

Time to Recommence to Endure -Harmonisation between Nature and Cultural Practices

Dr. Bandana Dhiman

Assistant Professor (Forest Products), RHRSS & Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Tabo, Lahaul & Spiti (H.P) 172113

Corresponding Author: bandana.dhiman18@gmail.com

Introduction

The term "culture," which sociology uses to refer to "the acquired behaviour in society from past generations". Its definition is simplified with recent paradigms when we study academic courses like 'Anthropology, Ethnography, Sociology, Extension Education etc. Practically these behavioural actions are shared and transmitted among society. In every part of the region, state, or country, we find different verses of cultural clusters which are defined by different values. These values are reflected by community behaviour, rituals or rites, and various religious practices. Some of the practices have detrimental impacts on the environment and disrupt ecology of the Nature.

'Culture' being a long-time contributor to maintaining the tradition, is becoming vicious for the environment either directly or indirectly. And if cultural practices are unfriendly to the environment, it can surely cause the 'Collapsing of Ecology'. As per ecologists, the loss of species and modifications to ecosystem biomass, nutrient cycles, carrying capacity, and disruption of balanced functioning due to outside influences are together referred to as 'Ecology collapse' which have been deeply analysed by Laurance *et al.* 1997; Lichter, *et al.* 2006; Abel *et al.* 2006, where they observed that prominent factor is anthropogenic activity. However, humans are the carriers for persisting these cultural activities by considering them as a tradition. Although, cultures and traditions have a great role in disclosing historical facts and describing primitive conditions. Hence, they are important in maintaining on-going religious affairs which are diversified and different as per the Indian states culture.

Examples and consequences

As far back as anyone could analyse their root connection with their culture. We all have been practicing the culture knowingly or unknowingly under societal guidance. Where society, especially family has instructed us to perform for spiritual and moral development. Like respecting sacred mighty trees and grooves; donating/offering to hungry

beings, pets, birds, and needy animals, prayers; offering water to 'Surya' when rising; watering *Tulsi* (sacred medicinal herb); to resist disturbing plants at dusk when birds are roosting over there & so...on...These mutual-positive practices have profound beneficial impacts on the environment and ecosystem as well. For instance, an article mentioned about extinct tree *i.e.*, *Maduca diplostemon* has been rediscovered in Kollam groove (Sacred) in Kerala (Western Ghats of South India). It was found to be the only remnant of the tree near the temple, where the locals have kept it as a sacred groove for its natural life.

Source-

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/extinct-tree-found-after-180-years-in-kollam-grove/article32760018.ece>.

Cultural customs of the Indian subcontinent such as tying fabrics/plastics laces to the young branches of tender sacred trees, continuously emitting incense fumes, and offering oil to them cause stress, and lead to difficulty in adaptation to altered microclimate created by human actions. These actions, such as hanging thread around a tree's stem to mark it as sacred and not to be cut, make sense if we consider the mythical justification for them. However, tagged one is over-rolled by so many pilgrimages, which has caused certain trees to become completely congested from the base to the subsidiary branches. Anything remaining with fabrics/plastics/wood after rituals-*pooja/haavans/yagyas*, such as dried flowers, burnt *haavan* material, oil, ghee, coins, clothes/rugs, cereals, mundan hairs, etc., are dumped into water sources *i.e.*, flowing rivers, ponds, lakes etc, contributing to pollution. Their impacts like contamination, pollution, toxicity, etc are common at sacred, religious or Holy places. When these practices exceed beyond the balanced limit of source, disrupt the ecosystem irreversibly. Every year consequences are visible in the Holy River- 'Yamuna during the 'Chhath puja' celebration. Sometimes flour balls are thrown at inland water bodies to enhance plankton's (marine microorganism) growth in water which acts as food

for fish. But in excess or beyond a certain limit that causes eutrophication. Nature has a natural phenomenon of scattering soil particles, dust, or ash to natural water bodies for balancing nutrition to marine life. Here the problem is the human population where 'N' numbers (countless) of people throwing diverse litter/chemical material, causing rivers to stagnate or eutrophication. 'Rewalsar Lake' (Mandi, H.P.) is one example with this negative implication due to human activities. The sacred natural lake has turned into a dead lake sustained with polluted ecosystem with dead fish, leaving no marine life behind in an altered environment.

