

Research Article

Preserving And Utilizing The Indian Knowledge System Through Libraries

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A B S T R A C T

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast and rich heritage encompassing philosophy, science, medicine, arts, literature, ecology, and social traditions developed over millennia. Libraries play a crucial role in preserving and utilising this knowledge by collecting, organising, conserving, and disseminating both documented and oral traditions of Indian wisdom. Through the preservation of manuscripts, rare books, archival materials, and indigenous records, libraries safeguard traditional knowledge from loss and degradation. The adoption of modern technologies such as digitisation, digital repositories, metadata standards, and open-access platforms has further enhanced access to IKS for scholars, students, and the wider public. Libraries also support the utilisation of Indian knowledge by integrating it into academic curricula, research activities, community outreach programmes, and interdisciplinary studies. By bridging traditional knowledge with contemporary information systems, libraries function as vital institutions in sustaining cultural identity, promoting indigenous scholarship, and ensuring the intergenerational transmission of the Indian Knowledge System in the digital age

Keywords: IKS, Indian Knowledge System, Traditional Knowledge, Ancient Knowledge

Introduction

Indian Knowledge System (IKS)

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) relates to the enormous, diverse, and holistic corpus of information developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years. Rooted in ancient texts, oral traditions, and lived practices, IKS encompasses philosophy, science, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, arts, governance, ecology, and spirituality. Unlike modern compartmentalised knowledge systems, IKS adopts an integrated approach that connects material, intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of life. Indian Knowledge Systems were introduced through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by the Government

of India, Ministry of Education, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, based on the Kasturi rangan Committee's recommendations. In 2021, the Ministry of Education set up a dedicated Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division under AICTE to implement the National Education Policy's Indian knowledge system vision.

IKS is preserved in manuscripts, oral traditions, inscriptions, palm-leaf texts, and classical literature written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Tamil, Persian, Arabic, and other Indian languages. Digitisation and critical study of manuscripts. Comparative research linking IKS with modern disciplines. 'The Division conducts internship programmes for undergraduate students in addition to conducting faculty

development programmes, workshops, text mining and documentation projects, and many outreach activities in partnership with other institutions. Additionally, the Division initiated IKS Wiki portal for article publishing in various Bharatiya languages, fostering a broader dissemination and engagement with traditional knowledge systems' (Indian Knowledge System India, 2026).¹

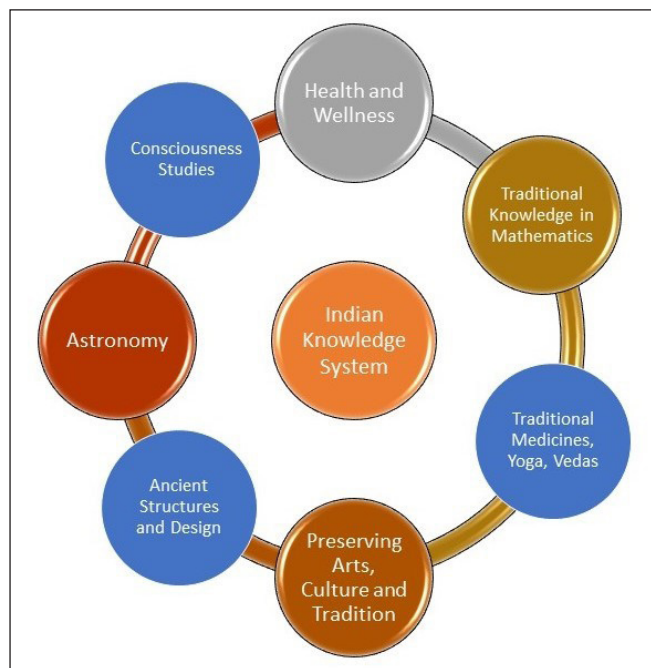


Figure 1. Source: <https://radiancenews.com/indian-knowledge-system-an-overview/>

Literature Review

A No of studies have been conducted by scholars, and various results have been obtained through these studies and explore the Indian Knowledge System.

(Das, Kalita, & Singha, 2025).² That study highlights how digitised IKS can empower educators to create culturally resonant, technology-driven curricula, aligning with India's educational goal'. Hazarika & Sudhier (2025).³ added another important case study to illustrate how academic institutions actively engage in the revitalisation of IKS by providing global access to ancient manuscripts, promoting interdisciplinary research, and encouraging public and scholarly engagement. Despite challenges like manuscript conservation and funding constraints, these institutions demonstrate the potential for IKS to be integrated into modern academic and research frameworks, ensuring its preservation for future generations. (Chattopadhyay, 2021).⁴ That study explores how NEP 2020 envisions an education system grounded in holistic, multidisciplinary learning. Libraries, as knowledge facilitators, are uniquely positioned to bring this vision to life by ensuring that IKS remains a vibrant and accessible part of India's educational and cultural landscape. (Lata, 2025).⁵ Paid attention to

the paper; therefore, it delves into various aspects of TK, related challenges, and CSIR initiatives for documenting and communicating India's traditional knowledge. India should tap the potential of its rich heritage and leverage scientifically validated TK/practices for a sustainable future, wherein effective TK communication can be a concrete stride towards it. (Sattigeri, Baleshwar, Kuma, Asthana, & Jain, 2025).⁶ The study has highlighted the synergy that can be drawn by bringing together TK, digital frameworks, and sustainability science to address global challenges. Digital databases such as the TKDL can serve as important instruments towards the pursuit of sustainability science.

