

Role of Traditional Practices in Conserving Environment: A Case of Manesar Village, Gurgaon

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Abstract: Communities have dependencies on natural resources since ages in the form of various ecosystem services like food, fodder, fuelwood, fresh air, water, medicinal plants and herbs etc. It has been seen that most of the forest areas were conserved by traditional societies with their socio cultural and religious practices. Various practices prevail even today in many parts of the country such as ‘Tarun Bharat’ in Alwar district, Bhotia community of Utrakhhand state etc. In the United Nation Conference on ‘Environment and Development’ it had been stressed out the contribution of indigenous knowledge is beneficial and urgent need for the protection of Earth’s biological diversity. It appeals for the active participation both by the government and the people in resource conservation and this can possible only through political will, education, empowerrnment of native people and a change in the mindset. In 1990s, Manesar town featured with rapid industrialisation and its ensuing development reduced the positive interaction of societies with their natural areas. It has depleted the natural resources on a large scale and the traditional knowledge reached at the edge of destruction. But the village community of Manesar came forward to set an example of community participation and revived their ethical values toward resource conservation.

Keywords: Natural Resources, Traditional Practices, Urbanisation, Development, Community participation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The presence of sacred groves since the time of Rig-Veda shows a relation between traditional practices and natural environment. Sacred groves refer to small forest area untouched but conserved by local inhabitants and communities which are of special spiritual significance. Budha’s study and enlightenment was also in the company and under the shade of a Banyan tree (Negi, 2005). Customs like worship of tree was quite popular and one of the best practice to conserve the groves of forest. The evolution of the concept of natural resource management is not new. The fact remains that the conservation and protection of the natural resources has been significant since ages. It has been noticed that there has been a direct link between resource management and traditional societies with the continuous interaction and dependency of communities on natural resources. This dependency reflects in terms of ecosystem services such as food, fodder, fuelwood, fresh air, water, medicinal plants and herbs etc, apart from soothing and recreational qualities that accomplish the basic requirement of the communities residing in and around natural areas. In the earlier time most of the rural societies were highly dependent on these services but there were certain measures recognized to conserve the natural resources. They had realised that these services are limited in nature and there is a need to protect them. In this direction certain beliefs, custom and tradition have been evolved and established their connection with the natural environment. In traditional societies, sustainable natural resource management was driven by the beliefs and behaviors of human communities, and local cultures were strengthened by their intimate connections to the natural environment that sustains those (Rist et al 2003). These traditions bounded the usage of natural resources. Some of the forest areas have been protected since ages by traditional societies with their socio cultural and religious practices. At present, the introduction of modernization, mechanization and globalization have transormed and weakened the beliefs and tradition. The industrial revolution occurred in 1990s changed the whole scenario and raised the economic opportunities especially for the developing countries resulting economies blooming at the cost of natural resources. Even the administrator, policy makers, economist have ignored the environmental aspects in the pursuit of achieving maximum economic growth. As a result the development of technology has not only reduced the positive interaction of human society with natural areas but it has depleted the level of natural resource on a larger scale.

II. TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND ENVIRONMENT IN INDIAN CONTEXT

The management of natural resources has always been regarded as tradition in Indian society. The Indian societies are relatively more associated with the components of natural environment like water, soil and trees in various forms. This has happened just because of the historical interaction of communities and their natural environment which gave birth to traditions and cultural landscapes such as sacred forests, groves, sacred corridors etc. According to the Indian traditions there were five basic elements exist in the Universe such as air, water, fire, earth and space because every thing comes with the combination of these element which forms nature. In ancient times people feared from all these natural forces and started worshipping them. Gradually, these forces got the divine status called God and this tradition of nature worship is still continued in Indian societies.

Water is an essential ingredient for human life as it is allied with human's birth and death with water of the river Ganga. Similarly, the various types of tree like Banyan, Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Asoka and Bela (*aegle marmelos*) in India are of great significance as the Banyan tree is attributed by its fertility, longevity and the home of Lord Siva and Devi Parvati while Peepal considered as one of the sacred tree in the Hindu religion because it is believed that the ancestors of Hindu live there and manifestation of Lord Vishnu found in this tree. It gives oxygen more than twenty hours a day as compared to other trees and each and every part of this has a medicinal value. Asoka tree has relevance with Sita, she spent much time under this tree in Lanka and as the name indicated it is pain killer.

