

## Significance of ICT tools in managing traditional knowledge through Public Libraries: an overview from Thrissur District.

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the sources of traditional knowledge available in the society with particular reference to Thrissur District, Kerala and the techniques in which they can be preserved for the benefit of future generations. The study reveals that identifying suitable resource persons and recording of information using the most appropriate ICT tool are the challenges faced by public librarians.

**Key words:** *Traditional Knowledge, ICT Tools, Public Libraries*

### 1. Introduction

Traditional Knowledge generally pertains to the age-old practices and teachings embedded to a community or geographical area, normally meant for its successful survival. This is equivalent to the entire ethical possession of the society. Traditional knowledge is derived from the accumulated empirical observations mostly through interaction with the nature. The manner in which traditional knowledge is followed, usually differentiate one community from another. It incorporates social legacy as customary stories, melodies, services that reflect beliefs identified with the most profound sense of being, family, land and social equity. Also called, indigenous know-how, conventional wisdom, local knowledge or tribal knowledge, it generally gives critical thinking methodologies for the members of local communities and directives for the development processes. A report of the International Council for Science and Traditional Knowledge (ICSU, 2002), portrays local knowledge as a collection of knowledge, continued to use by people with abundant experience about their immediate surroundings. These experiences and skills are directly proportionate to their language, resources, rituals, spirituality and worldview.

Public libraries are supposed to be the literal agents in charge of sustainable development and manifestation of local knowledge in a democratic environment. They propose livelihood to people in order to take part dynamically in the development of society, with the help of knowledge. The strengthening of libraries in developing countries with vibrant ideas, make it the most efficient weapon to fight against the digital divide. Libraries can also provide access to global knowledge by the way of modern communication technology tools. Hence it is appropriate to say that the public libraries are the apt social platforms to exchange traditional knowledge with better

self-esteem, to forthcoming generations.

This paper briefly examines the general attitude of public library managers towards the traditional knowledge and the possibilities of employing suitable information and communication technology methods to preserve them in public libraries, being a multi faceted platform for information interchange. The study is part of a detailed project exploring the avenues of knowledge management using ICT skills in public libraries of the area.

## **2. Meaning**

Practice of Traditional Knowledge is as old as mankind, created from past incidences, achieved over hundreds of years and adjusted to the local culture and environment. It is an emerging topic of study that spotlights on the methods for experiencing and imaging. According to Charyulu (2008) traditional knowledge refers to the distinctive, local knowledge prevailing in a specific area. It is often compatible with home culture and is easily comprehensible by all. Traditional custom is the basic criterion for the activities in local cultivation, health care, cooking, etc. Camble and Aliyu (2008) further asserts that, prior to the emergence of western education to African continent, local knowledge played an essential role in natural and human wellbeing, resource management, economic as well as social actions, etc. Further, Article 8(j) of the Convention of Biological Diversity, 1992 describes Traditional Knowledge as the styles followed by local people relating to the preservation and efficient usage of natural diversity.

## **3. Review of Literature**

UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) puts public library as the immediate access point of knowledge to ordinary people as well as voluntary organisations. One of the important purposes of a public library is to make quality addition to life and to the sum total of man's contentment and responsiveness of himself. Information gathered by way of traditional knowledge must be repackaged in the appropriate forms that will facilitate people in the society to make sufficient and efficient use of it. The transfer of tacit knowledge is far more ambitious and requires controlled interactions. There are detailed studies on the various ICT methods being used in the preservation of different knowledge streams in the society.

According to Sarkiunait and Kriksciunien (2005), human interaction between the employees can be improvised with the help of information technologies by manipulating implicit knowledge. Dyson (2004) asserts that, ICT is omnipotent to consolidate the styles of indigenous people who are already fighting with the Western ideologies to safeguard their unique culture. As per Anamuah-Mensah's (2009) observation, data maintenance becomes very simple by using ICT. This, on the other hand, will improve productivity and ultimately reducing the cost. Hook (2004) views that use of ICT have changed the process of forwarding the learning outcomes to the needy people. Also with the data preservation through ICT, Keakope (2003) finds that the organisational decision

making and administration are streamlined. This is also applicable to the society in general. It may be noted that, a World Bank (2004) report has also raised the issue of the challenges faced by the traditional knowledge. Unless these facts are appropriately recorded and dispensed, it is observed that within a certain span of time the information could be lost for good.

#### **4. Objectives of the study**

One of the characteristics of the traditional knowledge is that it is associated to a source community or to an individual in a community and it represents the cultural identity of that community. It is also the fundamental element of daily life of a group of people in a community or millions of people in several developing countries, in its macro sense. Hence, it is imminent that this cultural identity (diversity?) must be preserved and managed in good condition. Recording and safeguarding traditional knowledge for good is a major problem because of its oral nature.

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To identify traditional knowledge resource persons in the vicinity of public libraries
2. To record traditional knowledge insinuations from their experiences, teachings skills, artistic talents and ideas.
3. Arriving at some suitable methods of preservation and dissemination of the same.

#### **5. Methodology**

In order to evaluate the significance of the ICT tools in managing the traditional knowledge in public libraries, survey method has been adopted. A questionnaire is prepared with the objectives of study in focus to collect data. This is distributed randomly to twenty-five (25) librarians of different public libraries in Thrissur District. Out of this, eighteen (18) questionnaires come back from librarians, duly answered (response rate 72%). This further narrates that, 10 libraries are in the Panchayat area and the remaining eight lying within the Corporation limits.

