

Preserving and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Resources in Libraries: Initiatives, Challenges and Goal with Special Reference to College Libraries of Assam

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Abstract

Despite the abundance of indigenous knowledge across various developing world communities, its availability doesn't guarantee accessibility or utilization. Libraries can enhance access to this knowledge by fostering environments conducive to face-to-face discussions and networking, enabling community members to engage in debates and exchanges on topics beneficial to them. Globally, there is a growing recognition of the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge, much of which is transmitted orally. This study focused on college libraries in Assam to understand their current status of handling Indigenous Knowledge Resources (IKR), preservation efforts and future plans. It is also expected that in academic libraries like college libraries, there may not be always a separate section for IKR, but it is expected to handle IKR due to suggested curricula of various courses. The findings reveal that these libraries are actively pursuing initiatives to safeguard indigenous knowledge despite facing numerous challenges. Despite these obstacles, libraries remain committed to their long-term goal of preserving and promote this invaluable heritage.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Resources (IKR), Preservation, Colleges Libraries, NEP2020, Assam

1. Introduction

Knowledge is a powerful tool for human development and decision making. Indigenous knowledge has its origins in a given society's culture and traditions. Indigenous knowledge is essential for a society's livelihood and survival, including all elements of human life. These topics include health, fashion, food preparation, education, agriculture, religion, festivals, recreation, norms and values, institutions, politics, and technology.

Indigenous knowledge refers to the cultural practices and traditions of indigenous populations worldwide. For decades, indigenous groups have passed down oral knowledge that reflects their history and identity. Indigenous knowledge focuses on actions that directly impact people's daily lives, rather than abstract concepts and beliefs.



Battiste (2005) defines indigenous knowledge as a web of relationships within a specific ecological context, with unique linguistic categories, rules, and relationships, localized content and meaning, established customs for acquiring and sharing knowledge, and responsibilities for possessing various types of knowledge.

World Intellectual Property Organization defines indigenous knowledge as tradition-based innovations and creations arising from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary, or artistic fields, as well as any performances, inventions, scientific discoveries, designs, marks, names, and symbols, undisclosed information, and other literary, artistic, or scientific works based on tradition. Knowledge systems, inventions, innovations, and cultural expressions that are considered to be “tradition-based” are those that have been passed down from one generation to the next, are typically recognized as belonging to a specific people or region, and are always changing in response to their surroundings.

Indigenous Knowledge is becoming more widely accepted in today’s global society, which has raised many concerns about the need to protect and safeguard it for the sake of future generations. Libraries have long been thought of as the guardians of information and cultural heritage; they store manuscripts, records, books, audio visual materials, artworks, and other documentary objects. As college libraries are now a days considered as an essential point of contact between learners and resources and with the new prospects of NEP 2020, there is a lot to do for college libraries in terms of preservation and providing access to Indigenous Knowledge Resources (IKR).

2. Literature Review

Senanayake (2006) presented the concept of indigenous knowledge, outlining its origins and the methods through which it has been passed down over successive generations. Indigenous knowledge is unique to a particular culture or community. It is also referred to as local knowledge, folk knowledge, people’s knowledge, traditional wisdom, and traditional science. It was further supported by (Lor, 2004) stating that indigenous knowledge is a characterization of local insight, community wisdom or ancestral science.

Lor (2004) studied the role of South Africa’s libraries in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge. The study covered mainly research libraries (academic and specialty libraries), public libraries (including community libraries), and the National Library of South Africa. The study concluded that the role of library is not just typical library tasks such as collecting, organizing, archiving, and providing access (making recorded indigenous information available), but also potential roles in recognizing, locating, and recording indigenous knowledge, as well as raising awareness and promoting it.

Willett (1993) discusses two contrasting interpretations of Indigenous knowledge in contemporary society. Firstly, Willet explores the utilitarian viewpoint prevalent in modern culture, which sees indigenous knowledge elements as valuable assets to be integrated into mainstream development endeavours, aiming for efficiency, sustainability, and similar goals. Secondly, Willett examines the sacred interpretation held by indigenous peoples, whose holistic perspective is often only vaguely understood by modern culture. This literature review highlights these dual perspectives on Indigenous knowledge.

