

Traditional Knowledge and Practices of the Phom Nagas of Nagaland
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Introduction

Traditional Knowledge (TK) touches the aspects of traditional based cultural expressions in areas such as traditional folk lore, healing properties, songs, dances, artwork, crafts, weaving, painting and in many more continuous expressions of tribal ideas. It is the knowledge handed down from one generation to another in the form of oral/written tradition which speaks volumes of a sense of common or communal ownership. It is the organized body of knowledge learnt by the tribal people through the ancient experiences which may be of informal experiment and close understanding of local environments and gives a productive context for activities made to help the local communities. TK is the sum total product of decades of trails and errors. Through natural selection and keen observation knowledge can be formed based on which researchers and extension workers can work out their research ideas and inventive procedures (Somsasundaram 2005).

TK has received swift attention on the international discourse for many reasons, including that of indigenous rights and issues, recognition of TK importance in the lives of the world's population, sustenance of biological diversity. Because of apprehension about the unsanctioned use of TK with little or no sharing of benefits, there is growing interest in saddling the potential of TK for local growth. With such intense recognition of the momentousness of TK comes the call to establish the system that can address the possible problems that are challenging stakeholders in the TK sphere (Bubela & Gold, 2012).

TK and discourses related to it now are featured in almost all the international platforms and talks on human rights, health, energy, trade, agriculture, and most pertinent one, the environment. Considering the number of debates at the national and at the sub-national, there is perhaps a strong mark of the fluid and prevalent nature of (TK), both in terms of its concepts in practical application as well as in wide range of an area which is apparent. The discourse has become even more teeming at converging with the bio diversity of commerce, modern science, technology and the present legalities and generally the concepts which are all intertwined with contemporary knowledge system. Because of its relevance and importance it has garnered the large circle in the domain of scholastic research and thereby, gathered extensive amount of literature (Nnadozie, 2012).

Access and benefit-sharing systems are elementally about managing the process of specification, creating, protecting, applying and using knowledge, as well as sharing of any benefits. It is therefore, pertinent to have a full concept of TK regarding transforming the economy or community at large and also on how it can be governed. Though TK is a difficult concept to express, as it portrays an assemblage of dichotomies, it can be both explicit or implicit, it can be local or global and it can be individual or collective. (Bubela & Gold, p.64.)

All knowledge thrives in relation to particular times and places. TK gives voice to questions about location, politics, identity, and culture in addition to speaking of the history of people and their lands. TK cannot be overlooked as just localized concept. Such knowledge cuts across cultures, histories and geographical spaces. This body of knowledge is manifold and compound given the histories, cultures and the lived realities of people. In other forms, why we need traditional knowledge, it is important to restate some basic facts. TK is becoming more visible in the present days due to the growing awareness that the world's subordinated people and their importance have been marginalized *that their past and the present experiences have been flooded* out by the rise in influence of western industrial capital. The objective is to reveal the present association between 'valid' knowledge and 'not valid' knowledge and to introduce 'traditional knowledge' as legitimate ways of learning that both are dynamic and continual. It is not about treating the traditional knowledge as static, nor to romanticize the history of the indigenous people. However, the intention is to interrogate these forms of knowledge (Die G., Budd, Hall, et.al., 2000).

Many attempts have been made in academia to analyze the idea of knowledge into tractable/yielding and distinguishable components. Various types of knowledge can be obligingly differentiated by their degree of categorization and the degree of diffusion (whether held by individuals or by collective. There are at least six kinds of knowledge- know-why, know-what, know-how, know-who, know-where and know- when (Bubela p.65).

Table 1: Classification of types of knowledge

| | <i>Degree of codification</i> | <i>Produced by</i> | <i>Extent of dispersion</i> |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Know-why</i> | <i>Completely codified</i> | <i>Universities and public labs</i> | <i>Fully dispersed or published in scientific journals</i> |
| <i>Know-what</i> | <i>Completely codified</i> | <i>Universities, public labs</i> | <i>Privately held but fully disclosed by patents</i> |
| <i>Know-how</i> | <i>Tacit, not codified</i> | <i>Hands-on in labs or teams</i> | <i>Limited dispersion; often due to trade secrets</i> |
| <i>Know-where</i> | <i>Traditionally tacit; could be codified on maps</i> | <i>Exists within traditional communities</i> | <i>Traditionally limited to communities but now being codified on maps</i> |
| <i>Know-when</i> | <i>Traditionally tacit; can be codified</i> | <i>Exists within traditional communities</i> | <i>Traditionally limited to communities but can be codified</i> |

