

IX. Pending issues & urgent needs regarding the safeguarding of ICH

1. Is any of the intangible cultural heritages in your country in danger of disappearance or transformation?

Invariably with the transformation of the society in the light of modern development most of the ICH in the country is in danger of disappearance or transformation. This in fact is a common problem confronted by almost all the different societies and all the different aspects of ICH exposed to this epidemic. Few of the most threatened are taken for discussion here.

Traditional Agricultural Practices

The threat is most conspicuous in the field of traditional agriculture where mechanization, chemical fertilizations application of pesticides and weed killers have encroached the field in a most disastrous manner. This situation threatens the Sri Lankans' rich indigenous knowledge system on agriculture which depicts their nature friendly attitudes and values, details of which are given above under F. In the past they neither used pesticides nor fertilized with artificial chemicals. Sinhalese have their own indigenous methods for enhancing the fertility of the land and protecting the crops from pests and weeds.

But the present generation is deviating from these traditional practices and embracing modern methods which are detrimental to traditional agriculture. Modernization is never despised but it must be done in a meaningful way and adopted only if the indigenous system is inappropriate to the extant needs. Otherwise the valuable traditional knowledge which had been perpetuated for such a long time solely due to its appropriateness will be lost forever for no fault of its own.

Knowledge Systems Recorded in Ola manuscripts pertaining to Medicine, Treatments, Magic, etc.

Sri Lankans own knowledge systems had been documented in Ola manuscripts and most of them were preserved in temples. During the invasions by the foreigners from South India, many of these treasures containing our knowledge were destroyed. Subsequent invaders from Europe took away most of the remaining manuscripts and kept them in the museums of their countries.

Still a good collection of these can be seen in temples and with some individuals who had inherited them from their ancestors. But they suffer from lack of proper care, protection and conservation. They deserve to be taken care of as a national asset.

Folk Music/ Folk Dance/ Folk Tales/ Lullabies/ Folk Rituals

Sri Lankans have a very popular and expressive folk culture basically because it has been nursed and nourished by their life pattern. During the agricultural activities, rites of passage, festivals, and entertainment people participate very actively in folk music, dance, tales and rituals for the sake of enjoyment and relaxation from fatigue and stress. The Sri Lankan folk music is very rich in meaning as well as in the expressions. Folk songs related to the livelihoods of the people give enormous courage and endurance. Folk tales are invaluable in shaping the characters of the children and youth. Lullabies are also rich of meaningful messages in socializing and developing the personalities of the children.

But all these arts are rapidly disappearing from the people due to the influence of modern life styles.

Folk Theatre

Mask craft and dancing and Puppetry art as a part of folk drama are most popular art form in the Sri Lankan. Although the elder generation had preserved these arts and still continues to do so, the same commitment is not seen among the younger generation because of the social constraints and economic factors. Same fate has befallen on Sokari, another traditional drama form prevalent in the rural areas.

Therefore the urgent need has arisen to introduce mechanisms to preserve and propagate this aspect of ICH because any more neglect would result in the gradual disappearance of these modes of folk entertainments.

Traditional Culinary Art

Sri Lankans have an opulent culinary art tradition inherited from ancient times which has been admired by the natives as well as foreigners. This culinary tradition was maintained in the villages until recently. They had their own methods of preserving food for long periods, natural flavoring substances and traditional delicacies. From recent times there had been instances when certain knowledgeable individuals had engaged in research and experiments on our ancient food and culinary tradition, thus promoting these practices by disseminating knowledge and demonstrating traditional culinary practices in the media.

Unfortunately Sri Lankans are distancing themselves from their traditional culinary practices and embracing alien food culture due to the powerful marketing strategies adopted through the media. However a situation has arisen where alarmingly high instances of new health problems identified all over the world seem to ascribe the causes to wrong food habits and foods thus forcing the people back to old culinary habits Hence there seem to be an ideal situation where if proper action is taken to resurrect our valuable culinary art as an attempt at resurrecting ICH. It must not be forgotten that our culinary traditions have emerged to suit the environment in which we live.

Folk Games

Folk games in Sri Lanka relate to the folk festivals. The main festival occasion engaged in by the people of Sri Lanka is the Sinhala New Year Festival about which a detailed account is provided above. Although no other festival where folk games form an integral part can be claimed to be in popular use among the Sinhalese or any other segment of the population, it needs be emphasized that most of the folk games are in vogue among the children wherever they gather for recreation in their daily life. It indicates how much these folk games have been a part and parcel of the folk life of the people.

