Different facets of Indigenous Knowledge are discussed and experience of the Centre for IK/Folklore Studies (CFS), Thrissur, in collecting, documenting and promoting local knowledge, is narrated.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, Nattarivu, Local knowledge, Folklore, CFS Thrissur, Kerala.

NATTARIVU (Indigenous Knowledge, IK) is the total achievements traditionally attained in every field by the local people in each place. Collectively each tribal group expresses itself and the signs of culture through it. Mainly its art and orality are the mediums to communicate from one generation to another. “Ethnic music, performances, mythology, games, handicrafts, arts and rituals represent the whole cultural scenario of the society” — was the declaration to the world countries by UNESCO in 1989. When William Thoms wrote a letter in ATHENEUM (982nd issue, August 22, 1846) he used the word folklore which later was accepted universally. He wrote about the necessity to collect the information on the rapidly vanishing knowledge of the rituals, songs, legends and other oral traditions of England.

Bio-independence and IK
In the modern approach folklore/anthropology has now gone beyond the study of the local significance of collecting the ballads, the details of performing arts and the social psychology. The present day studies have an advanced perspective in this matter in order to have a sustainable development and progress. IK is the accumulated information, vision and philosophy of life acquired by the local people in each place and country observing the practical effect of everything when they lived in tune with nature. Ethiopia when faced severe drought could escape from it through the indigenous knowledge and the world now has recognised that. For the survival of each and every living being we need the sustained practice of the concept of bio-independence.

IK is marginalised truth and till now ignored, and its history is its struggle against the aggressive attitude by the written history, upper class culture and institutionalised research organisations. The enquiry into the terrain of IK started
on realising the ‘nature exploiting’ attitude of developmental processes of the modern research. IK can play as strong alternative, which should be brought under Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) as suggested by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

**Ethnobotany**

Though Harsh Berger used the term ethnobotany in 1895 this was the practising knowledge of the tribals and aborigines from time immemorial. Traditionally transmitted knowledge about plants, their medicinal and other uses and also their cultural significance are the three levels of ethnobotany. Now this branch has grown to the level of collecting and codifying the knowledge traditionally transmitted through centuries by the tribals. Ethnobotany tries to study the relation between humans and nature. Ethnic people are knowledgeable and their worldview about the sustainable life is now studied in modern context.

The exploitation of the IK in different countries by the pharmaceuticals and different multinationals has become a reality today and ethnopharmacology has become a potential target. Countries like USA have now realised that germplasm has brighter future than atom bomb and more than 43% of the ethnobotany research work is carried out in that country. The granaries of the knowledge in the memories of the indigenous people, in folk forms, should have the patent rights for which the people all over the world have to fight.

**Indigenous eco-knowledge**

Modern biology is partial and technological which is totally dependent on the laboratory based experiments and innovations. Modern science views the knowledge about nature only in a technological way in the process of which major part of the essence is lost. Ethnic people have acquired knowledge about their surroundings through hundreds of centuries and this makes the modern biology only a secondary source.

Perhaps the first beings that recognised the medicinal value of plants may be birds and animals. Monkeys, rabbits, tigers, cats and other animals prefer some plants during some particular bodily conditions.

**Local vision**

Instead of studying the details of development from the apex of power downwards, an integral study of the indigenous knowledge is now recommended. The methodology cannot be defined as a universal formula for everything and everywhere, but it sprouts from the logic of the local people and specific landscape. The subtle categorisation of things connected with agriculture and ethnozoology, etc., at micro levels by acquiring knowledge from indigenous people is done by sustainable harvesting of biological sources. Projects/agencies such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, ‘Our Common Future’ 1987, World Conservation Strategy 1980, WWF, UNESCO, etc. have already accepted Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) for the scientific and innovative
resource management. It is a community based research and participatory in action. The methodology of it is the Sharing of the Local Knowledge (SLK).

The difference between Indigenous Knowledge and the modern Scientific Knowledge can be broadly seen as given in Table 1.