Need Of Preservation Of Indian Knowledge Systems (Iks)

The Primary reasons for preserving IKS is the protection of India's cultural and civilisational heritage. Indian knowledge traditions are deeply rooted in the country's history, languages, customs, and value systems. Ancient texts, manuscripts, oral traditions, and practices reflect the worldview and wisdom of earlier generations. If these are not preserved, future generations may lose touch with their cultural identity and intellectual roots.

Ancient Library And Information Centres For Preserving, Refining, And Disseminating Indian Knowledge.

Nalanda Library (Bihar) Part of Nalanda Mahavihara (5th – 12th century)

Nalanda Library is considered to be the earliest and largest university library in the world. This library mainly consisted of three buildings: Ratnasagara, Ratnadadhi, and Ratnaranjaka. This library has thousands of manuscripts on Buddhism, Vedas, logic, grammar, medicine, and astronomy.

Takshashila (Taxila) Library (Pakistan, Ancient India)

Takshashila Library was established around the 6th century. This Library has thousands of manuscripts and books on subjects such as the Vedas, Ayurveda, military science, law, and politics Scholars like Chanakya and Charaka were associated

Vikramashila Library (Bihar)

Vikramshila Library was founded by King Dharmapala in the 8th century CE. It was a major centre for Buddhist Tantric studies, and its library contained manuscripts on logic, metaphysics, and ritual studies.

Odantapuri Library (Bihar)

Odantapuri Library (Bihar), founded in the 8th century CE, was a major centre of Buddhist learning and was greatly influenced by the universities of Nalanda and Vikramshila.

Valabhi University Library (Gujarat)

Vallabhi University Library (Gujarat), founded around the 6th century CE, was a centre of learning in Hinayana Buddhism, where subjects such as economics, law, and administration were taught.

Sarasvati Mahal Library (Tamil Nadu)

‘Thanjavur Maharaj Serfoji’s Saraswathi Mahal Library is one among a few libraries in the world with texts of the mediaeval period. It is a treasure house of knowledge carefully fostered and nurtured by successive dynasties of Nayakkas and the Marathas of Thanjavur. It contains a rare valuable collection of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu. Preserves ancient palm-leaf manuscripts in Marathi on all aspects of Art, Culture and Literature’. (saraswathi mahal library, 2026).⁷

Sharada Peeth Library (Kashmir)

The Sharda Peeth Library was part of an ancient, renowned centre of learning in Kashmir (now in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan) dedicated to the goddess Sharada (Saraswati) and known for its vast collection of manuscripts, attracting scholars globally for texts on philosophy, linguistics and scriptures, and grammar. Adi Shankaracharya visited the library during bharat bharaman.

Pushpagiri Library (Odisha)

The Pushpagiri Library refers to the ancient Pushpagiri Mahavihara, a major Buddhist monastic complex and renowned centre of learning that flourished from the 3rd to 11th centuries CE in the Jaipur district of Odisha

Major Institutions Associated With Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) In India**Table 1. Key Initiatives in IKS Preservation**

Initiative	Primary Focus	Role of Libraries
Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)	Traditional Medicine (Ayush)	Documenting and preventing misappropriation.
National Mission for Manuscript (NMM)	Manuscripts	Cataloguing, conserving, and digitizing rare texts.
National Digital Library of India (NDLI)	General Digital Access	Providing a unified platform for students/scholars.
Indian Knowledge System IKS Division (MoE)	Curriculum Integration	Promoting research and active use of ancient wisdom.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, has several divisions and regional centres dedicated to research and documentation. Key projects include the Vedic Heritage Portal, which provides access to over 550 hours of audio-visual Vedic content, and Project ‘Mausam,’ focusing on maritime history. Another project of IGNCA, The National Mission for Manuscripts, was established in February 2003 by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India. A unique project in its programme and mandate, the Mission seeks to unearth and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India. India possesses an estimated five million manuscripts, probably the largest collection in the world. These cover a variety of themes, textures, and aesthetics, scripts, languages, calligraphies, illuminations, and illustrations. Together, they constitute the ‘memory’ of India’s history, heritage, and thought. These manuscripts lie scattered across the country and beyond, in numerous institutions as well as private collections, often unattended and undocumented. ‘The National Mission for Manuscripts aims to locate, document, preserve, and render these accessible—to connect India’s past with its future, its memory with its aspirations’. (Namami, 2026).⁸

The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: (TKDL) is a pioneering Indian digital repository designed to protect the country’s vast heritage of traditional medicine and prevents its misappropriation through “biopiracy” (wrongful patenting by foreign entities). Established in 2001, it is a collaborative project between the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Ministry of AYUSH. ‘This initiative involves digitising and translating ancient texts on traditional medicine to protect the knowledge from misappropriation. TKDL technology integrates diverse disciplines and languages such as Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Yoga, Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Tamil, English, Japanese, Spanish, French, German, modern science, and modern medicine. Currently, TKDL is based on books of Indian Systems of Medicine, which are available in the open domain and can be sourced by any individual or organization at the national or international level. TKDL acts as a bridge between these books (prior art) and International patent examiners’ (TKDL, 2026).⁹