In the same way Bela grow up with fruits having medicinal value which heal the large number of diseases and its leaves offered to Lord Siva. Likewise Tulsi (*Basil*) is another sacred plant because the Puja of Hindu God is incomplete without the leaves of Tulsi. It has also a medicinal implication and assist in improving the fertility of the soil. An Indian scholar named kautilya developed the concept of forest reserve for the first time in India which shows that the idea of resource management is not new. Besides, the Bisnoi community of Rajasthan has a tradition of protecting wildlife and birds since ages. Moreover the conservation and protection of natural resources and wildlife has been regarded as integral part of Hindu religion and even in Constitution of India has supported this initiative. hence, it is widely known, as studies have shown that the local knowledge is being considered as one of the important tools for the management and protection of forest and other natural resources in the past. Local knowledge has proved useful for forest restoration and protected area management in Rajasthan – one of the driest regions of India with scanty rainfall. Cultural landscapes in rural and urban areas and agroecosystems, created by the application of scientific and local knowledge, also support a variety of trees, birds and other species, and provide opportunity of integration of nature and society (Taylor, 2002). However the integration of nature and society brought socio-cultural beliefs.

The traditional system of India can be identified in various form for instance religious traditions (temple forests, monastery forests), traditional tribal (sacred forests, sacred groves and sacred trees, royal traditions (royal hunting preserves, elephant forests and royal garden etc), livelihood traditions (forests and groves serving as cultural and social space and source of livelihood products and services. In the same way, there are diverse traditional practices that assist in protecting and conserving the natural resources. The collection of wood and other forest products, traditional ethics, norms and practices related regeneration of forest, cultivation of useful trees in cultural landscapes, creation and maintenance of traditional water harvesting system such as tank along with plantation, ponds etc. The feeling and trust in traditional customs, cultures are still preserving our resources in different part of the country. Hence, some of the important traditions and culture which are still in practice are as follows:

The tradition of community conservation is prevalent even today in many parts of the Rajasthan state. It is characterized by several Mandir, Banis, sacred groves which are allied with temples and goddesses. Moreover, in Alwar district an NGO named 'Tarun Bharat' has taken important steps towards conservation of resources. A study of eighty villages have been conducted along the Arvari River and identified that regular meeting to discuss issues is very important. In this regard villagers have structured Arvari Sansad which has played an important role in conservation of forest and wildlife and convinced the people to vacate encroachments on common land. similarly, in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state where if a rural girl gets married, the couple has to plant a seedling of a tree in bride's house. Thus, planting a tree seedling has become a cultural and traditional practice taken up by NGO in this region in the late eighties and created a lot of awareness among the locals. Another example of such conservation is the protection of trees named alpine plants through local custom and beliefs by linking these plants with local diet. No one was allowed from the village or outside to pluck the flower except the priest during specific day and time only. In the Doonagiri village of Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Uttarakhand state, Bhotia community has an ancient practice of conserving the medicinal plants which is attributed to their religious belief. Tribal people believed that if anyone from outside touch the medicinal plants from their village treated as an evil act which brings great misery to the inhabitants.

The Khasis, Garos and Jaintias community of Meghalaya have a tradition of natural resources conservation with their religious belief. Therefore, there are several sacred places like forest groves in India which have been protected under customary law. The Khasi Hills of Meghalaya are characterised by pockets of rich biodiversity that have been protected by the Khasi tribe and form the basis of nature worship practices in the area, manifested in the trees, forests, groves and rivers.

The Khasi people believe that those who disturb the forest will die, and that sacred animals such as the tiger bring prosperity, happiness and well-being. In fact, the people of Thaianing believe that the destruction of their forest by their forefathers has caused 'good luck' (i.e., the tiger) to leave, leading directly to suffering due to a scarcity of medicinal plants, wood, water and fertile soils. Sacred groves are often quite limited in size, but there are at least 40 of them in Meghalaya (out of a total recorded 79) that range from 50-400 ha, including the well-known Mawphlang sacred grove at 75 hectares.

2.1 Natural Resource Conservation and Traditional Practices:

History shows numerous instances related to cultural practices of diverse communities in close relationship with environment for many centuries. In the United Nation Conference on 'Environment and Development' it had been stressed out the contribution of indigenous knowledge is beneficial and urgent need for the protection of Earth's biological diversity. In the earlier time, rulers were engaged to preserve and promote environment protection and safety. In 'Arthashastra' Kautilya proposed that there is vital need to develop 'Abhayaranya' i.e forest and animal sanctuaries. He has also stipulated the post of forest superintendent and made the provision of penalty for those who cause damage to forest and other natural resources. The importance of water was felt by Kautilya in 'Arthashastra' and regarded as a collective not the common property. In ancient time, Indian rivers were not only considered as flowing mass of water but it was a symbol of life bestowing, life nurturing and life protect divine mothers. In Harappan sites some of the techniques have been found applied for water harvesting and storing of rain water during that time. The tank situated near temple serves dual purpose of cultural practices and recharges the ground water level. Thus, the cultural practices were prior intrinsically associated with natural environment and corresponding each other in their own way which shows but in the modern era of commercialization, careless technology, unplanned urbanization environment became an entity of isolation

