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Whispers of the Forgotten: A Study of Indigenous Communities, Sacred Knowledge, and Environmental Conservation

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ABSTRACT

Global warming, ecological collapse, and environmental degradation represent the defining crises of the contemporary era, underscoring the profound challenges facing our planet. A major cause of the onset of global crisis has undoubtedly been man's pursuit of economic development which has caused him to conquer nature instead of living in harmony with it. Simultaneously, modern man has tended to look down upon indigenous populations as "primitive" beings whose beliefs, attitudes and practices are 'outmoded' and 'backward'. Modern societies often misunderstand indigenous cultures by viewing them through a narrow, Eurocentric lens. Indigenous knowledge systems, traditions, and practices are not outdated but rather highly sophisticated, adapted to their environments, and rich in wisdom.

This paper intends to examine the interplay between indigenous knowledge system and modern outlay of societal developmental. It explores that there has been a growing realization that these communities have pursued lifestyles which are harmonious with and respectful of the elements that comprise this planet; and that they still hold vital and rare wisdom concerning how to exist in harmony with ecosystems which more 'developed' cultures have been recklessly destroying. The paper emphasizes the need for inclusive policies, ethical engagement, and community-led knowledge preservation. It attempts to highlight the significance of indigenous knowledge system in addressing contemporary global challenges such as climate change, sustainable resource management, and social cohesion. This paper poses some fundamental questions such as; how do indigenous stories, myths, and oral traditions reflect ecological principles? What role do indigenous spiritual beliefs play in biodiversity conservation? The paper would be broadly divided into three sections: first section intends to deal with rationales behind sustainability. Second section attempts to deals with ramifications of modern development and the last section intends to underscore the imperative role of indigenous communities towards sustainable future.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous Communities, Sacred Knowledge, Environmental Conservation, Folklore

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper followed both descriptive and analytical research methods as a methodology and consulted the secondary source materials as the main source to write this paper. This paper is based on secondary data which have been collected from various Books, different national and international journals, articles, website etc.

INTRODUCTION

It is the fundamental to the worldview of modernism that all benefits are man made products of scientific, technological and industrial progress and made available via the market system. Thus, health is seen as something is dispersed in hospitals, or at least by the medical profession, with the aid of the latest technological devices and parametrical preparations. Even government is seen as man made brought into being by the social contract. Not surprisingly, a country's wealth is measured by its per capita GNP debarred environment contribution. Indeed, natural benefits those provided by the normal workings of natural biospheric processes, those that assure the stability of our climate, the fertility of our soil, the replenishment of our water supplies and so on are not regarded as benefits at all. It follows that to be deprived of these non- benefits cannot constitute a cost and the natural systems that provide them can thereby be destroyed with economic impunity. The same argument by Gale Johnston, a university professor and well-known agricultural economist, insists that natural resources play but a relatively minor role in determine the wealth of nations. This attitude could not be more foreign to us. Our appetite for material goods and technological devices of all sorts, seems insatiable. However, Indigenous communities, vernacular man, even after has become a sedentary cultivator still derives much of its food from forest because forest is the sole giver of us food, fuel, fodder and so on.

Needless to say, there is no chance whosoever of our being able to afford to install all the technological devices required to perform the services which the forest once provided for us. This paper explores the Indigenous community's contribution in environment conservation and How Myths and hymns make environmental an epicenter in the earth.

INVOCATION: RITES OF PROPITIATION IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

