

CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Dr Manisha Sharma

Principal

Rajasthan Shikshak prashikshan Vidyapeeth

Globalization and global expansion is the latest trend to have affected the world landscape of today. Not surprisingly, the one thing that makes this globalization possible is cross-border communication and correspondence. Along with language, a country's culture, norms, and values play a significant role in making this communication possible.

A country's culture is more than just the way its people practice their traditions .it's a complete way of life, communication, norms, and values that shape how society is formed.

Every culture has a history revealing its past and civilization, its roots and ancestry. The inception of the culture and identity of a society traverses a path that follows multitudes of practices that nurture and shape the very existence and identity of a civilization paving ways through the wrath of nature and transaction with other societies.

The process of civilization is imbued with practices that it has followed and practiced through trial and error methods many a time and eventually has become second nature to the community. Such practices have changed hands and percolated down across generations and have been practiced without scientific tests but with known and proven results to the satisfaction of the community. Such tacit knowledge is followed by word of mouth over time. This knowledge is traditional knowledge that has been followed traditionally by a community as prescriptions for meeting various problems including ailments, problems of nature, problems of survival, etc. Such knowledge is specific in practice to a specific community or geography.

Traditional knowledge is thus indigenous knowledge of a region. World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) defines Traditional Knowledge as " knowledge, know - how, skills, and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity ".

Indian civilisation is one of the oldest in the world. Diversity of all types is pervasive in India including linguistic, religious, ethnic, geographic, etc. Each ethnic group has huge traditional knowledge having practising as a specific identity to the group. Such practices are rampant in traditional medicinal systems, mathematics, astronomy, art and music, justice, polity, architecture, town planning, etc.

Vedic mathematics has provided easy solutions to complex mathematical problems and owes its origin to the Atharva Veda. Likewise, Ayurveda is an established system of curing ailments of both body and mind. Besides, Indian yoga has also found a place in the West as a panacea for emotional well - being. The Harappan civilisation bears testimony to advanced patterns of urbanisation in its drainage system, the grid pattern of roads, and granary. Besides, advanced alchemy contributed to metallurgical improvisations (Banerjee, 2022). Indian traditional knowledge has travelled as a parampara as it changed hands across generations. This knowledge over time has been institutionalised as vidyas and kalas as forms of knowledge in diverse fields and forms of art and skill respectively. Most of the traditional knowledge lacks documentation and word of mouth is the instrument of flow and practice.

Indian knowledge system incorporates 18 vidyas which are traced from the four Vedas, four auxiliary Vedas, Puranas, etc. Additionally, 64 forms of arts are referred to in ancient India as vocational disciplines. These disciplines are taught in guru - shishya format mostly through practice. These kalas were more than a vocation and means of livelihood (Chandran, n.d.). It was synonymous with worship as the art forms exalted the highest levels of perfection. Despite having roots, in a religious context, the knowledge so practiced has been proven to have a scientific basis as established in today's context. Traditional knowledge systems can be a guiding tool in reducing the impacts of natural disasters such as earthquakes as established by age - old constructions withstanding earthquakes in prone seismic zones.

NEP 2020 emphasises knowledge of India to be an integral part of the academic curriculum wherein students shall be exposed to Indian knowledge systems including literature, philosophy, yoga, agriculture, astronomy, governance, etc. As per a general guideline, every student in the UG and PG Programme is to take up courses equivalent to 5 % of the total mandated credits. UGC has launched courses on Indian Knowledge systems through MOOCs using the SWAYAM portal. The course shall enable exposure to Indian

traditional knowledge systems across the country on a uniform pedagogy for various types of learners. The Indian Knowledge System envisages tribal knowledge along in with traditional learning methods (Mandavkar, n.d.).

The traditional knowledge system of India has been robust in knowledge as it encompassed all spheres of life and livelihoods. Such knowledge is documented in scattered pockets by institutions and percolated to the masses for deriving the benefits of the same. Largely, however, such knowledge remains tacit and confined to cultures and geographies. Considering the strength in adding worth to life and lifestyle, traditional knowledge has been disseminated amongst the masses in general and the upcoming generations in particular. This shall invite further research into establishing a scientific basis of traditional knowledge and pave the way for further studies to incorporate the same in mainstream education.

Challenges Ahead

It is hence imperative that traditional knowledge does not lose its identity over time and in the hands of modern knowledge systems. It is equally essential to preserve the practices as they bear testimony to the rich cultural heritage of the country. Given the benefits of such knowledge and the benefits such knowledge has provided to society, traditional knowledge needs to be adequately studied, preserved, and handed over to successive generations. It can be the basis for further research and can be indicative of an improvised lifestyle and a better society. However, the process of dissemination of traditional knowledge is not easy. The process is imbued with challenges of varied types.

