Libraries for Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge and Culture: Approaches and Initiatives

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Abstract - Knowledge generated by society is preserved in libraries for further use and research. Thus libraries play a pivotal role in preserving knowledge and culture of the ages of humankind. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is gained by experiences and experiments of the years by a community which are evolved and adapted gradually. IK is a knowledge which is not recorded in contemporary form, but passed through generations orally and through practicably knowledge bearers. This implicit characteristic of IK put it at risk of being lost. Major portion of this knowledge is not recorded and it is confined in the local communities in local language. Library and Information sector generally deal with documents which are explicit in nature. Considering prevalent loss of IK and its importance being recognised in the world; IK has been regarded as an important tool to be preserved for sustainability. Efforts to preserve it in codified and known form for the future generation are initiated across the world. Documentation and preservation of IK empowers the community and country for better development and prevents its unauthorized use. This study presents some major initiatives and approaches of and for libraries towards the preservation and safeguarding of Indigenous Knowledge.

Keywords: Library, Indigenous Knowledge, Documentation, Preservation

I.   Introduction

Culture and heritage represents the ways of living by a community that has been developed and inherited through generations. It may include books, art, artefacts, architecture, oral history and folklore. India represents the diverse, old and invaluable culture and traditions that people practices for thousands of years. Indigenous knowledge synonymously termed as local or traditional knowledge is a knowledge embedded in the life practices of a particular community or geographical area and exhibited in the culture and traditions. Indigenous knowledge and culture are passed from one to another generation by word of mouth and practical by its custodians. It is not documented, collected, stored and disseminated as the other type of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is implicit in nature and difficult to preserve and organize. Implicit characteristic of this knowledge makes it prone to extinct with time. Preservation of this knowledge is necessary as it could supplement comprehensive social and economic development of the community as well as of the nation as a whole. Importance of Indigenous knowledge and culture for sustainable development and importance of libraries in the preservation of IK is being recognised and accepted across the world. Documented Knowledge of generations is scientifically collected and

organised for its future use in the libraries. Indigenous knowledge is tacit and mostly not documented. Library profession possess the skills of handling this tacit knowledge. Initiatives and approaches of libraries and Institutions for the inclusion, documentation and preservation of Indigenous knowledge and culture manifest its value for humankind.

II.   Methodology

Websites of the Organisations and Institutions as well as the home page of the libraries engaged in the collection and preservation of Indigenous Knowledge and culture has been used to collect the information for the present descriptive study.

Concepts Indigenous Knowledge and Culture:

UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge programme has put forward a very basic and elaborated explanation for the IK. 'Local and Indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. These unique ways of knowing are important facets of the world's cultural diversity, and provide a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development' (LINKS, n.d.). Talati and Bhatt (2016) reveald that to create an excellent webpage of Library website with digital preservation makes effective role for better library services.

Shri K M Munshi has explained that, Culture is the characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values in which people live. It is the sum total of the values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour (Munshi, 1974).

The above concepts of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and culture indicates a common thing that culture and Indigenous Knowledge possess immense value and it has to be preserved scientifically for the future generation and better development before it is lost.

Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge and Culture:

Scientific and technical innovations and particularly Information and communication technology has revolutionised the whole process of preserving, organising and sharing. The multimedia technology that it provides is the main reason. It supports traditional culture to be incorporated with modern and contemporary knowledge system. Thus digital technologies offer modern tools for preservation of Indigenous culture and knowledge. Systematic and coordinated approach is required by the organisations or libraries involved in preservation of IK through modern technologies. Librarians, archivists, conservators, educational Institutes, hardware software developers, and managers of digital repositories could play vital role in preserving IK.

Preservation calls for Documentation. Bradford (1953) has defined the term Documentation as "the art of collecting, classifying and making readily assessable the records of all kinds of intellectual activities to put before the creative specialist the existing literature, bearing the subjects of his investigation in order that he may be fully made aware of the pervious achievements of his genius upon work already done. Documentation is an art of practical necessity practiced by brotherhood of enthusiastic devotees whose painstaking labour contributes in modest obscurity towards the progress of society". Documentation leads to the preservation , proper use, enhancement and empowerment of the holders of IK.

