

from one university to another as they could not get continued financial support at the university where they started the project – a good illustration of the practical problems knowledge commons faces!

On the whole this book provides an excellent introduction to the theory and practice of knowledge commons. It provides comprehensive overview of topics of great contemporary interest such as OA, long-term preservation and IP. The writing is uniformly lucid. The book deserves to be read widely, especially by academics and librarians.

SUBBIAH ARUNACHALAM

*M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation,  
Chennai 600 113, India  
e-mail: subbiah.arunachalam@gmail.com*

---

**Glimpses of the Agricultural Heritage of India.** Y. L. Nene (ed.). Asian Agri-History Foundation, 47, ICRISAT Colony I, Brig Sayeed Road, Secundrabad 500 009. 2007. 902 pp. Price: Rs 500.

The present volume is an excellent and comprehensive compilation of papers relating to the agricultural heritage of India. The editor, Y. L. Nene who is a plant pathologist by training, has rich and varied experience, having served at the G.B. Pant Agricultural University before he moved on to ICRISAT, Hyderabad. In 1994, he established the Asian Agri-History Foundation (AAHF) to 'facilitate dissemination of information on the agricultural heritage of South and South East Asia'. Nene states in the preface that in spite of a rich and varied agricultural heritage, the history of Indian agriculture and its achievements has not been understood or built upon as much as that of the other major civilizations. He feels that a major constraint to positive action for building on traditional agricultural knowledge is the lack of availability of resource material for prospective teachers. He has offered this current compilation of articles as a contribution that may orient teachers and students to undertake research to validate and improve tradi-

tional technologies for the benefit of the poor farmers.

The book is a compilation of articles that have been published in the quarterly journal *Asian Agri-History*, and presented in workshops and conferences held by the AAHF. There are a total of 84 articles that have been compiled broadly under six different sections. The material that is offered is vast and stupendous. The articles draw upon source material from Sanskrit, various Indian languages such as Tamil, Kannada and Hindi, classical texts in Persian and of course, a wide variety of archival and contemporary sources in English. There are also a large number of specific articles regarding concepts relating to agriculture in the ancient Indian literature, including the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, Sangam texts or texts such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and a large number of texts specifically devoted to traditional agriculture. The subjects dealt with in each of these chapters are rich and varied. The section on animal management includes articles on cattle, camel, yak, elephant and fish. Under farm management, a large number of topics of contemporary interest, including pest control, crop growth, and weather forecasting are touched upon, besides articles on individual species such as cotton, mango, rice, sesame and tea. The authors also constitute an interesting mix of scientists from agricultural universities, scholars of Sanskrit and various other Indian languages, NGOs and individual farmers who are carrying out a variety of experiments, to name just a few.

It is refreshing to see that the articles in general have taken a healthy approach. While there is indeed due place and credit given to some remarkable achievements of ancient India, the narration is generally not in the style of broadcasting the 'glory that was India in ancient times', but the focus by and large is towards the contemporary relevance and application of this knowledge. Prescriptions and approaches talked about in the classical texts of *Vrkshayurveda* (traditional Indian plant science) are brought vividly alive when we see articles reporting trials about testing out the approach of *Vrkshayur-*

*veda* to make organic tea in plantations of today. The editor, with his rich experience as a modern agricultural scientist, has opened up fascinating areas for research and investigation of contemporary importance. His paper regarding 'Modern concepts and practices evident in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*' (c. 300 BC) is a classic that deserves detailed study and investigation.

By and large, the organization and presentation of material is excellent, barring a few minor irritants and lapses. The contents have been organized into six major sections – along two different lines, namely chronological (ancient period, medieval period) and partly thematic (animal management, farm management, etc.). The author has also provided an appendix which is a chronology of some selected events and persons bearing relationship to Asian agricultural history. While the author states in the preface that it is based on considerable reading of old and new literature, it raises several questions – perhaps this needs to be looked at in much greater detail.

Overall the compilation is a splendid achievement that brings together in a single publication, a vast range of topics over a large timescale in this area. There is much in this compilation that is of great interest to not only the scholars and scientists, but also the practising farmers. In conclusion, it will be interesting to cite a fascinating passage from the article 'Plants and human history', which is a reproduction of a talk given by Maheswari in 1965: 'In fact even in the modern world plant power means as much or more than water power, sea power, atomic energy and so on. For obtaining plants men have gone forth in this world to distant lands, set out on long voyages and discovered and conquered new lands'.

A. V. BALASUBRAMANIAN

*Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems,  
No. 30, Gandhi Mandapam Road,  
Kotturpuram,  
Chennai 600 085, India  
e-mail: info@ciks.org*