

Hortus Malabaricus



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BACKGROUND

UNESCO has been involved in the normative processes related to Intangible Heritage. The Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (2001, 2003, and 2005) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) are examples. On 17 October 2003 following the Second Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and

Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage identifies five key domains in which the ICH is manifested:

- a) Oral traditions and Expressions,
- b) Performing arts,
- c) Social practices, Rituals and Festive events,
- d) Knowledge and Practices concerning Nature and the Universe, and
- e) Traditional Craftsmanship

There may be examples of Natural Heritage (NH) in each of the five domains even though the fourth one refers exclusively to intangible natural heritage (INH). However, in the context of the rightful recognition of the INH component of IH, the INH may be re-designed as follows:

- a) Oral traditions and expressions on nature and environment,
- b) Performing arts on themes related to nature and environment,
- c) Social practices, rituals and festive events on themes related to nature and environment,
- d) Knowledge and practices concerning nature, environment and the universe, and
- e) Traditional craftsmanship on themes related to nature and environment.



Hendrik Adriaan Van Rheede



Itty Achuthan

Museum field especially the ICOM (International Council of Museums) also has been increasingly recognizing the importance of Intangible Heritage (IH) and has recently modified its definition of Museums by including both tangible and intangible aspects of collections as the foundations of all Museums. The early efforts in this regard include Shanghai Charter (2001) and Seoul Declaration (2004). "Intangible heritage concerns both natural and cultural resources. There are many ICOM members who work in science and natural history museums dealing with the cultural dimension and knowledge base of the collections and programmes. Documentation on traditional knowledge about bio-diversity is an invaluable intangible element of natural heritage. The National Museum of Natural History in New Delhi and the Lawrence Durrell Zoo in Belize both integrate local knowledge and perceptions of science and the environment into their core activities" (Galla, A. 2003. ICOM News, 4: 4). "It is fair to say that the main emphasis of most museums over the centuries has been on the tangible or material heritage, primarily through collecting, recording, researching, interpreting and displaying physical evidence of the past, and of contemporary culture and environment. However, this arguably artificial distinction is by no means universal....More widely, from very early times some museums have also been closely involved in preserving and presenting not just the physical relics of the past, but also evidence of the immaterial or intangible culture, history or values as well. . . But a much wider



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range of museums, archives, libraries and related institutions have also been very concerned with recording, preserving and communicating many other aspects of the intangible heritage as well for many years.” (Boylan, P J. 2006. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 1: 54-55). The IGNCA, IGRMS, NMNH, and RMNH (Mysore) in India are examples in this regard.

In contrast to the UNESCO efforts in IH, which are generally skewed towards Cultural Heritage, the ICOM efforts give equal importance to both the aspects (i.e. cultural and natural) aspects of IH.

This has been effected largely through the efforts of ICOM-NATHIST (ICOM's International Committee on Natural History Collections) with active support from the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH New Delhi) and the Regional Museum of Natural History (RMNH), Mysore during the international conferences on Museums and IH held in Shanghai (2001) and Seoul (2004).

During the ICOM General Conference held in Seoul in 2004, a “Four years Programme on the Roles of Museums and Communities in the Proclamation and Protection of the Intangible (“Living”) Cultural Heritage (2005-2008)” was discussed:

- a) Launch of the UNESCO-ICOM Programme: 2004. Seoul.
- b) 2005: Surveys to Museums.
- c) 2006: International Meeting to create a network: Doha, Qatar.
- d) 2006: First capacity building workshop: “Documentation of Traditional Knowledge, Museums and INH”: Mysore, India.
- e) 2007: International Conf. on Community Participation in IH inventories: Bamako, Mali.
- f) 2007. Intermediary meeting of the partners and Advisory Committee for Evaluation.
- g) 2008: Second Capacity building and Regional workshop: Santiago, Chile.
- h) 2008: Evaluation meeting

There are efforts to launch a National Mission on India's Intangible Heritage by the Union Ministry of Culture. However, it cannot be expected to have the rightful inclusion of INH because of its priority for 'cultural heritage'. The rapid strides India has been making in the field of intangible natural heritage and biological diversity such as the earliest example of documentation of INH in Asia (*Hortus Malabaricus*); the People's Biodiversity Registers, the establishment of Biodiversity Boards etc have seldom been discussed in any forum on heritage in India. Therefore it is important to bring all stakeholders of INH in India to one platform so as to strengthen its campaign for the rightful inclusion of INH along with ICH in all discussions of IH.