India is among the 12 mega biodiversity countries in the world having 25 hot spots of the richest and highly endangered eco-region of the world (Myers et al. 2000). Due to increasing pressure of population, degradation and depletion of forests, it remains a challenging task to manage forests in a sustainable manner. India is classified under one of the low forest cover countries and account for 23.8% of total geographical area of the country (FSI Forest Survey of India 2005). This percentage is still low as highlighted in the Forest Policy (1988). There are about 0.63 million villages (Rehmani 2012), out of which nearly one-third are in the vicinity of forests. Thus, quite a large population is traditionally dependent on forests for a variety of reasons such as food, shelter, fodder, timber, and medicine which are directly linked to livelihood of these societies. Conservation of natural resources including biodiversity has been an integral part of several indigenous communities in and around the forest areas. Traditional and indigenous communities in India are of the religious belief that medicinal groves and plants are sacred in nature. Sacred groves (SGs) are patches of trees on forest land that are protected communally with religious zeal and connotations. These forest areas have been protected since ages by traditional societies and indigenous communities with their socio-cultural and religious practices. Sacred groves as a rule are treated piously. Sacred trees are prohibited from cutting and not axed except when wood is needed for the religious purposes like construction and repair of temple buildings or in cases like worshipping, death ceremonies and temple rituals. Thus, SGs carry direct and everlasting pious status and assist in maintaining social fabric of the society. Sacred groves (SGs) are small forest areas that are left untouched by the local inhabitants to be to be conserved by the local village folk deities and are of special spiritual significance to them. In India, different religions having different traditions, beliefs, and rituals are associated with conservation of biodiversity and forests. In Hindu religion, it is a traditional belief that nature shows a reverence for five basic elements i.e., Earth (Prithvi), Fire (Agni), Water (Jal), Air (Wayo) and Space (Akash). All the five elements are treated as a body of God and are worshipped. These five elements are protected for religious, cultural and spiritual reasons. There are many studies entitled to further quantify this ethics, which leads to biodiversity conservation and sustainable ecosystem (Pal and Mukhopadhyay 2011). Some of the taboos found related to animal and plant conservation. Let's take a caste study to understand, Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state (India), people believed that when a village rural girl gets married, the married couple has to plant a seedling of a tree in bride's house. Planting a tree seedling is a cultural and traditional practice in this region which later gained

momentum in late eighties and succeeded in creating a lot of awareness among the locals. Planting of sapling as a mark of respect, is undertaken by VIPs during their visit to various establishments. This practice has been popular and planting a tree seedling has been taken up by non-government organizations (NGOs) as an important movement (Maiti Andolan) which includes list of taboos that slowly intensified, spreading to nearby areas of the region. example of such conservation is the alpine plants *Saussurea obvallata* and *Delphinium vestitum* locally called Dongar and Loshkar; which have been protected through local customs and beliefs by linking these plants with local deity and not allowing any one from the village or outside to pluck the flowers except the village priest during specific day and time only (Meenakshi et al. 2011). In rural areas of India, many plants and animals are considered as pious and sacred religious piously having imbibed cultural values among the tribal communities. The religious belief serves as an instrument of protection of those rare forest species (Pandey 2003). Moreover, Traditional societies are characterized by their close inter connection with nature and its resources. Hence, the traditional communities depend upon natural resources a biodiversity more for their livelihood (Ramakrishnan 1996). Talking about medicinal plants, they have own significance let's take a case study, indigenous people residing near the groves are illiterate, they have scrupulously nurtured their traditional customs, rituals, ceremonies and a way of forest life through folk beliefs with great vigour. The fact that sanjeevani found in Himalayan region was used by Lord Hanuman (A Hindu deity) to resuscitate Lakshman the brother of Lord Rama is well known to all Indians. There is a need for protection of large number of medicinal plants as an important component of SGs in different parts of India which is already documented in various studies (Vartak et al. 1987; Bhandary and Chandrasekhar 2003; Pandit and Bhakat 2007). Another case study where local people follow their deities to live in with harmony as stated by Lord Rama named Chenchu Tribe (Andhra Pradesh & Telangana). The Chenchus, a forest-dwelling tribe in the Nallamala forests, live in harmony with nature and avoid over-exploitation of resources. They depend on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and follow sustainable harvesting practices, preventing deforestation. Talking about another community, In Doonagiri village of Nanda Devi Bio sphere Reserve, Uttarakhand state, tribal people of Bhotiya community have an ancient practice of conserving the medicinal plants of the region for centuries. This is mainly attributed to their religious belief. They have deep faith that if someone from outside the village up roots the medicinal plants from their village, it is treated as an evil act which may bring misery of great order to the village folks. They nurture a belief that Lord Hanuman came to their village and uprooted all their medicinal plants which was the cause of untreatable diseases, which struck the people

