

SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AMONGST THE GOND TRIBES OF AMRAVATI DISTRICT IN RELATION TO PLANTS.



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abstract

The present communication deals with the Socio-cultural aspect in relation to plants among the Gond tribes of Amravati District. Their feelings and love about the plants certainly helped in the conservation and least damage to the individual species and habitat thus maintaining the diversity of plant life in the area. Gond tribes are also aware of diversified uses of the plants influencing their life style and socio-economic conditions.

Keywords: Gond, Socio-culture, Amravati. Maharashtra.

Introduction :

The worship of nature is a tribal belief and these tribal communities maintain symbiotic relationship with flora and fauna of the region. It is because of their sacred feelings about plants that number of important taxa are still conserved in the forests. The study of cultural diversity alongwith biological diversity is an important aspect of the concepts and methods of conservation.

The culture means the understanding of customs, beliefs, taboos, rituals, religious association with bioresources.

It is estimated that more than 200 tribes of aborigines exceeding 30 million of population live in the close vicinity of forests occupying remote places. In Maharashtra alone there are about 50 tribes showing great diversity in culture, traditions,

customs, food habits and medicinal practices (Vartak et al 1981) plants have become a part and parcel of life and culture of the tribal communities. They love plants and consider them as "beautiful creations of God" sometimes feel them as symbols of good and bad omens revere them as God during festival use them as bioresources to fulfill need of food, shelter and healthcare. Such a study of close relationship has has been describe as meta-level of understanding between biologists and people (Ford, 1994) .

Tribal arequite familiar with plant resources and habits of wild life too. Cultural associations are also witnessed with specific trees. The Gond population is distributed in the remote villages of Amravati District. (Padhye , et al 1992)

Study Area:

The area under consideration in the present article includes hilly tribal areas of Amravati District in Maharashtra State. It lies between 20031' and 21046' North latitude and 76037' and 78027' East longitude and occupies an area of about 12, 449.7 Sq. Kms. The Floristic investigations in Amravati district initiated by Mirashi (et.al 1975). Further detailed studies brought to light 1084,species of plants (Dhore 2002), However socio-cultural practices in relation to plants have not been considered.

Methodology :

Present investigations were conducted from 2000-2007. Frequent visits were given to the tribal villages of Amravati District where Gond tribe is dominant . Older persons of the family in different localities were interviewed to know about their customs, beliefs about the plants, the role and significance of plants in their routine life, marriage ceremony, festivals etc. The interrelationship of plants narrated by the older persons were recorded and it was confirmed after discussing different persons in various localities of the Gond tribes.

OBSERVATIONS:

In Gond tribe RajGond, PradhanGond, Gaiki Gond, Zadi Gond, Parteki Gond, Gawari Gond, Bharadi Gond are the sub caste, out of these sub caste, Rajgond is considered as the Superior one. People from the subcaste Pradhan Gond perform the religious work as priest . They are known as "patau". Thus Pradhan Gond are considered as superior next to Rajgond. They also have their separate family God based upon their different Gotras.

According to Gotras they are also divided into Sahadeve and Satdeve. Marriages are performed between sahadeve and Satdeve. Marriages amongst sahadeve and Sahadeve or satdeve and Satdeve are prohibited and such marriages are not recognised by the Gond Society. The society bycotts such family.

Mahadeo Parwati is the main God of this tribe, at the same time they worship Dandivan, Kacchivan, Sahadeo Matia, Gadwa, Patau and pitar. They gives very much importance to following trees in their life. The trees like *Boswelliaserrata* (Salai) *Terminalia alata* heyne (Sajad), *Mudhuca Indica* Gmelin (Mohwa), *Lannea Coromandelica* (Houtt) Merr. (Moin), *Syzygium Cumini* (L) Skeels (Jamun) *Aegle marmelos* (L) corr. (Bel) *Ficus racemosa* L. (Umbar), *Butea monosperma* (Lamk), Taub (Palash), *Adina cordifolia* (Roxb) Hook (Haldu), *Zizyphus Mauritiana* Lamk. (Bor), are the most important. Out of these trees *Boswellia serrata* Roxb (Salai), *Madhuca indica*, Gmelin (Mohwa), *Terminalia alata* Heyne (Sajad) and *Butea monosperma* (Lama) Taub (Palash) have the most significance place in their life.

