

Conservation Through Cosmvision-Based Methodology

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Abstract:

In an ongoing effort to expand in-depth information on the interactions of the human environment among various cultures around the world, ecologists, anthropologists and ethnoscientists have further studied Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a major subject of the multidisciplinary field of social ecological science. This position is also supported by the Convention on Biological Diversity as one of the major international organizations which underlines the importance of indigenous knowledge for in situ conservation. Progress in this area not only contributes to the ongoing international debate about the role of indigenous peoples in conservation and sustainable development, but also helps bridge the gap between the natural and biological sciences. These studies seek to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity from the views and visions of indigenous and traditional peoples themselves regarding resource use, management and conservation, i.e. what determines the vulnerability or resilience of natural-community systems in 2 specific types of places and for types of ecosystems. and human livelihoods? ', there is a growing interdisciplinary interest in studying Traditional Ecological Knowledge with the aim of analyzing and understanding the complex relationships between the 'invisible' factors of knowledge, beliefs and perceptions in relation to traditional conservation practices in various settings.)

Key Word: Traditional Ecological Knowledge; Cosmvision - Based Conservation

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study of local perceptions and belief systems in relation to conservation in the diverse sense of environment and development has influenced recent interest in the field of ethnobotany. Various ethnobotanical studies that have been able to analyze 'indigenous management structures' from the perspective of local people suggest that local conviction about the management of agricultural and botanical resources is the key to sustaining the long-term use of resources. Comparative research in medicinal, herbal, and cosmetic plants and herbs also shows that conventional views of nature have a similar impact on the use of these plants for forest conservation and health care enhancement.

Linking up with classic ethnoscience studies in the 1950's of local perceptions and classifications of indigenous peoples, followed in the 1980's by a new, more dynamic approach of indigenous knowledge systems within the context of development, the 1990's heralded a more differentiated research 3 effort into the knowledge, beliefs and practices of indigenous and traditional communities for biocultural conservation. The cross-cultural approach of Alcorn, et al (1995) to define the dynamics of local knowledge as the 'cultural dimension of development' presented already a compilation of case studies in which gradually the recognition of a spiritual dimension of Traditional Ecological Knowledge started to emerge. Later on, this complex dimension of traditional biocultural conservation was explicitly brought to the fore in the pioneering work by Posey on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity, published as a complementary study to the comprehensive Global Biodiversity Assessment of Heywood (1995).

Traditional Ecological Knowledge embodies more than a mere accumulation of empirical facts for the people themselves. In many cases it is based on a general understanding that the living world is made up of three interrelated worlds: the human world, the natural world and the spiritual world, together representing their worldview or cosmvision. Although it has become clear that there are several factors which-from a Western point of view-cannot be brought directly in relation with local conservation practices, they obviously guide many of the traditional practices and methods whereby local people manage and use their diverse resources in a sustainable mode.

These factors are part of the cultural and spiritual worldviews or cosmvisions providing the base for most indigenous knowledge systems including Traditional Environmental Knowledge. As documented by several studies such as by Plaskow and Christ in India 4 (1989), Haverkort and Hiemstra. in Peru (1999), Millar in Ghana (1999), Ramakrishnan and Stuckey, in India (1998), Mahale and Soree in India (1999) and Slikkerveer in Indonesia (1999), in many indigenous and traditional cosmvisions, people perceive the universe as made up

by these three worlds: the human world, the natural world and the spiritual world. While the human world includes the social life of the people in all its dimensions-community life, family and kinship ties, ethnic groups, traditional leadership and institutions-the natural world encompasses nature in all its manifestations-animals, plants, crops, trees, landscapes, rivers and seas. The spiritual world is often composed of a variety of spirits-deities and gods, and the ancestral spirits. These three worlds are interrelated, rendering the various notions to form the cosmovision in which humans take a central position. In essence, cosmovisions are the organising spiritual and conceptual frameworks used by many indigenous peoples to organize themselves and integrate their communities into the world.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article is an analysis of a compilations of literary researches and articles by a multiplicity of renowned scientists in the field of bio-cultural diversity, ecology, anthropology and ethno science experts such as Maffi, Slikkerveer, Plaskon and Christ, Haverkort and Millar. A synthesis has been drawn from these literary reviews as described in this article with various modifications from field verifications. These verifications have been carried out through panel discussions with heads and members of village communities in both 5 rural and suburban areas. The focus of these panels were on the concept and practices of cosmovision-based conservation.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From an emic standpoint, the fundamental idea of these three interconnected realms of spirits, humanity, and nature, unified in the local cosmovision, can be used to divide six different forms of resources. They contain, as Haverkort et al (2003) point out:

- Land, ecosystem, climate, plants and animals are examples of natural resources.
- Knowledge, skills, concepts, ways of learning and experimenting are examples of human resources.
- Buildings, utilities, and machinery are examples of human-made resources.
- Markets, incomes, ownerships, price relations, credit are examples of Economic-financial resources
- Family, ethnic organizations, social institutions and leadership are examples of social resources.
- Beliefs, norms, values, festivals and rituals, art, language, lifestyle are example of cultural resources.

