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Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its Relevance in Higher Education: Implications for Library and Information Science (LIS) Education

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Abstract

*The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic paradigm shift in India's academic landscape by mandating the integration of the **Indian Knowledge System (IKS)** across higher education institutions (HEIs). While much of the existing scholarship focuses on incorporating IKS into STEM or humanities curricula, the operational foundation of this transformation rests heavily on modern information infrastructures.*

*This research paper explores the systemic implications of mainstreaming IKS within **Library and Information Science (LIS) Education**. Traditional Western-centric metadata schemas, classification theories, and digital preservation protocols are*

structurally ill-equipped to handle the non-linear, multi-layered, and oral-to-manuscript nature of classical and indigenous Indian knowledge. This paper identifies key areas of curricular reform—including indigenous ontologies, manuscriptology, traditional knowledge metadata standards, and computational tools for epigraphy—and proposes a strategic pedagogical framework to transform future LIS professionals into vital curators and co-researchers of India's intellectual heritage.

Keywords: IKS, LIS, Higher education, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), vedas, Ayurveda.

1. Introduction

The higher education ecosystem in India is undergoing a profound structural decolonization driven by the directives of NEP 2020. Central to this transformation is the resurrection and mainstreaming of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which spans a vast corpus of ancient, medieval, and indigenous tribal insights across mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, philosophy, ecology, and medicine (Rajput, 2025). The Ministry of Education has institutionalized this through the creation of dedicated IKS cells, credit mandates for undergraduate and postgraduate programs, and major funding pathways for interdisciplinary research.

However, the pedagogical success of IKS in HEIs remains fundamentally dependent on an unexamined variable: **information discoverability and resource management**. For a

university student or researcher to engage with IKS, classical texts, commentaries, manuscripts, and oral folklore must be systematically collected, accurately classified, digitally preserved, and made globally retrievable.

This requirement places **Library and Information Science (LIS)** education at a critical crossroads. For over a century, LIS education in South Asia has been deeply rooted in Eurocentric classification models (such as the Dewey Decimal Classification) and Western archiving conventions. To prevent the integration of IKS from becoming a purely superficial or symbolic academic exercise, LIS education must evolve. It must train a new generation of information professionals capable of bridging ancient epistemologies with cutting-edge digital curation techniques.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of indigenous knowledge management, national educational mandates, and Library and Information Science (LIS) has sparked growing academic discourse. The existing literature can be organized into three distinct thematic domains: the limitations of Eurocentric classification frameworks, the role of libraries in manuscript preservation, and the recent push toward digital repositories and artificial intelligence for IKS data curation.

A. Epistemological Disconnect and Eurocentric Domination in Taxonomy

The systemic structural violence imposed by Western classification frameworks on indigenous knowledge is a well-documented area of critique within critical library studies. Olson (2002) historically established that universally utilized systems such as the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC) are structured on a post-Enlightenment, white, Christian, and male worldview, which inevitably marginalizes non-Western epistemologies.

When applied to the Indian subcontinent, this colonial legacy becomes strikingly evident. Gupta (2023) notes that the structural architecture of classical Indian learning is interdisciplinary and multi-layered, operating within a philosophical paradigm (*Purusharthas*) that prioritizes holistic and purposeful human objectives (*Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha*) over physical and mutually exclusive material disciplines. Mandavkar (2023) asserts that forcing classical systems like Ayurveda or Jyotisha into marginal sub-branches of Western "folklore" or "pseudoscience" within modern DDC schedules strips these comprehensive sciences of their empirical framework.

Consequently, scholars are looking to revitalize the native facet-analysis and analytico-synthetic principles postulated by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan. Recent work by Abhijith and Sudhier (2025) exploring the creation of the *Brain Chamber Ontology* highlights a growing movement to construct native domain ontologies. Their study validates that Ranganathan's dynamic theory of the origin of knowledge provides a far superior, fluid architecture for cataloging complex, interconnected traditional sciences than static Western hierarchical models.

B. NEP 2020 and the Physical Imperative of Manuscript Conservation

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has accelerated academic accountability regarding the physical decay of India's classical materials. According to official estimates from the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), India holds a staggering corpus of over five million manuscripts, the majority of which remain hidden, untranslated, or decaying in private collections, mathas, and temple libraries (Gajbe, 2025).

