid expensive mistakes by preventing research and development initiatives that start from false premises through failing to show respect for local views. ; (c) Projects, by understanding and valuing people's (native) knowledge, can acquire a better understanding of the local position
- Indigenous knowledge make communication easier across the interface between local community and development project ,raising consciousness of scope of research and possible progress alternatives. (a) It promotes identification of jointly perceived troubles and negotiated action. (b) It allows others to teach us, and discourages imposition of unsuitable foreign ideas. (c) It helps resolve different and potentially incompatible cultural perspectives regarding development initiatives by promoting attentiveness of others' views.
- Traditional knowledge realizes the comparative pros of both outsider and inside knowledge, creating opportunities for synergy. (a) It conveys indigenous knowledge to technicians/scientists such that they can realize its relevance and links communities more successfully with high tech scientific research /development. (b) It recognizes that science may complement local understanding where it is insufficient; some interpret traditional knowledge enquiry narrowly as identifying such knowledge gaps and targeting scientific research. (c) It facilitates participatory research, interdisciplinary, recognized as necessary in progress contexts to overcome narrow sector biases.
- Traditional knowledge furthers empowerment of the poor through respect for management practices and their knowledge (a) It inspires individuals to have a voice and discourages unwanted involvement in their lives. (b) It facilitates local participation effectively in planning, decision-making and so on. (c) It may proceed scientific understanding because it may reveal intelligence unknown to science, and even challenge it.
- Indigenous knowledge promotes awareness of local social problems. (a) It helps judge the social impact of advancement interventions, notably relations between different interest groups such as the affluent and the underprivileged. (b) It seeks to evaluate local variation in knowledge (by gender, age, class, occupation etc.) and accommodate diverse perspectives and agendas. (c) It predicts possible clash due to different interest groups manipulating interventions to their advantage.
- Indigenous knowledge informs extension with a local view, encouraging information flow towards locals. (a) It helps tailor technical messages to issues as perceived locally, so that individuals can make more informed decisions. (b) It inspires uptake by tackling issues from the local perspective. (c) It informs individuals of the consequences of different choices.

## CONCLUSION

It is very clear that there is much to be learned from the traditional knowledge systems of local people. All the policy makers, academics, planers should pay greater attention to precious treasure of knowledge that is on the



verge of extinction. If we are to move from traditional methods to technological development, then people will have to learn many things from the villagers who know traditional knowledge. It is crucial for librarians and museums to do a proper documentation for preservation of the indigenous knowledge and heritage. It is also significant to be documented for the preservation of intellectual property right. Cultural heritage needs to be conserved as it brings us closer to our social value which eventually culminates in unity. A well preserved cultural heritage will bring about a well-preserved history for generations to come which also provides information to people about facts, roots and history. Funds should be provided to the information centers by the government as it improves the living standard of the people, community and country. It is important for libraries to go out to deprived communities to teach them that might be of importance to the communities. This is done mainly through book fair and book exhibition. Libraries and museums should do an unrestrained work in retrieving conventional materials so as to provide exactly which are very necessary for personnel and national development. Librarians and museums curator should work together with botanist, zoologist, ethnographers, oral historians, anthropologists and other related professionals in developing collection development policies so as to have a rich collection, for proper documentation and organization and for an efficient propagation of information. Also, library centers and museums should be built in local communities for accessibility of information. Libraries can also go out to share knowledge and information in the local communities.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aboyade, A.W. & Adeyemo, O.(2019). The role of the library in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. *American Research Journal of humanities and social science*, 2(8), 39-44.
- [2] Breytenbach, A., Lourens, A. & Marsh, S. (2013).The role of Jotello F. Soga Library in the digital preservation of South African veterinary history. *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 84(1), 1-7.
- [3] Ellen, R. & Harris, H. (1996). Concepts of Indigenous Environmental Knowledge in Scientific and Development Studies Literature – A Critical Assessment. Draft Paper Presented at East-West Environmental Linkages Network workshop 3, Canterbury.
- [4] Isaak, A. (2009). Public libraries in Africa: A report and annotated bibliography. Oxford. International network for the availability of scientific publication(INASP). Retrieved from [http://www.inasp.info/uploads/filer\\_public/2013/03/08/public\\_libraries\\_in\\_africa.pdf](http://www.inasp.info/uploads/filer_public/2013/03/08/public_libraries_in_africa.pdf)
- [5] Kaniki, A.M. & Mphahlele, M.E. (2002). IK for the benefit of all: Can knowledge management principles be used effectively? *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 68(1), 1-15.
- [6] Lor, P. J. (2004). The role of libraries in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge. *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 3(1), 45–56.
- [7] Nakashima, A.M., Prott, L. & Bridgewater, P. (2000).Tapping into the world's wisdom. *UNESCO Sources*, 125(5), 12.
- [8] Nonaka, I. (2006). Creating sustainable competitive advantage through knowledge-based management. Retrieved from: <http://www.opdc.go.th/uploads/files/nonaka>.
- [9] Okore, A.M., Ekere, J.N. & Eke, H.N. (2009). Promoting access to indigenous knowledge in digitize age: Libraries as facilitators. Libraries Create Future: A paper presented at the Nigerian Libraries Association 47th Annual General Conference 2009, Ibadan, Oyo State, from 26-31 July 2009.
- [10] Oyeronke, A. (2012). Information as an economic resource: The role of public libraries in Nigeria. *Chinese Librarianship: An International Electronic Journal*, 34 (1).
- [11] Perera, K. (2015). Protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions of South Asia in digital libraries and museums. <https://www.research gate.net/publication/288975714>.
- [12] Plockey, F. (2014). The role of Ghana public libraries in the digitization of indigenous knowledge: issues and prospects. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 6(10), 20-36.
- [13] Sarkhel, J. (2011). Management and preservation of tacit indigenous knowledge: issues and perspectives. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*, 2(4), 256-283.
- [14] Sen, B.(2005). Indigenous knowledge for development: Bringing research and practice together. *The International Information and Library Review*, 37(1), 375-382.
- [15] Senanayake, S.G.(2006).Indigenous knowledge as a key to sustainable development. *The journal of agricultural sciences*, 2(1), 87-94.
- [16] Sithole, J. (2007). The Challenges faced by African libraries and information centers in documenting and preserving indigenous knowledge. *IFLA Journal* 33(2), 117–123.

- [17]Tjiek, L.T. (2006). The role of digital libraries in the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge. *The International Information and Library Review*, 38(1), 123-131.
- [18]Torsen, M. & Anderson, J. (2010). Intellectual property the Safeguarding of traditional cultures: Legal issues and practical options for Museums, Libraries and Archives (WIPO, Switzerland, Geneva), p.18.  
[http://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/freepublications/en/tk/1023/wipo\\_pub\\_1023.pdf](http://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/freepublications/en/tk/1023/wipo_pub_1023.pdf)