later. Thus, medicinal plant conservation is an integral part of sustainable living by these people with the nature (King-Oliver et al. 1997). Till now medicinal plants like mint (*Mentha arvensis*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) and fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) are planted as an important component of SGs and preserving Himalayan ecosystem. Indeed, Apatani Tribe (Arunachal Pradesh), they practice an advanced form of paddy-cum-fish farming that maintains soil fertility without using chemical fertilizers. Their system of agriculture and water conservation is recognized as an indigenous knowledge system that supports biodiversity. Various other communities played an imminent role in environment conservation for example Mishng Tribe (Assam) here, Mishng people build their houses on stilts to cope with floods and have traditional ways of preserving wetlands and riverine ecosystems. They practice organic farming and protect their surrounding forests. Khasi Tribe (Meghalaya), what Khasi people practice "sacred groves" conservation, where patches of forests are left untouched as a tribute to deities. This practice has helped preserve rare flora and fauna in Meghalaya's biodiversity hotspots. Baiga Tribe (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh), Known as the "children of the forest," Baigas avoid plowing land, believing it wounds Mother Earth. They practice shifting cultivation and nurture biodiversity by growing a variety of crops without chemical fertilizers. Many Baigas are involved in protecting forests from illegal logging and poaching. Soliga Tribe (Karnataka), This tribe plays a crucial role in forest conservation through sustainable practices and deep ecological knowledge. They engage in non-destructive harvesting, practice agroforestry, and maintain sacred groves that protect biodiversity. Their controlled fire management reduces wildfire risks and promotes regeneration. The tribe's communal governance ensures equitable forest use, supporting both conservation and livelihood. By passing down traditional ecological knowledge, they safeguard forest ecosystems and maintain a balance between human needs and environmental health. Their reverence for nature and sustainable land-use practices make them vital stewards of the forest. However, from the above discussion concluded that different indigenous communities have different role in environment conservation but main focus is that different practices adopted to conserve the environment combining all organisms. Even though not forgot the contribution done by Koli Indigenous community (Maharashtra) to protect the Mangroves and extraction of fisheries which harm the nature. The Kolis, whose ancestral roots in Mumbai date back over four centuries, have seen their livelihoods and way of life increasingly marginalized. While modern high-rises and urban infrastructure expand, the traditional fishing villages, or Koliwad, are shrinking. Despite their crucial connection to the city's coastal lands, their access to these areas is being undermined by urbanization,

competition from commercial trawlers, and ecological changes exacerbated by climate change. Even with the 2011 Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification (Claiming Space: Infrastructure, Uncertainty and Fisherfolks' Livelihoods in Mumbai - T2S, 2020) that initially protected Koliwad, subsequent amendments have weakened these protections, allowing for more unchecked development. The Kolis have faced various legal challenges in their Coastal Road project dispute with the BMC. The community and civic groups like the Collective for Spatial Alternatives petitioned the courts to stop the project. For temporary relief, the Mumbai High Court declared land reclamation illegal in April 2019. The Supreme Court lifted the injunction, allowing reclamation to harm the surrounding ecosystem and Koli populations. The Kolis continue to fight for their rights to land and sea and Mumbai's coastal ecosystems despite legal disputes (Claiming Space: Infrastructure, Uncertainty and Fisherfolks' Livelihoods in Mumbai - T2S, 2020). The Koli culture have always used natural resources in ways that made them one with the land. By using bark, shells, twine, and rocks, they could fish, hunt, and farm using sustainable practices. Their desire is to protect the land first and live from it second, and that perspective is needed in today's India. Since the government won't regulate industries or agricultural applications, the Koli's knowledge of the land is being put toward modern tools that encourage restorage. Protection and preservation are not only to environment but the inhabitants those who are living they're not only forests instead all organisms and last, Devrai (sacred groves) in Maharashtra are protected by local communities through religious and cultural practices. These groves, dedicated to deities, are considered sacred, and activities like tree cutting or hunting are prohibited. Communities conduct rituals and festivals to honor nature, reinforcing environmental stewardship. Resource extraction is regulated to ensure sustainability, with elders overseeing the conservation efforts. These groves serve as biodiversity hotspots, preserving rare plant species and wildlife. The community's reverence for these spaces promotes sustainable practices such as organic farming and medicinal plant conservation, ensuring ecological balance and fostering intergenerational environmental knowledge.