Communication Issues

Most of the traditional knowledge is tacit and in native languages. In certain cases, as in art forms, such knowledge is limited to and associated with very limited masters who are old enough to adequately percolate down the generations. Further to this, access to knowledge by researcher sometimes entail a linguistic barrier and, in many cases, cultural and / or religious barrier in accessibility.

Herbal medicines specific to certain communities entail the use of herbs limited to certain geographies. Appropriate understanding of the knowledge requires researchers who are familiar with the cultural values of the region. Ethnographic research studies can be

instrumental in this regard. However, given the difficulties of cultural and religious barriers in ethnographic studies, access to such knowledge continues to remain difficult.

Percolation of Traditional Knowledge

To attain the benefits of traditional knowledge in society it is necessary that the same is accessible in the form of course curriculum in different academic areas right from secondary schools to higher education levels. A gradual transition in weightage and depth can be assured if and only if such curricula are imparted in a graduated manner across academic levels of education. This can facilitate incorporation with mainstream education and hence ensure assimilation of lifestyle with the values acquired from such education and its utility in all spheres of life as in town planning and architecture, mathematics, governance, etc. Access to traditional knowledge is still in its infancy to develop a structured and graduated curriculum. This poses a challenge to the proliferation of such knowledge systems in the society.

The Dearth of Resource Persons

Along with the dearth of a structured curriculum, there is also a dearth of qualified resource persons. The unavailability of teachers with wide exposure to traditional knowledge is a hindrance in imparting traditional knowledge in institutions. There is a necessity to train the trainers so that there is a seamless transmission of traditional knowledge in the curriculum. Researchers in traditional knowledge may be suitable for training educators and providing necessary exposure to traditional knowledge.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in collaboration with the IKS (Indian Knowledge System) division of the Ministry of Education has planned to train teachers of HEI so that Foundational Courses on IKS could be taught to students. The process has been initiated during 2023 through the initiation of Six Day short term face to face training programmes presently for 1000 teachers at six HRDCs spread over the country.

The Dearth of Documented Knowledge

Traditional knowledge is largely tacit and limited to a handful of masters in each field. It is difficult to decipher and document owing to linguistic and cultural barriers. In many cases, the process of documentation is difficult to achieve given the complexity of the subject such as in the case of arts and unfamiliarity with the depth and exposure of the subject. Such

knowledge needs to be gathered in situ to reduce errors and be made available to the communities through IT based applications so that the community is honored as part of the documentation process. The process of documentation itself is tricky, and even if documented such knowledge needs to be structured appropriately for the understanding of the masses and in line with the appropriateness of the learners. This process requires adequate design of curriculum and is a time - consuming process.

The Mental Block

The modern knowledge system is proven as scientific and established as instrumental in leading to changes in society. However, the same is not true for traditional knowledge. The very appropriateness of traditional knowledge as scientific and its worth to society is to be established first. Till then, the acceptability of traditional knowledge in modern lives and the present society is far from being accepted. There is a reluctance to associate traditional knowledge as parallel to modern knowledge systems. Appropriate awareness among the masses can aid in acceptability. However, providing awareness is a daunting task. Documentaries, films, advertisements, etc. highlighting the positive effects of traditional knowledge can eliminate the notion of traditional knowledge as being unscientific and unempirical for acceptance amongst the masses.

Association with Religion

There is a perception that traditional knowledge is associated with religious practices. Although some are, including food habits ; yet not all are rooted in religion. Scientifically, many practices have been established to have far - reaching positive consequences as intermittent fasting is proven to fight cancer cells in the body. The present - day research findings do substantiate the scientific basis inherent in the traditional practices. Arthashastra explains management, diplomacy and war tactics, law, and governance (Chandran, n.d.).

Vedic Mathematics has a strong root well established through present - day mathematical research. The beneficial effects of basil leaves and turmeric are beyond religious context. The change in perception can aid in the larger acceptance of traditional knowledge amongst the masses. This calls for popular science and general literature to be disseminated through mass media and incorporated into the school curriculum for change in the notion.

Lack of Repository

As traditional knowledge is tacit and wherever researched and documented it is imperative to be made available across the globe. A repository for such knowledge can help in ease of access to knowledge as well as further research. Such a repository shall do away with studied traditional knowledge being available in specific regions, and research institutions and be made available to all. This can invite further research on the subjects and shall aid in bringing Indian traditional knowledge accessible across research institutions. A repository shall aid in conserving the traditional knowledge and the indigenous communities associated. Such repositories can be both confidential and synchronous with Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Conclusion

In the context of the discussion, the process of dissemination of traditional knowledge calls for a rigorous exercise in documentation and training of manpower for the availability of knowledge and sensitizing the society. It can be a solution to protecting and preserving the rich culture and heritage of India. Addressing the challenges can be a solution to the is dissemination of traditional knowledge and bringing it to the global platform.

