

Accessibility of Indigenous Knowledge in the College Libraries of Assam: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Indigenous knowledge (IK) contains views, beliefs, traditions and practices followed by a community or individual. This paper contains the views and initiatives of the college libraries of Assam towards the preservation and dissemination of IK. The study shows that 62% colleges have the collection of indigenous resources within their library. It indicates that most of the college library procures Manuscripts (both Sanchipat and Tulapat). 68.60% of college libraries have the collection of Sanchipat manuscripts. Some other indigenous collections are like hand written documents, inscriptions, artifacts etc. Libraries are taking various initiatives towards preservation of IK. They are organizing various awareness programmes and seminars. Majority of the libraries kept it for display only and some of them adopted the digitization initiatives. 26.90% libraries make the digitized manuscripts available through their digital repositories. Though the library and the librarians are taking various steps towards preservation of IK, they are facing some problems. They don't have separate policies as well as separate funds for this kind of activity. Some of them don't have digital devices to digitize them. On the other hand indigenous resources are collected mainly from local individuals and religious places. But the local community sometimes doesn't want to donate such resources. The lack of trained staff is a very big issue in preservation of such resources which can be fulfilled by organizing training programmes for the staff. It is the responsibility of every individual to preserve our indigenous resources for the future and make it accessible to the upcoming generation.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Manuscripts, Preservation, Accessibility, College libraries

1. Introduction

Indigenous knowledge, encompassing the cultural practices and way of life of indigenous communities worldwide, serves as a vital reflection of their history and identity. Transmitted orally across generations, it focuses on practical aspects of daily livelihoods rather than abstract concepts. This knowledge, essential for maintaining cultural heritage, dialects, and traditional living, must be safeguarded and passed down to future generations. Through mediums like tales, songs, dances, manuscripts, and artworks, indigenous



communities perpetuate their knowledge. Recognized also as traditional or local knowledge, indigenous knowledge pertains to the collective wisdom of specific rural communities, encompassing areas such as food preparation, healthcare, occupations, and social customs. Libraries and archives, traditionally guardians of cultural heritage, have a responsibility to collect, preserve, and disseminate this knowledge. Historically, these repositories mainly contained depictions of indigenous peoples by non-indigenous observers. Given its significance, indigenous knowledge should be a central focus of library collections, ensuring its preservation and accessibility for development endeavours.

Assam's Indigenous communities possess invaluable traditional knowledge crucial for cultural preservation and sustainable development. Yet, accessibility to this knowledge in library systems poses challenges. This paper explores strategies to improve Indigenous knowledge accessibility in Assam's college libraries, stressing the significance of cultural sensitivity and community involvement.

2. Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices and beliefs developed by indigenous people over generations through direct interaction with environment and cultural traditions. 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 (Kamboya, 2017). "According to Marie Battiste (2005) Indigenous knowledge embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge and implies responsibilities for possessing various kinds of knowledge." IK comprises many parts ranging from culture, religion, mythologies, economy, governance, medicine, and agriculture to taboos, poetry, art and crafts and many more. It is often related to oral history, oral archives and oral tradition (Adeniyi & Subair, 2013).

3. Review of Literature

Anyira, I. (2010) highlights in his research, Libraries and librarians should prioritize managing IK by providing necessary equipment, collaborating with indigenous communities, collecting, packaging, and making it available online.

Adeniyi, I. A., & Subair, R. E. (2013) highlighted in their research that academic and special Libraries focus on cataloguing indigenous knowledge, except public libraries. Despite this, all libraries struggle with documenting and managing this knowledge due to lack of support and recognition from library management and the government.

Ojei, L.N. (2020) stated that IK is the knowledge held by a group of people in a specific geographical location, including aspects like language, greetings, and beliefs. The main obstacles to its promotion are the roles of individuals as government representatives, information managers, and users.

Hangshing, J. & Laloo, B. (2021) in their study found diverse indigenous knowledge (IK) in libraries, including art, culture, agriculture, rituals, and environmental wisdom. Preserving and sharing this knowledge requires professionals to prioritize resources, innovate solutions, and collaborate across sectors.

