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Traditional Knowledge System for Nature Conservation

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Introduction

The visionaries in India from the ancient time have advocated integral development of the man as an individual, the community and the Nature. There has to be healthy and sustainable relationship between them. No one can develop at the cost of others. Man is a part of Nature and has rights to share the nature only as much as other living things on mother earth. Misconceptions of happiness as material consumption and comfort has created ecological imbalance in most parts of the world. As Gandhiji said “There is enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed”. As need and greed increases man tends to take more from nature. The Utilization of nature then turns into Exploitation of Nature. These activities has disturbed the cycle of nature. The breaking of rhythm of nature has created imbalances which is harmful for all living beings. The modern world has realised the crisis and has started to think over the answers to save the earth from further degradation. Ancient Indian knowledge system advocates the sustainable patterns and flow of nature in the lifestyle. This knowledge of living harmoniously with nature is passed from one generation to other either orally and gradually in written form. Traditional knowledge system in India through its beliefs, rituals, practices and folklore has guided the holistic living approach to people of country.

Traditional knowledge system

A body of knowledge which is very ancient, deep rooted and have origins in the remote past is termed as Traditional knowledge. Grenier Defines Indigenous knowledge as.... “The unique, traditional and local knowledge existing within and developed around specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area.” Traditional knowledge system is mostly practiced in rural and tribal area as compared to urban area. Almost all the communities in India have developed such body of knowledge for that particular geographical area. The transmission and percolation of such knowledge is mostly oral and informal. This body or system of knowledge contains the wisdom filtered by experiments and experiences of centuries. Traditional knowledge system was coined by anthropologists as a scientific system which has its own validity in contradiction to modern science. Traditional knowledge systems are not recognised properly in blind quest of economic and political development. Development has been viewed as marginalizing the traditional and putting on modern or western. Traditional cultural knowledge is seen as underdeveloped and lower. Lack of proper documentation and back up of scientific experiments is also one of the reason, that traditional knowledge system was losing faith in developed areas. But in process the world is now realizing that the so called modern development is not sustainable. Traditional knowledge systems are very crucial in conserving natural resources, biodiversity and sustainable society. The time has come to recognize, conserve and document traditional knowledge and make it applicable by policymakers.

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Traditional Knowledge system and Nature Conservation

The complexity of environment sustainability in global, social, economic and individual perception has put on great challenges for policy makers, academicians, Ngo and researchers around the world. Traditional knowledge system accommodates diverse range of topics like Agriculture, architecture, health and nutrition, medicines, irrigation, forest management, weather forecasting etc., which are embedded in the culture, customs, rituals, practices and way of living of particular indigenous community. Traditional knowledge system is capable and sound enough to offer an answer to the challenges of conserving the natural resources.

Advantages of Traditional Knowledge System

Traditional knowledge has two powerful advantages over outside knowledge- it has little or no cost and is readily available. Development efforts that ignore local circumstances, local technologies, and local systems of knowledge have wasted enormous amounts of time and resources. Compared with many modern technologies, traditional techniques have been tried and tested; are effective, inexpensive, locally available, and culturally appropriate; and in many cases are based on preserving and building on the patterns and processes of nature. (Grenier) IK systems and technologies are found to be socially desirable, economically affordable, and sustainable and involve minimum risk to rural farmers and producers, and above all, they are widely believed to conserve resources.

Conservation of Nature and social ethos

Social ethos is defined by Webster's Dictionary as 'the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution'. Social ethos are traditional guiding principles and ideals of any community and it can play major role in conserving nature. Bisnois of Rajsthan Protecting deer and black bucks for about 500 years is well-known example of living social ethos. A notable example of two social ethos 'Matanu van' and 'Halma' are practiced by tribal community in Zhabua District Madhya Pradesh. 'Matanu van' is a practice of maintaining a nursery at home and village for afforestation. 'Halma' is a concept where thousands of men, women and children from distant village come together on their own expenditure and inspiration to work selflessly for a call given by an individual or an Institute to come out of any crisis. In one such Halma inspired and revived by NGO Shivganga, people created trenches on barren deforested Hathipava hill for water harvesting and next year they called Halma for plantation on that hill. Hathipava hill is now declared a sightseeing place by Madhya Pradesh Tourism. It is a traditional social practice of thinking and working selflessly for community. To inculcate the culture of conservation of natural resources could become effective through social ethos and thus invoking the old systems and beliefs for conservation.