**Experience and worldviews of traditional people**

The methodology of acquiring knowledge, used by traditional people, is through 'seeing, hearing and doing' and is connected with the diachronic nature of myths, proverbs, ancient sayings, etc. in which the oral tradition hands over information from generation to generation. Those who work in the traditional local knowledge systems accept the informants as belonging to the traditional scientific community of researchers or as community researchers or as indigenous researchers. The informants are to be given prime importance. The knowledge should be patented in the name of the community and the professional researchers have very little part in it, and anybody from any strata of the society can gather information and be a researcher.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems have views different from the conventional modern research practices. Its strategies are totally eco-centric and objective as well as intuitive and they are derived from practical and innovative life of the generations. For example, Shri Kochukuttan from Poyya, Trichur district, classifies local fish in the river into three categories such as lower level fish, middle level fish and upper level fish. He explains: Different fish produce different noises, *Mola*'s humming, *Mullan*'s rough noise, *Korukka*'s and *Vatta*'s noise with ‘Kurukuru’ tone are his observations. Shrimps are described as creatures who stab even when dead, and they produce ‘Kilukila’ noise before death. A crab species that lives long when crawl deep under water produce bubbles. Crabs and shrimps exuviate as snakes do. Shrimps have ‘fever’ from Ashtami day and become normal after Ekadasi. The flesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Knowledge</th>
<th>Modern Scientific Knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Oral tradition</td>
<td>1) Written documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Born from nature</td>
<td>2) Taught and disciplined</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Eco-centric</td>
<td>3) Anthropocentric</td>
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<td>4) Embracing the whole nature</td>
<td>4) Pertaining only to physical world</td>
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<td>5) Integral/holistic</td>
<td>5) Segmental</td>
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<td>6) Eco-contextual and shared knowledge</td>
<td>6) Power centred and monopoly of scientific knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) Accumulation of knowledge through ages</td>
<td>7) Partial knowledge collected during a short span</td>
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<td>8) Qualitative</td>
<td>8) Quantitative</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) Intuitive and emotional</td>
<td>9) Analytical and depersonalised</td>
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<tr>
<td>10) Decentralised knowledge of the people</td>
<td>10) Centralised knowledge of the experts</td>
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<tr>
<td>11) Proved that it is temporal and liable to change according to context, locality and individual</td>
<td>11) Universal generalised rules</td>
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of shrimps is hard during the month of Vrischikam and Dhanu (Dec-Jan) and is soft during Meenam – Medom (April-May). During the month of Kanni even crows won’t eat Kanambu as they don’t have fat during that season. Thus goes the indigenous knowledge of Shri Kochukuttan Poyya collected by Shri Madhu Poyya.

Shri Karuvannur Chirayath Antony categorises the local cows as follows: 1) Pure white; 2) Good Karimbu cow (black); (3) Mayil Pasu (peacock cow); (4) Deep Red; (5) Pulirbu red.

**Traditional knowledge in memory**

Indigenous knowledge is needed in these alienated circumstances to regain the independence of the villages. As the informants from older generations are very few now, it is essential to have a strategy to collect the information as early as possible and document it. This history of knowledge / village can give information about diverse agricultural practices, details of the terrain, eco-history, village rituals and practices, the composition of ballads narrating the episodes of the life of communities, etc. The oral tradition of the villagers and indigenous people can contribute a lot to this.

Some rare medicinal remedies could be known when ethnobotany practised by indigenous people was explored. The dropsy could be treated in the modern medicine when the indigenous knowledge about its treatment was discovered. Home medicine practised by many grandfathers and grandmothers could be a potential source of knowledge. They have their secret compositions of indigenous plants and other substances.

As the indigenous knowledge is rapidly fading out of the memory, a number of schemes to preserve it have been worked out by organisations such as WWF and UNESCO. People and Plants, Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor, Compas Newsletter, etc. are some of the publications promoting this concept.

Ethno medicine, ethno ecology, ethno agriculture, ethno botany, traditional eco zones, etc., are some of the sociologically relevant themes found in forest lores. Places like Kerala where there were numerous sacred groves and related culture, are ecologically disturbed now due to the so called developments chartered out by those who did not have any knowledge or concern about nature/ecology. Modernists could not understand the natural significance of the numerous rituals and myths. The tribals had their own thoughts and philosophy about ecological niche, and from their memory the concept of native ecology can be revived. Had the world listened to the talk in Washington by the Red Indian Chief, Siatil in 1854 this tragedy would not have happened. Each inch of the land, to them, was divine. The totemism of the tribals is the symbol of the co-existence of the tribes of humans, plants, animals and other natural materials. For the Red Indians whale and crow are their brethren. The biodiversity was preserved in tribes in the form of totemism.

Through globalisation local cultures are rapidly vanishing. There should be an upsurge against the theft of
indigenous knowledge through the laws of patents. The biodiversity and the indigenous knowledge of the people about numerous varieties of seeds are the wealth of the folks.

