Libraries: Catalysts for Sustainable Development and IKS

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ABSTRACT

Several facades of human beings of the Indian sub-continent, having been highly influenced by the classical wisdom, customs, and ideologies, comprise the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The philosophy inherent in IKS promotes a code of sustainable living among human beings by emphasizing holistic awareness and a strong, positive correlation with the environment and society, which is rooted in Indian classical literature, such as the Vedas and Upanishads (Karmanya Gurutvam, 2024; Gopal, 2024). IKS has been more acquainted with the contemporary concept of sustainable development goals, especially the prevailing issues, viz., social injustice and climate change, and has emerged as a useful tool for dealing with these issues. To preserve the accurate and authentic information about India's indigenous knowledge systems, libraries play a gigantic role. Manuscripts and historical documents, among other rare and treasured resources, are kept safely in the libraries' repositories and made publicly available as and when required. As well, libraries are the part & parcel for bringing a vast collection of classical/traditional resources to the larger users. Libraries correspondingly play the pioneer role in updating as well as digitizing the classical Indian knowledge systems to make them more widely available to their clientele (Lata and Dahiya, 2024). To preserve these knowledge systems for future generations, which is ultimately the main motto of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), libraries encourage the usage of indigenous languages and cultures; provide equitable access to information, promote education, and facilitate civic participation through several community driven activities. As collaborators, libraries offer a venue for preserving and sharing IKSs. The focus of the article is on how libraries today have integrated the IKS into SDGs. This paper explains how the United Nations SDGs came to be and how libraries influenced them via the repositories of IKS.

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KEYWORDS: Indian Knowledge System, United Nations, Library, Data Repository, Sustainable Development Goal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over millennia, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has been evolved not only because of a synthesis of indigenous knowledge, but also due to the outside influences, especially during the period of colonial administration and foreign invasion. Lots of intellectual activities have been incorporated during the Middle Ages, and ancient universities like Takshashila and Nalanda became the important knowledge-hubs which facilitated vibrant exchange of ideas across Asia. The moral and ecological constituents of Indian classical philosophy are emphasized by concepts like

"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which resembles the idea of "the world is one family." There are lots of moral, ethical, and intellectual lessons to be learned from the epic tales, viz., the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata also has a significant spiritual discourse called the Bhagavad Gita. These constituents, all together, constitute a rich tapestry that has strongly influenced scientific, philosophical, and cultural legacy of post-colonial India (Kumar and Bist, 2024). Indian knowledge confronted with several difficulties and experienced considerablealterations. Although Indian and Western ideologies were blendedbecause of the colonial penetration of Western thoughts, as well as the customs and practices brought by the Islamic rulers, yet, the Indian knowledge system persisted in thriving and adapting despite these transformations (Biswas, 2016).

Throughout history, libraries have been crucial to maintaining this vast body of knowledge. They act as archives for manuscripts and old books, making sure that traditional knowledge is not only preserved but also disseminated and brought back to life through outreach initiatives and exhibitions (Mali and Deshmukh, 2025). With a focus on their role in accomplishing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), libraries are the part & parcel of institutions for enhancing the sustainability. Modern days libraries must have to change their perspectivesto meet the various current demands of modern society and give people access to knowledge that promotes learning, creativity, and community growth., especially, for reaching the mission of sustainability (Dutta and Rahaman, 2017).

A greater awareness and comprehension of India's rich and diverse knowledge base can be fostered by incorporating traditional wisdom into modern sustainability initiatives, as highlighted by the historical interaction of IKS, colonial effects, and the function of libraries.

2. WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Knowledge is nothing but a repository of precise information. As per philosophical literature, knowledge is kept as beliefs, which are later warehoused in language, in sentences or propositions. The intuitive definition of knowledge is a propositional explanation of knowing. The philosophical explanation of knowledge in Indian context is not a propositional one. Instead, it is considered as knowhow or knowledge as a type of cognitive action (jñāna). Any awareness, or jñāna (cognitive), takes in the behavioural agent capturing an entity at every awareness affair of life. Moreover, all premises are seen as qualitative observations of the soul (ātman), meaning that our beliefs/thoughts originate in the soul (संवादसह: saṃvādasaṃgrahaḥ). The knowledge concept provided by the Indian philosophers can be summarized with the help of the following schematic representation.

3. THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

Fig 1: Indian Knowledge System

Source: https://in.images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search

Over thousands of years, the Indian subcontinent put forth a wide and diverse collection of information, beliefs, and customs which are considered as the base of the Indian Knowledge System. It has been enriched as well as developed because of the contributions of numerous civilizations and cultures and has its roots in the ancient Vedic, Upanishad, and Puranic cultures (Timane and Wandhe, 2024).One of basic axiom of IKS is its prominence of the idea of 'Dharma'—the code of conduct that every human being must adhere across his/her life. The moral philosophy intrinsic in Dharma's teachings incorporates not only the individual behaviour but also social duties &responsibilities of the human beings. In Indian society, where individual is expected to accomplish their duties &responsibilities to their families, society, and nation, this idea has contributed to the nourishment of the strong sense of India as a nation (Sondhi, 2023). IKS encompasses various fields including logic, philosophy, language, architecture, aesthetics, mathematics, and astronomy. The wisdom and customs that indigenous and local populations have accumulated over many generations are referred to as Indian traditional knowledge. Maintaining environmental sustainability, fostering social cohesion, and protecting cultural heritage all depend on this information. However, preserving traditional knowledge has grown more crucial in the face of globalization, environmental degradation, and cultural homogeneity (Mali and Deshmukh, 2025). By engaging in multidisciplinary activities, IKS hopes to empower the next generation to look for long-term answers to personal and societal problems, thereby promoting sustainability.
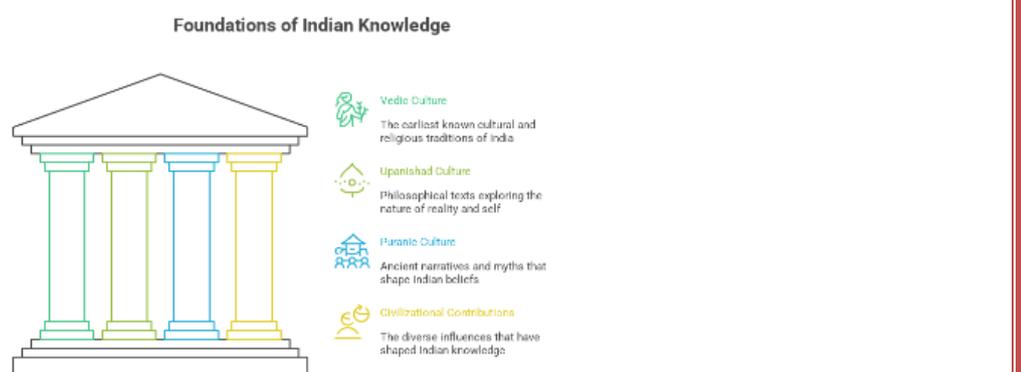

Foundations of Indian Knowledge

Vedic Culture
The earliest known cultural and religious traditions of India

Upanishad Culture
Philosophical texts exploring the nature of reality and self

Puranic Culture
Ancient narratives and myths that shape Indian beliefs

Civilizational Contributions
The diverse influences that have shaped Indian knowledge

Fig 2: Foundation of IK

4. ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As of 2030, all 193 UN Member States have committed to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A fresh set of objectives guarantees not just that development is urgent, but also that it must be sustainable and promote equality. Libraries are turning into more and more community service centres, including initiatives that support civic involvement, health, and education - all of which are critical components of sustainable development - in addition to making information more accessible.

Fig 3: Sustainable Development Goals

Source: https://unosd.un.org/content/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs

Here are a few examples of how libraries help to come up with the mission of United Nations to achieve SDGs (Vijesh, et al, 2024) -

➢ SDG-1: No Poverty - Libraries provide the library clientele free access to various tools and information that might help them a lot to take initiatives for initiating entrepreneurship activities, create employment opportunities, and acquire new skills.

➢ SDG-2: Zero Hunger – Various programs and resources provided by libraries to their users promote nutrition, ensure food security, and enhance sustainable agriculture.