Mahwasane (2016) explores the role of contemporary library services in the utilization of indigenous knowledge systems. The study aims to assess how libraries can effectively manage indigenous knowledge to contribute positively to society. Mahwasane emphasizes the value of libraries in safeguarding and transmitting indigenous knowledge, particularly highlighting the vulnerability of orally transmitted knowledge when its holders pass away. The paper underscores the importance of documenting and preserving indigenous knowledge, especially in rural areas where much of it remains undocumented. The study concludes that libraries should take on the responsibility of gathering, storing, and disseminating indigenous knowledge to ensure its accessibility and longevity.

Jaya (2006) explores how universities can advance agriculture and rural development by collaborating with government ministries and higher education institutions to integrate culture, indigenous knowledge, and cosmo-vision. It discusses indigenous knowledge development, methods of transmission, creativity, experimentation, and the role of indigenous specialists. Emphasizing the aim of indigenous development to maximize resource dynamics and promote cultural variety, human well-being, and environmental stability. It highlights universities' potential to contribute to sustainable livelihoods by fostering Indigenous Knowledge Systems, leveraging their position in academia and society, and addressing issues such as supportive research policies and traditional resource rights protection. The study also addresses potential obstacles faced by libraries in preserving indigenous knowledge and suggests techniques for preservation.

Tabut & Damme (2012) argue that Indigenous Knowledge (IK) offers significant socio-economic potential. However, many fail to recognize its value, necessitating enhanced awareness and dissemination efforts. The study highlights the benefits of IK for Ugandan households and communities, amid its decline due to acculturation and exposure to external cultures. It primarily examines its impact on the Kaliro District community and the threats it confronts.

Sarkhel (2016) defines Indigenous knowledge (IK) as community-developed knowledge crucial for sustainable development. It addresses the challenge of preserving tacit IKR and suggests library professionals' roles in its management and preservation. The study emphasizes the importance of libraries in documenting and promoting IKR for direct access by individuals. It explores the activities associated with IKR management and highlights the proactive role of library professionals in devising preservation strategies.

Hangshing & Laloo (2021) examine the preservation and accessibility of indigenous knowledge in North East Indian universities. They find that archived indigenous knowledge covers various domains like art, cultural practices, agriculture, rituals, and environmental wisdom, with similar acquisition policies. Challenges include inadequate funds, ICT infrastructure, storage facilities, manpower shortage, and time constraints. Addressing these challenges requires increased efforts from working professionals.

Chutia & Kalita (2021) explore the awareness among library professionals and students regarding the importance of indigenous knowledge in preserving Assamese cultural heritage. They examine collaborative efforts in exchanging indigenous knowledge and preservation methods, including web 2.0 technologies.

Suggestions include using microfilms, video tapes, photographs, audio recordings, and drawings for preservation. The study concludes that documenting indigenous knowledge in accessible formats is crucial due to its primarily oral transmission among communities.

Anyira, Onoriode & Nwabueze (2010) examine libraries' role in conserving indigenous knowledge in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. They suggest prioritizing IK administration and collaborative initiatives between libraries and indigenous communities. The study emphasizes the need for appropriate equipment, online accessibility, and the involvement of traditional institutions and knowledgeable individuals for effective preservation.

3. Objective of the Study

The study's purpose is to analyse research activity in light of the following objectives

- i. To find out the initiatives taken by college libraries to preserve and promote the IKR
- ii. To find out the challenges faced by college libraries in preserving the IKR .
- iii. To find out what are the future plans or long-term goals of college libraries to preserve IKR.

4. Methodology

This research utilized a survey approach, employing a Google Form questionnaire with multiple choice questions, that was designed keeping in view the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was then sent via email to college librarians and information was collected of the responses to the questions. Additionally, information was gathered from various sources such as books, journals, and articles. Oral discussions were also conducted to supplement the data acquisition process.