#### **6. Results of the Study**

##### **6.1 Age wise distribution of librarians**

It is observed from the Table 1, that majority of the librarians (44.43%), upon whom the responsibility of knowledge management falls in, coming under the age group of 41 to 50. Age groups, 31 to 40 and 21 to 30 are coming close behind with 27.78% and 16.67%, respectively.

Table 1: Age of respondents

Sl No	Age group	Number	%
1	10 to 20	1	5.56
2	21 to 30	3	16.67
3	31 to 40	5	27.78
4	41 to 50	8	44.43
5	51 to 60	1	5.56
6	61 above	0	0
		18	

## 6.2 Academic qualifications of librarians

Table 2: Academic qualifications of librarians responded

Table 2	Academic Qualifications		
Sl No	Qualifications	Number	%
1	NIL	1	5.56
2	SSLC	3	16.67
3	HSSC	4	22.22
4	DEGREE	7	38.88
5	PG	3	16.67
		18	

Seven out of 18 respondents (38.88%) are graduates as shown in the Table 2 above, and 3 persons are holding Post graduate degrees. This reveals that most of the middle aged librarians responded are well educated, responsible and accountable.

## 6.3 Areas of Traditional Knowledge

The below table shows that librarians are taking interest in the following areas of study to document the traditional knowledge, in which the natural resources attracts about 38.88% of respondents. It could be that, respondents are dutiful in exploring implicit ideas about natural resources because of the emerging threat against the eco system and alarming increase in the global warning pointers. It is followed by agriculture which is the food resource with 22.22%.

Table 3: Areas in which Traditional Knowledge documentation is possible

SI No	Subjects	Number	%
1	Health	3	16.67
2	Agriculture	4	22.22
3	education	3	16.67
4	Food processing	1	5.56
5	Natural Resources	7	38.88
		18	

#### 6.4 Methods to identify resource persons

Table 4: Methods of identifying the resource persons

SI No	Methods	Number	%
1	Local Investigation	4	22.22
2	Interview	3	16.67
3	Workshops	6	33.33
4	Others	5	27.78
		18	

The Table 4 above shows the various methods to identify the potential resource persons in the surrounding area in order to share their respective local knowledge. Though all of them are more or less feasible, a face to face group discourse (33.33%) like that of a workshop, might be more effective.

#### 6.5 Methods of documentation

Table 5: Methods of documentation

SI No	Ways	Number	%
1	CD	8	44.44
2	Text	4	22.22
3	Website	3	16.67
4	Blog	3	16.67
		18	

The Table 5 shows that, saving traditional knowledge in Compact Discs is the most favoured (44.44%) method by the respondents.

### 6.6 Stages of documentation performed

Table 6: Stages of traditional knowledge preservation

Sl No	Steps	Number	%
1	Identification	8	44.44
2	Consultation	6	33.33
3	Documentation	3	16.67
4	Ready for dissemination	1	5.56
		18	

As per the above table, identification process is in full swing (44.44%) and consultation with the resource persons (33.33%) are going on. Only one library is ready with the dissemination ready knowledge at its disposal.

### 6.7 Barriers of documentation

Table 7: Obstacles in the process of documentation

Sl No	Reasons	Number	%
1	Lack of Fund	1	5.56
2	Manpower	2	11.11
3	ICT Resources	5	27.77
4	Lack of Planning	1	5.56
5	Lack of RP	9	50
		18	

The Table 7 lists out the various difficulties which may arise on the process of traditional knowledge documentation. Obviously, identifying proper resource persons is the superior problem in this area, though there are enough manpower and infrastructure to preserve the knowledge.

### 7. Findings

1. Youngsters under the age of 30yrs are reluctant to take up the duties of librarians.
2. It is appreciable that most of the librarians are aware of the vanishing local knowledge and dutiful to find out and record the available data in the area about the natural resources and agriculture.
3. Public Librarians are aware of disappearing local knowledge regarding the ecological and food resources
4. Methods (CD, Blog or website) by which the process is documented have to be updated with the advent of new ICT gadgets or tools.
5. Language used to communicate with the resource persons is very critical in a study like this; otherwise the result may end up in a state of confusion.

6. Knowledge, especially tacit type, is intangible and does not have any proper format. This abstract nature helps the greedy corporate to plunder to modify and raise profit out of it, which is highly deplorable.

7. Once the documentation is over, the form and format of the knowledge repackaging is also important, for the selective dissemination of information.

### 8. Limitations of the study

1. Traditional knowledge resource persons are of the opinion that they should be benefited from any earnings resulting from the profitable use of their knowledge. This fact has not been examined in the study.

2. The statement that, initiative to record traditional knowledge is contemplative of having a plan for knowledge colonisation has not been examined here.

3. The theory of loss of social position and livelihood with the rendering of local knowledge by the resource person is not examined here.

4. The study is limited to a certain geographical section.

### 9. Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge remains connected to every aspect of mankind, whether or not, adopted which is intentionally in the daily life. It is also true that, these local guidelines have enriched human race from time immemorial and continues to do so. This study establishes the fact that traditional knowledge is in the neighbourhood and it is the social responsibility to find out and preserve it for the more civilised future generations. The only body which can successfully organise and coordinate this great task conclusively is public libraries, because of its position in the society and its access to citizens.

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