GUARDIAN OF THE WILD: MYTHS MEET CONSERVATION

India has a rich heritage of wildlife as well as a long history and tradition of the protection of a most sensitive and vulnerable element of natural life- wildlife. The ethic of wildlife protection was imbibed in the Sylvan surroundings of the Ashramas of our sages which were the seats of learning in the country's ancient past. The first recorded game laws were promulgated by Kautilya in his Arthashastra in third century B.C. in which provision was made to punish

severely all offenders if they entrapped, killed or molested deer, bison, bird or fish in an area declared “protected”. The forests were called Abhayarnaya. One – sixth of all wildlife, such as birds and beasts, was let off in forests under state protection. Certain animals and birds were absolutely protected. The ancient Sanskrit literature such as Sutras and Smriti which were written in the centuries immediately preceding Christ contain some laws intended to protect wildlife. Killing of birds and fish even unintentionally, is to be atoned for by fasting and suitable penances. A killer or a stealer of animals is also required to pay a fine, thus it says:

Paksighati matsyaghati ca dasa- Karsapanan (Adhyay V Sutra 53)

Once Kalidas’s hunted deer which flew to the rishi’s ashram for protection (Bho bho Rajan! Ashram mragoyamna hantavya no hantavyah). This verse implies the that at that time protector rishis played a key role in protection and conservation on the other they are torch bearer because the Yoga and meditation kept only under tree shadow. Different animals were associated with different gods and were thus provided with religious sanctity. Protection of animals and other creatures along with human beings is essential to maintain eco logical balance. As a result, all categories of wild and domesticated animals were identified/attached to Gods (Table 1). For instance, Garuda (eagle) vahana (Vah in Sanskrit language means to carry or to transport) was symbolized with Lord Vishnu, Peacock to Muruga, Bull to Lord Shiva, Tiger to goddess Durga and Rat to Vinayaka. Thus, all gods typically or mythologically are symbolized with animals as their vachanas often called the deity mounts. Often, God is icon graphically depicted riding animals as (or simply mounted upon) vahana. Even one of the trees, Kalpavrusha, is treated as vahana. Lord Shiva uses lion skin for his attire and as supports a reptile king cobra as an ornament. Serpents are venerated on Nag Panchami day and offered milk for maintaining the natural food chain and preserving environment of SGs. Monkeys as a part of respect to Lord Hanuman and bears were also treated as gods and remained a part of the army force of Lord Rama (Table 1). In Rajasthan (western-India), the Bishnoi community treats Black Buck Deer as their child and killing or harming them is considered a great sin. Thus, Bishnoi cult supports the wildlife protection act as Black Buck Deer is considered as human friendly in selected localities (Kala and Sharma 2010). Such incidences are widely prevalent and practiced in other countries also. The cow worship is another example of deep religious belief in India. Cow milk is treated as source of balanced diet for children in the Indian food basket. Cow dung is treated as having anti infection properties and used for domestic purposes. Cow urine is believed to possess rich chemical content and is highly useful to treat disease of human beings and is also applied as pesticide. With all its multidimensional uses of cow products, cows are treated sacred and prohibited from killing and worshipped in the name