Lalruatpuii, E. (2023) highlights the importance of professionals stepping outside their comfort zones to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge. Libraries and LIS professionals have a crucial responsibility in this endeavour.

4. Statement of Responsibility

For the development of a sustainable environment, the significance of IK is very crucial. It helps the present and future to understand the history and culture of a community. It is the duty of an institution to preserve IK and create awareness among the present generation. Considering this, the study is set out to assess the accessibility of IK and the initiatives taken by the college libraries of Assam to preserve them.

5. Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To find out the awareness & preservation of IK among the college libraries of Assam.
- ❖ To know the types of IK that are procured by the college libraries.
- ❖ To find out the initiatives taken by the college libraries to collect the IK.
- ❖ To assess the Authority's participation to preserve the IK.
- ❖ To know how the IK makes it accessible to the users.
- ❖ To examine the policies adopted by libraries to collect IK.
- ❖ To investigate the challenges in preservation of and accessibility to IK.

6. Methodology

Data is collected via the questionnaire technique. The college libraries of Assam were surveyed using a structured questionnaire to collect data regarding the use of library resources for indigenous knowledge and the provision of access to IK by patrons of college libraries. Email and WhatsApp were used to distribute the questionnaire. The distributed questionnaire yielded a total of 52 responses, which were analyzed using MS-Excel.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

7.1. Details of the Colleges responded for the Survey

The questionnaire is distributed among the college librarians of Assam through E-mail and WhatsApp and 52 colleges have responded. The details of the colleges are given below:

Table- 1: List of responded colleges

Sl. No.	Name of the College	Name of the Library	Year of establishment
1	PDUAM, Amjonga Goalpara Assam	Central Library, PDUAM, Amjonga	2018
2	Kamala Bezbaruah Memorial College of Teacher Education Jorhat	College Library	1990
3	Panigaon OPD College Lakhimpur	Panigaon OPD College Central Library	1984
4	Rampur Anchalik College	Rampur Anchalik College Library	1996
5	Jhanji Hemnath Sarma College, Sivasagar	Lalit Chandra Rajkhowa Memorial Library	1964
6	Dhemaji college, Dhemaji	B. C. Pegu library	1966
7	Sapatgram College	Central Library, Sapatgram College	1972
8	CKB Commerce College, Jorhat	Central Library	1965
9	Patidarrang College	Patidarrang College library	1989
10	Goalpara College	Goalpara College Library	1955
11	Raha College	Rasaraj Lakshminath Bezbaruah Central Library	1964
12	Dimoria College	Central Library, Dimoria College, Khetri	1979
13	Dharmasala College	Dharmasala College Library	1993
14	Nanda Nath Saikia College Titabar	Chakreswar Saikia Central Library	1962
15	Kakoli Goswami	Bongaigaon College Central Library	1964
16	Vidya Bharati College	VBC, library	1990
17	K.C. Das Commerce College	K.C. Das Commerce College Library	1983
18	Cachar College Silchar	Central Library	1960
19	Joya Gogoi College Khumtai	Capt Jintu Gogoi, Vir Chakra library	1992
20	Pub Kamrup College	Pub Kamrup College Library	1972
21	R.S.Girls College	College Library	1962
22	Bahona College	Bahona College Library	1966
23	Gargaon College	Gargaon College Central Library	1959
24	Kakojan College	Central Library	1967
25	Bapujee College, Sarukhetri	Bapujee College Library	1970
26	Sibsagar College Joysagar (Autonomous)	HPM LIBRARY	1958
27	BHB College, Sarupeta	Central Library BHB College	1971