In this way, the cosmologies provide the local people with a comprehensive philosophy of life, often deeply rooted in their religion which guides them in their behaviour to maintain a harmonious balance among the components of the cosmic order. Their more or less sanctioned conduct includes their use, management and conservation of their resources, with the ultimate objective to achieve their fulfilment of life. These worldviews on the cosmic order and its components form the base for most traditional philosophies of life, guiding human behaviour and religious conduct, rendering the people as guardians or stewards of their environment. Moreover, many of these traditional philosophies have continued to play a major role not only in the maintenance of the human relations with the environment, but also in the overall survival of indigenous cultures under pressure of external forces, development experts and scientists ignoring, neglecting, forbidding or ridiculing this traditional system for centuries.

The increased interest in holistic and philosophical aspects of traditional peoples' 'indigenous management systems', natural and social scientists are continuing to document in their studies on Traditional Ecological Knowledge the specific orientation of indigenous peoples towards sustainable use and conservation of their resources. Here, a new impetus is given to biocultural systems approach to the study of indigenous management and conservation of biocultural diversity in developing countries. Embarking on the evidence that most traditional livelihood systems are constantly adapting to changing social, cultural, economic and ecological conditions, these studies contribute to the literature that such systems are not always inherently destructive but in many cases rather sustained. While these concepts cannot be considered universal, they do, according to Posey (1999), emphasize the following values in general:

- Co-operation;
- Family bonding and cross-generational communication, including links with ancestors;
- Concern for the future generations' well-being
- Local-scale self-sufficiency, and reliance on locally available natural resources;
- Rights to lands, territories and resources which tend to be collective and inalienable rather than individual and alienable;
- .Restraint in resource exploitation and respect for nature, especially sacred sites.

The importance of 'respect for nature,' especially for sacred sites, highlights indigenous peoples' cosmovisions as an integral part of their culture. Despite the fact that management and conservation are essentially pragmatic practices, indigenous peoples typically consider their experience as having a spiritual underpinning. All creations are sacred to them, and the secular and sacred are also inextricably linked in their

holistic view of the world. As a result, environmental experience is influenced not only by humans' interactions with nature, but also by their interactions with the unseen realm of ancestors, spirits, and deities. The idea of the Sacred Balance, which encapsulates the connections between life, property, and culture, is also part of the local belief system. Such a relationship, for example, is well articulated in traditional African religions, which are viewed as a way of life aimed at bringing order to human relationships with one another and with the environment (Opoku 1978; Odera 1994; Agazzi 1994).

Evolving from 'new' ethnoscientific research showing that several indigenous systems of knowledge and technology are being marginalised or put at risk of extinction as a result of external forces, Slikkerveer (1999) documents 8 that the concept of biocultural diversity has also been further elaborated: 'in order to stress their crucial complementarity for achieving an alternative, less exploitative philosophy of nature and the environment for improved sustainable natural resource management and conservation'. Similarly, Haverkort & Hiemstra (1999) document on the sustained agricultural system in the Andean Highlands of Bolivia: 'In working together with rural communities, the technicians learned that farmers in their tradition were not only practicing organic farming, but that their knowledge was based on a comprehensive philosophy that was the result of a worldview or comovision that was much richer than expected'. This perspective links up with Harmon (1992), who identified a number of indicators of the world's cultural diversity, ranging from the use of local languages, ethnic affiliation, forms of social organisation practices, land management, diet, medicine, to aesthetic and religious manifestations. His assessment of the current status of these indicators reveals an overall downward trend in all cases. Since the position of humans within the universe is an essential component of most NonWestern philosophies rooted in various religious systems, it is interesting to note that in contrast to the Judaeo-Christian view of nature which has dominated Western philosophical thought, the related environmental ethics of several indigenous philosophies are not human-centered.

IV. CONCLUSION

Indeed, the common Western view of nature in which humans are placed apart, and above the rest of nature has led to a form of possessive individualism which through its utilitarian application of modern science and 9 technology, according to some observers, has contributed to the current global environmental degradation. Odera (1994) argues that this philosophy is spreading in today's world: 'as pluralistic democracy and a free market economy are becoming the dominant political and economic norms for humanity'. Such anthropocentric ethics of Western philosophy are not found in the less harmful environmental philosophies, indigenous to Africa and Asia. As Wiredu (1994) notes: 'It is well known that Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism-all in their different ways teach respect for nature'. In these Non-Western systems of thought, human beings are basically seen as fellow participants together with animals, plants and nonliving things in one organic system in the universe.

As this philosophy of life is guiding human behaviour within the cosmic order, i.e. to maintain or restore the 'Sacred Balance' in order to establish a harmonious relationship with the rest of the universe, it renders human efforts principally as conservation-oriented. For the local population, in daily life cosmovisions not only provide explanations of the way in which spiritual and natural processes are taking place, but they also form the basis for peoples' interventions in nature and culture. As Posey (1999) notes, harmony and equilibrium are basic concepts in most cosmovision, and can provide: 'balance for well-being through relationships not only among people, but also nature and deities. Thus, the local practices to manage, use and conserve resources can be regarded as a traditional philosophy guided by soul, nature and religious beliefs for human behavior which providing for a Sacred Balance way of life.

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