Sinhala New Year period is the action-packed time when all the people in the country irrespective of any difference get engaged in entertainment through participation in folk games. Hence this is considered the period of rejuvenation of all things called traditional and specially folk games owing to their capacity to promote unity,

cooperation, group consciousness in addition to the entertainment value.

Beside the entertainment quality in the folk games the psychological value is highly appreciated by the people and hence they allow the children to get engaged in them. However, as a result of the domination of the colonial education system all things of indigenous origin had been devalued and discouraged from being used. Hence most unfortunately along with the folk games the inherent ICH qualities too have started to fade out. Hence the need for the use of these folk games in the schools among the children during their formative stages has been felt by the knowledgeable people.

But most of the folk games have gone into oblivion due to lack of knowledge and appreciation related to these games. Any move by the promoters of ICH to revitalize these traditional items is sure to bring in much beneficial results since they are not mere modes of entertainment but inventions imbued with unlimited knowledge and wisdom.

Traditional Combat Arts- Angam Pora

Sri Lankans had a traditional combat system called 'Angam Pora.' In several Provinces in Sri Lanka, the traditional lineages carry on with them and still preserve and transmit this valuable self-protective and combat system. This traditional combat system is gaining ground among the youth and therefore there appears the possibility of preserving and propagating this useful branch of ICH if proper attention is paid to it.

2. What are the reasons the heritage is in danger and what type of safeguarding measures have been taken? Please be specific.

There are many reasons affecting the survival of ICH. Colonization, modernization, urbanization, westernization and globalization have been responsible for massive changes within the Sri Lankan society over the last five centuries during which period Sri Lankans were under the rule of the colonial invaders of Portuguese, Dutch, and British. It resulted in a heavy blow to the heritage leading to the probable danger of their disappearance. This threat was aggravated after the fall of the Kingdom of Kandy in 1815. Resistance to the

foreign rule took many forms. Apart from the 'great rebellion' of 1817, which lasted one and a half years and almost succeeded in ousting the British, the Kandyan provinces were in a state of continuous ferment, culminating in the war of independence of 1848. Yet it did not bring desired results.

The advent of imperialism brought many changes to the political and social structure of the country. It had direct impact on the whole culture including the attitudes and the value system of the society. Education in pre-colonial Sri Lanka was largely a function of the Buddhist monks and was carried out in temples and monastic institutions known as Pirivenas. They were the fountains of knowledge as well as giver of life to the men and society. Once they were done away with disaster fell upon the nation.

The ancient society was immensely shaped by the traditional norms, values, cultural traits and practices. Since these rituals were performed collectively, the solidarity among the members of the society was maintained. During the colonial rule the traditional economy was pushed into oblivion. Along with that, all modes of expression of their feelings and knowledge like folk music, arts, crafts, drama etc started to fade away. Collectiveness of the society has been destroyed and interdependence has been projected as a weakness. These are the results of the forced mechanization and commercialization. Due to these factors the entire ICH in the country is in danger of fabrication, misinterpretation and devaluation leading to ultimate natural death.

The establishment of a 'Folk Music Conservations Library' with the aid of Norway Government is a recent attempt by the authorities to achieve the objective of preserving traditional music pattern of the country. 'Adi Vasi Jana Uruma Kendraya' (heritage center for indigenous community) at Vedda habitat in Dambana is yet another project implemented in the recent times.

The Cultural Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Education has started a project 'Daye Urumaya Daruvantaya' (The heritage of the nation belongs to children). A series of books on ancient knowledge pertaining to food practices, agriculture, knowledge on ancient irrigation system, rituals related to ancient tanks and on archeological sites etc. was published and distributed among school libraries for the benefit of the children.

The government's initiative in the preservation of the ICH is further proved by the establishment of an Aesthetics university, a campus, and two teacher training schools for fine arts. Fine arts have been included in the curriculum of the national education and hence all the students from grade six have to select one subject in fine arts.

3. What are the pending issues for safeguarding ICH in your country that you have found through interviews and the field survey?

Despite the actions taken by the Ministry of Culture to safeguard ICH in the country several issues can be recognized as deserving more attention.

The lack of coordination and cooperation among the many institutions involved in the protection and preservation, promotion and propagation of ICH in the country is seen as a great drawback in the successful implementation of the plans drawn up for the purpose. Hence a Centre with full pledged powers and funds to initiate and implement necessary projects and coordinate all the activities in the area is an absolute must.