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28	Progati College, Agomani	H.N.P.M Library	1991
29	Pramathesh Barua College, Gauripur	Alokesh Chandra Barua Central Library	1964
30	Dibru College	Dibru College Central Library	1963
31	Sipajhar College	Central Library	1971
32	Government Model College Deithor	Bonglong Terang Library and Information Centre	2021
33	S.B.Deorah College	S.B. Deorah college library	1984
34	Dhakuakhana College	Central Library, Dhakuakhana College	1966
35	B.P.Chaliha college, Nagarbera	Central Library	1972
36	DKD College, Dergaon	N S LIBRARY	1962
37	Bikali College	Central Library Bikali College	1982
38	B.H. College	B.H. College Library	1966
39	B.N. College, Dhubri	SNT Library	1946
40	sarupathar college	Sarupathar College Library	1970
41	birjhora mahavidyalaya, bongaigaon	Central library, Birjhora Mahavidyalaya	1987
42	Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Adarsha Mahavidyalaya, Tulungia	Central Library, PDUAM Tulungia	2017
43	Duliajan College	Duliajan College Library	1969
44	North Gauhati College	North Gauhati College Library	1962
45	CKB College, Teok	Siba Ram Borah Library	1959
46	Halakura College	Halakura College Library	1991
47	Madhab Choudhury College, Barpeta	Kameswar Das Library	1939
48	Chilarai College, Golakganj	Bhuban Chandra Prodhani Central Library	1973
49	Sonari College	Sonari College Library	1970
50	M.N.C. Balika Mahavidyalaya, Nalbari	Munindra Narayan Choudhury Central Library	1979
51	Pragjyotish College	Pandit Tirthanath Sarma Library	1954
52	Paschim Barigog Anchalik Mahavidyalaya	P.B.Ancalik Mahavidyalaya Central Library	1984

7.2. Do you have any knowledge of IK?

From the collected data, it is found that 44 (86.50%) of librarians out of 52 college libraries of Assam are aware about the term Indigenous knowledge. On the other hand 4 (7.70%) are not aware and 3 (5.80%) have little knowledge about the term IK.

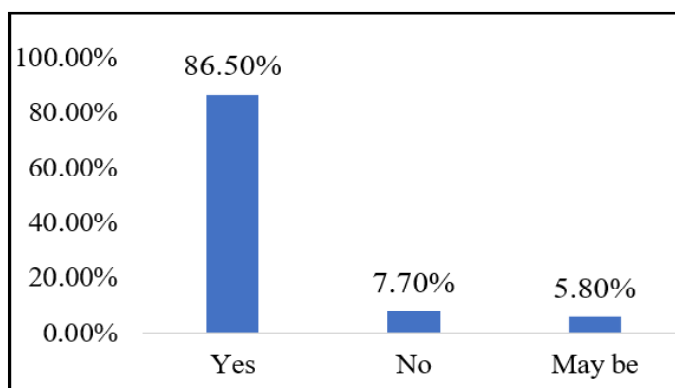


Fig: 1 Awareness about IK

7.3. Do you possess any resources on IK within your library?

This question indicates whether the IK resources are available or not in the library. Fig: 2 shows that 32 (62%) college libraries have IK related resources in their library and 20 (39%) libraries don't have such resources.

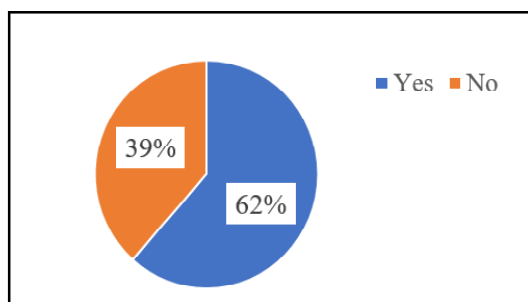


Fig: 2 Availability of IK resources

7.4. What type of Indigenous resources has your library procured?

IK resources are categorized into various types. To find out which types of resources are available in the college libraries of Assam is the main objective of this question. Fig: 3 indicates that most of the libraries have the collection of Sanchipat. The tally shows that 24 (68.60%) libraries have Sanchipat manuscripts followed by Handwritten documents 7(20%), Tulapat 3 (8.60%), Artifact 3 (8.60%) and only one (2.90%) library has the collection of Inscription. 13 (37.10%) libraries have some other collections excluding the mentioned category.