Rajput (2025) emphasizes that while NEP 2020 advocates for an institutionalized revival of India's intellectual heritage (*Gyaan Parampara*), the policy's execution remains bottle-necked

by a critical lack of skilled archivists capable of handling organic substrates like palm leaves (*Tala-patra*) and birch bark (*Bhurja-patra*).

The literature highlights an evolutionary gap in LIS curriculum design. While traditional LIS training in India focuses primarily on modern electronic resource management and typical paper preservation, it largely ignores the biochemical complexities of organic manuscripts. Historical institutions, such as the Thanjavur Serfoji's Saraswathi Mahal Library or the ancient remains of monastic systems like Nalanda and Valabhi, utilized rigorous indigenous methods of chemical preservation using natural pest repellents (Kori, 2026). Modern LIS research calls for a synthesis of these traditional methods with modern biochemical restoration technologies to train information professionals specifically for South Asian archival challenges.

C. The Digital Frontier: Metadata Standards, Open Access, and AI

In the era of Digital India, the focus of IKS literature has shifted toward digital curation, metadata architecture, and machine discoverability. Chari (2025) observes that simply uploading static PDFs of scanned ancient texts does not guarantee meaningful research access. Traditional texts are inherently non-linear, consisting of a base script (*Sutra*) surrounded by centuries of evolving commentaries (*Bhashyas*) and sub-commentaries (*Vartikas*). Standard metadata frameworks like Dublin Core lack the metadata tags required to track these multi-generational scholastic lineages.

To counter this, recent studies by Lal et al. (2024) and Sudhakara (2025) advocate for building open-access semantic networks using advanced Semantic Web technologies, including Resource Description Framework (RDF) and Web Ontology Language (OWL). This allows digital library repositories to execute complex SPARQL queries, enabling researchers to search across interconnected historical lineages and philosophical schools (*Darshanas*).

Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML) is emerging as a critical frontier in IKS data curation. Recent papers within the *Annals of Library and Information Studies* (Kalpana & Raghuvir, 2025) examine how modern Large Language Models (LLMs) and advanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) systems can be trained on obsolete historical scripts like Brahmi, Sharada, and Grantha. This research positions the future LIS professional not just as a silent custodian of books, but as an active digital humanist who leverages cutting-edge technology to unlock centuries of undocumented knowledge for global academia.

2. Epistemological Foundations of IKS: The Challenge of Knowledge Organization

The foundational issue when handling IKS in a library environment is the systemic incompatibility between Western and Indian structures of knowledge organization.

The Limits of Western Classification Schemas

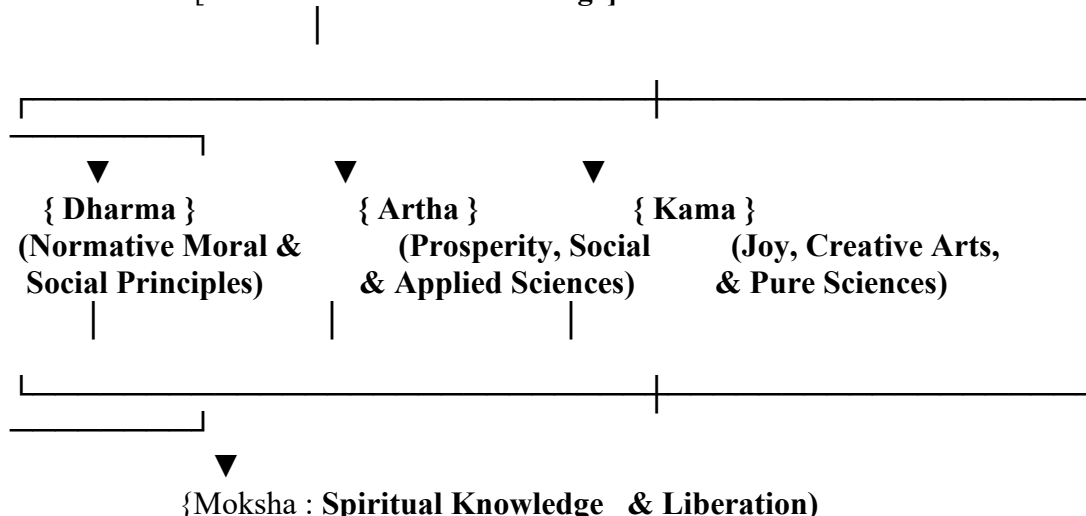
Modern libraries worldwide rely predominantly on the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and the Library of Congress Classification (LCC). These systems are structurally built upon a Eurocentric, post-Enlightenment taxonomy of disciplines. When applied to classical Indian disciplines, these schemas result in acute marginalization and misclassification:

