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## Role of Libraries in the Preservation of the Indian Knowledge System: An Overview

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Dr. Sangharsh Shamrao Gajbe<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Ravikant N. Mahindkar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Librarian

South Indian Children's Education Society's  
Degree College of Arts, Science & Commerce  
Jambhul Phata, Chikloli Ambarnath (W)

<sup>2</sup>Librarian

Arts and Commerce College, Jarud Dist.- Amravati

Corresponding Author – Dr. Sangharsh Shamrao Gajbe

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### Abstract:

*Libraries are the caretakers that preserve and propagate the Indian Knowledge System (IKS, traditional wisdom, ancient texts, indigenous knowledge including cultural heritage). This paper examines the role of libraries to protect the work of IKS through digitization, archiving of manuscripts, popularizing vernacular literature, and encourage research. It has emphasised the need to proceed with modern technological tools along with traditional methods of preservation so that this intellectual wealth of India might be sustained and made accessible. In addition, the research explores the significance of academic and public libraries in promoting awareness, research, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge, which plays a crucial role in the wider academic and cultural context.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Library Preservation, Indigenous Knowledge, Digital Archiving, Cultural Heritage.*

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### Introduction:

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) comprises of a rich, diverse, and sophisticated body of knowledge, including traditional wisdom, cultural practices, scientific systems, and philosophical systems developed by various civilizations in India over thousands of years. Its coverage includes ancient scriptures, traditional practices, indigenous knowledge and historical records. It is crucial for the continuity of culture and research. Such preservation techniques and digital initiatives are significant in protecting, documenting, and disseminating this knowledge, and libraries play a critical role in such processes.

### Historical Background of the Indian Knowledge System:

IKS has been transmitted through diverse channels, including oral traditions, manuscripts, temple archives, and community knowledge centers. Institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila were among the world's earliest knowledge hubs, preserving philosophical, scientific, and literary works. Traditional knowledge was also maintained in palm-leaf manuscripts, birch bark texts, and copperplate inscriptions, which are now at risk due to deterioration and neglect.

### Ancient Indian Learning Centers:

**Nalanda University:** A renowned center for Buddhist studies and a hub for knowledge

exchange between India and other Asian civilizations.

**Takshashila University:** One of the earliest known universities offering education in medicine, politics, warfare, and philosophy.

**Vedic Gurukuls:** Institutions where knowledge was passed orally from teachers (gurus) to students (shishyas).

#### **Traditional Knowledge Transmission Methods:**

**Oral Traditions:** The primary mode of preserving religious texts and philosophical teachings.

**Manuscript Writing:** Palm-leaf and birch-bark manuscripts used for documenting knowledge.

**Temple Libraries and Mathas:** Religious centers that housed vast collections of sacred texts.

#### **Types of Knowledge in the Indian Knowledge System:**

IKS includes diverse domains such as:

##### **Sacred and Philosophical Texts:**

The original books of knowledge that lay the foundation for Indian Knowledge System are sacred and philosophical texts, called scriptures, treatises, and commentaries, which are part of the more extensive body of writings developed in India over the centuries and making profound contributions to the religious and philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. These literatures are the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas, Buddhist and Jina scriptures, and the philosophical writings of the likes of Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Madhvacharya. Grounded in the classical languages of India, in particular Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil, they reflect on breast on metaphysics, ethics, cosmology, and what it means to be human. It covers manuscripts, digitization, and translations to preserve such texts so that they could be accessible to the scholar or researchers and to

generations to come. Preserving them not only protects India's philosophical heritage, but also grants insight into various knowledge traditions that remain impactful

##### **Scientific and Mathematical Contributions:**

A country that has immensely contributed to the world knowledge systems and served it with its impressive myths, discoveries, and techniques, from the highest Uranium mines to the gravity concepts; India has never been short of scientific or mathematical wonders. Aryabhata and Varahamihira are forerunners in celestial studies with Aryabhata introducing heliocentric theory and predicting calculated planetary motion. Over a thousand years ago, Indian mathematicians invented the concept of zero and the decimal system, setting the stage for numerical calculations and the basis of the arithmetic system today. The Iron Pillar of Delhi is an excellent example of ancient India's advanced knowledge of metallurgy that displays remarkable rust-resistant qualities, and has been a topic of interest for scientists. India's Scientific Heritage and Its Enduring Contributions

