

Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development: Role of Libraries

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***Abstract** - Cultural traditions and knowledge embedded in the age old life practices has conserved and nourished the Nature. These knowledge systems prevailing in the Indian society should be preserved, documented and revitalized for the cause of sustainable development. The knowledge and practices to preserve natural resources concealed in the traditional social customs and ethos has been discussed with examples. This article focuses on the significance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions in sustainable development. It concludes by emphasizing the need of preservation of this knowledge and role of libraries.*

Key words: Indigenous Knowledge, Library, Sustainable Development

Introduction:

Swami Vivekananda has rightly explained Sustenance of Nature as basis of existence in following phrase ‘All nature is bound by law, the law of its own action; and this law can never be broken. If you could break a law of nature, all nature would come to an end in an instance. There would be no more nature’ (Vivekananda, 2016). The technological developments in the past decades have raised the standard of living of mankind. Even though there are problems at all levels social, individual and environmental. The reason is obviously the exploitation of natural resources and materialism. The result is poverty, climate change, natural calamities, physical disease and psychological illness. The world has now realized the adversity and is engaged in pursuing answers to this environmental crisis. Coexistence of Man with Nature is reflected in the Indigenous beliefs and systems. With its rich and diverse cultural heritage, India has been a repository of Indigenous knowledge. Library and archives are in a position to play crucial role to preserve and manage Indigenous knowledge for its appropriate use in sustainable development plans.

Indigenous Knowledge:

Indigenous knowledge is a body of knowledge which is very ancient and deep rooted in the culture of communities of the world. This system of knowledge contains the wisdom accumulated over the years of experiments and experiences. Such body of knowledge is developed by different communities or in particular geographical areas. The transmission and percolation of such knowledge from one generation to next generation is mostly oral and informal. Grenier (1998) has defined it as, ‘Indigenous knowledge (IK) refers to the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area.’ Unesco has taken great care of this other kind of knowledge system. The relationship of Indigenous knowledge and sustainability is explained as ‘Sophisticated knowledge of the natural world is not confined to science. Human societies all across the globe have developed rich sets of experiences and explanations relating to the environments they live in. These ‘other knowledge systems’ are today often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge or indigenous or local knowledge. They encompass the sophisticated arrays of information, understandings and interpretations

that guide human societies around the globe in their innumerable interactions with the natural milieu: in agriculture and animal husbandry; hunting, fishing and gathering; struggles against disease and injury; naming and explanation of natural phenomena; and strategies to cope with fluctuating environments (Nakashima, Prott, & Bridgewater, 2000).’

Sustainable Development:

Also commonly known as the Brundtland Report, ‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs’. This definition clearly indicates to preserve the natural resources on earth for future generation. The goals of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) calls for the universal actions to end poverty, sustainable consumption, climate change and to protect the planet (UNDP, 2016).

Significance of Indigenous knowledge in Sustainable Development:

Synergy between Man and Environment results into the sound Ecosystem. This knowledge system by ancient Indians has been practiced by centuries and thus are time tested and proven. Traditional or Indigenous Knowledge refers to the knowledge, skills and practices retained by the local people. Because of fast and hasty Industrialization and modernization traditional knowledge systems are on the verge of erosion today. Visualization of the development plans should be carried out taking into consideration the science and knowledge ingrained in the culture and traditions. Conservation and Management of natural resources should reflect the local and indigenous thoughts and practices. Utilization and Regeneration concepts for biodiversity and agro ecosystem should be well defined in the progress plan. The importance of natural resources in the inclusive and holistic development, traditional knowledge systems and their vital role for conserving the natural resources, the wealth of nation should be recognized in time. Soni (2007) has observed the important role of IK in different segments of human life that includes intercropping techniques, pest control, crop diversity, and seed varieties in agriculture; plant varieties, and fish breeding techniques in biology; traditional medicine in human healthcare; soil conservation, irrigation, and water conservation in natural resource management; and oral traditions and local languages in education. The realization of IK’s contribution to these sectors has led to an increasing interest in it by academicians, and policymakers alike. Ryser (2015) has pointed out that the challenges of sustainability in the twenty-first century across the world has created a shift in attitude towards recognizing indigenous knowledge and correspond it to other forms of knowledge. The serious damages to environment has made it essential to understand and incorporate IK into the global body of knowledge for the benefit of all human kind. The significance of IK in sustainable development is perceived by the policy makers across the world.

Indigenous Knowledge System for Conservation of Natural Resources:

The quest of dominance on nature by humans has resulted into the exploitation of the natural resources from all over the world. It has seriously disturbed the ecosystem. Environment sustainability in global, social, economic and individual perception is a complex phenomenon. The modern scientific understanding of ecosystem is very limited and not enough to guide the mankind for ecological management that could result into the sustainable development. Imbalance of ecosystem has put on challenges for policy makers, academicians, NGO and researchers around the world. On the other hand, Indigenous

knowledge system led by traditional communities is in tune with nature as they recognize the interdependence of man and nature and believe that Nature being their sustainer, is not to be exploited but respected. Indigenous knowledge system encompasses diverse range of topics like Agriculture, irrigation, architecture, health and nutrition, medicines, forest management, weather forecasting, technical skills, art, artisans which are reflected in the culture, customs, rituals, way of living and practices of particular indigenous community. The Indigenous knowledge system is ecofriendly. It is sound enough to address the sustainable development goals. The need is to preserve and restore these knowledge system.