Marriage Ceremony:

On the previous day of marriage they prepare a pendal for which they use wooden log of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb tree and branches of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin tree. If *Boswellia serrata* Roxb is not available then they used wooden log of *LanneaCoromandelica* (Houtt) Merr tree. Young boys of the village do this work. If the marriage is to be performed in satdeve family then the boyes from Sahadeve family would

bring the wooden logs from the forest and vice versa.

Before cutting the branches of *Boswellia Serrata* Roxb. tree and *Madhuca indica* Gmelin tree they worshiped and they considered this prayer as an invitation to these trees for the marriage ceremony. Bark of these logs does not removed, they draw the sketches of sun and Moon on these *Boswellia Serrata* Roxb tree logs with the help of peculiar instrument. They also draw the pictures of bride and bridegroom. They shows the bridegroom holding dagger in one hand and hand of the bride in another hand. Wooden logs of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb tree and branch of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin are fitted at the centre of pendal and thus pendal is erected. They apply turmeric to the log of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin and log of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb and whorshiped it on this pendal, they spread branches of *Syzygium cumini* (L) Skeels and *Ficus racemosa* L Bride as well as bridegroom are required to put five branches in the beginning only, thereafter other people do the remaining work. One 'oata' is prepared at the centre and four oil lamps are lighted at the four corners of this "Oata," the bride and bridegroom are asked to sit there and the people present there, put the white cotton thread around the "Oata" even the pendal is also covered by white cotton thread, marriage rites are by a person who is well acquainted with religions rituals, marriage ceremony is performed at the home of bridegroom, if she demanded so by the bridegroom on the other hand, marriage ceremony is performed at the house as bride, then the bridegroom is to start living at the

house of the bride even after the marriage.

The reason behind the use of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb. tree for preparing a marriage pendal is like this. They says that when the marriage of God Mahadeo and Goddess parwati was fixed , mahadeo had prepared the marriage pendal of Gold and silver. But parwati declined for such pendal and requested mahadeo that, her family is poor while the family of mahadeo was rich one. Obviously she meant that, her family members could not prepare pendal of. Gold and silver, therefore she requested that branches of *Boswellia Serrata* Roxb and *Madhuca indica* Gmelin should be use for preparing a marriage pendal as a symbols of Gold and Silver. The tribals narrate the above mentioned story and say that their society is also very poor. Therefore, whenever marriage ceremony are to performed, they follow the example of marriage of mahadeo and Parwati. It is their belief that if there is a branch of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin and *Boswellia serrata* Roxb. wooden log in the marriage pendal and if the whole pendal is encircled with the cotton thread then the evil spirit would not affect the family members. There is also no danger during the marriage ceremony.

This tribe does not permit the inter caste or inter-sub caste marriage. If this rule is not followed strictly and an inter-caste or inter-sub-caste marriage tooks place, then the society bycotts such newly married couple. If such couple want reentry into the society they are required to perform a special religious rites. Such a person has to desert his wife, then and then only he is re accepted by the society. This

solemn ritual is performed by the 'Patau', who is the man from main subcaste pradhan.

Importance of *Terminalia alata* Heyne (Sajad)

This tribe believe that *Terminalia alata* Heyne tree is inhabited by the God. Family God resides at the particular place according to Gotras, for example family God of Parteki Gotra is at Chittagadh, Madhya Pradesh, while Family God of some Gotras are at "Mainee Khapa paresia" in chhindwara district of M.P. Here the family Gods are under the *Terminalia alata* Heyne tree. At such place the boycotted person is required to worship the God then he hug this tree. Then and then only such boycotted person is reaccepted by the society such a person has to desert his wife. If he is not inclined to give up his wife then the women is asked to beg at five houses. She has to prepare food with the help of things which she has collected by begging, then all family members have their meals and then she is formally accepted by the society. In this way Gond gives importance to sajad tree.

People from this tribe consider the person sinful and impure if he is injured and have absces or ulcers on his person (body) and there is green colour disease carrying fly. Such an individual is not accepted by anybody. Even he is not allowed to enter the home or not allowed to touch them. such a person is even not offered drinking water. At "lawapati" in Melghat there is one tree of *Terminalia alata* heyne (Sajad) Under which they believe that Gods kacchivan and Dandivan lives at this place the boycotted person is

purified. Again the 'patau' does the holy rites. While the religious rite is being performed, they dig peats on the river side. If the boycotted person belongs to sahadave then six peats are dug and if he belongs to satdeve then seven peats are dug. At this place first they sacrifices black coloured chick, the blood of which is spread all over the peats. The boycotted person is asked to take bath. Therefore they throw out the water from the peat. Again white coloured chick is Sacrifices, the blood, of whom is spread in the peat's then the patau whorship all peats and then boycotted person is asked to drink one drop from each peat thereafter all other are offered drops of water from these peats for drinking. Thereafter the sinner is taken under the sajad tree. Here the patau sacrifices red colour cock, while the sinner kills white colour cock. Again the sajad tree is worshipped. First the patau embraces the tree and thereafter the sinner at last all the persons present there hug the sajad tree. Then the chicken (Flesh) of the sacrifices cocks is prepared and all of them enjoy the food and return to their places. In this way the sinner is again brought in the main stream of the society.