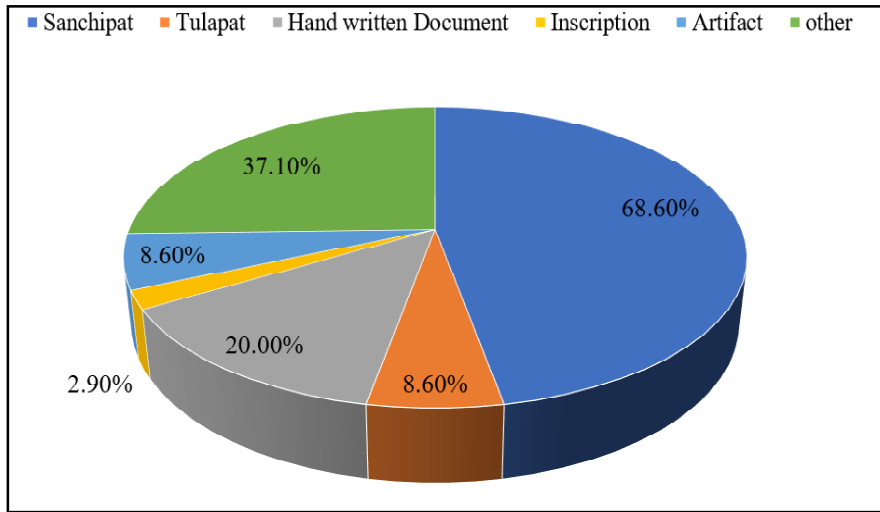


Fig: 3 Types of indigenous resources

7.5. Does your library take any initiatives to acquire indigenous resources specific to your locality?

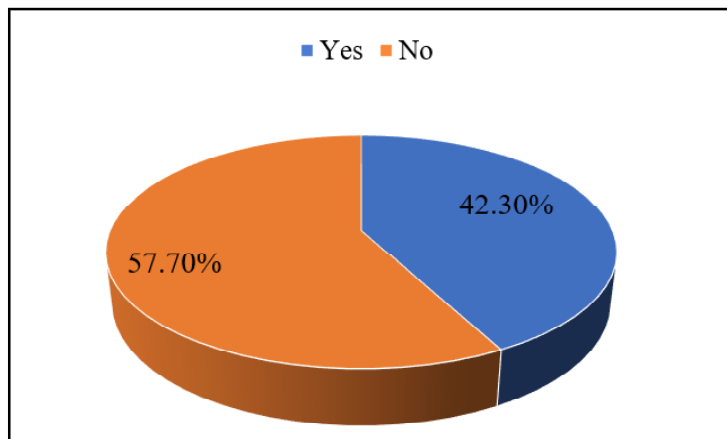


Fig: 4 Initiatives taken by the libraries

From the collected data it is found that only 22 (42.30%) libraries have taken initiative to collect the IK of their local community. But the majority of the colleges (57.70%) have not taken any such initiatives.

7.6. How does library /authority go about gathering and safeguarding IK?

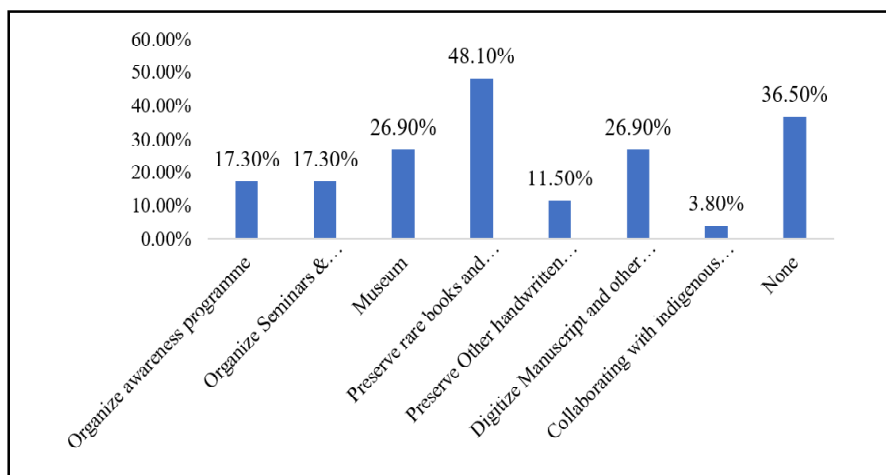


Fig: 5 Initiatives and programmes organised by the libraries to collect IK

Fig: 5 indicates the different types of initiatives taken by the colleges. 25 (48.10%) libraries preserve manuscripts and rare books in their institution, 14 (26.90%) have digitized the manuscripts and other IK resources, and the same percent have their own museum also. Some of them have organized awareness programmes, seminars & workshops on preservation of IK. 19 (36.50%) college libraries are not engaged in such type of preservation activities.