- **Ayurveda** is frequently pushed into subcategories of Western "Alternative Medicine" or "Folklore."
- **Vedic mathematics** or ancient astronomical treatises are stripped of their conceptual contexts and forced into rigid Western branches of arithmetic or geometry.
- Complex concepts like **Dharma** are flattened and erroneously cataloged exclusively under "Religion," misrepresenting its socio-ethical, legal, and philosophical dimensions.

The Vedic Epistemology of Classification

In contrast, early Indian classification systems were explicitly value-based and built around the purposes or goals of human life, known as the *Purushottam* (Gupta, 2023).

[Universe of Vedic Knowledge]



As analyzed by Gupta (2023), this matrix organizes knowledge not by mutually exclusive material disciplines, but by an order of decreasing immediate social utility and increasing potential for long-term inner realization.

While Dr. S.R. Ranganathan sought to capture this fluid, multidimensional universe of knowledge through his **Colon Classification (CC)** system, modern LIS curricula have increasingly phased out analytico-synthetic classification in favor of simpler, Western-dominated digital metadata tags. Mainstreaming IKS requires LIS departments to revitalize Ranganathan's facets while designing new, indigenous ontologies and specialized bilingual thesauri that can accurately chart the hierarchies of classical Indian *Darshanas* (philosophical schools) and scientific treatises.

3. Core Implications and Curricular Reform in LIS Education

To effectively support IKS in higher education, LIS curricula must expand beyond standard library operations into four specialized technical domains:

A. Manuscriptology, Palaeography, and Physical Conservation

India possesses an unparalleled textual wealth, with an estimated 5 million manuscripts composed on organic substrates like palm leaves (*Tala-patra*), birch bark (*Bhurja-patra*), and indigenous handmade papers (Gajbe, 2025). These records are distributed across temple archives, private mathas, and university vaults, written in scripts that are obsolete to the modern eye (such as Brahmi, Grantha, Sharada, Modi, and Nandinagari).

Organic Substrates	Ancient Scripts	LIS Curricular Need
• Palm Leaves • Birch Bark • Handmade Paper	• Brahmi/Sharada • Grantha/Modi • Nandinagari	• Biochemical Preservation • Paleographic Decoding • Restoration Technology

Standard LIS training focuses on industrial bookbinding and modern acid-free paper preservation. Revamped LIS programs must integrate **Manuscriptology** as a core specialization, teaching:

1. The biochemistry of organic material decay and traditional/modern preservation techniques.
2. Basic training in palaeography to allow librarians to accurately verify, identify, and catalog unprinted materials.

B. Traditional Knowledge Metadata Customization

Standard metadata models like Dublin Core or MARC21 lack the descriptive granularity required for complex ancient texts. A classical Indian work rarely exists as a single, isolated book; it is typically surrounded by historical layers of *Bhashyas* (commentaries), *Vartikas* (sub-commentaries), and *Tikis* written across completely different centuries by different scholars.

LIS education must train students to engineer expanded, hyper-granular metadata architectures. These schemas must accurately track variables unique to IKS resources:

Custom Metadata Field	Academic Purpose for IKS
Original Script (iks:script)	Identifies the physical script used (e.g., Grantha), distinct from the language (e.g., Sanskrit).
Commentary Lineage (iks:lineage)	Explicitly links a commentary back to its base text (<i>Sutra</i>), mapping intellectual networks over centuries.
Philosophical School (iks:darshana)	Contextualizes the text within specific frameworks (e.g., Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Buddhist, or Jaina logic).
Oral Custodian (iks:oralCustodian)	Records the specific tribal community or lineage (<i>Parampara</i>) responsible for preserving oral data.