III.   Results and Discussions

Approaches and Initiatives for Preserving Indigenous Knowledge and Culture in Libraries:

Libraries play a vital role in preserving culture, heritage and knowledge of the society. Many Govt. and Non Govt. organisations are engaged in integrating modern technology for preserving the Indian Heritage. Libraries of these Institutions play crucial role in documentation and preservation of Indigenous knowledge and culture.

World organisations likeIFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) has put forward recommendations for libraries and archives for inclusion of IK to ensure its preservation which includes, Implementing programs to collect, preserve and disseminate indigenous and local traditional knowledge resources (IFLA, 2014). Effective documentation and promotion of local or Indigenous knowledge as "living knowledge" is taken great care of by UNESCO. It has launched the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme in 2002, to contribute to the Development Goals of poverty eradication and of environmental sustainability. The goal of the programme is to empower local and indigenous people in various aspects of environmental management.(LINKS, n.d.). World Bank states that, Sources of IK are at risk of being extinct. As this system is relevant for the development process, investing in the exchange of IK and its integration into the assistance programs of the World Bank and its development partners can help to reduce poverty.(World Bank, 2009). NKC in its recommendations has projected Libraries and its Networks as an important agency for access to knowledge. The contemporary relevance of Traditional Knowledge with greater community participation in rural library management was suggested by NKC. The role that rural library could play is crucial as knowledge provider and development assistant in rural areas of the country. Libraries could facilitate and encourage the knowledge sharing. (NKC, 2007). These approaches of national and world organisations clearly indicate preservation and integration of IK and cultural heritage in main stream where libraries have to play critical role. Library initiatives in India and across the World in this regard have been presented below.

INTACH Knowledge Centre (IKC):

The main objective of The Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is to make aware public about the social responsibility towards nation's heritage and to conduct training programmes for the conservation, restoration, preservation and to documentation of cultural heritage of the country. The INTACH Knowledge Centre (IKC) resources includes books on architecture, art, conservation, crafts, archaeology, Intangible heritage, history, Indigenous people, tourism and museums. The documentation and cultural mapping of the Cultural heritage is being done in the centre. The Audio visual centre of the knowledge centre maintains collection of these documentary films, recorded interviews, lecture, slides, photographs and selected archives of Akashvani. The Documentation centre of IKC fulfils the requirements of the scholars, researchers and practitioners in the field of conservation of architecture and natural heritage with its special collection. (INTACH Knowledge Center, n.d.).

KALASAMPDA (Digital Library: Resources of Indian Cultural Heritage)

The IGNCA (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts) is a National Information System and a Data Bank of the arts, humanities, cultural heritage with a fully supported reference library of multimedia collections.

KALASAMPDA (Digital Library: Resources of Indian Cultural Heritage)is a project initiated by the IGNCA in collaboration with Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. Kalasampada facilitates the scholars (users) to access and view the materials including over couple of lakhs of manuscripts, over a lakhs of slides, thousands of rare books, rare photographs, audio and video along with

highly researched publications of the IGNCA, from a single window. Multimedia computer technology has been used for the development of a software package that integrates variety of cultural information accessible at one place. The system aims at being a digital repository of content and information with a user-friendly interface. Kalanidhi is one of the divisions of IGNCA.D-Space –Open source digital library software has been installed at the Reference Library of IGNCA. It is proposed to upload the entire digital collection of Kalanidhi in D-space (IGNCA, 2016).