At present the dilemma of environment degradation become a matter of concern at global level and emerged because of rapid industrialization, growing urbanization, rigorous cultivation and other developmental activities posed detrimental impact on environment. The major environmental issues identified are deforestation, pollution (air, water and land) and loss of biodiversity, depleting ground water sources etc. The air pollution mainly concentrated in ten cities because of the eighty percent industrial areas are located with in these cities. Besides this the heavy volume of traffic causes pollution and adding significantly in the severity of problem. The huge population of a developing country like India highly dependent on natural resources for their food, shelter, fodder, medicinal plants etc and causing a greater pressure on the existing resources. Although the percapita income is increasing day by day even then forty percent population still residing below poverty line. Thus it has been seen that there is conflict between environment and development but the environmental protection can't be isolated, it is an integral part of sustainable development. In this regard government has made efforts by incorporating environmental concerns in policies and programmes. At this point it is essential to look back towards traditional practice and culture which have been surpassed by western utilitarian approach in order to conserve the natural resources which are at the edge of degradation.

III. CASE STUDY

Some of the scholars attributed that the name of Haryana state derived from two words "Hari" (green) and "Aranaya" (Forest) which entails "greenlands". According to the historical evidences it is scrutinized that the community of Jats were so prominent in Haryana and assert that they are the descendants of Rajput. But when it comes to culture Haryana is adorned with several colourful festivals blended with cultural heritage, hookas, khaats, mustard, wheat and paddy fields and warm gesture. The culture of southern Haryana it seems to be influenced by Rajasthan customs and rituals on some extent. It has been observed that traditional practices allied with nature are still alive in some of the distant villages of southern districts of Haryana. Though, these districts are surrounded by Aravalli ranges which were earlier considered as a habitat of large number of species but at present the situation becoming worse.

3.1 Manesar Village, Manesar Tehsil:

Manesar village with a population of 23,448 is the tehsil headquarter of Manesar, district Gurugram as per census 2011. Out of the thirty four villages of tehsil Manesar, 15 villages including Manesar are having a spread of Aravalli ranges.