C. Digital Repositories and AI-Driven Text Retrieval

The digitization of IKS materials goes far beyond flatly scanning pages into static PDFs. Ancient texts require interactive, highly discoverable environments (Sudhakara, 2025). LIS professionals must be trained to work at the intersection of information science and computer science to deploy:

- **Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for Ancient Scripts:** Training AI/ML models on historical handwriting variations to extract text from scanned manuscripts.
- **Text Encoding Initiative (TEI):** Teaching LIS students how to use XML-based TEI schemas to embed structural, linguistic, and historical analysis directly into digital text formats.

D. Managing Oral Traditions and Tacit Knowledge

A massive segment of India's indigenous knowledge—particularly regarding ethnobotany, localized ecological management, water conservation, and folk medicine—is completely unwritten, surviving solely through community oral traditions (Jena, 2025).

Applying these concepts specifically to **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** adds a unique layer of complexity. For millennia, IKS—spanning everything from Vedic chanting and *Ayurveda* (traditional medicine) to *Vastu Shastra* (architecture) and traditional agricultural practices—relied entirely on **Shruti** (that which is heard) and **Smriti** (that which is remembered).

The Unique Challenges of Preserving IKS

Managing tacit knowledge within IKS requires recognizing three distinct systemic challenges:

- **Loss of Context (Decontextualization):** Extracting a formula or practice from a traditional text without the lived lineage often renders it ineffective. For instance, an *Ayurvedic* formulation depends heavily on the practitioner's intuitive pulse diagnosis (*Nadi Pariksha*), which is purely tacit.
- **The Fractured Lineage (Guru-Shishya Parampara):** Traditional knowledge was structured around deeply personal, long-term mentorship. With modern educational shifts, these formal structures are breaking down, leaving a gap where masters pass away without a qualified "successor."
- **Codification Loss:** Much of IKS is wrapped in structural frameworks like *Sutras* (highly condensed, mnemonic statements). A *Sutra* is useless without the oral commentary (*Bhashya*) that unlocks it.

3. Analytical Matrix of Structural Bottlenecks in LIS Curricula

A)

System	IKS Framework	How Tacit Knowledge is Embedded	Modern Management Parallel
Vedic / Textual	<i>Veda Pathashalas</i>	Use of physical accents (<i>Svaras</i>), hand movements (<i>Mudras</i>), and mathematical permutations (<i>Ghana/Jata Patha</i>) to prevent data corruption.	High-Fidelity Audio/Visual Archiving paired with acoustic metrics.
Practical Arts	<i>Shilpa Shastra</i> (Sculpture/Architecture)	Proportions are memorized via verses, but material selection (stone texture, grain) is learned purely by touch.	Apprenticeship Labs and physical simulation metrics.
Healing Systems	<i>Ayurveda & Siddha</i>	Local health traditions (<i>Paramparik Vaidyas</i>) rely on forest exploration and visual/olfactory plant identification.	Geographic-Contextual Mapping and collaborative clinical documentation.

B) Frameworks for Modern IKS Knowledge Management

To sustainably manage and revive these systems, modern institutional frameworks must adapt to the nature of the knowledge, rather than forcing the knowledge to fit rigid digital database boxes.

1. Audio-Visual "Thick Description"

Standard text documentation strips away the tacit elements of oral traditions. Preservation initiatives should prioritize capturing the behavioral ecology of the practice.

- **Multi-angle video capture** of arts and rituals to record micro-expressions, hand movements, and tool handling.
- **Acoustic mapping** for linguistic and phonetic preservation, ensuring the precise oral frequencies of specialized chanting are not lost.

2. Institutionalizing the Parampara (Modern Apprenticeships)

Instead of forcing traditional experts into standard university lecturing styles, institutions need to fund experiential residencies.

- **Living Heritage Fellowships:** Providing financial security to traditional masters (*Gurus, Vaidyas, Sthapatis*) exclusively to train a core group of full-time apprentices under traditional immersive models.
- **Integrating IKS into Applied Labs:** Allowing traditional masters to work alongside modern scientists (e.g., ethnobotanists working with traditional healers) to map intuitive findings directly to experiential learning metrics.