➢ SDG-3: Good Health and Well-being - Libraries offer lots of services which not only support mental but also physical health by way of access to data related to health issues and resources.

➢ SDG-4: Quality Education - Libraries support the universal access to quality education, lifelong learning, and more literate ambience.

➢ SDG-5: Gender Equality - Libraries accelerate access to resources and information to the users which tremendously help women's literacy and empowerment, by this means reducing the magnitude of gender disparity.

➢ SDG-6: Clean Water and Sanitation - Libraries facilitate access to resources and knowhow which help a lot for bringing forth sustainable water management, sanitation, and preservation of water.

➢ SDG-7: Affordable and Clean Energy - Programs organized and materials provided by libraries to their clientele support the use of sustainable & renewable energy, and conservation of energy.

➢ SDG-8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - Libraries create the ambience of information and resources more accessible which promote economic growth, entrepreneurship, and the job-market opportunity.

➢ SDG-9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure - Libraries provide lots of library tools and initiatives which put forth technological advancement, infrastructural growth, and innovation.

➢ SDG-10: Reduced Inequalities - Libraries not only encourage social inclusion but also give the access of underserved areas to resources and knowhow.

➢ SDG-11: Sustainable Cities and Communities - Libraries encourage sustainable practice for enhancing urban development by providing resources and programs to the urban library users, and encouraging them for community involvement.

- SDG-12: Responsible Consumption and Production - Libraries assist sustainable living by providing those tools and initiatives which promote meticulous production and consumption.
- SDG-13: Climate Action - Libraries assist climate related tasks & activities and sustainability by providing resources and programs which raise the knowledge regarding environmental issues & concerns.
- SDG-14: Life below Water - Libraries smooth the accessibility for materials and knowhow which support healthy marine ecosystems and promote ocean conservation as well.
- SDG-15: Life on Land - Libraries enable access to resources and knowhow which assist sustainable land use and the protection of biodiversity.
- SDG-16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions - Libraries promote the availability of materials and information that helps a lot to uphold justice, democracy, and human rights.
- SDG-17: Partnerships for the Goals - Libraries encourage cooperative activities and the formation of joint-partnerships in order to assist the mission and vision of sustainable development.

Development that satisfies current demands without endangering the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs is known as sustainable development. The integration of political, social, and economic development within a community is known as sustainable development. As the community's information hub, the library plays a vital role in advancing sustainable social development. Through a variety of programs, libraries play a vital role in the community's participation and the diffusion of knowledge, greatly aiding in the accomplishment of the SDGs of United Nations. Three main advocacy programs which have been suggested by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) for achieving sustainable development (IFLA, 2020, 2021) are , namely, to assist regional, national, and local libraries for taking part in national level SDG implementation programmes, building up new associations, and attaining new recognition in national level plans and strategies; to engage themselves in direct activities on a global level to influence the policymakers and obtain support and recommendations for national advocacy; and to provide resources and tools for assisting libraries in utilising the SDGs as a tool for planning, creating, and successfully presenting their own strategies to policy-makers which can support the activities of librarians generally rather than simply concerning the SDGs.

As per view of Bawack (2018), there exist some important ways by which libraries and librarians may help libraries to achieve the SDGs are providing a conducive environment for access to relevant and user-friendly information on development issues; establishing a strong library programme; selecting resources that are pertinent to the development indicators entrenched in the SDG document; partnering with other agencies in promoting changes required for SDG in all spheres; establishing branch libraries or information centres rooted in local communities; motivating and building the professional capacity of LIS professionals; improving government - library partnership and synergies among others; and engaging in LIS stakeholders for regular trainings, so that they can professionally fulfil their mandate and official roles.

Gupta (2020) presented the idea of green libraries in a comprehensive manner. The UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 are supported by the green library efforts implemented in India. The Green Library movement has gathered steam in India in recent years, with several noteworthy instances setting the standard for encouraging environmentally responsible and sustainable library operations. The followings are amongst the prominent instances of Green Library movement in India.