Source- <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/features/hundreds-of-fish-found-dead-in-rewalsar-lake-106280>

Cultural Scenario

Thus, for the sake of devotion by performing unfriendly rituals and ceremony, we are contaminating precious segments of Mother Earth. Not only flora is at the edge of the knife, tradition is also playing equally to fauna like an animal sacrifice for pleasing the local deity in a family's annual rituals/marriages/celebrations etc. Earlier, these practices were limited or with unnoticeable impact as they were performed by taking care of nature. But blasting human population with half-shattered knowledge, these practices are being performed blindly; resulting noticeable alteration in environment and imprinting negative impacts as well.

Researchers and elite sociologists express those past traditions had been distorted after diffusion with animism control by religious instructors. Masses are influenced by instructors/astrologers in the name of family well-being, good-omen, futuristic luck etc. Religious instructors lure pessimistic or agonized people with esoteric religious beliefs which sensitize people to follow them to overcome all kinds of miseries. Soon enough, they start following them in routine and practicing without knowing that some of them are unhealthy to the environment. All of us have unknowingly or with lack of awareness/education. Whether unknowingly or with a lack of awareness/education, we have all been convicted of these traditions and still not found guilty of these unless a big disaster didn't appear. These practices must be reduced or minimised if not concern nature's protection.

In a country or state having a dominant orthodox population, these practices are no less than slavery where masses are influenced more blindly than education and legal rules. To overcome these practices, we have to shift our attitude toward nature and should come out of religious slavery. A religion called 'Sarna' is a paradigm of naturalistic religion; tribes of this religion are nature-protector, fought for separate religion with their state government Jharkhand. Finally, the state passed a resolution on their demand to recognize 'Sarna religion' where their community will solely focus on the preservation of natural resources. This was happened with their longing efforts and life devotion to nature.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/why-jharkhand-is-seeking-a-separate-religious-code-for-sarna-tribals-7048700/>

In the era of development and urbanization, we are forgetting our roots of wilderness. Humans have ignored their preservation; hence, the option left is conservation, where liberalization of each entity of Nature is needed. We have to divert the minds of the dominant orthodox public to adopt Nature-friendly cultural heritage, sensitizing them toward speechless natural entities' emotions. It can be simply understood that 'Human race survival depends on healthy Nature'.

Conclusion

Need of the hour to waken social determination

It may be an uphill task to shift societies' perception of cultural and religious practices as these are inherited but still pedantic. Sometimes, the government itself is caught under it. Nevertheless, democratic handling (Zimmerman, 2004) under the direction of good governance is extremely needed for nations' future sustainability by highlighting the scenario as an 'Environmental Emergency'. Government policies must include aspects having a socio-ecological perspective rather than political-religious dominance. Various national organizations (NGOs or GOs) working for the environment, should target orthodox society and learning students of each societal class. Motivative events, demonstrations, practical solutions, and follow-up activities must be carried out which could aware society of nature's harmonization with human activities.

Young environmentalists must work or protest as liberals to avoid shattering from *Ecofacism* (Kev

Smith) created by polarised society. Environment protection movements over bad traditions/cultural practices happened in the past history of Europe. Hence youth awareness has to be awakened toward nature-loving past events that happened globally. Due to diverse culture, previous eco-movements at one location of state or part of the Indian continent haven't shake the far region or government for long time effectively. Hence energetic, educated, combined youth-quack can create a roaring impact on the government to make strict decisions concerning cultural alignment to the environment. It would be slow but soon enough, one day transformed ideology as well as policies will result in positivity for 'Mother Nature' and 'Human race'.

References

Abel, N. *et al.* (2006) Collapse and reorganization in social-ecological systems: questions, some

ideas, and policy implications. *Ecol. Soc.* 11, (1).

Kev Smith, "Ecofascism: Deep Ecology Theory and Right-Wing Co-optation," in *Rising Tide: Climate Justice Network*, at: www.risingtide.nl/greenpepper/envracism/ecofacism.html

Laurance, W.F. *et al.* (1997) Biomass collapse in Amazonian forest fragments. *Science* 278, 1117-50.

Lichter, J. *et al.* (2006) The ecological collapse and partial recovery of a freshwater tidal ecosystem. *Northeast. Nat.* 13, 153-178.

Zimmerman, M. E. (2004). Ecofascism: An enduring temptation. *Environmental philosophy: from animal rights to radical ecology*, 4, 1-30.