C). Community-Owned Knowledge Registers

Traditional agricultural and ecological knowledge (*People's Biodiversity Registers*) must be managed carefully to avoid exploitation while preventing extinction.

- **Decentralized Repositories:** Digitizing oral narratives within local communities so the knowledge remains accessible to the youth of that specific culture, fostering continuity where the language or dialect may be fading.

Following international frameworks established by IFLA for indigenous knowledge preservation, LIS curricula must prepare students to step out of physical library walls. Librarians must be trained in field ethnography, digital multimedia recording, ethical interviewing, and community-led archiving. This active approach effectively converts fragile, tacit community wisdom into open-access, protected digital repositories.

The integration of **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** into **Library and Information Science (LIS)** curricula represents a critical paradigm shift mandated by frameworks like India's National Education Policy (NEP). Historically, LIS education has been built upon Anglo-American, print-centric, and post-Enlightenment classification and preservation theories.

When these modern LIS structures encounter IKS—which heavily features non-textual, organic, oral, and fluid structures—severe systemic friction occurs.

The analytical matrix below breaks down these structural bottlenecks across five critical dimensions of LIS curricula: **Epistemology, Metadata & Organization, Technology & Preservation, Pedagogy, and Institutional Policy.**

Analytical Matrix of Structural Bottlenecks

Curricular Dimension	Traditional Western LIS Bias	IKS Structural Reality	Resulting Bottleneck	Strategic Curricular Intervention
1. Epistemology & Theory	Positivist; secular; hyper-compartmentalized categories (e.g., separating Science from Philosophy).	Holistic; interconnected; unified frameworks (<i>Caturdaśa Vidyāsthānam</i> — 14 branches of knowledge).	Epistemic Incongruity: Curricula fail to theorize or validate traditional, spiritually interconnected ways of knowing.	Introduce <i>IKS Epistemology</i> modules mapping ancient classification models alongside modern theory.
2. Knowledge Organization & Metadata	Linear, hierarchical, text-based (e.g., DDC, standard MARC21, Dublin Core).	Non-linear, relational (<i>Sutras</i>), oral mnemonic permutations (<i>Ghana/Jata Patha</i>), contextual meaning.	Ontological Flattening: Metadata schemas cannot capture performance elements, lineage (<i>Parampara</i>), or oral variants.	Develop specialized ontological frameworks and semantic web/SKOS standards tailored to indigenous knowledge.
3. Preservation & Materiality	Acid-free paper, digital bits, microfilms, climate-controlled static rooms.	Organic materials (Palm-leaf <i>Tala-patra</i> , birch bark <i>Bhurja-patra</i>); dynamic oral transmission.	The "Archive" Fixation: Curricula train for physical/digital objects, ignoring how to preserve the <i>living context</i> of oral practitioners.	Integrate manuscriptology, traditional conservation (<i>Ayurvedic</i> preservation methods), and audio/visual ethno-archiving.
4. Pedagogy & Skillsets	Institutionalized classroom teaching; standardized literacy metrics.	Experiential, relational, linguistic-dependent learning (<i>Guru-Shishya</i> model)	Linguistic & Skill Gap: LIS graduates lack the linguistic competence (e.g., Sanskrit,	Mandatory cross-departmental electives in classical languages, paleography

Curricular Dimension	Traditional Western LIS Bias	IKS Structural Reality	Resulting Bottleneck	Strategic Curricular Intervention
		requiring Sanskrit/regional linguistic fluency).	Pali) to catalog or authenticate historical texts.	(scripts like Brahmi, Sharada), and internships at traditional repositories.
5. Policy, Ethics & Economics	Individual intellectual property (IPR); open-access/freely monetized public data.	Community-owned, sacred, or restricted knowledge; lineage-protected practices.	Ethical-Legal Friction: Standard curriculum fails to teach the complexities of protecting traditional knowledge against bio-piracy or cultural exploitation.	Introduce specialized courses on <i>Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)</i> legalities, indigenous IPR, and ethical curation protocols.