Local and Indigenous knowledge about the soil, plants, ecology, water management, ethno zoology, ethno philosophy, ethno education, village games, local archaeology, markets, festivals, local fisheries, toxicology, agriculture, grandma medicine, rain lore, paddy lore, honey lore, sea lore, forest lore, groves, local technologies, food, fruits, ethno music, ethno astronomy, river lore, arts and crafts, etc. are now studied. This knowledge is totally different from the recorded written matter, as it lies in the oral tradition. By understanding the ethnicity of every aspect cultural continuity can be found out, as the local knowledge is not a “taught” one but a “learned and assimilated” one. As this is a multidisciplinary area, present century will have to do a lot in preserving and documenting it.

Methodology of collecting IK
—Experience of Centre for IK/Folklore Studies

A new methodology is to be adopted for the collection and the study of IK. That follows:

1) Forming the IK centre: This can collectively be done by the help of elderly people, women, children and those who are outside the conventional educational stream. One such centre is Nattukala Nattarivu Samithi, Viyyur, Thrissur. Similar NGOs can be constituted in schools, colleges, libraries, farmer’s gatherings, women’s associations, offices, factories, etc.

2) Formulation of the methodology of collection of IK.

3) Training people to collect information. This is not the conventional survey system. Instead of teaching the old people of the folks our knowledge, we should go to them and collect information from them. This is the ‘Mapping of the Memory’ method. If the informants are taken into confidence they will be opening up their memory. Similarly field workers have to adopt methods to activate the memory of the old by suitably making them prepare to narrate, etc.

4) Preparation of micro level questionnaire. This questionnaire will have a key word and should be flexible. Along with this preliminary survey, an interview can be undertaken and accordingly changes can be done. Collecting the information of previous surveys is to be done, and questionnaire can be changed according to the information collected from them. Questionnaire may differ from place to place; the same questionnaire cannot be used for getting IK of Kol agriculture and paddy cultivation of Kuttanad. New questions will sprout according to the ability of the field workers.

5) Materials for survey: Writing materials, Audio / Video cassettes and still camera may be used.

6) Field survey: Making rapport with the person, telling him/her the aim of the work, and collecting the IK should be informal. The information they give is their worldview and philosophy. A local
fisherman may know much more than a marine biologist in a particular field. For example, field workers collected some 30 methods of fishing from the fishermen from Poyya near Mala, Thrissur district.

When they are contacted mainly three things are to be noted. (a) Request them to compare their traditional IK with the imported one; (b) Request them to suggest some remedies to get over the present crisis; (c) Request them whether they are ready to help in propagating the IK.

7) After collecting the information categorisation of IK and registration are to be done.

8) By using the collected materials folklore museums, IK bank, IK library, audio/video library are to be set up. There are a number of manuscripts of folksongs and medicines; these are to be preserved. Taped materials are to be made into written form the same day itself.

9) Handicrafts of the people can be exhibited in folk museums. Primitive and rare tribal and folk performing art forms can be demonstrated. Daweli – a folk scroll painting and reading performances, Nokkuvidhya – a puppetry in kinetics, Mudiyattom – women dance performances, Pathirakkalam – a floral folk painting, Malavazhiyattom – a ritualistic folk drama of Paraya community, etc. have now become popular again because of this kind of work. Pathila – a seasonal food of ten leaves in the rainy season, Marunnukanji – a medicinal food, Panikkashayangal – local medicine for fever, and sacred groves are becoming popular today. Mankai and the flute called Therali of Erula tribe, masks as old as 200 years, decorated Polavi, the ethnobotany of the seashore vegetation are the IK items regained. Folklore items should not be collected for fancy. It should be under the proper custodianship after proper documentation. It can be also entrusted to the tribals and folk themselves informing them their importance. And it is to be well documented that the particular item is there in the particular house.

10) Sharing of Local Knowledge (SLK): This can be arranged anywhere, even in the courtyard or wherever convenient. This is a ‘counter’ assembly–traditional village gathering, to question the ‘power assembly’. IK experts are to be brought from the village in the most natural way. Their knowledge can be shared by asking about the doubts and questions, politely and paying due regards to them. There should be provision to document it in different media. This informal assembly is a venue to share the knowledge and to discuss it. The IK experts from the audience also can contribute a lot and that information also is to be incorporated.

11) Special training should be given to write down the matter. It should be taken down in the same accent. Later it should be written in proper contemporary communicative language for documenting it. Old people will be talking in proverbial language. Those who talk to them, if possible, should be from the same locality. The local plant names from seashore thus collected are recorded as Chulli, Kalli, Nochi, Kozhikkalu, Adambumvalli, etc.

