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Towards Indigenous Librarianship: Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous librarianship focus in providing services for propagating relevant cultural information for the indigenous peoples and environmental knowledge associated with them. This paper traces the emergent field of indigenous librarianship, draining from experience in developed countries. The study highlights the progress growth of librarianship in India to the present day. It discusses Indigenous knowledge and its intersection with the LIS sector in India, drawing attention to its significance and relevance to Indigenous Indian. It concludes with suggestions by emphasising the need for Indigenous librarians and practitioners involvement in the LIS sector and the importance of procedures to guide and practice in this most complex of intersections.

Keyword: Indigenous librarianship; Protection of indigenous knowledge; Indigenous tribes; Library and Information Science services for indigenous peoples.

1. Introduction:

The importance of indigenous knowledge and awareness of its vital role in sustainable development is evidenced by leaders and information professionals around the globe. A growing increase in recognition of indigenous knowledge as valuable and vulnerable system of knowledge by national and international organisation alarmed a wide range of challenges in protection of indigenous peoples and their intellectual rights. Therefore, it is first essential to identify, 'who are the indigenous people?'. The term indigenous people acquired wide

range of usage, however there is no proper definition adopted for parallel procedure internationally (Sahai, 1996). One of the most cited descriptions on the concept of indigenous people given by Jose R. Martinez Cobo (1986) in his famous “Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations” opines that, ‘Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system’.

Indigenous librarianship focus in providing services for propagating relevant cultural information for the indigenous peoples and environmental knowledge associated with them. It unites the discipline of librarianship with Indigenous approaches to knowledge, theory, and methodology. It emerged as a distinct field of practice and an arena for international scholarship in the late 20th century bolstered by a global recognition of the value and vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge systems, and of the right of Indigenous peoples to control them (Burns, et al., 2009). Indigenous librarianship guides the profession of library housekeeping and the way in which we execute culturally relevant information resources and transmit knowledge pertinent to the requirement of the users. For library, archives and information professionals, knowledge is the stuff in which we deal. We have a responsibility to curate it and ensure its transmission through good times and bad to those who may need or appreciate it in other periods and places. Our responsibility goes beyond the artefact— be it clay tablet, manuscript, codex, photograph or dataset—to preserve and make available the

knowledge it carries. This is a deeply felt commitment which goes to the core of our being as professionals (Byrne, 2005).

2. Indigenous knowledge and libraries:

Libraries can help in collecting, preserving, and disseminating indigenous knowledge and publicizing the value, contribution, and importance of indigenous to both non-indigenous and indigenous people. The National Library of South Africa deals with making recorded indigenous knowledge available for users (Lor, 2004). National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Canada transferred ownership of more than 800,000 indigenous cultural objects (Stevens, 2008). Niger Delta Libraries in Nigeria makes indigenous knowledge accessible, including television/radio broadcasting, exhibits and displays, film, mobile library services, lending of relevant indigenous materials, and online access (Anyira, Onoroide & Nwabueze, 2010). Some libraries of Australia that deal with aspects of indigenous knowledge is studied below; Northern Territory Library and Information Service (NTLIS) acquired indigenous collection and shelved in designated area and is identified by an Aboriginal flag on the spine of each item. Queensland State Library also collect, preserves and provides access to Indigenous materials for all Queenslanders. Moree public library documented indigenous knowledge, photographs of people, places, ceremonies etc. Galiwin'ku Indigenous Knowledge Centre digitized old collections for local access. The studies also illustrate that libraries play a prominent role in preserving and accessing of indigenous knowledge and that they are one of the most appropriate environments for sustaining the original perception of this knowledge. Many libraries recognize indigenous knowledge as an important source of developmental information (Nakata et al., 2005). They assert that libraries must consider IK not simply as part of a historical archive, but a contemporary body of relevant knowledge. Joyce B. Nyumba (2006) in her study "The Role of the Library in Promoting the Application of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Development Projects" opines

that libraries can raise awareness about indigenous knowledge, document indigenous knowledge, develop digital libraries based on indigenous knowledge, identify indigenous knowledge specialists, establish the value of indigenous knowledge, and build capacity to develop indigenous knowledge. She also argued that indigenous knowledge can usefully be applied in development projects since it is considered the basis for self-sufficiency and self-determination, providing effective alternatives to western technologies.