5. Study area

The study was conducted in a sample of 22 college libraries situated in various parts of Assam. The study was conducted between March 2024 to April 2024.

The basic information regarding the colleges covered in the study are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of the colleges

Sl no	Name of Colleges	Name of the college libraries
1	Birjhora Mahavidyalaya	Central library, birjhora mahavidyalaya
2	Government Model College, Deithor	Bonglong Terang Library and Information Centre
3	LTK College	Central Library
4	West guwahati commerce college	Narayan Chandra Bharali Library
5	K.C. Das Commerce College	K.C. Das Commerce College Library
6	K.R.B. Girls' College	Prabir Ram Barooah Library
7	Gauhati Commerce College	Dr BKB Library

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8	MK College	Central Library
9	Dispur College	Dispur College Central Library
10	B. Borooah College	Hem Barua Library
11	Baosi Banikanta Kakati College	Hridayananda Choudhury Library
12	Handique Girls' College	Rajabala Das Library
13	Karmashree Hiteswar Saikia College	Uma Charan Bania library and Education Center
14	Dudhnoi College	Dudhnoi College Library
15	Doomdooma College	Doomdooma College Central library
16	Narangi Anchalik Mahavidyalaya	Narangi Anchalik Mahavidyalaya Library
17	Nanda Nath Saikia College Titabar	Chakreswar Saikia Central Library
18	B.N. College, Dhubri	SNT Library
19	Sipajhar College	Central Library
20	Bahona College	Bahona College Library
21	Arya Vidyapeeth College (Autonomous)	Central Library, Arya Vidyapeeth College
22	S B Deorah College	S B Deorah College Library

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 Distribution of Indigenous Knowledge Resources among the studied colleges

In the survey an attempt was made to know the distribution or collection of indigenous knowledge currently the libraries have in their possession. The study finds that Book is the most popular form of IKR among the colleges as 90.9% of college libraries possess IKR in the form of books. Manuscripts and other traditional materials form the second most popular form of IKR amongst colleges with 45.5% libraries having it as a part of their collection. Maps are the least popular form of IKR amongst the studied libraries. Details are presented at fig 1.

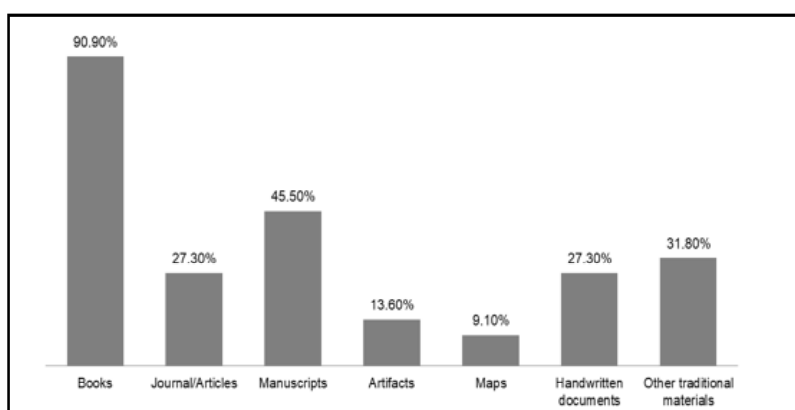


Fig 1: Collections of IKR among the college libraries

6.2 Access to IKR material among the studied colleges

In the survey an attempt was made to know how IKR materials are made accessible to library users. Fig 2 shows the findings. *In campus reading* is the most popular way of giving access to the IKR of college libraries, as 68.2% of college libraries allow this. 50% of colleges allowed items to *use for research purpose*, 18.2% of college libraries *allow items to users for borrowing* and in 18.2% colleges *uses the items for display purpose for users*.