Towards this direction, the RMNH Mysore, organised the first National Conference on Intangible Natural Heritage and Museums, in Calicut during 18-20 April 2007. About 100 experts from various museums, related organisations as well as from Netherlands (National Herbarium) and UNESCO participated. A Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums was released at the end of the Conference.

The Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums suggested to “Recommend to consider the publication *Hortus Malabaricus* (compiled by Van Rhee de the Dutch Governor of Malabar with headquarter in Cochin and published from Netherlands during 1678-1693) as the earliest Asian example of systematic, scientific documentation of intangible natural heritage through the method of oral transmission of traditional knowledge about the plant medicinal use prevalent at that time in Malabar, belonging to the present Kerala State.”

The Museum organised a Workshop on *Hortus Malabaricu* in Kochi (Cochin) during 14-16 March 2008 as preparation for an Exhibition.

Importance of Hortus Malabaricus

Hortus Malabaricus is the earliest example of systematic scientific documentation of Intangible Natural Heritage (Traditional Knowledge about Nature) from Asia. It is the oldest comprehensive printed book on the natural plant wealth of Asia and of the tropics, compiled and published in Latin by Van Rheedee (the then Dutch Governor of Malabar at Cochin) during 1678-1693. It is a 12-volume treatise, which contains illustrations of 742 plants belonging to 691 modern species, together with their descriptions and medicinal and other uses. All plants are described and illustrated under their local Malayalam names, written in Roman, Malayalam and Arabic scripts. In most cases, their Konkani, Portuguese and Dutch names are also given. The entire text of the book is in Latin. It is perhaps the only authentic evidence of the ancient ethno-medical knowledge of Kerala, culled from the hereditary traditional knowledge of native Physicians such as Itty Achuthan, Ranga Bhat, Vinayaka Pandit and Appu Bhat. Father Mathews of St. Joseph also collaborated with Van Rheedee during the initial days of the preparation of the book.

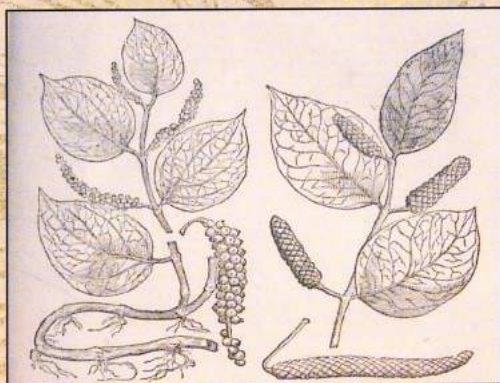
Malayalam Certificate in Kolezuthu
by Itty Achudem

Handwritten Malayalam text in Kolezuthu script, a traditional form of Malayalam used in Kerala. The text is a certificate or acknowledgment, likely related to the book's preparation or the author's contribution. It includes a signature and a date at the bottom.

About a century after its publication, Carl Linnaeus, considered to be the father of modern Botany, accepted Hortus Malabaricus as an authoritative manual on the plants of Asia and made extensive use of it when establishing his new binomials system of nomenclature of plants.

The information on the medicinal use of plants described in this book is of immense importance in the context of attempts being made in several countries to recover the Traditional Knowledge and native wisdom related to various scientific disciplines.

Despite the unique importance of the book, Hortus Malabaricus has not been mentioned in any discussion on Intangible Heritage of Asia, because the entire text of the book is in old Latin and thus not accessible to most Asians. Dr. K. S. Manilal, Emeritus Professor at the University of Calicut, and who has studied the various aspects of the original book for more than 35 years, has written the English translation (2003).