There is also the urgent need for a very comprehensive policy on the part of the Government towards the protection and preservation and promotion and propagation of ICH.

The failure to achieve the desired results from the Government's policies on this subject can also be attributed to the failure to pool the necessary expertise on the subject. Plans and programmes have to be drawn up with the proper expertise and on the basis of correct facts gathered after methodically undertaken research rather than on the raw statements of the bureaucracy. Lack of knowledge among the officials in charge on the subjects like folklore, culture, research methodology etc is often hindering the progress of these programmes.

4. What kind of problems and difficulties were encountered during the safeguarding projects?

The Convention for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage [ICH] adopted by UNESCO in 2003 defines ICH as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and the associated

instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces. Furthermore it is recognized as a part of cultural heritage by communities, groups and in some cases, individuals. Accordingly, Sri Lanka is well-known for its distinctive and abundant cultural heritage of both tangible and intangible cultural properties has willingly opted to be a signatory to it.

Successive governments after the independence have been taking measures to safeguard them. But whether satisfactory results have been achieved is debatable. Despite the many acts and ordinances added into the law books up to now, there have not been specific programmes or projects to protect the ICH of the country. This is responsible for the many problems and difficulties encountered in safeguarding the ICH.

Following can be identified as problems and difficulties responsible for this situation

1. Lack of a comprehensive policy statement on ICH. Only policy statement available is a brief statement published in 2007 but not known by the public.
2. Lack of a comprehensive plan of action to achieve the objectives.
3. There is a problem of lack of necessary funds to carry out the work
4. Lack of proper coordination and cooperation among and between the various government agencies involved which brings negative results.
5. There is the urgent need to evolve mechanisms to discourage the people from being addicted to lifestyles harmful to the ICH of the country.
6. Integration of the basics of ICH into the school curriculum and other educational centres including the training colleges of the armed forces a means of popularizing and safeguarding of these valuable resources of a country.

5. What future plans are there for the safeguarding of ICH?

Realizing that the ICH is in danger of disappearing due to industrialization, modernization, westernization and globalization, the authorities are getting alarmed and looking for ways and means necessary to be taken by the relevant authorities to stop this trend and develop and promote the ICH of the country. However the

official action seems to suffer from lethargy. Therefore following actions are recommended to speed up the accepted action plan.

Empowerment of the National Committee of ICH

As a major step intended at safeguarding the ICH of the country urgent need is there to establish the high powered Committee with full powers. It can act as the body responsible for preparation and implementation of relevant policies and advise the government on the subject. Hence it will function as the sole authority on the subject as far as policy and programmes are concerned. It can be entrusted with the following tasks.

1. Encouraging the research on ICH at the University level as well as the national level
2. Conducting awareness programmes and assignments at school level to disseminate and promote ICH knowledge.
3. Launching websites for the proliferation of the hidden treasures of the ICH
4. Convert the existing cultural centers in the country as the nucleus of ICH activities in the island and improve them as village centers.
5. Launch an island wide in-service training programmes for Cultural Officers to prepare them to undertake these responsibilities.
6. Strengthening of the National Inventory of ICH which has been created by the Ministry of Education at the Board of National Library Services
7. Implement more and more pilot projects for the protection of the traditional arts and crafts.
8. Embark on popularization programmes at school level.
9. Create mini museums at rural level.

6. What type of contributions and cooperation from the international society is needed for the safeguarding of ICH in your country?

Provision of funds and resources as well as the expertise knowledge essential for the successful completion of programmes and projects planned can be one of the best way the international community can be of help in these less affluent states.

International support for the establishment of a full pledged institute to conduct research into the preservation and development of the ICH of the country will be of immense importance.

Granting scholarships to improve the knowledge and skills for the locals who are serving in the field of ICH will be a productive way to improve the existing conditions.

Establishment of full pledged ICH Libraries in the member States as databases for future researchers.

Helping to develop a national, regional and global network with other countries to document the ICH across the globe would be of paramount importance for research on ICH.

Introduction of strong and severe rules and regulations to curb the commercial misuses related to the ICH is a crying need and hence the need for the support of the international community.

International pressure will be of immense help in compelling the relevant countries to take genuine steps to return the valuable ICH items that have been taken away during colonial rule.