7.7. In what ways are resources made available for library users to access?

The libraries keep IK resources in different ways for the library users as well as the future generation. 24 (46.2%) libraries only display the items. 2 (3.8%) libraries allow the users to borrow the items. 10 (19.2%) libraries allows to borrow books within the campus and 14 (26.9%) libraries allows their students to access IK resources through digital repository.

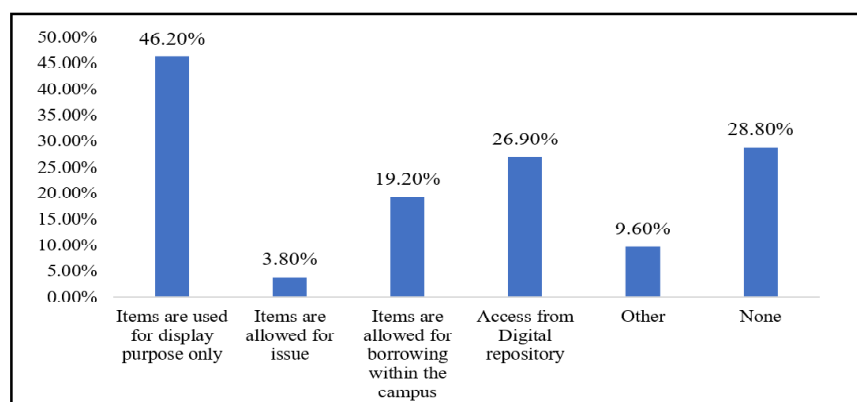


Fig: 6 Accessibility of IK resources

7.8. Does the library have any policy for collecting IK?

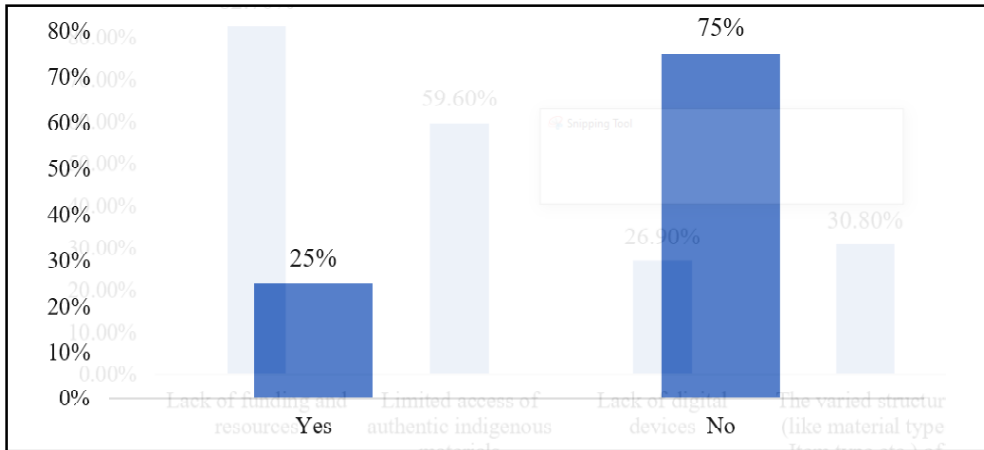


Fig: 7 Policies regarding collection of IK

Almost two third i.e. 39 (75%) college libraries don't have any separate policy for collecting IK resources. Only 13 (25%) agree that they are maintaining policies for collecting such resources.

