

# Indigenous Technical Knowledge and ancient proverbs of the coastal fisher folk of Kerala and their implications

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Received 10 August 2006; revised 19 December 2007

The paper attempts to study the Indigenous Technical Knowledge of the fisher folk of fishing villages, Maruvakkad and Mallipuram belonging to Chellanam and Elankunnapuzha Panchayats, respectively of Palluruthy and Vypeen Block, Ernakulam. The Traditional knowledge and proverbs pertaining to the fishing community of these villages were collected and the scientific rationale for the same was studied.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Technical Knowledge, Fisheries, Proverbs, Implications

**IPC Int. Cl.:** A01K61/00, A01K63/00

Indigenous Technical Knowledge is a treasure trove of ancient wisdom, beliefs and traditional knowledge handed down generations after generations by forefathers to the posterity for preservation and conservation of the repertoire of natural resources, soil, plant and other organisms. Indigenous knowledge can be defined as a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature<sup>1</sup>. It is mainly passed from generations to another through folklore, myths, customs, mores, folk songs, proverbs, puppetry and other traditional methods. Whereas crop science or agriculture abounds in a plethora of such knowledge in the field of fisheries too, similar knowledge sources can be traced and documented. Such indigenous knowledge may or may not have a scientific rationale. An attempt was made to study the Indigenous Technical Knowledge among the fisher folk of selected coastal villages of Ernakulam district of Kerala State and also to study the scientific rationale, if any, behind them. Besides, the ancient proverbs of the coastal community have been documented in the regional language (Malayalam) and the same translated in to English.

## Methodology

The fishing villages namely, Maruvakkad and Mallipuram belonging to Chellanam and

Elankunnapuzha *Panchayats*, respectively of Palluruthy and Vypeen Block, Ernakulam district were selected. Twenty five fishermen from each village were randomly selected to get a total sample size of 50. Group interaction was made use of to elicit information on the Indigenous Technical Knowledge systems as well as to document the proverbs used in the community.

## Results and discussion

Indigenous Technical Knowledge provides a deep insight in to the experiences and wisdom of the local people accumulated over generations. Indigenous Knowledge helps to unravel the causes and reasons for occurrence of a natural phenomena relating to the biological activity of living organisms. They provide food for thought and offer subjects and areas for newer research. The fisher folk of Kerala are by themselves a community enriched with ancient wisdom of their seas, oceans and fishery resources. Indigenous knowledge collected from the fishermen is presented in Table 1.

## Proverbs related to fisheries prevalent in the villages

1 *Attil kаланjalum Alannukalayanam* (Even if you are throwing something in to the river, you should measure and do it).

Implication: Always keep a record of everything. Do not waste anything even if you are not in need of it.

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Table 1—Indigenous Technical Knowledge among coastal fisher folk

Indigenous Technical Knowledge	Scientific rationale
Presence of dark patches in the water with ripples indicates a good catch of mackerel	The dark patches indicate the presence of mackerel shoals in the daytime. The colour change is due to the change in light penetration through the shoal.
Flipping and splashing noise in the water indicates the presence of thick shoals of oil sardine	This is attributed to the group behaviour of sardines. When sardines move in groups they produce jerking movements and splashing noise.
Series of air bubbles coming from below and bursting at the surface indicates the availability of oil sardine.	These air bubbles are believed to be released by oil sardines while feeding on muddy bottoms, which in turn give an indication of the bottom shoals.
Presence of strong fishy odour at sea gives a sign of big concentration of fishes.	When there is a big concentration of fishes, a strong fishy odour originates from the mucus they discharge and this enables the fishermen to spot the shoals.
Jumping of prawns and fishes is an indication of good catches.	An indication of the presence of predator fishes.
The formation of mud banks, <i>Chakara</i> in Malayalam is a good sign of high catch of fish and prawns.	Mud banks is formed due to the upwelling of water resulting in the lifting of nutrient rich bottom water. The water in this mud banks are calm. This leads to the segregation of fishes and prawns, which results in a good catch.
Use of lantern lights at night in shrimp farms attracts the prawn seeds to the farms.	During night, the post larvae of the prawn get attracted to the light as they are phototactic.

2 *Attil Erangiyavane Azhamariyavoo* (Only a person who has gone in to the water will know about the depth of the river).

Implication: Only personal experiences make things clear.

3 *Iruthoniyl kal vacchal Nedupuzhayil* (If you are standing with legs in two boats you will end up in the depth of the river).

Implication: Double mind and confusion always leads to danger.

4 *Irayittale meen pidikkanokku* (You must have a bait to catch a fish).

Implication: Only with the effort you can achieve something.

5 *Aazhamulladathe choondalidavoo* (Do the angling only where the water is deep).

Implication: You should know what the right thing to do is. Otherwise the effort will be wasted.

6 *Thirraadangiyittu meenpidikkanokkumo* (You cannot catch fish from the sea if you wait till all the waves subside).

Implication: If you are looking for excuses you cannot complete any work.

7 *Karayil meen pidichitta meen pole* (Like fish out of water).

Implication: Restless and uncomfortable.

8 *Samudrathil mungiyalum paathrathil Kollunna-thekitoo*. Even if you go deep in to the ocean, the water you collect depends on the size of your container.

Implication: You should plan your efforts according to your potential.

Although the ancient people were not aware of the genetic principles responsible for particular characters of living organisms they were able to test and isolate the suitable ones based on the physical or external or observable expression of those genes called phenotypes through their long association, experience and keen observation of those organisms<sup>2</sup>. Proverbs are yet another means of communicating ancient wisdom from generation to generation. Proverbs of the fishing communities are no exception to this and have great significance and implications for day-to-day life. Such proverbs and traditional wisdom should be preserved and conserved to enrich the learning experiences of the present and future generations.

#### References

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