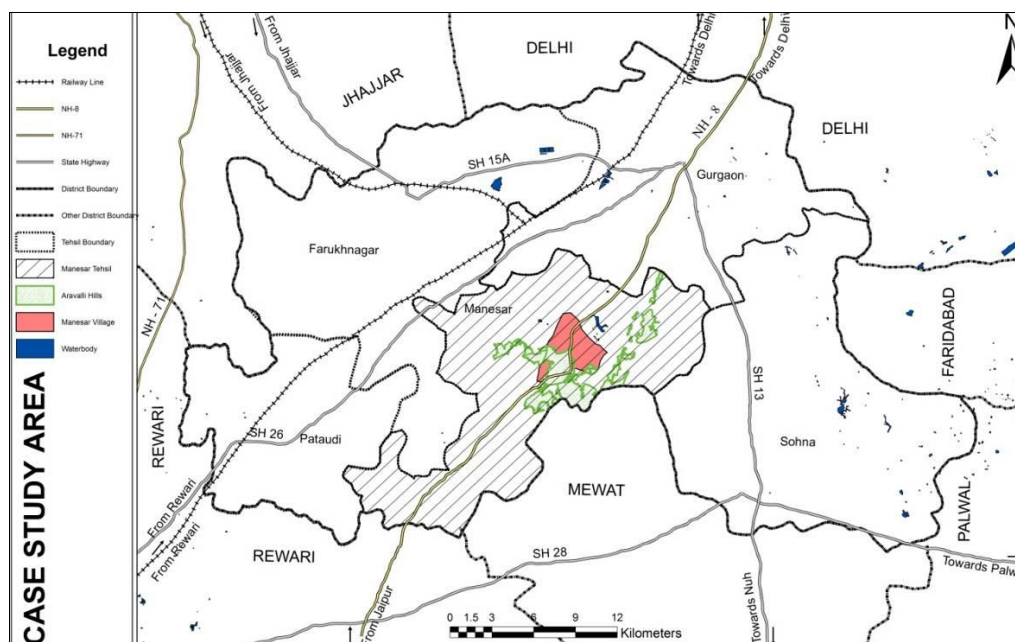


Figure 1: Manesar Village with the expansion of Aravalli Ranges

It is located at a distance of 20 kms from its district headquarter of Gurugram, 35 kms from Indra Gandhi International airport and 45 kms from National capital Delhi and is well connected by National Highway 8 and other roads with Delhi, Jaipur, Mumbai and other important towns of Haryana and Rajasthan (refer Fig 1). It is also the part of investment zones along Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor, a project envisaged to attract investment along NH8 with additional proposed population of 42.00 lacs between Manesar and Bawal. There are other special projects such as SEZs and technology parks taking place in the proximity of this town because of easy accessibility and connectivity. Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway which is the part of east-west outer peripheral expressways proposed in the NCR plan and a significant western link between Kundli and Palwal via Manesar. With a total geographical area of 14.2 sq. kms it is physiographically nestled at the foothills of Aravalli ranges- the oldest mountain system of India.

The hilly area in Manesar village is the highest i.e 3.06 sq. kms. constitute 21.54% of the total area among all the villages in Manesar tehsil. With the establishment of industrial model township in the year 1994, the rich natural resources such as hills, forest, fertile soil, waterbodies etc available are under the threat of degradation and denudation. Wild animals are on the verge of extinction because of indiscriminate urbanization and industrialization, encroachment and other activities of human intervention in the area (Mehta, 2016). In the past time, traditional practices performed by the people were associated with important local resources such as temple, pond, well, forest, soil etc. The main intention behind this worship was to conserve available resources that were the ultimate source of survival. But presently, the traditional knowledge that were used by the local people in the past are at the edge of destruction due to the introduction of modernisation in the form of industrial model township, expansion of real estate, corridor development, farmhouses etc. and destroying the important natural resources such as forest, water, wild life etc. Although nature has gifted several precious natural resources in the region like waterbodies, forests, hills, biodiversity and minerals etc. but continuous exploitation and irrational use of these resources made situation worse. There are several reasons responsible including deforestation; loss of biodiversity, pollution, stage of industrial development and the degree of enforcement of environmental regulations, laws, conservation strategy etc. that raised the magnitude of problem. Thus there is a need to preserve conventional knowledge for conserving precious resources. In this regard village community of Manesar came forward to set an example of community participation and revived their ethical values toward resource conservation (TABLE 1). The said community has done numerous activities which pertain conservation of resources are as follows:

1. Conservation of ponds
2. Preservation of watershed
3. Conservation of soil
4. Preservation of trees
5. Preservation of medicinal plants and shrubs
6. Digging of small ponds
7. Saving birds and other wildlife in the area.

Table 1: Traditional Practices, features, issues and ways towards conservation

Sr. No.	Resource	Practice	Features	Traditional way of conservation	Issues	Reason	A few Cases noticed towards conservation
1.	Water	Bathing ceremony	Protection of water sources, forest and sacred plants has been one of the most traditional expressions of 'duty'	Disiltation of pond, fencing around the pond by community	Drying up water bodies	Lack of maintenance of waterbodies, on ly extraction of water no recharge, filled dry ponds with mud for construction purposes	Formation of check dam to store rainwater in the foothills of Aravalli ranges, Disiltation of ponds
2.	Forest	Animals Worship	Worship of Cow is a religious duty, as Cow (associated with Lord Krishna), Products obtain from Cow like milk, ghee etc are good for health	Provide shelter to feeble Cow in 'Gaushala' and take care of them by community	Decreasing number of Cows	Due to mining activities, extraction of ground water for construction purposes and removed forest cover which raised the crisis of fodder for animals	There are 12 'Gaushala' in Manesar that are running by community itself
3.		Trees worship	Each household keeps sacred plants and worships those every morning as a duty, Tulsi plant leaves are used to manifestations of Gods Leaves of mango tree and Ashoka tree are used in performing religious rituals and other social occasions like 'Havan' without these worship considered partial Offering water to Pipal tree for the wellbeing of relatives and ancestors	Plantation of trees in the temple premises and on any selected piece of land which are usually used for performing the religious activities. Limited access, only few people are allowed to access	Loss of forest cover, no fear, no religious duty, people are allowed to cut trees for their benefits.	Absence of traditional knowledge and institutions to restrict the undesirable activities in the controlled zone	Afforestation has done by the community on common land
4.	Land	Sowing and harvesting of crops	Enjoy the period when rain starts, do prayers for getting the maximum yield and celebrate harvesting time, organize folk songs and in the moonlight for protecting crops from animals	Prevent soil erosion by collecting rain water into pond	Loss of agriculture land	Pressure on limited land resource due to development activities	--

