

Documenting Indigenous Traditional Knowledge in Odisha

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Introduction

The people in Odisha were more traditional in nature believing the faith and practices of the local communities. They happened to manage their livelihood through agriculture and maintained an indigenous life with their own knowledge system. They used to maintain the long-standing traditions from their ancestors and spread the knowledge in different spheres of livelihood. Such socially generated knowledge is popularly called as local knowledge. The on-going practice of using such knowledge for indigenous communities established the belief that such knowledge used in traditional manner was fruitful for the people. In course of time such personalized knowledge took the shape of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) which was confined to a particular community and locality and specific knowledge seekers find the effective use of such traditional knowledge for indigenous people and are interested to preserve the knowledge for the communities. It is an established fact that India has long and strong racial, cultural and ethnic groups that generate a traditional knowledge system for its people. The ethnic minorities, rural and tribal populations, women and other disadvantaged communities in India who are deprived of economic, political and social benefits are more dependable upon such knowledge

system for their livelihood. With the modernization of the present society, the needs of those disadvantaged populations were brought to the limelight and their knowledge system was given the importance. Similar phenomenon is gaining ground in other countries in the world where the local knowledge of the communities are treated as the real knowledge for survival. The concept of indigenous knowledge gained its world wide recognition through the United Nations Conference on Environment and Education in 1992, World Conservation Strategy of International Union and Conservations of Natural Resources in 1980, Brundtland Commission, and World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. These events recognized the existence of indigenous knowledge in every country, society, culture. Since India has a long history and much enriched culture there is abundant reservoir of indigenous knowledge in every part of the country. Similarly Odisha is a historical land having enriched cultural heritage which has varied communities and immense resources. Its flora and fauna are vast and varied in nature. The State has a large number of tribal communities who appear to live on their own knowledge system. The paper is intended to unfurl the essence of indigenous knowledge in Odisha and discuss the need for documentation of indigenous knowledge system for the State.

Concept and Definitions of Indigenous Knowledge

The term indigenous knowledge has different connotations such as, traditional knowledge, local knowledge, community knowledge, rural peoples' knowledge, farmers' knowledge. Although the concept has different forms the meaning appears to be synonymous. According to Grenier (1998) indigenous knowledge is the traditional knowledge of the local community existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographical area. Basu (2009) do not find the restrictions of the concept and expanded its scope in that the term indigenous knowledge is not confined to tribal groups or the original inhabitants of an area. It is not confined to the rural people rather any community possessing indigenous knowledge- rural or urban, settled or nomadic, original inhabitants and migrants. Indigenous knowledge is referred to not only to the knowledge of indigenous people but also the intellectual property of other communities. There are many facets involved in the indigenous knowledge such as, *information* of the communities, *beliefs* on religious faiths, *tools* of using in agriculture, *materials* in house construction work, *experimentation* in farming and healthcare, *natural resources* in flora and fauna, *human resources* and *expertise* in skilled artisans, *education and learning* and *communication* of information. Indigenous knowledge is found in peoples' memories and activities and is expressed in the form of stories, songs, folklores, proverbs, dance myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipments, materials, plant species, and animal breeds (Basu, 2009).

Significance of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is primarily inherited from the ancestors through generations of the community. Such knowledge stands as the main source of utilization and management of resources. It is not only a self centered knowledge but a collecting knowledge, the collection of phenomena and experiences which the older people also. Such knowledge is confined to few people who shared influenced others in a restricted manner. In a particular tribal society Jani is the master of all religious ideas and practices. Other people are imparted to know the religious ideas and practices by Jani which is ultimately used for individual welfare of the common people. The knowledge with personal perseverance of Jani is self centred. On the other hand that common knowledge is about the general livelihood pattern of that community which is more or less to all in the society. Those are very practical knowledge which is primarily earned his livelihood. The making of household artifacts, knowledge about cultivation, health care etc. are major arena of the indigenous knowledge development.

Indigenous Knowledge is primarily referred to the long standing traditions, belief and practices of certain regional, local and indigenous communities. The people in older times were more spiritual, religious, God- fearing and believing in virtuous livelihood. They believed that their living will be happy and prosperous if they work in a systematic manner with certain beliefs and practices. Such beliefs of a locality bear fruits for their existence. Indigenous Traditional Knowledge is developed and adopted continuously to a changing environment and passed on from generation to generation. The livelihood of rural population mainly depends on certain experience-based knowledge which is essential for their survival. Such knowledge system has embraced

many areas of the people's activities such as health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, religion, culture and tradition of a local community.

The people in those days used to practice such knowledge for sustainable development. The knowledge is basically used to cure diseases of human as well as animal and to develop nutrition, to bring out better agricultural systems in farming, to improve the arts and craft, and to maintain the religious practices and astrological beliefs. Indigenous knowledge is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals. It provides the basis for problem solving strategies for the communities.