12) By collectively visiting the local workshops of the IK experts they can be
made aware of the importance of their crafts. By creating a rapport with them they can be given new chances to do their work so that they become financially better off. Sanskriti in Kannur, Kumbham in Nilambur, Uravu in Wayanad, Mulappanikkoottam in Mala, are some examples of such activities.

13) Young generation from the local population /tribe should be trained in the folk crafts.

14) Preparation of a local calendar of the festivals, rituals and agricultural works is needed. A directory of IK people may also be prepared.

15) Matter related to Intellectual Property Rights and Patents should be taken care of. The information should be registered, legally and officially, and should be published according to the international norms.

Similar endeavours have been made by Centre for IK/Folklore Studies (CFS), Thrissur, in collaboration with different Panchayats, Research Organisations and Cultural Centres. The first attempt by CFS was Swaraj done in Varandara pilly, Thrissur Dt on 1st November 1997. After that, Thrissur Dt Panchayat, and panchayats of Ollur, Mala, Avinissery, Porkkalam, Vellangallur, Padiyoor, Cherpu, Perinjanam, Elavally, Karalam, Vaniyamkulam Chovannur, Wadakkanchery, Vadakara, and Kodungallur also did the same. Krishampattukkoottangal of Idukki, Gandhi Sankara Samiti of S.L. Puram, Alappuzha, Karshikavayanasa Sala of Ponnuttassery also did similar works. With associative endeavour with Kerala Forest Research Institute, Kerala Forest Department, and FRLHT (Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions), similar works were done in Peechi, Peerumedu, and Kotharmanakkadu, and many ethno medical workshops were conducted. Libraries, Adivasi-Dalit Groups, River Protection Organisation, Karshakasree Agricultural Conferences, Literacy Mission, Kudumbasree Units, Teachers Training Centres, College Teachers Training Camps, NSS Units in many colleges, Sastra Sahitya Parishat, Project Bharathapuzha, Swadesi Sastra Congress, International centre for Kerala studies, Kerala University, etc. were some other venues where this methodology was introduced.

**Repertory of Knowledge**

Many unknown and marginalized grandfathers and grandmothers from different branches of IK came forward to share their knowledge in all these attempts. K. P. Neelakanta Kartha (Toxicologist), Kochu Pennu (Gynaecologist), Elichetathi (Grandma Medicine), Malayari Kunjan (Tribal Medicine Man), Kochukuttan (Person who knows IK about fish), Karthiayani Amma (Expert in Folk songs), Raman Panikkar (Kol farming), Ouseph Chakkamban (Ethno veterinary expert), Patha (Ethno botanist), Vasu (Sea Iorist), Subhadra V. Nair (Expert in indigenous food items), Narayani Amma (who talks about the details of floods), Velayudhan (Black smith), and Mariamma Chetathi (Expert of ballads – Edanadan songs) — are some of them. All these are documented in the Centre for Folklore Studies, Kanimangalam, Thrissur. Those who wrote down all these matters were house wives, children and youngsters.
The tri-monthly publication 'NATTARIVU' by CFS has encompassed tribal lore, child lore, sea and culture, women and folklore, Mappila folklore, seed lore, ballads of Kerala, folk architecture, folk painting, village theatre, IK on food, IK on crafts, etc. as titles which became an encyclopaedia in IK having more than 1200 pages. About 80 research workers, from May 1995 to May 2002, collected this information from people having IK. Krishigeetha (songs on agriculture)—an 18th century text on agriculture practices, Gothrakalavativukal—a book on ethno-aesthetics, and IK on River, are some other significant publications by CFS. This centre has an ethno-music performing group called, 'Karithalakkoottam'. Apart from these activities this organisation has done a lot of work on ethno-medicine, ethno-orthopaedics, ethno-music, women’s status, rain water harvesting, river lore, biodiversity project report for Govt. of India, local history, TV serials on local knowledge, audio albums of folksongs, etc. Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor, a journal from Netherlands has published the details of IK seminar on agriculture held at Alappattu village near Thrissur. British Columbia Folklore Journal has published the essay on the music of the ethnic/aborigine group of Kerala.

Translated by Vijayakumar Menon

Related Readings
2. Bertus Harverkort (Ed), Food for thought, ancient visions and new experiments of rural people, (Compas, Netherlands), 1999.