

Folklore Institute of Rajasthan

Rupayan Sansthan



National Workshop on Intangible Natural Heritage

TITLE OF THE PAPER:

**RUPAYAN SANSTHAN'S ROLE IN DOCUMENTING
ORAL TRADITION AND CULTURAL ASPECTS
OF
INTANGIBLE NATURAL HERITAGE OF RAJASTHAN**



Since 1960 Late Komal Kothari a renowned folklorist and ethnomusicologist and his very close friend Vijaydan Detha an eminent Rajasthani writer realized that the problem of language covered the whole way of life of people and soon set out goal which became larger than collecting tales and songs. They further expanded their archival and research work in the field of folklore encompassing, folk songs, folk tales, folk beliefs, proverbs, folk ballads, folk epics of long plays, folk gods and goddesses, social practices, rituals, fairs and festivals, rural food, nomads and pastoral ways of life.



Until 1990's they travelled more than 29000 villages to collect the large repository of cultural heritage both intangible (oral) in the form of audio video and tangible object's of daily life made from natural resources. During 30 years of intense study by them on folklore (in ethno-geographic regions) finally lead to looking into— what are the traditional ways by which one generation passes its local traditional knowledge and skills to the next generation where the practice is to "learn but not to teach" in any structured way.



After 1990, for few years Rupayan Sansthan remained defunct. During this period a lot of Komal Kothari's friends and well wishers were insisting him to restart the organization and take care of collected valuable archival material. Many granting agencies like Ford Foundation, Prince Clause Fund, India Foundation for Arts, Ministry of Culture, IGNCA, Sangeet Natak Akademi, India International Centre, ICCR and many of his friends abroad as well as family members played a big role in its revival which laid the foundation of Arna Jharna the Desert Museum of Rajasthan and also preserving the Rupayan's old archival material.



In the year 1995 Komal Kothari got the recognition of his work by the Government of India and has been awarded Padma-Shree in 1983 and Padma Bhusan in 2004. He envisioned the Arna Jharna Desert Museum, and he was clear that the diversity of desert life cannot be encased in glass boxes. A museum of folklore has to be linked with the everyday lives and arts of people, their traditional knowledge systems or the environment they live in. Every part of this museum, right from the food crop zones, the folk exhibits, the water conservation efforts, the flora and fauna, the breathtaking locale, reflect his vision to create a living repository of desert life.

Before he passed away in 2004, he made the road map for an ethnographic museum of Rajasthan with the definition-

- **To explore and understand human effort to sustain life based on utilizing natural resources from immediate surroundings by developing creative or productive social institutions and finally to pass on traditionally acquired skills and knowledge to next generation.**
- **To cover all social creative actions of society, which makes the life possible in the defined region.**
- **To acquire artifacts and exhibit them in a way to throw light on human ingenuity, development and culture. It has further to move from tangible to intangible cultural manifestations i.e. to cover material and spiritual culture of the society.**



We know that Intangible cultural heritage is slightly different from the discipline of oral history, the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information (specifically, oral tradition), based on the personal experiences and opinions of the informants. Here I want to comment honestly that (Rupayan) did started its collection with oral tradition but later on moved to need based daily life objects used by the people living in different parts of the Rajasthan for ethnographic museum.



When the simplest object of daily life as a Broom made of vegetation had been researched, it really unfold many vertical chapter and suddenly representing through visual evidence how the broom is used in diverse spaces, in room and shrines, in courtyards, to clean corps, in rough terrain of street etc. As part of cultural manifestations it shows people ingenuity, knowledge and craft.



Our Broom exhibition in Arna Jharna: The Desert Museum of Rajasthan has clearly distinguished between the uses of different broom material varies upon the availability of natural vegetation in the region it grows, where certain sub caste group, nomads or the communities are living. This shows rich biodiversity/living cultural heritage of Rajasthan.

The only threat we could face in future will be the replacement of old traditional Broom by synthetic Broom which can be produced and sold at a lesser cost in mass scale by so called MNC's.



Such idea will stop people to interact with nature and slowly we tend to lose intangible cultural heritage, which our ancestors have nurtured over centuries. We have also observed that mostly younger generation of urban area have lost their connection with nature and its biodiversity, which was very much part of our daily life.



I want to quote here an example based on vegetation which will throw light on Intangible Natural Heritage? For example Neem, as I mentioned, within a second everybody must have recollected its intangible connectivity in mind or its value system learnt from society when we were kids.

Neem as tree has a great significance in our lives. In the past people religiously grow Neem tree near their home. So that immediately you can access and make use of it in our daily lives. Every part of Neem tree has its own significance in human life, we have described the parts of Neem and its value:-



Stem: - Tender stems where fresh leaf is growing are used as brush for cleaning teeth to remove germs and keep gum intact in everyday life. (Here we have folk song known as Nindarli). The villagers consider auspicious if neem brush is used in making Madanas on floor. The big stems are used after drying at domestic and agriculture level. Its wood is considered as one of the best insect resistant wood.

In one of the song Nindarli, a women is singing to call her beloved who lives far way, who have forgotten her. In song she is commenting that I have arranged all the luxury for you from morning till evening. So please come enjoy them. In the song one stanza is about neem stem where she is requesting him to come and use the neem planted by you for brushing (Datunia).



Leaf: -

- On Neem leaf there is popular folk epic of Devnaryan. The Rupayan has its audio collection in archives.
- New leaves are used as blood purifier.
- To cure the skin diseases neem leaves are boiled with hot water and bath with it.
- A bunch of neems are used by Bhopas during trans situation. It cures many psychological, social and cure from bite of snakes and Scorpions.
- Dry neem leaves are kept in woolen clothes and food grain to protect from insects.
- Neem leaves are used in making organic manure in traditional agricultural practices.



Flower: - Minjar-white small flower which grows during the-Chaitra month are crushed and turned into semi-liquid drinks for blood purification.

Fruit: - Nimboli eaten by the children has medicinal values. Rupayan archive have collected folk song on Nimboli in Rajasthan.

Bark: - Has great medicinal value. Bark paste used for healing cut and wounds.



While searching Neem images in Rupayan archive we discovered hundreds of images have taken on various life cycle passage ceremonies, depicting neem used in child birth, marriage and death.

One very important belief in the society is that Neem is also known as Neem Narayan – God.

Apart from Neem we have many important plants in desert for example Khejri, Akada, Thor, Goggal etc. which are associated with folk God and Goddesses. If we associate the tree with God then it means people are bound not to cut trees in defined region known as Oran or Gochar. There is always a belief that if we cut the tree it will bring bad luck.

At the End: -

Rupayan would follow the future prospect of INH in Rajasthan.

Rupayan is very much interested in bridging the Traditional Knowledge with modern scientific knowledge.

Working on the practicality INH will definitely increase its applied value in the society. Hold our own researched based exhibition or even invite loan exhibitions related to INH at our museum to improve the knowledge of children and society at large. Through such research studies on INH will also get validation.

Rupayan Sansthan always welcome the students, scholars and researchers in its endeavour.

Thank you

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