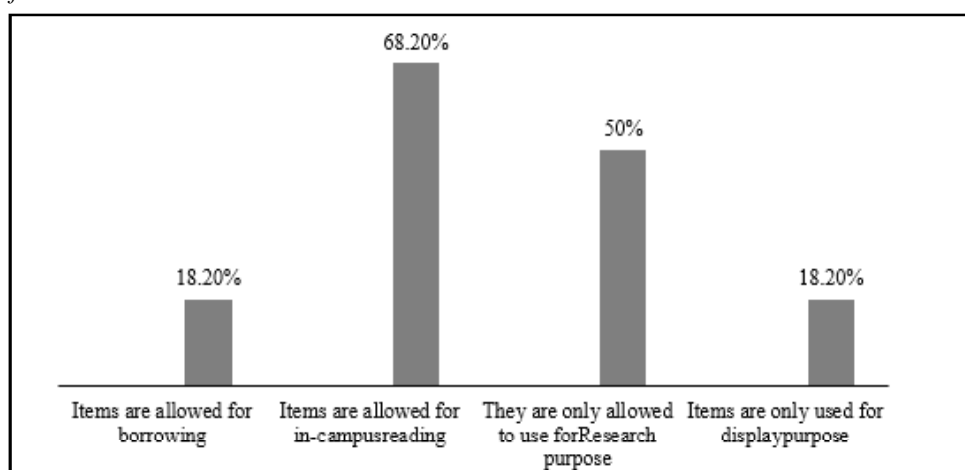


Fig 2: Accessibility of IKR among the libraries

6.3 Initiatives taken by college Libraries

The probable initiatives or programmes a college library may take or plan to preserve and promote IKR were given in the questionnaire and they were asked to give their responses in 7 point Likert scale. The responses were then analysed and the ultimate result for each of the activities are presented at table 2. The popular initiatives among the college libraries are digitizing and archiving the IKRs. Libraries also take initiatives to share relevant articles, resources and events related to indigenous knowledge among their patrons or users. The least popular initiatives among the college libraries are hosting workshops and seminars. Details findings are at table 2.

Table 2: Popular initiatives among the college libraries for promoting IK

Initiatives	Average Score
Hosting workshops and seminars	2.72
Collaborating with indigenous organizations for resource sharing and outreach	2.77
Digitizing and archiving traditional Knowledge	3.77
Implementing cultural sensitivity Training for library staff	3.09
Facilitating internships or research opportunities for students and researchers	3.31
Sharing relevant articles, resources, and events related to indigenous knowledge	3.68

6.4 Challenges faced by the College Libraries

The probable challenges college libraries may face for preservation and promote indigenous knowledge were given in the questionnaire and they were asked to give their responses in 7-point Likert scale. The detailed findings are presented at table 3. It is found that among the given challenges the major challenges faced by the college libraries are limited access to authentic indigenous materials, lack of funding and resources for preservation and promotion of IKR among the studied college libraries.

Table 3: Challenges faced by college libraries to preserve IK

Challenges	Average score
Lack of funding and resources	4.68
Limited access to authentic indigenous materials	5.22
Lack of proper preservation tool	4.36
Lack of proper training in handling indigenous resources	4.27
The varied structure (materials, item types etc) of indigenous resources	4.27

6.5 Opportunities for preserving and promoting IK

The probable opportunities that college libraries see for improving and promotion of indigenous knowledge were given in the questionnaire and colleges are asked to give their responses in 7-point Likert scale. The detailed findings are presented at table 4. It is found that most of the college libraries see opportunities for enhancing access to digitized indigenous materials through online repositories and archives. They also see opportunities for taking community based initiatives to popularise IKR among general people.

Table 4: Opportunities college libraries see for improving and promote IK

Opportunities	Average
Increasing collaboration with indigenous organization for knowledge sharing and resource development	5.27
Enhancing access to digitized indigenous materials through online repositories and archives	5.45
Offering courses and programs focused on indigenous studies and traditional knowledge	4.31
Taking community based initiatives to popularise Indigenous Knowledge Resources among general people	5.31

6.6 Digital Repositories or platform for preserving and promoting Indigenous Knowledge among the studied colleges

In the survey an attempt was made to know if there is any repository or platform that college libraries have for preserving and sharing the indigenous knowledge. The findings presented at Fig 3 shows that 59.1% of college libraries have the repository to preserve and share their IKR collections.