7.9. Challenges encountered by the library staff to work on IK?

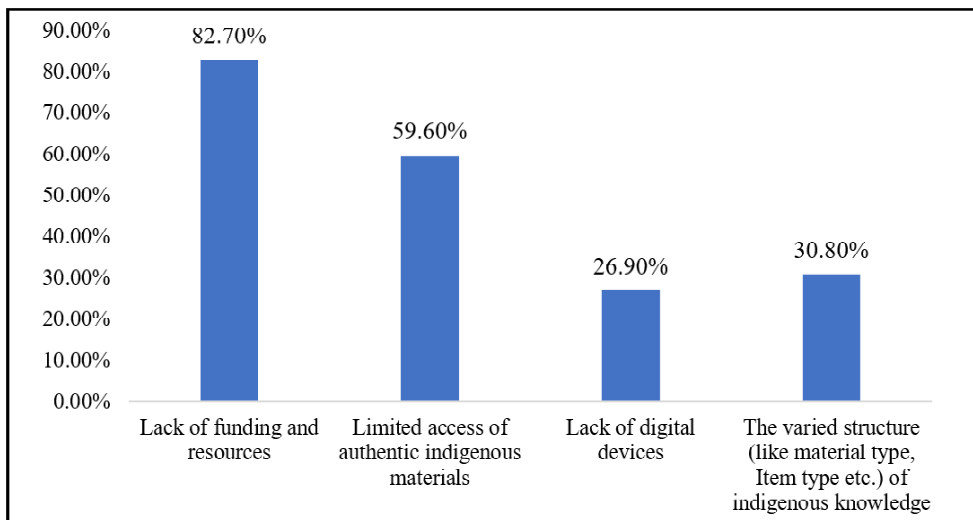


Fig: 8 Challenges encountered by the libraries

Fig: 8 depicts the challenges faced by the libraries to work with the IK are categorized into four categories. The survey shows that 43 (82.70%) libraries of them are facing lack of fund and resources, 31 (59.60%) facing the problem of limited access of authentic indigenous materials, 14 (26.90%) have lack of digital device and 16 (30.80%) libraries are facing problem due to the varied structure of IK.

7.10. Is there any training provided by the colleges for library staff to maintain IK?

For any development or modification training of the staff is most important. To collect, preserve and decimate the information regarding Indigenous knowledge it is most important for a librarian to train their staff. But in the survey it is found that the majority of the libraries i.e. 49 (94.2%) college libraries have not provided any training to preserve the IK resources. Only 3(5.80%) libraries have provided training programmes to their employees.

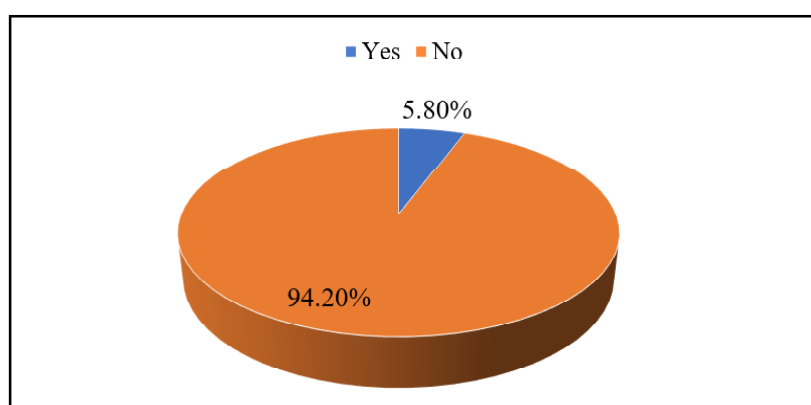


Fig: 9 Training programmes for the library staff to maintain IK

8. Finding and Discussion

8.1. Objective-1

To find out the awareness & preservation of IK among the college libraries of Assam

The analysis shows that most of the college librarians are aware of indigenous knowledge. 45 librarians out of 52 are aware of IK which is a good sign. It will surely help to preserve the IK system.

8.2. Objective-2

To know the types of IK that are procured by the college libraries.

The college libraries in Assam have a range of indigenous resources including Sanchipat and Tulapat manuscripts, handwritten documents, inscriptions, and artifacts. 24 libraries have Sanchipat collections, 3 have Tulapat, 7 have handwritten documents, 1 has an inscription, and 3 have artifacts. Additionally, 13 libraries have other indigenous resources like handloom and traditional items from the local community, with manuscripts often obtained from Namghars and rural households.

8.3. Objective-3

To find out the initiatives taken by the college libraries to collect the IK.

42.30% of the population are actively involved in collecting indigenous knowledge (IK) resources within their communities. They organize awareness programs, seminars, and workshops on IK, inviting experts to decode ancient scripts of manuscripts, thus disseminating hidden knowledge. Additionally, 26.90% of colleges have digitized manuscripts, a significant step in preserving IK. Furthermore, two libraries have collaborated with indigenous organizations, indicating a growing recognition of the importance of preserving indigenous resources.

