

LIBRARIES AS CULTURAL CUSTODIANS: NURTURING AND SAFEGUARDING INDIA'S RICH HERITAGE

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Abstract: Indian libraries are not just repositories of knowledge but also serve as cultural custodians that safeguard and nurture the country's rich heritage. The article highlights the diverse ways in which libraries are contributing to cultural preservation, such as collecting and archiving rare manuscripts, organizing cultural events, promoting indigenous knowledge systems, and fostering reading habits among the masses. Additionally, the article sheds light on the challenges faced by libraries in fulfilling their cultural responsibilities and suggests potential solutions to address them. The paper argues that libraries have a significant role to play in the cultural development of India and that sustained efforts to promote and preserve cultural heritage through libraries can positively impact the country's socio-economic development.

Keywords: libraries, culture, heritage, India, preservation, promotion, manuscripts, socio-economic development

1.0 Introduction

Cultural heritage is the people's way of living (including their outlook, behaviours, acts, ideas and artefacts) which is passed on from one generation to another. Cultural heritage is instrumental in enhancing social inclusion, stimulating intercultural dialogue, shaping the identity, and nourishing social cohesion, as well as sense of self and belonging. India is a land of diverse cultures, traditions, and languages. The country has a rich literary and cultural history that has been shaped by centuries of diverse influences. The country's cultural heritage is a unique amalgamation of various influences and cultures, and encompasses a wide range of art forms, painting, sculpture, literature, and architecture (Chandra, 2018; Kumar & Kumar, 2019). Our cultural heritage may decay, get forgotten and become obsolete with time. Hence it is crucial to take significant measures to safeguard it (Kumar & Kumar, 2019). The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage are critical for the continued growth and development of our country. Being the essential repositories of knowledge and information, libraries can play a significant role in disseminating and preserving our rich and varied cultural heritage. India has a rich tradition of libraries, with some dating back to more than a thousand years. There are evidences that our libraries have significantly preserved and nurtured our rich culture, acting as cultural custodians.

Libraries in India have considerably contributed to collecting and preserving rare manuscripts, organizing cultural events, promoting indigenous knowledge systems, and fostering reading habits. They have been instrumental in promoting and preserving India's rich cultural heritage. In addition to their traditional roles, libraries in India have evolved to cater to the changing needs of the society. Despite facing numerous challenges, libraries continue to contribute significantly to India's cultural development (Singh, 2018). They are now more accessible and have embraced modern technology to reach a wider audience (Nigam and Singh, 2017).

This article explores the role of libraries in promoting and preserving culture in India and highlights their contributions in safeguarding the country's cultural heritage. The article will first discuss the importance of collecting and archiving rare manuscripts, followed by the role of libraries in organizing cultural events. The article will then examine the role of libraries in promoting indigenous knowledge systems and fostering reading habits. Finally, the article will address the challenges faced by libraries in India and suggest possible solutions to address these challenges.

2.0 Collecting And Archiving Rare Manuscripts

One of the primary functions of libraries is to collect and preserve rare manuscripts. India has a rich literary and cultural history, and libraries have played a crucial role in safeguarding and preserving the country's literary heritage. Libraries such as the National Library in Kolkata, the Rampur Raza Library in Uttar Pradesh, and the Saraswathi Mahal Library in Tamil Nadu are home to thousands of rare manuscripts in various languages, including Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu (Sharma, 2018; Kumar (2019). Ancient Indian libraries, such as Nalanda and Takshashila, are renowned for their vast collections of manuscripts, which include works on philosophy, religion, and other subjects (Singh, 2004). The National Library in Kolkata, which is India's largest library, has an extensive collection of rare manuscripts, including the personal collections of renowned scholars and writers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (Dasgupta, 2016; Gupta, 2019). The library has been instrumental in preserving and promoting Indian culture through its vast collection of books, manuscripts, and other cultural artefacts (Swain, 2017). Libraries play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage by collecting and preserving rare manuscripts, books, and other cultural artefacts (Hossain, 2018). Khandelwal (2020), Farooq (2017), and Singh and Kumar (2019) emphasize the significance of libraries in preserving cultural and historical heritage, and provides a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by libraries in collecting and archiving rare manuscripts, and suggests various strategies to overcome these obstacles.