Social Ethos:

Social ethos are guiding principles and ideals of any community. A notable example of two social ethos '*Matanuvan*' and '*Halma*' practiced by tribal community in Zhabua District of Madhya Pradesh narrated here are the best examples of Indigenous knowledge of conserving natural resources. '*Matanuvan*' is a practice of maintaining a nursery of plants at home and village for afforestation. '*Halma*' is a concept where thousands of men, women and children from distant village come together on their own expenditure and inspiration to work selflessly for complete day. The '*Halma*' is called upon by community to come out of any adverse situation. In one such *Halma* inspired and revived by NGO Shivganga to emerge from problem of water shortage, people created trenches on barren deforested Hathipava hill near Zhabua for water harvesting and next year they called *Halma* for plantation on that hill. It is a social practice of working selflessly for self and community. Under this custom *Halma* villagers have also created lakes and check dams in their villages for water conservation.

Sacred Groves:

Sacred Groves are the patches of forests conserved with all diversities of flora and fauna for centuries by a particular community as a part of their culture and customs. Amirthalingam (2016), has defined sacred groves as 'undisturbed patches of vegetation on the outskirts of villages and towns or in the plains or a part of forested areas that are dedicated to local folk deities or ancestral spirits. They vary in size between 05 – 500 hectares. Their existence depends upon the social traditions and taboos incorporating spiritual and ecological values which prevent their destruction. These groves represent an invaluable gene pool, conserve the biodiversity and are found all over the country under different names. Sacred groves provide various ecosystem services such as biodiversity, medicinal plants; regulating services and the range of functions carried out by ecosystems. It also serves as a repository for biodiversity. These pristine patches of forests have been instrumental in saving many vanishing species that might otherwise have been destroyed. The entire ecosystem helps in soil and water conservation, apart from preserving biological wealth. They are a dependable source of water for organisms living in and around the sacred groves. Hunting, logging and other developmental activities are strictly prohibited within the sacred groves.' Indian traditions and beliefs represents great vision to nurture and nourish the nature for the advantage of humans. The knowledge of sustainable living is put forward to the communities in the form of customs and beliefs which is carry forwarded orally among the generations through word of mouth. This beliefs and customs should be preserved and explained in modern concepts, valued and recognized.

The Role of Library and Information Professionals:

Knowledge to develop sustainably is embedded in culture and ethos of Indian society. 21st century modern invasion and globalization has adversely affected the fabrics of Indigenous knowledge system and culture. As Indigenous knowledge is tacit in nature and transferred orally it is at the risk of extinction. New generation is seems to be less interested in carry forward this knowledge system. If old generation passes away without transferring the knowledge it is lost forever.

Library professionals are engaged in acquiring, organizing and disseminating the knowledge created by human society. They possess expertise in handling all types of knowledge sources from manuscripts to digital. 'While the ways libraries carry out their functions have changed dramatically over the years, their primary mission remains the same- discovery, dissemination and preservation' (Bora, 2012). The role that library could play as knowledge provider and development assistant in rural area of the country is very crucial. Rural libraries could facilitate and encourage the knowledge sharing. It could be a catalyst in generating the new knowledge by providing both...traditional knowledge and latest information regarding it. National Knowledge commission has suggested naming the rural libraries as rural knowledge center/Community Information center shows its importance in development process. The commission has further narrated the skills required for the Rural Knowledge centers. These skills also includes knowledge mapping skills and understanding of culture diversity (NKC, 2007). Documented literature on indigenous knowledge is limited was the observation of United Nations Environment program. Indigenous knowledge concerned with varied aspects of life is usually passed from generation to generation through traditional socialization process and demonstration by elders and custodians. The reliability of this mode of dissemination is under threat in modern times and influence of western culture, higher levels of interactions between different communities, as well as the passing on of the custodians of this knowledge. Unless indigenous knowledge is properly documented, analyzed and disseminated, it could be lost forever. This is where library and information professionals, who are well trained and properly equipped with skills in information and knowledge management becomes relevant (Chinaka, Iwuoha, Abdullahi, & Aniedu, 2015). Though Indigenous knowledge is tacit in nature and complex in handling, library professionals are best suited for the assignment. Library and Information professionals particularly in rural areas could very well practice their knowledge management skills. The approach should not be one size fits all. Sound village library system with properly laid down vision and objectives keeping in view the cultural aspects and needs could prove its vital role in sustainable national development and conservation of heritage of Culture and Indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion:

Man, Nature and Development are not watertight compartments. Policy makers should accept and acknowledge the interdependence of these factors. It is high time for mankind to look back, introspect and take proper measures to rectify the errors. Materialistic and extravagant approach of living should be replaced by holistic and spiritual approach for living standards. Indigenous knowledge system could play significant role and show the way for sustainable development. Invoking this knowledge system which is time tested could be the guide and foundation thought for conserving the natural resources while framing the development plans. By documenting, preserving and managing this knowledge system, Library and Information professionals can serve the Indigenous knowledge bearer communities and nation.

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