8.4. Objective-4

To assess the Authority's participation to preserve the IK.

Majority of the libraries don't have any separate policy for collection of IK resources. 33 libraries out of the total population responded that their authorities are taking initiatives towards gathering and safeguarding IK resources. They organize various awareness programmes and seminars with the collaboration of their authorities. They mainly focused on preserving manuscripts and rare books.

8.5. Objective-5

To know how the IK makes it accessible to the users.

In 24 libraries indigenous resources are kept for display purposes only. Only two libraries allowed the items for issue and 10 (19.60%) libraries allowed for borrowing within the campus. Libraries who have digitized their resources, they put it in the institutional repositories of their parent organization. 14 libraries (26.90%) have done the digitization initiatives. 28.80% of libraries do not have any steps for IK resources.

8.6. Objective-6

To investigate the challenges in preservation of and accessibility to IK.

Libraries are facing various problems while preserving IK resources. 42 (82.70%) libraries have lack of funding and resources. 59.6% have responded that there is a limited access of authentic indigenous materials. 14 libraries lack digital devices for digitizing the IK resources. 30.80% of libraries are facing difficulties due to the varied structure of IK. Other than that 49 (94.20%) library staff are not trained properly to handle indigenous resources. Only three libraries the staff got training for this. Training is very much essential for the collection, preservation, and dissemination of information related to indigenous knowledge.

9. Recommendation

As a knowledge or information provider, it is the duty of a librarian to collect, store and disseminate information for the present and future generation. IK is an important part of our society which helps us to understand our culture, tradition, history etc., From the above analysis it is found that most of the colleges of Assam are struggling to adopt the activities related to acquisition and preservation of IK. Lack of funds, trained staff, and interest of the parent organization as well as the Government are some reasons for this status. Here some recommendations are given below from the study-

- 9.1. Community engagement/ involvement:** The librarian should take some initiatives by conducting awareness programmes, street plays, meetings etc. in the locality to inform the locality about the importance of preservation of indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, oral knowledge etc.
- 9.2. Interest of the parent organization:** For collection and preservation of IK resources and to make proper awareness, the interest of the authority is very important. By taking some initiatives like- policy making, organizing awareness programmes, seminars, workshops etc., the authority can support in preservation of Indigenous Knowledge.
- 9.3. Interest of the Government:** The Government should take some initiatives viz. some awareness campaigns, proper policies, avail grants for preservation of IK to create an IK friendly environment.
- 9.4. Collaboration with IK communities:** Librarians also take initiatives to collaborate with related organizations and practitioners to preserve IK and organize some activities with them to create awareness on IK, our history, traditions etc. This type of collaboration will help to popularize the traditional activities and knowledge in the society.
- 9.5. Documentation:** There are various types of IK (oral knowledge, hand written documents, Folk stories/ songs/dance, traditional medicine, artefact, etc.) available in our society. But all are not present in written format. So it is our responsibility to record this knowledge and preserve it.
- 9.6. Digitization of resources:** To solve the space problem and minimize the expenses it is the most important step to preserve the IK resource. The copyright issues should be shouted out properly before digitization. And if the IK resources were accessed openly then it will attract the students as well as the others.
- 9.7. Staff Training:** Without proper trained staff it is not possible to collect and store IK resources in the library. The library should provide proper training to its staff to deal with the IK resources.

10. Conclusion

Preserving indigenous knowledge (IK) is crucial for maintaining social identity and understanding cultural heritage. IK exists in various forms like manuscripts, oral traditions, and ancient inscriptions, embodying a rich history. In today's digital age, there are both challenges and opportunities for preserving IK. While digital resources are increasingly popular, much of IK remains in printed or undocumented forms. Workshops and seminars led by experts play a key role in raising awareness and translating ancient texts for wider accessibility. Both library and information science (LIS) professionals and society at large have a responsibility to ensure the preservation and accessibility of IK in both print and digital formats. In future, govt. can also make some policies so that indigenous resources can be collected easily for preservation purposes and digitization steps can be carried out on a large scale.

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