of Kamadhenu (Table 1). Let's talk about the family of Lord Shiva. The need to protect and conserve biological diversity is exemplified in the representation of the family and habitat of God Shiva, his consort Parvati and his two sons Karttikeya and Ganesha. His habitat is Mount Kailash, with snowy peaks representing the cosmic heavens. The crescent moon on his forehead denotes tranquility; the constant stream of Ganga's water from the lock of hair on his head indicates the purity and importance of water; Nandi, his bull mount, represents the world of animals; serpents signify the presence of toxicity in nature; the lion used by his consort Parvati represents wildlife; the peacock, the mount of Karttikeya, represents the avian species; and the mouse, the mount of Ganesha, represents small underground animals. Different types of animals and birds inhabit the holy abode of Lord Shiva. Another significant aspect is the harmonious relationship between natural enemies. In Lord Shiva's household, natural enemies live in harmony with each other. The carnivorous lion's food is the vegetarian bull, the peacock is the enemy of the serpent and the mouse is the serpent's food; nevertheless, all live together. Thus, when a devotee worships the family of Lord Shiva, he or she observes this coexistence and is influenced by what in contemporary times might be seen as analogous to the concept of ecological harmony and respect for biological diversity.

Table 1 List of some common animals, birds & reptiles and their associated beliefs

S. No.	Scientific name	Local name	Beliefs/uses
1	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	Tiger	Used in rituals and medicine.
2	<i>Elephas maximus indicus</i>	Elephant	In Hindu mythology, during Sagar Manthan (Milk sea churning), the Gods (Angels) and the demons (Asura) churned the ocean for the elixir of life called "Amrit" (Nectar) which make them immortal. From the churning the 'navratnas' (nine jewels) surfaced. Some of these jewels were the Aeravatha (white elephant), Karpavruksha (tree), Kamadhenu (Holy cow). Therefore considered to be sacred among Hindus.
3	<i>Bos Taurus</i>	Cow	In Hindu mythology the cow is considered holy The cow is equated to one's own mother (hence the expression 'Gaumata). In Hindu mythology, Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling celestial cow. It is believed that cow could grant any wish for those who worship cow.
4	<i>Bos taurus</i>	Bull	Bull occupies a special place in Hindu mythology. The reverence of the animal has been one of the central themes of Hinduism, since ancient times. Bull is vehicle/vahana of Lord Shiva.
5	<i>Antelope cervicapra</i>	Black buck	It is also known as Krishna Mruga in Kannada.
6	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	Monkey	Monkey is known to be associated in the army of Hindu God Hanuman hence considered sacred.
7	<i>Felis catus</i>	Cat	Cats are associated with fertility and the goddess of birth, Shakti.
8	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Peacock	Hindu mythology peacocks are associated with the goddess Saraswati (goddess of education & knowledge). The feathers thus represent qualities like: kindness, patience and good fortune.
9	<i>Naja naja</i>	Snake	The snake is commonly called ('Nag' in Hindi language) is worshipped by people across the country. Some of the snakes are considered in mythology as 'protectors' and other categories as harmful/destroyers'. Lord Shiva wore snake as an ornament. Lord Vishnu sleeps on snake with thousand heads Adishesu (King cobra) as his bed on milk sea.
10	<i>Bos grunniens</i>	Yak	The bushy tail is in great demand as a fly-wish (fan) in many Buddhist monasteries and temples.
11	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	Indian Vulture	According to the epic Ramayana, when Ravana was abducting Sita to his kingdom of Lanka, a fierce battle took place between him and the vulture King Jatayu. The bird was fatally wounded in its attempt to rescue Sita from Ravana.
12	<i>Columba turica</i>	Dove/Pigeon	Goddess Rati, the Goddess of passion and lust and the consort of Kama, the God of love, is believed to be usually depicted with a pigeon as her vahana.
13	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	House Crow	The house crow occupies a special place in Hindu religious rituals. It is usually identified with departed souls of ancestors. In Hindu the ritual of 'pinda pradana' (offering of cooked rice balls) to the crow.
14	<i>Sus scrofa</i> Linnaeus	Wild Boar	The third avatara of Lord Vishnu was Varaha, a boar. Varaha is generally depicted having a boar's head on human body. Varahi is the Hindu Goddess Durga in the form of a wild boar.
15	<i>Ratufa indica</i>	Squirrel	Squirrels are considered sacred in India and are not to be harmed. Squirrels are associated with Lord Rama. During the construction of the Adi Sethu (bridge) at Rameshwaram by Lord Rama and the vanaras, a little squirrel also contributed in its own little way. Lord Rama was pleased by the creature's dedication, caressed the squirrel's back and ever since, the Indian squirrel carried white stripes on its back, which are believed to be the mark of Lord Rama's fingers.