Root-Cause Diagnostics of the Bottlenecks:

[Western LIS Framework] —> Structured for Static, Print-Centric, Explicit Data

▼ (Friction/Bottleneck)

[IKS Structural Nature] —> Relies on Fluid, Multi-Modal, Oral, Tacit Lineages

The "Metadata" Crisis

Modern systems like the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) inherently marginalize eastern philosophies and sciences into tiny sub-sections (e.g., grouping vast Indian philosophical schools under a generic "Eastern Philosophy" tag). When LIS students are trained purely on these tools, they lack the structural tools to catalog complex multi-layered commentaries (*Bhashyas*).

The Linguistic Chasm

The vast majority of LIS instruction and advanced software suites operate in English. However, the core source material of IKS exists in classical languages or regional oral dialects. This mismatch produces information professionals who understand database management but cannot evaluate the authenticity or provenance of the actual manuscripts or oral tapes they are archiving.

The Decontextualization Trap

Standard digitization training focuses heavily on turning physical items into PDFs or metadata entries. In IKS, separating a practice (like an *Ayurvedic* healing chant) from its performer, time, and environment strips it of its structural validity. Curricula rarely teach how to document the "behavioral ecology" surrounding information.

Strategic Roadmap for a Hybrid LIS-IKS Curriculum

To remove these structural bottlenecks, LIS departments must evolve from a model of "**Assimilation**" (forcing IKS to fit Western boxes) to "**Pluralistic Integration**".

1. **Dual-Track Classification:** Teach Ranganathan's *Colon Classification* not merely as historical trivia, but as a dynamic, faceted gateway to understanding non-linear, multidimensional knowledge structures native to Indian thought.
2. **Living Archives Integration:** Expand field training beyond university or corporate libraries. Send students to *Veda Pathashalas*, traditional craft guilds, and tribal communities to design collaborative registers that respect community constraints.
3. **Techno-Heritage Alignment:** Pivot technology modules to focus on how Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing (NLP) can be used for decoding ancient scripts, OCR for fragile manuscripts, and semantic search interfaces for oral traditions.

D). Analytical Matrix of Structural Bottlenecks in LIS Curricula

Transitioning LIS education to support IKS requires resolving several operational and systemic friction points:

Challenge Domain	Current Institutional Bottleneck	Strategic Curricular Response
Linguistic Competence	The vast majority of IKS primary literature is in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Persian, or old regional dialects, while LIS training operates entirely in English.	Introduction of specialized elective modules focusing on Computational Linguistics , machine translation validation, and multilingual indexing tools.
Intellectual Property & Piracy	Traditional Knowledge (TK) is highly vulnerable to biopiracy and exploitation without community consent.	Mandatory coursework detailing the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) framework, geographic indications (GI), and defensive patenting protocols.
Technological Deficits	Most institutional library systems use rigid, turnkey open-source software (e.g., standard Koha configurations) that cannot process non-linear semantic networks.	Integrating Graph Databases (e.g., Neo4j) and Semantic Web technologies (RDF/OWL) directly into LIS database management modules to chart interconnected philosophical concepts.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The integration of the Indian Knowledge System into higher education cannot succeed if the underlying information management strategies remain trapped in colonial-era taxonomies. For NEP 2020 to achieve its visionary objectives, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and LIS departments across Indian universities should coordinate on the following urgent measures:

1. **Mandatory Curricular Redesign:** Overhaul the model UGC curriculum for Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLISc) and Master of Library and Information Science (MLISc) programs to embed IKS data curation, manuscriptology, and indigenous ontologies as core competencies.
2. **Interdisciplinary Clusters:** Establish collaborative research clusters linking LIS schools directly with Departments of Sanskrit, Computer Science, and Indigenous Studies to build unified open-source tools for manuscript transcription and digital resource discovery.
3. **Institutional Repositories:** Task university libraries with serving as active hubs for capturing regional, tribal, and folk knowledge systems, ensuring they are documented and legally protected against biopiracy (Jena, 2025).

By equipping future information professionals with the specialized tools needed to preserve, systematically classify, and digitally amplify India's classical and indigenous heritage, LIS education can transform librarians from traditional book curators into active, indispensable research partners on the global academic stage.

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