National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR)

National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) came into existence in 2002 with the merger of National Institute of Science Communication (NISCOM) and Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC). Both NISCOM and INSDOC, the two premier institutes of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), were devoted to dissemination and documentation of Scientific &Technical information. INSDOC was engaged in providing S&T information and documentation services through myriad activities such as abstracting and indexing, design and development of databases, translation, library automation, providing access to international information sources, human resource development, consultancy services in setting up modern library-cum-information centres. Now, with the formation of NISCAIR, all the above multi-faceted activities have been amalgamated. The core activity of NISCAIR is to collect/store, publish and disseminate S&T information on plant, animal and mineral wealth of the country through a mix of traditional and modern means, which will benefit different segments of society (NISCAIR, n.d.)

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)

The project TKDL is an initiative of India to prevent misappropriation of country's traditional medicinal knowledge at international patent offices. More than 70% population for their healthcare and also livelihood of many people in rural area depends upon the Indigenous medicinal knowledge. The project was started in collaboration with CSIR, Ministry of Sc. & Tech. Dept. of Ayush and NISCAIR. The project TKDL is engaged in documentation of the traditional Medicinal knowledge in digitized format. It has classified the Indian Medicine system in about 25,000 subgroups for Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Yoga. TKDL is based on the 359 books of Indian systems of Medicine in open domain and can be sourced by any individual or organisation at international or national level. Thus TKDL acts as a bridge between these books and international patent examiners saving the IK for betterment of the country (TKDL, n.d.).

Library of Congress: The American Folk life Centre

The American Folk life Centre Archive was established in the Library of Congress Music Division. The main aim of the centre is to "preserve and present American folk life" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibitions, publications, and training. As one of the largest archives of ethnographic materials from the United States and around the world it encompasses items of ethnographic and historical documentation recorded from the nineteenth century to the present. Its collections are preserved for the future in the Library of Congress. Traditional songs, music, and dance, folk beliefs and practices about religion and healing, weddings, and funerals, traditional food preparation, recipes, vernacular buildings, clothing, handicrafts, technical skills and knowledge related to traditional occupations and many other related things are documented and preserved under the archive "folk life" (Winick & Bartis, 2016).

Ulwazi Programme

Ulwazi Programme is a community generated digital library established in 2008 in Durban of South Africa. This program is aimed to collect and share aspects of history, Indigenous knowledge and culture in English as well as local Zulu languages. The program is run through the use of basic digital media tools and community participation. The program collects IK that includes recorded oral histories,

photographs, recipes, clothing, proverbs, customs, music, art and local ways of doing things. The form of content is newspaper style articles. The program is available on public domain (Ulwazi, 2016).

Digital Image library of Foundation for Library Awareness (DILFOLA)

Foundation for Library Awareness (FOLA) is a program initiated in Sri Lanka. Digital Image Library (DIL) is a pilot project of FOLA. This project acts as an institutional repository to preserve the living cultural heritage of Sri Lankan Tamils. DIL has been constructed with the help of Dspace the open source library software. The tangible and intangible heritage which still exists is documented by photographs. The culture and heritage which is lost is collected from secondary print sources. This library also maintains a corner titled as 'Visible to Invisible information: Feel introspective views of information through our cultural heritage. Models and objects of the past reflecting the culture and knowledge of the past related to present curriculum are selected and presented for the patrons (FOLA, 2015).

IV.   Conclusion

The approaches and the initiatives to preserve and disseminate Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage with application of science and technology indicate its recognition as a knowledge system significant for humankind. The efforts seem scattered and not uniformed. Efforts and initiatives to document and preserve the IK in libraries for future generation and well being of society require integrity and consistency at all levels. World level organisations should put forward guidelines and formats for Library and Information Science sectors to carry out the work of documentation and dissemination of IK. These initiatives and approaches are indicative of positive approach towards conservation of IK by library professionals. Rural libraries are in a position to play a massive role to capture, identify and document Indigenous knowledge and local culture practiced mostly in rural areas. Urgent measures are required to form a policy and support for the library and Information sectors to integrate IK in their working area, as IK always faces a risk of being lost and misused. All these valuable knowledge and culture needs to be preserved for next generations.

V.   References

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