ECHOES OF ETERNITY: MYTHS, HYMNS, AND FOLKLORE AS CULTURAL MEMORY

Asian and Pacific countries have developed patterns of agricultural and rural life and effective methods of land and water management that have been sustainable over many centuries. The experiences and knowledge of generations of their indigenous people are largely responsible for this. Traditional peoples are the primary custodians of most of the evolutionary experience of mankind. The belief of Indian tribal peoples, for example, that their culture was born and nourished in the forest, and their dependence for survival upon its continued existence, has imbued in them a respectful attitude to nature. And given rise to the development of the most

basic principles of forest management. Around the world, the knowledge of indigenous people on local plants and their application is an important basis for the development of medicines for the wider good of mankind. Indigenous understanding of the integrated nature of environment and development is summed up in the proverb "Without the land, the people are lost. Without the people, the land is lost". Intergenerational equity is a mainstay of indigenous culture.

Meriah Sacrifice

It was the golden sunshine of the last days of Pausa. Eighty-year-old Sarabu Saonta leaned against the trees at his door step and sal looked at the distance. At the end of village street, worship of Dhartani had started. Sarabu brought out his flute from the house and in the golden sunshine of last Pausa, danced and dozed off on the most important festival day of Kondhs (Southern Orissa). Kondh culture represents a deep attachment to and intimate love of their ancestral village and their culture. Sarabu signifies primitives, indigenous people etc. thus the death of Sarabu implies that the sacred soil of ancestors into which one is born is thus a part of one's fundamental psychic experiences of life and is part of its spiritual dimension. After death the bones were scattered into the field soil of great cultivation as they believe she was the earth goddess, the mother earth.

Dongrias Tribe

Kondhs sub group Dongrias are among the most primitive not only in Orissa but in the whole of India. Kondhs were famous in history for the Meriah Sacrifice. They live primarily in the hills of Koraput and Phulbani Districts. Worship of the earth Mother, however, is almost a universal phenomenon in the primitive cultures. It needs, however, to be emphasized that the sociological roots of human sacrifice as a part of the worship of Earth Goddess. Some American Indians, for example, refused to till the soil because they felt they could not wound the body of their mother, the Earth. The Sioux Indians used to say: "Must I mutilate her flesh so as to get at her bones? Then I can never again enter into her body and be born again." This is one extreme of the mythology of the primitives relating to earth Mother. Other American Indian myths speak of a remote age in which the "Earth mother produced human being in the same manner as she now produces bushes or reeds". Human sacrifice was thus prevalent in many agrarian primitive's cultures. Frazer has discussed them in detail in his *Spirit of the Corn* and *the Golden Bough*.

Purchase of the Meriah

O our Saonta
Our village elder
Have you baby kutas
Have you got tiny fowls
Have you got sons?
The season has come
The season of dhartani
The earth goddess.
Give us young fowls
Baby kutas
We will buy.

Santal tribe

The Santals are among the major tribes in India. they are also among the most numerous along with the numerous along with the Gonds and the Bhils. They live in a contiguous area comprising the santal pargana, Dhanbad, Hazairbag and Midnapore districts of West Bengal. It is a tribe deeply conscious of what it considers to be its Great tradition. This sense of a great tradition seeks to recall a glorious past in which the tribe enjoyed material prosperity and cultural efflorescence. The santal is till very much in the lap of nature and natural phenomena inspire in him a sense of wonder, awe and reverence.