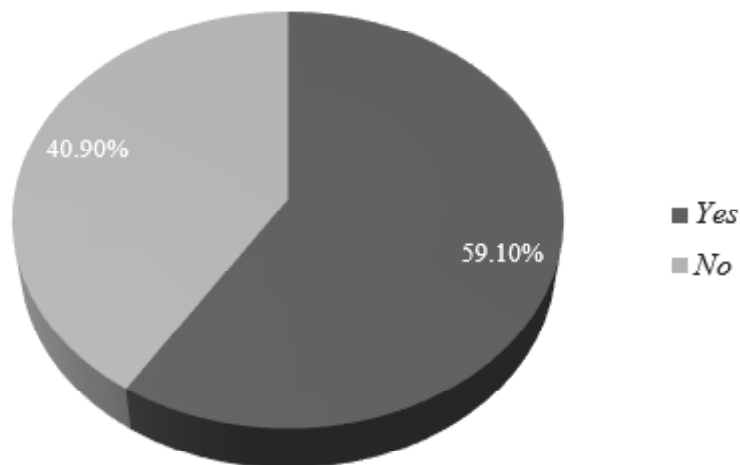


Fig 3: Digital repositories or platform for IKR

6.7 Libraries Long term goal to preserve IKR

The long term goal and aspiration that college libraries may have for enhancing its support for indigenous knowledge resources preservation were given in the questionnaire and they were asked to give their responses in 7 point Likert scale. The detailed findings are at table 5. Findings show that most of the colleges aim to establish dedicated portal to digitize and archive the traditional knowledge which are part of their library collection. Also they aim to expanding indigenous collections to encompass a wider range of topics and perspectives.

Table 5: Libraries long term goal to preserve IK

Long term Goal or aspiration	Average
Establishing a dedicated indigenous knowledge center within the library.	5.36
Expanding indigenous collections to encompass a wider range of topics and perspectives.	5.40
Strengthening partnerships with indigenous communities for knowledge sharing and collaboration.	5.13
Digitizing and archiving traditional knowledge	5.86

7. Findings

The research revealed that the majority of studied college libraries in Assam are familiar with the notion of indigenous knowledge, and some are actively acquiring materials on the subject. These libraries possess diverse collections including books, journals, articles, manuscripts, etc., with books being the most prevalent among the studied libraries.

The study highlights several initiatives undertaken by college libraries to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge. These primarily include digitizing and archiving traditional knowledge materials they possess. Moreover, they actively distribute relevant articles, resources, and event details related to indigenous knowledge to their users.

College libraries encountered several challenges in preserving indigenous knowledge. The primary obstacles identified include limited access to authentic indigenous materials and insufficient funding and resources for the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge among the surveyed college libraries.

College libraries harbour long-term aspirations to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge. The findings indicate that the majority of these libraries aim to digitize and archive the traditional knowledge housed within their collections. Additionally, they aim to broaden their indigenous collections to include a more extensive array of topics and viewpoints.

8. Conclusion

Assam has a diverse range of indigenous knowledge, making it a rich region in India and beyond. Indigenous knowledge plays an important part in the establishment of all sustainable lifestyles. It helps local communities understand their culture and serves as a foundation for problem-solving in complex development. Indigenous knowledge is under threat of extinction due to dilution and replacement by modern techniques, particularly with the rise of computer technology.

The current research aims to thoroughly examine the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge within college libraries in Assam. Through surveying and analysing data, the study has noted the diverse collections of indigenous knowledge existing in these libraries. To safeguard and advance these collections, college libraries undertake various initiatives. Despite encountering challenges in preservation, they remain committed to protecting this knowledge, with a long-term objective of preserving this cultural heritage.

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