Piper Nigrum & Piper Longum

A National Conference on "Intangible Natural Heritage and Museums" organized by the RMNH Mysore in 2007 had a special session on Hortus Malabaricus. The Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums, released during the occasion, highlighted the importance of Hortus Malabaricus as the earliest example of documentation (systematic and scientific) of Intangible Natural Heritage in Asia as applicable to 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums

The participants of the National Conference on Intangible Natural Heritage and Museums organized by the Regional Museum of Natural History Mysore (Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India) in collaboration with the Ecotourism Directorate (Government of Kerala) during 18-20 April 2007 in Calicut (India), in which about 100 experts (including from UNESCO and Netherlands) participated, recommend the following, which may be called as the "Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums":

1. Support the concerns of the ICOM (International Council of Museums) that Natural heritage and Cultural heritage are two equally important component parts of Intangible Heritage.
2. Recommend to adopt the Indian Model on intangible Heritage, which was originally recommended in the ICOM-ASPAC workshop on "Intangible Heritage, Museums and Globalization", held in Shanghai, China in October 2002. This Indian model on Intangible Heritage involves benefit sharing to the original stakeholders, the Kani tribes in Kerala.
3. Recommend to consider the publication Hortus Malabaricus (compiled by Van Rhee de the Dutch Governor of Malabar with headquarter in Cochin and published from Netherlands during 1678-1693) as the earliest Asian example of systematic, scientific documentation of intangible natural heritage through the method of oral transmission of traditional knowledge about the plant medicinal use prevalent at that time in Malabar, belonging to the present Kerala State.
4. Recommend that the People's Biodiversity Registers be considered as examples of community involvement in the documentation of intangible natural heritage,
5. Recommend that the National Biodiversity Authority (Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India) establish a National Committee on Intangible Natural Heritage in collaboration with the RMNH Mysore,
6. Recommend that the various agencies of the Government of Kerala especially the Department of Forests establish a State Institute of Intangible Natural Heritage to coordinate all activities regarding the collection, conservation, documentation, research, exhibition and management of Hortus Malabaricus,
7. Appreciate the efforts of the Centre for Heritage Studies, Thripunithura to establish a Department of Intangible Heritage, a Heritage Garden (based on Hortus Malabaricus) and a Museum on Hortus Malabaricus and Van Rhee de,
8. Recommend to the professional organizations in Museology such as MAI (Museums Association of India), ICOM (International Council of Museums), INC-ICOM (Indian National Committee of ICOM) to give wide publicity to the Calicut Charter,
9. Recommend to the various Ministries of the Government of India (such as the Ministry of Forests & Environment, and the Ministry of Culture) to consider the Calicut Charter in all discussions on Intangible Heritage.

Signed on behalf of the participants of the Conference:

Dr. B. Venugopal,
Coordinator of the Conference;
Scientist-in-Charge,
Regional Museum of Natural History, Mysore



Project INH

(Intangible Natural Heritage)

by RMNH Mysore

The RMNH Mysore is in the forefront of studies on Intangible Natural Heritage and Museums in India. It has undertaken a project in this direction: Project INH. The details of the Project INH are given below:

1. Phase I: Organization of National Conference: A National Conference on “Museums and Intangible Natural Heritage” was organized in Calicut during 18-20 April 2007. A “Calicut Charter on Intangible Heritage and Museums” was released.
2. Phase II: Preparatory Workshop: The Museum organised a national level preparatory workshop in Kochi (where the original efforts on the preparation of Hortus Malabaricus was done by Van Rheede, the Dutch Governor of Malabar with headquarter in Cochin) during 14-16 March 2008 in order to have inputs from experts, resource persons and all other stakeholders. In addition, many archival materials and remnants of Heritage Garden related to Hortus Malabaricus are situated in Kochi.
3. Phase III: Exhibition: With the inputs received and the resource materials collected from Phase II, the Museum plans to open a Temporary Exhibition on Hortus Malabaricus in RMNH Mysore.
4. Phase IV: Outreach/ Traveling Exhibition: The temporary exhibition on Hortus Malabaricus will be sent as Traveling Exhibition to various institutions in India for exhibition for a specified period in the selected locations with the help of other agencies/ organisations interested. This will also help us to foster collaboration and outreach activities, which will eventually lead to fulfilling the objectives of the Museum.

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