Sources: Adapted by authors from E. Malecki, Technology and Economic Development: the dynamic of local, regional and national competitiveness (Toronto: Longman, 1997) at 58; OECD, The Knowledge Based Economy, OCDE/GD(96)102 (Paris: OECD, 1996), available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/8/1913021.pdf>

Each variety has special characteristics. *Know-why* refers to scientific knowledge of the principles and laws of nature, which is normally is subject to global public-funded universities and not for profit research institutes and therefore, is codified and published in academic and professional journals. *Know-what* refers to knowledge about facts and techniques which is subject to codifying and transferring through the commercial market place. *Know-how* refers to the mixture of intellectual, educational and physical agility, skills and analytical capacity to blueprint a hypothesis-driven agreement with a set of expected outcomes, which includes the ability of scientist to effectively add the know-why and know what to launch. This role is often learnt through education and technical training and chiseled by doing. *Know-why*, which involves information about ‘who knows what and who knows how to do what’, is becoming very important. And as the volume of knowledge requires expansion it has become necessary to collaborate. In the present scenario know-who needs the knowledge to access private sector generators who may withhold the important enabling information, skills and knowledge. In addition to the four contemporary, one can add know-where and know-when, which constitute the basic foundation of the TK as endorsed by the indigenous groups.

Though TK is still a contested term it often necessitates the blend of the non-codified types of knowledge, comprising both of know-who or know-how that refers to normally occurring phenomena captured in the know-where and know when categories. In quintessence, TK, is not actually codified but traditionally it exists only within limited communities (Lawson, Charlles, 2012).

The Longleng Area of Nagaland

Longleng district is a hilly district located in the northern part of the Indian state of the North East of Nagaland. It is home to the Phom Nagas. District headquarter is the Longleng town. The boundary of the district is divided by natural rivers such as the Dikhu river which divides Mokokchung district. It is surrounded by Mon district in the east; Assam in the north; Tuensang district in the south; and Mokokchung district in the west. Mount Yingnyiüshang is the highest peak in the south-eastern part of the district with an approximate height of 2500 meters above sea level. The Yingnyiü mount is known for its biodiversity hotspot and for its species-rich tropical rain forest and diverse flora and fauna. It has the distinction of being one of the few places in Nagaland where virgin forests are still found. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longleng_district)

Longleng district is known for its great variety of wildlife and can be considered as the mega diverse district of the country, rich in biodiversity and connected with TK. There are various kinds of categories which practice TK, the individuals, groups or groups of communities who

may all be the guardians of the TK. The nature of TK is also varied and covers rich artistic works, song, dance, indigenous health treatments and farming methods and practices. Literary works also cover a small segment of TK here.

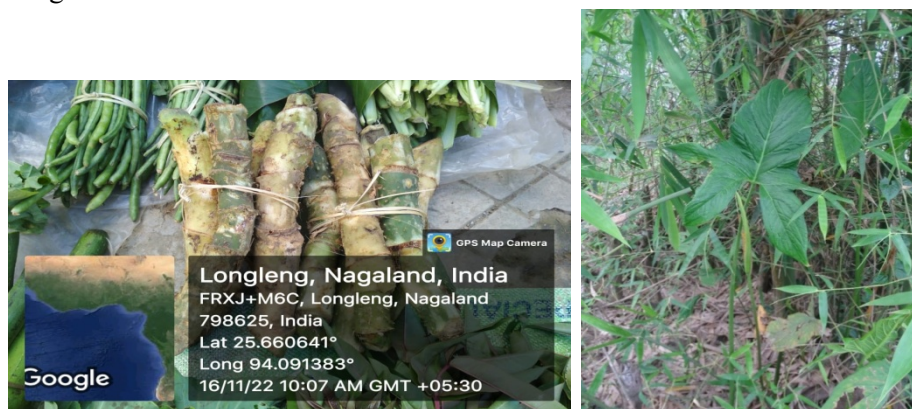
Three villages, namely, Yaongyimchen, Alayong, and Sanglu fifteen to eighteen kilometers away from the Longleng town have set the prime cause for protecting and preserving the biodiversity without any helping hand from the government. The said villages formed the Lemsachenlok organization under the innovation and supervision of the church leader Nuklu Phom which has brought so much of impact in creating sustainability of biodiversity in the area. Now the area is well known for roosting of the Amur Falcons in the state. Lemsachenlok society initiated another milestone in convincing the three villages to part away some of the acres of the shifting/jhum land to convert it into community owned forest into wildlife habitat. For the hilly people surrendering jhum land is one of the rarest of the rarest thing to do. The marked areas has the success story of hosting more than eighty five species of birds including Amur Falcons, different species of frogs, barking deer, serows, and otters (Phom, 2022). The present case study focuses on the TK of Longleng, specifically the flora, the edible plants and their traditional usages.