Sources of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge

The sources of the traditional knowledge mainly derived from the human experiences, beliefs and practices which are collected from several sources. There are also semi-recorded information such as manuscripts, photographs, and folk literature and grey literature. Ancient people had developed the Vedas, Puranas, religious books, grey literature, ethno-botanical texts and archaeological deposits which were the sources of knowledge for those people. Those sources give detail account of the life of the ancient people and the method of living in a prosperous way. Again those sources also give information about biotechniques, medicinal knowledge, breeding techniques, agricultural farming systems, healthcare techniques, religious and astrological guidelines and cultural artifacts. Some of the indigenous traditional knowledge are available in written form in primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information. But most of the indigenous traditional knowledge are undocumented and are available orally or in memory of the group of the community of a region or area.

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge in Odisha is widely scattered and fragile and there is a need to integrate those distributed sources of information in concrete form. Although religious books which give a lot of information about indigenous traditional knowledge are least used in present time. There is greater need to accumulate and acquire to collect information and make documentation of such knowledge. While tribal communities frequently use such knowledge which is essential to trace the sources of information of indigenous traditional knowledge among tribal communities.

Documenting the Indigenous Knowledge

The origin of indigenous knowledge can be traced back to the ancient period. People used such knowledge from generation to generation for their livelihood in an unaccounted manner. There are no such written documents for recording and dissemination of such knowledge. Brokensha (1990) found that such knowledge system is essential for development. It must be gathered and documented for a particular community.

Warren *et al* (1993) commented that the collection and storage of indigenous knowledge should be supplemented with adequate dissemination and exchange among interested parties using newsletter, journals and other media. In order to develop an indigenous traditional knowledge system in Odisha, it is essential to prepare a documentation and archival repository. A division under the state archive may be opened which primary role is to trace the documents available and collect those sources of information. Although collection of indigenous traditional knowledge is difficult, adequate attention is necessary to convince the indigenous traditional knowledge owners to share their knowledge by protecting their intellectual property. After collecting those knowledge it is essential to record

the list of such indigenous traditional knowledge facets available to different parts of the state. The most important responsibilities is to develop documentation of indigenous traditional knowledge in particular library and information centre. The next step is to develop a database or repository of indigenous traditional knowledge in Odisha. It is required for making a selection and scrutinization of data to be stored in a database. The storage and retrieval of indigenous traditional knowledge is a difficult process which requires classification, indexing and assigning metadata for making the database accessible to the users. While considering the storage, steps may take to consider classification of textual data, graphical, pictorial, audio-visual picture of indigenous traditional knowledge in database. By developing the database is not the end of the process, the library has to prepare the strategy of information services to disseminate information. It is essential to propagate the use of indigenous traditional knowledge for human causes through certain activities such as seminars, workshops, debates, lectures, and exhibitions in which such stories of indigenous traditional knowledge use need to be reflected. Adequate publicity majors need to be taken-up so that people are aware about the use of indigenous traditional knowledge in their daily livelihood.

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Digital Library

Library plays a very significant role in acquisition, organization and dissemination of knowledge in any subject. Libraries available in rural areas are the sources of such indigenous traditional knowledge and can act as a key agency in local community for collection, organization and preservation of local culture. It is essential to identify such rural libraries existing in the state and the sources of information available in those

libraries. After identifying and collecting such information, the appropriate technology can be used for capturing that knowledge in variety of media such as, audio, video, digitized, electronic database. All such knowledge available in libraries may be digitized in systematic classification, cataloguing and indexing so that effective retrieval can be made. Whenever required retro-conversion of those documents can be done for developing the digitized format. The traditional knowledge digital library developed with the objective to protect the ancient and traditional knowledge of the country from exploitation such as bio-piracy and un-ethical patents. Such system of digital library may be indigenous traditional knowledge system is strengthened which will be ultimately used for sustainable development of people.

Conclusion

Odisha is the land of enriched cultural heritage and traditions. It has a vast reservoir of indigenous knowledge existing in rural society. Indigenous traditional knowledge is the real knowledge exists in people's mind, local society, which is more informal in nature. This sort of knowledge represents the human mind with insight on how a large number of communities manage their livelihoods through an informal knowledge system. In spite of the present modern world the people and knowledge seekers are searching for traditional knowledge to unfurl the mystery of such knowledge system and revive the indigenous traditional knowledge scenario. It is acknowledged fact that the indigenous traditional knowledge system is essential for development for which it is required to prepare documenting such knowledge sources existing and useful for the people at large and develop a documentation centre in a State like Odisha. The responsibility of documentation centre is to identify the

knowledge sources, information sources and acquire the details of each knowledge entity, classify them, prepare metadata, develop databases to preserve those information for further use. The preparation of electronic database of indigenous traditional knowledge is the need of the hour. The collection and storage of indigenous knowledge should be given priority with right dissemination among interesting organizations and individuals. Promotional activities and publicity majors are required to be taken up to promote the use of libraries that appears to be very significant in acquisition, organization, and dissemination of indigenous traditional knowledge related information to the users and the public.

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