5. LIBRARIES' ROLE IN PRESERVATION OF IKS

Libraries play the vital roleforpreserving Indian ancient knowledge systems in addition to their role in sustainable development.By acting as a bridge between the past and the present, libraries act as the custodians of knowledge, preserving the Indian Knowledge System as an essential and ever-evolving part of our common cultural heritage (Singh and Sharma, 2024).The preservation of India's historical manuscripts through appropriate conservation methods, such as climate control, digitalization, and restoration, depends heavily on libraries (Deulkar, 2025). India is the home of two oldest and most sophisticated educational institutions in history: the universities of Takshashila and Nalanda. These institutions were well-known for their rich libraries, which housed thousands of manuscripts and attracted scholars across the world. By serving as knowledge stewards and granting access to old books and manuscripts that are crucial for IKS research and study, libraries continue to maintain this legacy in the present day. Libraries have meticulously preserved priceless manuscripts, many of which were written on birch bark and palm leaves, ensuring their survival for upcoming generations (Subbarayappa, 2001). Libraries support the preservation, sharing, and growth of these invaluable resources so that future generations can access this knowledge and reap the benefits from these resources as well (Mali and Deshmukh, 2025).Specialized collections dedicated to the vast resources about IKS create a rare opportunity for the libraries and information centers. Manuscripts in digitized mode, texts having been translated, multimedia, and other resources showcasing India's rich intellectual heritage can be included in these collections. Libraries can build up an extensive collection which will be very much useful tool for research scholars, educators, and students by arranging and preserving these valuable items. These carefully chosen collections guarantee that this ancient Indian knowledge is still available and applicable to future generations which will both scholarly inquiry and a greater appreciation of IKS. Connecting the knowledge of the past with the innovations of the future is made possible by the integration of IKS with modern LIS trends and technologies, like AR, VR, MR, etc. (Mane and 2025).

6. SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES TO IKS IN LIBRARIES

For many years, human civilizations have benefited from IKS and its various manifestations, including traditional ecological knowledge, medical knowledge, cultural knowledge, farming knowledge, and others. These IKS have been passed down through the generations in a variety of material ways, such as teachings, oral histories, and storytelling traditions (Berkes, 2017). To meet the challenges of modernization, these physical manifestations, also known as Indigenous Knowledge Resources (IKR), must be conserved, shared, and used for sustainable living in the genuine spirit. The IKRs' integration of IKS into formal education is crucial to achieving a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for "peace and prosperity for people and the planet" that were set by the UN in 2015.Societies may conserve cultural diversity and create workable answers to the global sustainability issues covered by the SDGs by encouraging education on IKS. For the IKRs to be used properly, they must be conserved in the most scientific manner possible, and libraries are the best place to do this (Choudhury and Kalita, 2025).

7. CASE STUDIES: SUSTAINABLE LIBRARY INITIATIVES IN INDIA

Case Study -1:Perma Karpo Library

The Perma Karpo Library is part of the Druk White Lotus School, which is located at Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas. This library prioritizes environmental preservation while providing essential services, exhibiting a comprehensive approach to sustainability. Its design philosophy sets an example for resource efficiency and

environmentally conscious construction by successfully integrating local resources, energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable building processes (Hasan and Panda, 2023).

Fig 4: Perma Karpo Library

Source:https://www.researchgate.net/figure

Case Study -2: Valapattanam Grama Panchayat Library

The Valapattanam Grama Panchayat Library, situated in Kerala's Kannur district, has carried out noteworthy initiatives that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. With a staff of enthusiastic volunteers, the Valapattanam Grama Panchayat Library is a one-person institution that bills itself as a Rural Community Knowledge Centre in a Keralan village. It has been acknowledged for its outstanding efforts, which have been featured in the SDG Stories of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Library Map of the World. As an example of how libraries may actively support sustainable development, this library sets an example for others in India and abroad (Bhanu, 2025).