Some of the sample plants of the study are examined below,

1.Name: Cyrtosperma cuspidispathum,

Local name: (Awa Ancho in Phom dialect) is found in tropical Asia, from India to China and Japan. It is regularly sold in the market by the women folks. Cut into short stems and bundled up. Per bundle is priced at Rs. 50. Its medicinal values claimed by the local people are for sever tooth ache, ulcer, allergic, curing liver disease and stomach ailments. *Cyrtosperma cuspidispathum* is also used as an ornamental plant in gardens and as a cut flower in floral arrangements(<https://www.selinawamucii.com> › plants › araceae › cyr...

Image 1



2. Name: *Clerodendrum glandulosum* Lindl

Family: Lamiaceae

Local Name: Kainem

Uses: Medicinal, vegetable

This particular green leaves is abundantly sold in the local market. Apart from using colebrookianum as the medicinal utility, it is one of the regular item of curry. Colebrookianum is commonly used for the treatment of various ailments and disorders such as cough, dysentery headache stomach disorder colics pain, diabetics, hypertension, helminthic infections, diabetes and some skin diseases in the traditional system of medicine. It is also referred as the anti oxidant plant (Khound, 2024).

Image 2



3. *Ocimum basilicum* var. *thyrsiflora*

Local name: Nangpelang Phom dialect

Locals use basil for reducing inflammation in the body, lower blood pressure, and for reducing high blood sugar levels. Basil has antibacterial properties, therefore considered a good item for treating fever. (Zhakipbekov, et. al, 2024). The refreshing smell of the leaves are use mostly for chutney and for soup as well. Its utility is used mostly for its therapeutic effect as one of the indigenous practices since the ancient time. One can see basil plants in almost all the kitchen garden of Longleng. Basil plant moreover, is a plant that fights free radicals

Image 3



4.Name: *Rhus chinensis*

Local name: Athum (Sumi Naga)

Benefits: Medicinal

Benefits: Leaves are mostly used by the locals for Depurative, stimulating blood circulation, hemoptysis, inflammations, laryngitis, stomachache, traumatic fractures, spermatorrhea, snake bite, relief nausea, cough and diarrhea. And the fruits are mostly used for Colic, diarrhea, dysentery, jaundice and hepatitis. In the Naga society some people always carry the powdered leaves in small pouches/containers to consume after food in parties or big gatherings to avoid food poisoning (Devi, 2018).

Image 4



5. Name: *Baccurea ramiflora* Lour.

Family: Phyllanthaceae

Local Name: Jangshi

Health Benefits

Highly rich in Vitamins. It boost up the immune system. It increases appetite and reduces nausea. Also, called as the Burmese grapes, beneficial for controlling blood sugar and cholesterol. It is used to treat jaundice and constipation. Benefits can be extracted even from the barks of the tree and the leaves which are highly useful for skin problems. The dried powdered leaves is essentially use in the treatment of diarrhea (Goyal, et.al, 2020).

Image 5



Recommendations and Conclusion

The importance of traditional knowledge in the present context is gradually increasing due to the various number of elements and the limited number of resources to cope with them. It is important to understand the basic principles of traditional knowledge, and examine them through scientific observations and logic and apply the lessons to the changing world.

To enhance the process two ways can be added: one by introducing the inclusion of traditional knowledge in the decision making process. Secondly, through education and awareness programs in the community with different stakeholders. To enhance policy making both at local and national level, a systematic approach of government, non-government and academic organization is required. As an educational approach traditional knowledge can be introduced in the curriculum both at the beginning and advanced levels of education. While traditional knowledge is recommended to be introduced in the school education, introducing in the higher education is also a requisite.

Meaningful and sustainable food security support to any community, area or region should, therefore, be built locally growing and producible items through optimum use of the locally available knowledge and resources without prejudice to techniques to flow in. Such flow can always be regulated to enrich and broaden the indigenous vase. Protecting the existing forest covers and regenerating degraded ones to broaden the collective base of the neighbourhood should be viewed as complementary/ supplementary measures to ensure peoples' entitlement to safe, nutritious and adequate food to maintain healthy and active life

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Primary source

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