##### **Medical Sciences:**

India boasts an enviable history of medical sciences as Ayurveda is the oldest of all, and the classical texts such as Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita document the principles of medicine and surgery. In addition to Ayurveda, large traditional systems, such as Siddha and Unani systems, which promote our health by emphasizing holistic health, herbal treatments, and personalized therapies, have also contributed to the development of medicine. The effects of these ancient medical customs persist in contemporary medical practices with continued research and integration into modern healthcare.

##### **Arts, Literature, and Folk Traditions:**

Traditional forms of Indian dance and music (like Bharatanatyam, Kathak and

Carnatic music) are powerful cultural expressions that tell spiritual stories, historical epics, and help us connect with aesthetic principles as defined in the Natya Shastra. From the revered verses of the Vedas to the epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, Indian literature is replete with philosophical, devotional, and artistic works — including regional works like the Tamil Sangam poetry. These classical legacies are enlivened by rich folklore and oral traditions, through which epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata are transmitted across generations in a constellation of vernacular dialects, weaving a patchwork of myths, legends and community knowledge into India's cultural tapestry.

#### **Role of Libraries in Preserving IKS:**

**Libraries function as custodians of knowledge:**

1. Collection and Conservation
2. Acquisition of rare manuscripts, ancient books, and archival materials.
3. Use of controlled environments for storing fragile texts.

#### **Digitization Efforts:**

- Manuscript Digitization Projects: National and international efforts in preserving rare documents.
- Online Repositories: Open-access archives for scholars and researchers.

#### **Specialized Repositories and Archives:**

- National and regional libraries focusing on Indian heritage.
- Private collections and temple archives safeguarding religious texts.

#### **Collaborations for Knowledge Preservation:**

- Partnerships between libraries, museums, and research institutions.
- International collaborations for cross-cultural knowledge exchange.

#### **Challenges in Preserving the Indian Knowledge System:**

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist:

##### **Manuscript Deterioration:**

- The fragile nature of palm-leaf and birch-bark manuscripts.
- Environmental factors causing damage to historical texts.

##### **Lack of Awareness and Public Engagement:**

- Insufficient understanding of IKS among modern scholars.
- Need for increased community participation in preservation efforts.

##### **Funding and Infrastructure Issues:**

- Limited financial support for conservation and restoration.
- Need for enhanced technological infrastructure for digital archives.

##### **Access and Copyright Concerns:**

- Intellectual property rights and restrictions on knowledge sharing.
- Ethical considerations in making traditional knowledge widely accessible.

#### **Government and Institutional Initiatives:**

Several national and institutional programs aim to preserve IKS:

##### **National Programs:**

- National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM): Cataloging and conserving ancient texts.
- Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA): Houses extensive archives for cultural research.
- Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL): Digitally documents medicinal knowledge.

##### **University and Public Libraries:**

- Integration of IKS into university curricula.
- Digitization projects in major Indian libraries.

**Future Prospects:**

To strengthen the preservation of IKS, the following measures can be adopted:

**Advanced Technological Interventions:**

- AI-based manuscript restoration and analysis.
- Blockchain technology for secure knowledge preservation.

**Community Participation and Awareness Programs:**

- Engaging local communities in preserving oral traditions.
- Encouraging citizen science projects for knowledge documentation.

**Policy Frameworks and Legal Protection:**

- Strengthening intellectual property laws to protect indigenous knowledge.
- Encouraging research grants and funding for IKS studies.

**International Collaboration:**

- Partnering with global institutions to enhance knowledge exchange.
- Promoting IKS at international cultural forums.

**Conclusion:**

Libraries are an indispensable part in preserving the Indian Knowledge System for our future generations. Digitization, conservation, and dissemination, keeping India's intellectual heritage accessible to scholars, researchers, and the general public. These preservation initiatives are also determined by continued efforts in funding, policy-making, and technological advancements. This invaluable heritage must be preserved by stakeholders, be it government, academia or the society at large.

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