Seasonal symposiums to exchange and benefit from the knowledge of each country will be a useful mechanism to widen the awareness and also the interest on ICH

7. What role do you expect ICHCAP to play in the safeguarding of ICH in the region in terms of programs, projects etc.

There is the high potential for ICHCAP to join hands with the local activists in many ways. Local National Committee can embark on programmes intended to conduct national surveys for collecting ICH and background information. This should include knowledge items, knowledge sources, knowledge holders (practitioners), and other resources. This should explicitly focus on ICH knowledge system management and traditional knowledge transferring mechanisms. In this exercise the ICHCAP can be of great help and support to the local Committee by way of providing expertise, guidance and financial assistance.

At the end of the survey the need will automatically arise for the establishment of a national database / registry / inventory for preservation and management of ICH. Every country should be encouraged to have an ICH museum, library and information centre with the database to make the people aware of this heritage.

Encourage researchers and research institutes in ICH by financial support and recognition. There should be an international channelling and networking system for disseminating, exchanging and sharing research outcomes.

ICHCAP can enlist research Institutes, academia, journals and experts involved in ICH research activities and encourage international research projects to facilitate them. Also ICHCAP must establish an international exchange program and collaborative research initiatives among ICH interest groups on research findings and project outputs.

Introduce guidelines for preparing legally stable, socially acceptable, and financially equitable IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) mechanism at country level for sharing of mutual benefits among stakeholders. ICHCAP must closely monitor each country's legal strategies to ensure protection of IPR in ICH and facilitate interest groups to work with communities in awareness programs.

Set up a national focal point to network and coordinate all resource centers and stakeholder institutes. There should be a proper coordination and mutual understanding among all the institutes, Departments, authorities, bureaus, units under various ministries.

Encourage national policies to be in correct place and implemented. The reciprocal commitments and formal roles of each and every stakeholder should be defined.

8. Please include any requests or suggestions you have on this matter.

Substantial proportion of ICH is not recorded or written or documented. 70 percent of such ICH is in practice. Most of the rest is in verbal form. A very few elements have been previously recorded. But these documentations are also in danger of extinction due to various reasons. Hand written manuscripts are naturally

getting decomposed. There are resources like instruments, apparatus, articles, objects which are relevant to ICH but most of them are in private custody and not well-protected due to negligence. Therefore there is an urgent need to preserve these resources physically and make an inventory.

In indigenous knowledge systems prevailed in traditional societies, cultural semantics, socio-linguistics, etymology, ontology and epistemology are playing a key role in defining the nature of ICH in each country. Therefore terminology is very critical in this kind of survey projects. This can also include not only virtual library but also a collection of manuscripts, items, articles, objects as well as audio and video records of ICH practices.

There is an urgent need to study the outcomes of ICH in sustainable livelihoods in terms of environmental, social, economical, physical, mental and spiritual health. ICH can contribute very effectively in humanitarian crisis evolved in many countries due to culturally displacement in globalized societies. Also it will recover the dehumanized values and commoditized needs of society through readopting workable norms of ICH practices.

Anthropological and ecological perspectives of ICH should be broadly and extensively studied in a systematic way to understand the origin and survival of these knowledge, practices and values in ancient societies. It would define and describe the evolutionary process of ICH in a given culture or community. These studies should be culture-specific or community-specific.

There should be an effort to regain cultural identities and replant values into national educational system with an intension to communication for behavior change in young generation. It will help to prevent the upcoming society from injurious, unethical, disgraced and socially harmful behaviour pattern. This is a kind of cultural immunity to develop a resistance against "contagious invasions of cyber exploitation and immoral abuses" transmitted from an alienated cultures. Story telling is a powerful tool which can be used to cultural immunization of early childhood development and implanting personality morals. Some mental attributes and characters are beneficially and positively streamlined with cultural norms with folk stories, lullabies, puzzles, songs, poetry and games. It was the foundation of "cultural man" inside every citizen who was extremely proud his cultural heritage.

Ultimately legal enforcement is very crucial to preserve ICH and avoid the politically planned, socially driven or spontaneous threats. The legal system must be strengthened, enhanced, and expanded through community charters, conventions and organizations in preservation and socialization of ICH.

9. What should be considered to encourage or to ensure active involvement from community in safeguarding ICH?

Recognition of ownership and representation of particular ICH at national, community and individual level

Creating awareness and vigilance in value of ICH to ensure transferability and pedagogue (cultural literacy and cultural intelligence) to next generation

Responsible participation in every level of safeguarding (policy planning, project implementation, research, publication, legal representation etc.)

Equitable benefit sharing and tangible support for their commitment through a rewarding system or financial incentives

Empowerment of rights and role of community with regard to ICH through skill-based awareness

Capacity building pertaining to strengthening KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, Practice) in ICH