The trees used in different festivals and occasion by Gond tribe.

These people do not use fruits of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin tree before its worship. They also bring branch of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb tree. They put two Fruits of *Madhuca indica* Gmelin on the leaf of *Boswellia serrata* Roxb.

They also keep six or seven stones as a symbol of God and

worship them. They collect fruits of *Madhuca Indica* Gmelin and after drying them oil is extracted which is mostly used by the tribal for various purposes.

Makarsankarant :

During this festival branches of *Terminalia alata* Heyne (Sajad) tree are brought and worshipped.

Nagpanchami :

On the eve of Nagpanchami branches of *Boswellia Serrata* Roxb tree are brought and they are cut into 6 or 7 small pieces which are worshiped at home as God.

Some Important trees.

Butea Monosperma (Lamk) Taub (Palash)

Ceremony last rites and naming ceremony of child . Even during marriage ceremony the leaves are worshipped . After death Two and half leaves are kept on the chest of the dead person, two and half leaves on the belly and two and half leaves on the mouth . During the naming ceremony of a child three leaves are kept in "Aarti" and they are worshipped.

***Adina Cordifolia* (Roxb) Hook (Haldu)**

Adina cordifolia (Roxb) Hook is considered as holy tree by this tribe. They prepare small statues of God like Kacchivan and Dandivan from the wood of this tree. These statues are worshipped. These tribe also considered *Terminalia alata* Hyene (Sajad), *Boswellia serrata* Roxb (Salai) *Adina cordifolia* (Roxb) Hook

(Haldu), *Lannea coromandelica* (Houtt) Merr (Moine), *Madhuca Indica* Gmelin (Mohwa) *Butea monosperma* (Lamk) Taub (Palash) and *Aegle marmelos* (L) corr (Bel) as holy trees on the contrary (*Careya arborea* Roxb) (Kumbhi) and *Delbergiaa paniculata* Roxb (Fasi) trees are not used even as a fuel since they considered as unholy.

In almost all tribes and caste *Ficus benghalensis* L and *Ficus religiosa* L are worshipped as "Rushis."

Discussion :

There are about 472 tribal communities all over India. It has been estimated that about 15% of the total geographical area is dominated by the tribal communities . The traditional cultural practices among Gond tribes bring to light their feeling love, devotion about natural heritage. The indepth study of the Gond tribes reveled their perception about the plants they have established a spiritual relationship namely *Boswellia Serrata* Roxb (Salai), *Terminalia alata* Heyne (Sajad), *Madhuca Indica* Gmelin (Mohawa), *Lannea coromandelica* (Hautt) Merr. (Moine) *Ficus racemosa* L (Umbar) *Butea monosperma* (Lamk) Taub (Palash) *Aegle marmelos* (L) Corr (Bel), *Adina cordifolia* (Roxb) Hook (Haldu), *Zizyphus mauritiana* Lamk (Bor) etc. Thus conserving the natural diversity of the forest. Now a days this man plant relationship is influencing the style of living, leading to the socio-economic changes. These traditional practices and faith contributed much to the better preservation, negligible damage to the individual species and their habitats.

Conclusion

Author has been conducting survey of the social life of Gond tribe inhabiting a small villages of Satpuda in Amravati District Author has given frequent visits to the area and closely associated with them as well as the minute observations of their socio - cultural life helped him to arrived at some conclusion.

That Gond tribe have got a rich cultural tradition which is

largely influenced by their close proximity with nature. Basically there tribes are nature worshipper. There is a common connecting bond between God, nature and man, Every aspect of tribal life is deeply influenced by objects of nature, mountain , river, plants, wild life, different seasons and music created by these objects of nature have influenced their life obviously their thoughts, ideas, opinion, approach towards life, attitude, mental set up actions reactions are all developed because of the influence of natur

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