The jhola (hill-stream) rustling over its bed of stones and pebbles. The vulnerable village is protected by the boundary God from the evil eye and from the wrath of hostile gods and spirits. Often the evil spirits or Bongas are spiteful and malicious. There are sixteen santal invocation songs which are sang to commemorate the festivals. The invocations are sacred and; like all sacred literature, there certain restrictions regarding their singing and the persons who sing them. The village priest or the Naike alone is authorized to chant the invocations relating to Erok Sim Bonga and Baha Bonga ceremonies. Erok sim bonga, at the time of sowing seeds, and the baha bonga also an invocation to her at the time of Baha or flower festival. Czeslaw Milosz calls it the unattainable earth.

Munda Epic

The Munda epic glorifies the Singbonga, the sun spirit. He plays a crucial role as the destroyer of Munda's enemy, the Asuras, and protector of Munda's. Though the concept of Sun spirit antedates the Asur Story, the epic is interpreted to suggest the rise of monotheism among the Munda's. It represents the "patriarchal Stage of Monotheism". Here, Munda's displayed warriors who destroy the asuras to protect the devi kumari or virgin goddess along with the singbonga which shows the fruit giver of foods, fruits, and so on and also played a significant role in protection and a distinct similarity with women as a vibrant symbol of fertility and sexuality.

Garo Myths

In the Garo myth, what is new the world was a vast plain covered with water. There was no light and everything was dark. Tatara Rabuga (the supreme male deity) decides to make the world and he sent his servant, Nostu- Nopantu, in the form of a woman, to carry out his intentions. Here we see the opposition of high and low, light and dark, further strengthened by that of male and female. The creator is not God himself, but his servant, and he too, dressed as a woman, in contradistinction to the male god. To further strengthen this opposition, Nostu- Nopantu is accompanied by a male companion whose only function is to make the wind blow in the myth and as a contradistinction to the temporarily female Nostu- Nopantu, structurally. The opposition is carried to be earth itself, and the myth inform us: then tatara gave the earth a riking and a pagri (female garments). He also presented her a marvelous head of hair in the form of parp (Ficus Rumphii) and blong (bamboo). Thus, we complete the process of an opposition emerging between high and low, male and female in distancing God from man.

Oraons Tribe

Oraons call themselves Kurux (Kurukh). The Oraons are the fourth largest tribal group in India after the Bhils, Gond and Santhals. They inhabit the territory comprising the adjoining districts of Bihar, MP, and Orissa and some segment of Jharkhand. In the Oraons story of creation, the world was covered with water. It is out of clay obtained from under the water and with the help of the earthworm of Kilkila bird, that God furnished the earth. Men and animals were made out of this clay and were provided with food according to their needs. After some time, God found the world infested with undesirable elements as a result of human excrement, according to one story. another story hold that the world was covered in a foul smell emanating from the corpse of a man- eating beast. God therefore rained fire day and night with a review

to destroying this infection and purifying the earth. He instructed monkey to beat on a drum when half world destroyed. But he forgot because of eating tela fruits, then the whole world destroyed, but in a crab hole two human beings called bhaiya- bahin (brother-sister), he taught them art of plough cultivation and gave them seeds to sow. He also asked them to perform ceremony of Dandakatta (destroying the effect of the evil eye and tongue) to ensure the abundance crops and increase of cattle and progeny.

However, the countless myths relating to snakes again pervade the Indian psyche in all regions, all levels of society giving rise to major cults which have great ecological significance. Most Indian sculpture is structured to comprehend the world of aquatic, plant and sustainable lifestyle of Warli's.