3. Practices: Draining from experiences in developed countries.

The United Nations estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. A growing awareness of the importance of indigenous knowledge and growing support from national and international organizations in recognition of rights of indigenous people to control their own intellectual property has strengthened the resolve of indigenous librarians around the globe who have organized and form the International Indigenous Librarians Forum (IILF) in 1999 (Patterson, 2002). The IILF was formed in 1999 for Indigenous library, archives and information workers to share experiences and to discuss common issues and concerns. The IILF meets every two years and publishes conference proceedings on an irregular basis. The first forum was convened by the Maori in Auckland, New Zealand in November, 1999. Subsequent forums have been hosted by local Indigenous groups in Jokmökk, Sweden 2001; Santa Fe, New Mexico 2003; Regina, Saskatchewan 2005; Brisbane Australia 2007; Otaki in Aotearoa/New Zealand 2009; Karasjok, Norway 2011; Bellingham, Washington 2013; Winnipeg, Manitoba 2015 (Burns, et al., 2009).

The State Library of Queensland, in Australia acknowledged that Indigenous Australians were “denied, excluded, and/or discouraged access” implemented an Indigenous Library Services Strategy in 2002 focusing on the establishment of Indigenous Knowledge Centres

(IKCs), improving public library services for Indigenous Australians, raising the profile of Indigenous people in libraries, particularly at the State Library, and increasing Indigenous employment and training opportunities. Many Indigenous communities are developing local Indigenous Knowledge Bases either informally or within Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Centres (IKCs) established specifically for this task. The digital content being assembled and presented within these IKCs is either captured locally, donated or repatriated from external private and public collections belonging to museums, church archives, community members, anthropologists, missionaries, and others. Determining the optimum software solutions to support such knowledge bases requires an analysis of the communities' needs and objectives (Hunter, 2005).

In USA, The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) hearings in 1974, examined library services to urban and on-reserve American Indians and identified a great need for LIS services and an 'abysmal' lack of formal policy. The White House Pre-Conference on Indian Library and Information Services On or Near Reservations (1978) gathered representatives from 103 tribes to lay the groundwork to improve library services for American Indians and shape U.S. Federal library and information policy. The tribal representatives advocated for tribal libraries as spaces to foster and preserve cultural heritage for future generations, and became a keystone in this national library service framework. Tribal libraries strengthen oral traditions through preservation programs and the dissemination offered by print as well as new media. They serve the educational, informational and recreational interests of Native Americans, as well as provide vital access to government data that supports self-governance activities (Burns, et al., 2009).

In Canada there are 615 First Nations, 10 unique language families and over 60 different Aboriginal languages spoken in the country although, many Aboriginal languages in Canada are endangered and many have been lost. Southern Ontario Library Service has a full time

First Nations consultant who helped organize a First Nations Public Libraries. Canada has activities which vary by Province. In Ontario, the Southern Ontario Library Service has a full time First Nations consultant who helped organize a First Nations Public Libraries' Spring Gathering held in Toronto. In Vancouver a group of librarians serving in various libraries in the area meet informally on a regular basis and, at their own expense and on their own time, offer support and assistance to First Nations library workers by holding workshops, seminars, providing on-site assistance and other consultative aid (Patterson, 2002).

In New Zealand, the New Zealand Library and Information Association and the Maori Library and Information Workers Association joined in partnership to seek the views of the Maori in relation to library services. The National Library of New Zealand conducted a study in the mid 1990's to evaluate the changes that had occurred in the public library sector since 1991 and found that over half of the libraries had done specific initiatives in relation to Maori. These included employment of Maori staff, the development of a Maori collection, staff training, and services for the Maori (Szekely, 1997).

4. Indigenous peoples of India:

India is a country that has constitutional republic consisting of 29 states, each with a substantial degree of control over its own affairs; 6 less fully empowered union territories, which includes New Delhi; India's capital. India occupies the greater part of South-Asia with roughly one-sixth of the world's total population. India is the second most populous country, after China. It is the seventh largest country by area with the most populous democracy in the world. Country with one of the oldest civilisation, India is occupied by different community with rich cultural heritage who co-existed under the theme 'unity in diversity'. These are some facts about India that can be taken into consideration to discussed about people in India.

India is home to the largest population of indigenous peoples of any country in the world. Roughly a quarter of the world's indigenous population – around 80 million people – are scattered across India, their numbers a staggering diversity of ethnicities, cultures and socioeconomic situations. The Government of India officially does not consider any specific section of its population as 'indigenous people' as generally understood and implied in its usage in the UN. Rather, the government claims all its peoples as indigenous. However, operationally in many of its dealings, those sections of people declared as falling within the administrative category of 'Scheduled Tribes' (STs) are considered as indigenous peoples (Bijoy, Gopalakrishnan & Khanna, 2010). 'Scheduled Tribe' is an administrative term used for the purpose of 'administering' certain specific constitutional privileges, protection and benefits for specific section of peoples, historically considered disadvantaged and backward. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India defines Scheduled Tribes as 'such tribes or tribal communities or parts of, or groups within such tribes, or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution'. The Scheduled Tribe status confers on the tribe, or part of it, a Constitutional status invoking the safeguards provided for in the Constitution in their respective states/UTs. The Scheduled Tribe status is conferred on the basis of birth to a person into a Scheduled Tribe. Although no well-defined criteria have been developed for the purpose, the general official refrain has been that the identification of Scheduled Tribe (ST) is done on the basis of the following characteristics:- (i) primitive traits; (ii) distinctive culture; (iii) geographical isolation; (iv) shyness of contact with the community at large; and (v) backwardness. The Scheduled Tribes comprise 8.6% of the country's total population (Census of India, 2011). The tribal community in India stretches from the remote villages tucked in the Northern Indian Himalayan region to southern – most tip of India and from the farthest corner of North East India to the dunes of Rajasthan in the western region.