5.	Socio-cultural	Bhajan by 'bhajanmandlis', prayers sung by the students in schools and swangs staged by 'sangis'.	Important part of cultural life, Sings song in folk atmosphere and moralize people through songs and encourage them not to harm natural resources For the development of society and welfare	Collection of common donation for the construction of school buildings, temple etc.	No such groups left due to the absence of sense of unity, cooperation etc.	Self centred approach	--
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Source: Primary Survey

IV. CONCLUSION

The comprehensive knowledge of connection to religion based traditional beliefs and protection of natural resources absolutely creates logic and treated as sustainable approach for resource conservation. In the Article 48(A) of Indian constitution imposes a legal compulsion on State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country. Similarly in the Article 51(A)(g) appeals to the citizens of India to protect and improve the natural environment which demonstrate the severity of problem of resource management. Although, the country has various Acts and laws such as air pollution, emission of greenhouse gases, water Act, air Act and the Environment Protection Act but there is no stringent action and implementation have been observed yet in this view. In the 32nd session of UNESCO in 2003 had urged for safeguarding knowledge and skills recognised by communities, groups etc and gave stress on the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation which is commonly known as indigenous knowledge. Besides, UN declaration spotrd "that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment". Moreover, cenral government has enacted

Biological Diversity Act for the protection of rare species and made provision for the promotion of uncommon knowledge of indigenous communities but again the issue of poor implementation resist the accomplishment. There are few instances which illustrate the value of traditional ecological knowledge in sustainable natural resource management are as follows:

1. The Demazong, the Buddhist eco-cultural landscape in Sikkim Himalayas and the Apatani eco-cultural landscape in Arunachal Pradesh are eminent for their intrinsic traditional knowledge for the conservation of resources.
2. In 1987 the rural community of Mendha village, Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra State put their efforts towards biodiversity conservation and ensured no commercial exploitation of forests, measures taken to handle soil erosion, encroachment and important feature of this community is that the villagers decide for themselves and learn their own from the outside world.
3. Similarly, the fishermen of Greater Mumbai and Sindhudurg districts of Maharashtra was found to be rich in indigenous inherited knowledge with the management of bag net, shore-seine, gill net, long line and traditional trawl fishery.
4. An ethno-botanical survey was conducted during 1998 and 1999 in villages of Bhadra Wild Life Sanctuary area, situated in the Western Ghats region of Karnataka. The utilisation of leaves of Centella Asiatica, and roots of Ichnocarpus Frutescens in the treatment of jaundice, diabetes were found to be noteworthy. Although, India represent
5. In spite of having a rich herbal capital, India is contributing only 1.5 percent in the GDP, although the potential is enormous as it observed through increasing growth percent of medical tourists (10%) coming in India from West in order to seek comfort in the form of Medicine, Meditation/ Yoga etc.
6. Due to the relocation from their forest land and limited access to the forest the Yanadi tribals in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh lost their traditional knowledge which became a serious issue as of now. The tribals have developed extensive knowledge of bio-resources, medicinal and aromatic plants and wild foods, including unique remedies for snake bite, paralysis and skin diseases

V. WAY FORWARD

Therefore, the traditional cultures and knowledge are very important for the both nature and society. For this government should take measures to preserve, protect and promote knowledge and cultures and also encourage research on this for conducting social and scientific study in order to preserve the remaining traditional practices. In this view, the overlapping of functions among allied department and lack of coordination are the important concern for the smooth implementation of particular policy. Hence, the involvement of non-government organisation is very important to interact with the tribal people. In the same way, another aspect is

to educate concerned official at the state and local levels so that they can respect and understand their traditional culture and should work with them in a synergy. An equal platform should be provided for both scientists and locals who can come together and shared the benefits, issues and potential for accessing traditional knowledge. In the end, role of community in the decision making process should be ensured for the successful implementation of plans and policies in the regard and persuade youth to learn more about their cultural heritage as well as tolerance and respect for other cultures and traditions.

Therefore, presently we are facing the challenge of not only industrialisation, liberalisation and urbanisation but also the problems related to environment degradation which are continuously declining the health status of our people. Thus it appeals for the active participation both by the government and the people in resource conservation and management and this can possible only through political will, education, empowerment of native people and a change in the mindset of the people in general. At last, our efforts towards preservation of natural resources have been recognised in a survey conducted by National Geographic that 'Indians as the most environment-friendly people'. But this bring as an additional responsibility on Indians that they have not only to protect, preserve and promote Indian cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, but also to direct the world in environment conservation through sustainable development.

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