Sahitya Akademi: The Sahitya Akademi, formally inaugurated on March 12, 1954, is India’s National Academy of Letters. It functions as an autonomous organisation

under the Ministry of Culture to promote literature in the languages of India. It is unique because it recognises literary merit in 24 languages: the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, plus English and Rajasthan. 'It has ceaselessly endeavoured to promote good taste and healthy reading habits, to keep alive the intimate dialogue among the various linguistic and literary zones and groups through seminars, lectures, symposia, discussions, readings, and performances, to increase the pace of mutual translations through workshops and individual assignments, and to develop a serious literary culture through the publications of journals, monographs, individual creative works of every genre, anthologies, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, bibliographies, who's who of writers, and histories of literature' (Sahitya Akademi, 2026).¹⁰

Indian Knowledge Systems In Higher Education

Central and State Universities have established Centres for Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). IKS departments have been set up in IITs, IIMs, central universities, and private universities. AICTE has incorporated IKS into engineering and technical education. Under the National Education Policy 2020, UGC is running various IKS-based courses, certificate programmes, etc. Indian Knowledge Tradition/ Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) is now being offered as an elective subject in many educational institutions and universities. The Higher Education Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh has established Indian Knowledge System Cells in colleges, where IKS-based certificate/value-added courses, seminars, lectures, and workshops are being conducted.

Role Of Libraries In Preserving Indian Knowledge System

Libraries play a crucial and multidimensional role in preserving, protecting, and promoting the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which encompasses India's ancient and traditional wisdom in fields such as philosophy, science, medicine, arts, culture, linguistics, astronomy, and governance.

Preservation Of Ancient Texts And Manuscripts

Libraries safeguard rare and valuable materials, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Itihasas, and manuscripts on Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotisha, mathematics, metallurgy, architecture, and agriculture, texts written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Tamil, Persian, and regional languages. Special preservation techniques like manuscript conservation, lamination, climate control, and digitisation help extend their lifespan.

Documentation Of Indigenous And Oral Knowledge

Indigenous and Oral Knowledge (IOK) refers to the wisdom, practices, skills, beliefs, and cultural expressions developed by local communities and transmitted mainly through oral traditions such as storytelling, songs, rituals, proverbs, and lived practices. Documenting this knowledge is essential for its preservation, transmission, and respectful use, especially in the context of modernisation and globalisation. By recording oral traditions in written, audio, and video formats, libraries help prevent the loss of intangible heritage.

Organization And Classification Of Iks

Proper cataloguing and classification of IKS resources presents challenges because traditional knowledge often does not fit neatly into Western classification schemes. Using DDC/UDC with local adaptations, developing IKS-specific taxonomies, subject headings reflecting Indian philosophical concepts, and multilingual metadata are essential for better retrieval.

Digitization And Digital Repositories

Digitisation and digital repositories are key components of modern information management, especially for preserving knowledge, improving access, and supporting research and education. Digitisation is the process of converting physical or analogue materials (books, manuscripts, photographs, audio, video, palm-leaf manuscripts, etc.) into digital formats using scanners, cameras, or other digital tools, which are then converted using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for Indian scripts. Metadata is created following metadata standards like Dublin Core and then stored in digital repositories and digital libraries. Institutional repositories, through digital repository software on open access platforms, enable global access, reduce physical handling, and ensure the long-term preservation of digitised manuscripts.

Access And Dissemination

Libraries play a crucial role in providing access to this knowledge and disseminating it to scholars, students, and researchers, including access to primary and secondary IKS resources supporting multilingual access to Indian texts. They also provide reference services, bibliographies, and research guides, and support Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) through authenticated documentation. They also organise training programmes, exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and storytelling sessions for scholars and librarians in manuscript biology, paleography, and digital preservation.

Table 2. Challenges in Modern Library Systems to preserve IKS

Challenge	Impact on IKS
Western Classification Bias	Systems like the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) often scatter IKS across unrelated categories (e.g., Yoga might be under “Religion” or “Health”), losing its holistic context.
Linguistic Barriers	Much of the knowledge is in Sanskrit, Pali, or regional dialects. Libraries face a shortage of professionals who are both library-trained and linguistically proficient in these languages.
Intellectual Property (IPR)	Balancing “Open Access” with the protection of community-owned indigenous knowledge remains a debated ethical issue in library science literature.

Conclusion

Libraries play a pivotal role in preserving and utilising the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which embodies India’s rich intellectual, cultural, scientific, and philosophical heritage. By collecting, conserving, and organising ancient manuscripts, rare books, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge resources, libraries safeguard invaluable wisdom for future generations. Through digitisation, the creation of digital repositories, and the application of modern information technologies, libraries enhance access to IKS beyond physical boundaries, making it available to scholars, students, and the general public worldwide.

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