5. Librarianship in India:

India has a long tradition of libraries, their evolution and development running parallel to that of the culture and society. Librarianship in India can be traced back from ancient India mainly by the patronage extended by emperors, major capitalists, and scholars. Indian emperors and kings were supported scholars and scholarship. There is evidence of well-developed libraries even in the sixth century A.D. The famous Nalanda University in Bihar had its own magnificent library with a massive collection of manuscripts covering the universe of knowledge (Wani, 2008). In medieval times, India's rulers and elites became caught up in a love for books primarily manuscripts, mostly illustrated, and often written in oriental languages. They amassed monumental libraries, of which quite a few are still accessible to researchers (Banerjee, 1996). However, modern concept of library development began to sparkle with the arrival of the British. Establishment of academic institutions in India by the British became the model foundation of modern libraries. The first university, University of Calcutta was founded in 1857, followed by the University of Bombay and the University of Madras. These three universities were based on the model of University of London and followed a British system of organisation and Administration. The University of Calcutta opened its library in 1873, Bombay University library in 1879 and University of Madras in 1907. The growth and development of libraries were initiated by the establishment of these universities libraries. Furthermore, the Indian University Act of 1904 placed importance in college and universities libraries and contained specific provision to build equip and maintain university libraries. Consultation of experts from United Kingdom and United States were made in progressive development and improvement of academic libraries (Patel & Kumar, 2001).

The most significant development after the independence of India was the establishment of Delhi Public Library. The public library was started in 1951 as the first UNESCO public

library pilot project under the joint auspices of UNESCO and Government of India. The purpose of this library was to adopt 'modern technologies to Indian conditions' and to serve as a model public library for Asia. By 1954, the country had 32000 libraries with a book stock of about 7.1 million volumes. Credit for the development of public libraries goes to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan and other leaders. The Madras Public Library Act of 1948 was the first library legislation in India. Ranganathan showed that effective public library legislation development could be achieved with library legislation and other states became aware of it. Public libraries Act enacted in different states of India include Andhra Pradesh Public Library Act-1960, Karnataka Public Library Act-1965, Maharashtra Public Library Act-1967, West Bengal Public Library Act-1979, Haryana Public Library Act-1989, Kerala Public Library Act-1989, Mizoram Public Library Act-1993, Goa Public Library Act-1993, Gujarat Public Library Act-1998, Orissa Public Library Act-2001, Uttaranchal Public Library Act-2005, Uttar Pradesh Public Library Act-2005, Rajasthan Public Library Act-2006, Bihar Public Library Act-2007, Chhattisgarh Public Library Act-2007 and Pondicherry Public Library Act-2007/2008 (Kumbar, 2005).

In the context of librarianship in India, the role of library Association made a significant contribution for promoting a strong movement of libraries, for raising the standards of library services, training of librarians and also for better service conditions for the librarian. Library Associations, in spite of many limitations has done a lot for developing library services in the country. Some of the active library Associations in India at present are:

1. The Government of India Librarian's Association (GILA).
2. The Indian Association of Academic Librarians (INDAL).
3. The Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC).
4. The Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS).
5. The Indian College Libraries Association (ICLA).

6. The Indian Library Association (ILA).

The most important event in the history of the university education in India was the establishment of University Grant Commission on December 28, 1953, on the model of University Grant Commission of Britain. The main functions of the UGC were to look after the educational interest of the country and to oversee the development and functioning of all the academic institutions, including the libraries. The UGC was given a statutory form in 1956 by the University Grant Commission Act No.3 of the Parliament. Since its inception, the UGC has given priority to the development of facilities of academic libraries in the country. The UGC gave grants to more than 50 Universities to build their modern library building. Beside these grants for library buildings, equipment, collection development and expansion, the UGC has help the professionally qualified academic librarians to get better pay scales equal to the teaching members of the universities. The UGC attaches great importance to the strengthening of library facilities in efficient administration of modern Indian libraries (Bhatt, 1995).