INDIAN MYTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The wisdom of ancient India recognized the importance of nature and natural resources. The Vedas are dedicated to various forces of nature that are evoked for the benefit of man. Everything that was created was regarded as sacred—trees, plants, animals, mountains, forests, rivers and water bodies and in order to protect them, the ancient rishis deemed all of nature to be sacred. Unfortunately, all of this took a turn for the worse in the medieval period when sanctity was denied and destruction took place on a massive scale, and in the desperation to survive, Indians forgot their heritage of regarding the environment with its biotic and abiotic properties as sacred. In the colonial period, the destruction became exploitative and Indians became part of the exploitation. The Earth is known to all civilizations and cultures as the great mother Goddess. The Vedas dedicate many hymns to Prithivi, the Prithvisutra being one of the greatest hymns. She is invoked as born of the waters of the ocean. Surrounded by space, she is the Creator, the sustainer. She is the mistress of past and future giver of the wide and wildlife world of human life. The tree- woman relationship dominate Indian myth. The most functionally meaningful, inspires of countless myth and the richest treasure of Indian sculptural motif is the Vrishkika, also called by other names- Yakshi, Sur Sundari and many others. They stand against trees, embrace them and thus become an aspect of the tree articulating the interpretation of the plant and the human. The tree is dependent upon the woman for its fertility as is the woman on the tree. The mythology relating to the Himalayas is intrinsically connected with the Ganges; and of course, that other symbol of purity, virginity, austerity – Uma, Parvati. Although shiva appears in the Vedas only as Rudra and Satrudriya, the Puranas, especially Siva Purana, are full of descriptions, myth and stories full of ecological significance and meaning. In this case also, shiva as the Lord of the Himalayas is everything and anything in the Universe.

He is the Lord of animals, Pasupati and the Lord of place, Vastospati. Significantly, among his progeny, one belongs to the animal kingdom, Ganesa and the other to water and fire. Kartikeya somaskanda rides a peacock. Vishnu lies on the snake. Shiva rides the mighty bull. Each of these myths moves concurrently on an ecological biophysical and physical plane. God is called Brahma, the creator of the universe, Vishnu, the all-pervading preserver and Rudra, the punisher of the wicked. The idea is that „God is one; Gods are differently named concepts of the One Being“ (Atharva Veda, II.1.3). This primordial or cosmic matter of nature is made up of five elements - prithvi (earth), vayu (air), Agni (fire or energy), aapa (water) and akasha (space) - better known as the pancha-maha-bhuta. Their proper balance and harmony are essential for the well-being of humankind, and maintenance of this harmony is a dharma, or righteous duty. The Maitrayani Upanishad has a beautiful analogy of Brahman as a tree with its roots above and its branches below, the branches being earth, water, air, fire and space. This is likened to the five senses: space is sound, air is touch, fire is colour, water is taste and earth is smell.

“Mata bhumih putro aham prithviah parjanyeh pitah sa un pipastu.”

(Soil is my mother, water is my father let both lead me to perfection.) These descriptions speak about the attitude of man towards environment – it was so revered like the relation between parent and offsprings. About soil conservation, the following verse is very relevant:

“Yasya Vriksha Vanaspatya, dhrirvastishthati vishwaha prithavi vishvadhay sam dhratamac echavadamsi “

(Let us protect her with all the care- the soil that produces crops, fruits and grows trees for us.)

CONCLUSION

In the words of M. S. Swaminathan “Unlike a botanical garden, where a wide range of trees and plants are collected and cultivated for the purpose of our education and enjoyment, the sacred groves are one method of expressing the gratitude of human beings to the trees which sustain and support life under a given agro-ecological condition”. We therefore need immediate measures to stop the destruction of SGs and start their conservation as being an integral part of the social and cultural life in rural India. Documentation of all the sacred groves needs to be taken up on high priority basis so that management and conservation programs for these threatened groves can be initiated. The bondage between people, their beliefs and rituals associated with SGs in the past have hidden scientific truth. Many ancient trees are surviving till date due to the sacred belief and worship. Loss in faith and religious conversions in general has further intensified the magnitude of erosion of beliefs and value system. While myths and

hymns represent the core syllabi of local or indigenous people, their attitudes, their vision towards environment and more so about the ontological thinking of different communities. Thus, scanning the ancient Sanskrit literature and philosophical ingredients, it has been revealed that the key essence of the environmental conservation ethics in ancient India was the art of human relations, bodily control (Sanyam), respect and non-violent relations with the environment. It was based on simplicity and non-violence, people satisfying their needs by means of modest use of resources which has been amply reflected in one of the verses mentioned in Atharveda, which runs as: “What of the, O’ Earth I dig out, let that quickly grows ever, let me not hit thy vitals or thy heart.”

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