Sacred groves

Number of local communities in India worships nature. One such tradition of nature worship provides protection to forest area which is dedicated to local deities are called as Sacred Groves. These Groves are stretch of virgin forests, the mark of an ancient practice in

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which people protected forest patches to avoid the perceived anger of their deity. The usual saying is that the sacred groves were preserved on behalf of the god and that particular forest patch is kept as it is with all its biodiversity. People restrain themselves from denuding these virgin forest patches. (Rajendraprasad M. and Pushpangadan) In India more than 13000 sacred groves have been documented and experts estimate no. could be higher in range of 100000 to 150000. These Groves are called 'Devvan' in Himachal Pradesh, 'Sarna' or 'Dev' in Madhya Pradesh, 'Orans' in Rajsthan, 'Lai Umang' in Manipur, 'Devaraban' in Karnataka 'Kavu' in Kerla. (Bharatkumar) Indigenous and local community all around the world have conserved and nourished such sacred groves for centuries. In Ancient Indian literature the concept of sacred grove is mentioned as 'Panchavati'.

Agriculture practices

Traditional farming methods used to be very simple and sustainable. Organic farming, mixed cropping, seed diversity, natural cultivation and storage systems were supported by lots of observation and communications. Indigenous guides and indicators helps determine the favourable time for varied agricultural processes. Millets or paddy as main crop intercropped with pulses, vegetables and oilseeds is one of the example of traditional mixed cropping system. Local seed storage and preparation, pest management and plant protection systems do not harm the cycle of nature. Plenty of local seed variety used to be an alternate to medicines. There were variety of natural foods which provided stamina, organic and local fruits and vegetables nourished body, mind and soul. Traditional food dishes were also healthy that produce efficient generation. Attitude of respect towards earth as mother is widespread among traditional Indian society. A shift to the modern methods of agriculture has experienced a huge loss of community knowledge and culture.

Traditional Water Harvesting

Traditional water harvesting structures like small ponds, local check dams, well and step well, kunds in any small village are the age old traditions of rain water harvesting. These places in small villages also habitat variety of birds, vegetation and big sacred trees around it which are conserved. Every region in India has its own water harvesting expertise as per the geographical and cultural demands. Water Tanks in houses of Khambhat and Old Ahmedabad city are some of the best examples of harvesting drinking water.

Traditional Medicine

It is estimated that more than 70% of the India's population depend upon the traditional medicine for healthcare. Most of these herbs are found in natural, nonindustrial, remote, rural places. As they are collected from natural sources and the process is also natural they do not harm environment and also human body. Indigenous people have the knowledge of varied species of plants and their medicinal value in their area. This knowledge system is getting extinct very fast. TKDL (traditional Knowledge Digital Library) is an Indian initiative towards documenting the traditional knowledge of medicines digitally and safeguarding the rights of traditional practitioners. It has access to 2.50 lakh medicinal formulations which are available to patent office. (tkdl)

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Conclusion

It is noticeable that various traditions and customs practiced by any local community are given either religious or social cover so that they are followed through generations. These holistic practices and traditional knowledge systems are thus protected and act like controlled guidelines for conserving and nourishing natural resources. Traditional knowledge, practices, ethos, values and beliefs reflect the love and respect for nature and has capacity to protect the nature with all its biodiversity. These knowledgeable traditions are getting extinct very fast. It is the time to document it and put it in a form more appealing to modern generation. These knowledge systems reflect knowledge and norms for living compatible with nature...A way that modern world call conservation, utilization and regeneration. If decoded scientifically eco-friendly traditional knowledge systems could continue playing their significant role in safeguarding the healthy ecosystem.

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