India has now spread its wing in the field of libraries and information science with many centres of knowledge that disseminates its resources to the world. But, after 60 years of independence India, libraries could not be overseen and managed with the clear mandate. As such, the development of the nation through library services is derelict in some states, and its services are still beyond the grasp of the rural poor.

6. Issues:

Challenges in protection of indigenous peoples and knowledge associated with them had become a major concerned in many parts of the world. This led to formulation of basic principles, guidelines, directives and protocols, by national and international organisations and political entities, for safeguarding and serving indigenous peoples around the globe. The

global library community has also taken notice. Groups of indigenous people in countries around the world are developing their own library organizations for the purpose of sharing experiences and supporting the development of libraries and library services that serve their particular interests. They have begun to draft policy statements, form coalitions, organizations and informal groups and to hold their own meetings and conferences to exert their influence over issues of concern to them, such as intellectual property rights, language retention, and all matters related to cultural heritage (Patterson, 2012). In India, most of the libraries are mandated under the government sector. These are academic and research institutions under the public library system, which is again under the state and central governments. Every aspect of indigenous culture, traditional knowledge, songs, dances, music, rituals, medicinal practices, ceremonies can be found in the libraries and most of the collections got there by virtue of someone for their financial gain or sometime as gift for the library. Most of the indigenous collections in the Indian libraries are assemble without the consent of the original stakeholders and consequently leads to misconception and misrepresentation.

As discussed earlier, in the context of India, the term “indigenous tribe” has not been defined in any Indian statute. So, does it mean that there is no indigenous tribe in India? Legally speaking, the concept of indigenous tribe does not exist in India. The answer may be different if we see the social context of India. While seeing the list of scheduled tribe, it can be easily found that most of them are Adivasi. The term “adi” refers to old and “vasi” refers to resident and hence, the term refers to person living in forest as the people used to live in ancient time (Kumar, Gupta & Jain (2011). However, the used of the term indigenous knowledge to refer Indian local communities give stance to professional and practitioners. This is the reason why the use of the term Traditional knowledge becomes relevant in Indian perspectives. One of the outstanding achievements by the Indian practitioner librarians’ worth to be mentioned is

the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL). The objective of the library is to protect the ancient and traditional knowledge of the country from exploitation through bio-piracy and unethical patents. Government of India, on 29th June 2006, has approved to provide the access of TKDL database to International Patent Offices, under Non-disclosure Agreement, between CSIR and respective International Patent Office, according to which -

- (i) Access to TKDL by the examiners of an international patent office would only be utilized for patent search and examination, and
- (ii) International Patent Offices and their examiners would not make any third party disclosure other than what is necessary and essential for the purpose of patent search and examination.

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) is a collaborative project between Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology and Department of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. TKDL involves documentation of the knowledge available in public domain on traditional knowledge from the existing literature related to Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha in digitized format, in five international languages which are English, French, German, Spanish and Japanese (<http://www.ayush.gov.in/sites/default/files/tkdl.pdf>).

Library and Information Services (LIS) sector in India has got remarkable achievements. Conference and seminars have been conducted all year round to uplift the profession. Efforts had been made to set up networks at local, regional and national level to deploy information and communication technologies and to build electronic information sources. However, in the light of this background, the determination to focus on libraries relevant for rendering explicit services for the indigenous local communities' remains neglected. There is little indigenous curriculum content within the professional programme.

7. Suggestions and conclusion:

Indigenous people and their knowledge in many parts of India remains unravel and isolated. Even today, most of indigenous knowledge is not in written form. It is mainly in practice and transmitted from one generation to the next orally. This renders difficulty in handling information requirements of indigenous communities. Nevertheless, it is necessary to engage the working practitioners to incorporate the needs of indigenous culture and intellectual sovereignty. It requires the professional to come out of their comfort zone and initiate new approach to render services for indigenously developed knowledge. The LIS sector in India should integrate the recognition of indigenous people and their knowledge by providing well equip environment to control their own intellectual property rights. Social justice demands that Indigenous people gain equitable access to public institutions and the resources within those institutions. Equitable access includes a range of considerations including the resolution of jurisdictional barriers, the provision of culturally appropriate and relevant collections and services, and the development of meaningful knowledge organization tools; these may be bilingual or multilingual depending on the locale and clientele. Public institutions have a responsibility to staff their services with diverse staffs that represent the clientele being served and to explore innovative measures to ensure diversity (Burns, et al., 2009).

It is well evidenced that, Gathering, Organizing and Disseminating information and knowledge remains the fundamental functions of any libraries. The librarians are custodians of knowledge and the libraries are the storehouse of universal knowledge. An indigenous library aims at providing information services for indigenous communities' interest. Indigenous librarianship plays a vigorous role in shaping the principles concept of library and information discipline by integrating the issues of national and international interest.

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