3.0 Organizing Cultural Events

Libraries in India also organize various cultural events such as book fairs, literary festivals, and workshops. These events provide a platform for authors, scholars, and other cultural enthusiasts to come together and exchange ideas. The Jaipur Literature Festival, which is one of the largest literary festivals in the world, is organized by the Jaipur-based Diggi Palace Library (Nigam and Singh, 2017). The festival brings together some of the most renowned writers, poets, and scholars from around the world and has become a platform for promoting Indian culture globally. Many other libraries across the country also organize similar events, providing a platform for cultural exchange and promoting Indian culture (Singh, 2018).

4.0 Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Libraries in India have also been instrumental in promoting indigenous knowledge systems. India has a rich tradition of indigenous knowledge, including traditional medicine, astrology, and yoga (Pandita, 2019; Bhatt, 2017; Garg, 2016; Kumar, 2015). Libraries have played a crucial role in promoting these knowledge systems by collecting and archiving texts related to them (Singh and Tripathi, 2019). The Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN) Library, located in New Delhi, is an example of a library dedicated to promoting indigenous knowledge systems (Khan, 2016). The library has a vast collection of books on yoga, ayurveda, and other traditional systems of medicine (Pandey and Bhardwaj, 2020). It also conducts research on these systems and publishes papers and books to promote them (Singh and Khan, 2019).

5.0 Fostering Reading Habits

Libraries in India have also been successful in fostering reading habits among the masses. India has a large population, and access to books and other reading materials is often limited in many parts of the country. Libraries provide a space for people to access books and other reading materials and help inculcate a reading habit among them (Deshpande, 2017; Gupta, 2014). The Rural Libraries and Development Programme (RLDP) in India is an example of an initiative that has been successful in fostering reading habits in rural areas. The program aims to set up libraries in rural areas and provides books and other reading materials to children and adults (Banerjee, 2015). The initiative has been successful in promoting literacy and inculcating a reading habit among rural communities (Kaur and Kaushik, 2016; Prabhu, 2017). Bairwa and Sharma (2019) provide insights into the importance of reading habits for children's cognitive and emotional development, and identify various factors that influence children's reading habits, while emphasizing the need for various programs and initiatives by libraries to provide a conducive environment for reading.

6.0 Challenges Faced By Libraries

Despite their significant contributions to promoting and preserving culture, libraries in India face numerous challenges. One of the primary challenges is inadequate funding, which limits the capacity of Indian libraries to collect and preserve rare manuscripts and other cultural artefacts (Jhuree, 2019). Many libraries also lack adequate infrastructure and staffing, which hampers their ability to organize cultural events and promote reading habits

(Kadam and Dange, 2019; Naushad, 2018). Pachouri and Kumbhar (2020) highlighted the importance of data privacy and security, and the need for implementation of new technologies and in libraries, while emphasizing the recruitment of trained personnel to manage digital resources. According to Singh (2019), the challenges faced by libraries and librarians in India in the digital era include copyright issues, data management, and the need for digital literacy. Another challenge faced by libraries is the lack of public awareness and interest in their cultural programs (Vijayakumar, 2019). Many people view libraries as mere repositories of books and do not realize the significant role they play in promoting culture. This lack of awareness and interest often leads to a decline in library usage and funding, which further hampers their ability to promote and preserve culture.

7.0 Solutions

To address these challenges, there is a need for sustained efforts to promote and support libraries in India. The government and other stakeholders need to increase funding for libraries and provide them with adequate infrastructure and staffing. Libraries also need to promote their cultural programs more effectively and engage with the public to increase awareness and interest in their activities. Furthermore, to confront the challenges, librarians need to be proactive and make efforts for collaboration and partnerships (Singh, 2019). Libraries can collaborate with other institutions such as museums and universities to organize joint cultural programs and events (Vijayakumar, 2019). This collaboration can help libraries to expand their reach and promote culture more effectively. Researchers also emphasize the importance of technology integration, community involvement, and partnerships with other organizations to provide better access to resources and enhance library services (Kadam and Dange, 2019; Singh, 2019; Pachouri and Kumbhar, 2020). Hossain (2018) points out the importance of digitization of library collections to ensure their accessibility and preservation for future generations. Gupta and Sharma (2019) highlight the need for reimagining libraries for a sustainable future by adopting modern technologies, embracing digital transformation, collaborations, and promoting community involvement.

8.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, libraries in India have played a crucial role in promoting and preserving the country's rich cultural heritage. They have collected and preserved rare manuscripts, organized cultural events, promoted indigenous knowledge systems, and fostered reading habits among the masses. Despite facing numerous challenges, libraries continue to contribute significantly to India's cultural development. With sustained efforts and support, libraries can continue to serve as cultural custodians and safeguard India's rich heritage for generations to come.

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