Fig 5: Coordinator leading the screening camp conducted by Valapattanam Grama Panchayat Library

Source: https://www.ifla.org/news

Case Study-3 : National Digital Library of India (NDLI)

NDLI is a virtual learning resource repository that offers a variety of services to the learning community in addition to search and browse capabilities. Through the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT), the Ministry of Education, Government of India, sponsors and mentors it. All academic levels, including researchers and lifelong learners, as well as all fields, popular access devices, and learners with disabilities, will be supported by its design. It is intended to let researchers conduct interconnected investigation from many sources and to allow people to learn and get ready from global best practices. The Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is responsible for its development, operation, and maintenance.
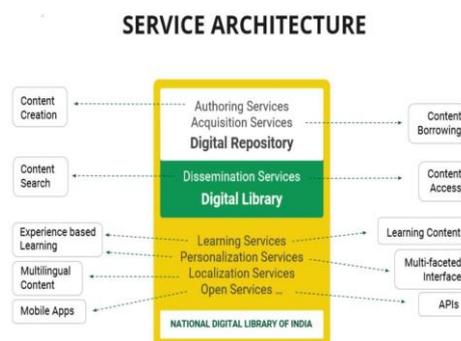
SERVICE ARCHITECTURE

Fig 6: NDLI

Source: Bashir, et al, 2019

8. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the framework of SDGs and IKS, the libraries in India confront a variety of challenges and opportunities amongst which the followings are noteworthy.

8.1 Challenges

8.1.1 Funding Issues

Lack of finance is one of the biggest problems facing libraries, especially in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Many libraries find it difficult to raise the requisite fund to initiate green library projects and implement sustainable practices. Specially, the traditional libraries trying to switch themselves to green libraries are mostly affected by this budget deficiency due to this funding gap, which restricts them to implement sustainable practices and innovative technologies.

8.1.2 Technical and Resource Limitations

Apart from financial constraints, libraries frequently face technical problems, such as a lack of expertise and the absence of burgeoning tools for tracking advancement towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The complicated and drawn-out transition from traditional to sustainable library models is made worse by a lack of tech-savvy human resources and technological constraints. Furthermore, a lot of libraries are either underequipped or unequipped with modern technologies, and their librarians and library assistants are not properly trained to cope up with the modern technological changes. The difficulties in integrating classical IKS into curricula which emphasise cutting-edge digital innovations are explored, along with significant constraint like the technical intricacy of modern technologies (Garg, 2024).

8.1.3 Community Engagement Constraints

Although libraries are vital for encouraging community engagement and helping the surrounding local users, they frequently experience themselves strained due to the ever-growing demands of the community. It is too tough to find the proper blending of talents among library staff, and the burgeoning demand for a variety of library services might overwhelm library resources. Libraries must have to maintain a proper balance between service delivery, operational capabilities, and financial constraints as they strive to become the centres for community support(Agarwal and Jaiswal, 2022).

8.2 Opportunities

8.2.1 Role in Sustainable Development

Although there are obstacles, libraries offer a special chance to support sustainable development. They can be treated as the vital resources for learning about environmental education, community engagement programs, and sustainable practices. Libraries may play a crucial role in accomplishing the SDGs by empowering communities to engage in sustainability initiatives via the utilisation of their resources.

8.2.2 Partnerships and Collaborations

To improve their community engagement initiatives, libraries might involve in the collaborative activities with local governments, non-profit-organization, NGOs, and educational institutions. Collaborative initiatives, such public debates on regional concerns or community gardens, can improve community relationships and the library's role as the facilitator of social capital (Agarwal and Jaiswal, 2022). By establishing these relationships, libraries can increase their influence and reach in their surrounding local users , and ultimately the local communities.

8.2.3 Adopting Green Library Practices

Libraries have the great opportunity to innovate through green library practices via the increased awareness of sustainability. Libraries can increase their servicesprovided and lessen their environmental impact by using new sophisticated technology and budding their digital resources. Over and above being in line with international sustainability goals, the shifting towards green libraries establishes libraries as pioneers in neighbourhood-based sustainability efforts (Vora and Hussain, 2025).

8.2.4 Enhancing Public Access to Information

According to the Lyon Declaration of IFLA, people may make better decisions in life when they have access to information. Communities are better equipped to reduce poverty and inequality, enhance agriculture, offer high-quality education, and promote people's health, culture, research, and innovation when everyone has access to timely and pertinent information.

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