

Practices of Indigenous People are Leading Towards Sustainability

Dr Prasanta Sahoo

Counsellor, Dept of Rural Development, School of Continuing Education, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Abstract:

India is a land of tribal people. Tribal people are the original inhabitants of India as they live in forests, hills and naturally isolated places. The present paper focuses on the traditional practices of tribal people which are nature friendly. The indigenous knowledge system enriches their culture, livelihood and health practices for present and future also. The practices and trends of tribal people support towards a stable, sustainable growth and development, where they maintain communal harmony with nature. It is witness that their bio cultural practices make a strong bond between human settlement and nature which is to be replicated in all section of society for a better society with a happy and happy situation. Sustainability is a long-term concept where the protection of natural environment and social environment are taken care. The tribal people have already adopted this process in their life and livelihoods based on sustainability.

Keywords: Bio cultural, Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, Sustainable, Nature, tribe

Introduction:

The tribal people are the initial dwellers in India. They are commonly designated as Adivasi the original settlers, Girijan the hill dwellers, Vanyaajati the forest caste, Adimjati the primitive castes, Jana Jati the folk communities, Anusuchit Jan Jati the schedule tribes and they live in different parts of India, commonly known as Adivais for tribal people. The indigenous people are the initial dwellers of the earth who follow the distinct cultural and social customs guided by nature in their life from generation to generation. They have their own social governance system where social justice and human development are ensured. They are unique as their way of life is something special in maintaining their livelihoods in convergence with nature and culture. The indigenous knowledge which they have developed in course of time supports them to live a happy life. The sustainability indicates a situation where every body is in a comfortable position now and act for a better tomorrow by integrating equity with nature and culture. The tribal people take care of the physical environment and social environment towards sustainable development which is now need of the hour. The practices and trends of tribal communities towards a stable, sustainable growth and development is an indigenous inherited trait. They maintain communal harmony with nature. It is witness that their bio cultural practices make a strong bond between human settlement and nature which is to be replicated in all section of society for a better society with a happy and happy situation. Sustainability is a long-term concept where the protection of natural environment and social environment are taken care. The tribal people have already adopted this process in their life and livelihoods based on sustainability.

Objectives of this study:

- To study the indigeneity and bio cultural practices of tribal people which is leading towards sustainable development.
- To study the role of sacred groves in maintaining the cultural practices and social governance in the life of tribal people.

Hypothesis:

- Indigenous knowledge system of tribal people is a driving force for sustainability.
- Forest and sacred groves have enormous impact and implications on tribal people for sustainable development.
- Intervention by various government and non- government organisations and external parties have brought multiple effect on the tribal people specially in the field of education, agriculture, health and livelihood.

Methodology:

This study is based on both primary and secondary data available in various forms. The primary data includes the interaction with various people and secondary data is based on various published and unpublished books, journals and reports.

Literature Review:

The United Nation(UN) Working Group for Indigenous Peoples(1983)¹ defines that “Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic, and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant”.

The World Bank(1991) defines² “Indigenous people can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics :

1. Close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas;
2. Self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group;
3. An indigenous language, often different from the national language;
4. Presence of customary social and political institutions; and
5. Primarily subsistence-oriented production”.

UNESCO’s Local and Indigenous Knowledge System (LINKS) defines “Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs

¹ INDIGENEITY, LANGUAGE AND AUTHENTICITY(Accessed on 24.10.2016), Official Definitions of Indigeneity

² THE WORLD BANK OPERATIONAL MANUAL September 1991 OD 4.20 Operational Directive Page 1 of 6 Indigenous People

decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. The LINKS promotes local and indigenous knowledge and its inclusion global climate science and policy processes. LINKS ensures the strengthening of indigenous peoples and local communities, foster transdisciplinary engagements of with scientific and policy-makers and pilot novel methodologies to further understandings of climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation”³.

In the process of development, the human being is experience with the ecological imbalances, loss of biodiversity and environmental disaster which are badly affected the present society and also threat to the future generation. It is due to the unsustainable practices adopted by the human beings for shake of materialistic development. At the conference on World Commission on Environment organized by United General Assembly(UNGA) in 1987, the Norway Prime Minister H G Brundtland submitted a report on sustainable development in his book “**Our Common Future**”⁴ as “**development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**”. Environment is the foundation of sustainable development, the economy is the tool and social dimension refers to the target of sustainable development.

The International Development Research Centre(IDRC, 1997)⁵ proposes the ‘egg of sustainability’ which is originally designed in 1994 by International Union for the Conservation of Nature(IUCN). The egg of sustainability narrates the relationship between people and ecosystem as one circle inside another, like the yolk on an egg. This explains that people are living within the ecosystem and one system is entirely dependent upon the other for survival. The hypothesis of IUCN is Sustainable Development ie, human wellbeing with ecosystem well being. Social and economical development is possible where the environment offers the necessary resources to make it possible in the society.

The “Prism of Sustainability”⁶ adopted from Spangenberg and Bonnit(1998) states that there are four pillars of sustainability ie, the institutional dimension(social capital), economic dimension(man made capital), social dimension(human capital) and environmental dimension(natural capital) which are required to achieve the sustainable development.

Singh Sengar S.R, Singh Kumar Prashant(2005)⁷ opines that “We have to go ahead on the path of development with a changed attitude. The changed attitude demands a realization by the present generation, that they are custodians of present natural wealth and the coming generation is true owner. The present-day man express through his behaviour and activities that he is a trustee of present day natural resources, which he has to transfer to next generation with added interest in the capital that he received from his forefathers. The change is necessary which will take place in many fronts-Economic, Social, Psychological and Political simultaneously.”

³ Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)(Accessed on 30.07.2023), <https://en.unesco.org/links>

⁴ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/figure/IUCNS-egg-of-sustainability-Source-IDRC-1997_fig1_326259022

⁶ https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-prism-model-of-sustainability-from-Spangenberg-and-Bonniot-1998_fig3_273965629

⁷ Singh Sengar S.R. , Singh Sengar Kumar Prashant, 2005, Indian View of Sustainable Development, *University Book House(P) Ltd., P-15(Para 2.4)*

Indigenous Knowledge System(IKS) of Tribes: A brief note

Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of the indigenous and local communities around the world. There is lot of information with local communities since long as they have been practicing it from generation to generation because they are in touch with nature since their birth. They live with nature, utilise the resource of nature and interact with the flora and fauna on daily basis. Due to continuous interact with nature they gather lot of information and knowledge about the utilities of plants and animals as they inherent and inherited it from one generation to another, is termed as the Traditional Knowledge. This traditional knowledge supports them to bring growth and development in the society. The traditional knowledge is same as indigenous knowledge, embedded in the cultural tradition of regional, indigenous and local communities. The indigenous knowledge system of tribes is represented in following ways as they practice it on day to day basis to meet their socio cultural and livelihood purposes which are sustainable in nature.

Socio Cultural Belief Systems:

Myth and mythology tell different story on socio cultural belief systems of tribal people. The culture is a process consisting of socially acquired knowledge and behaviours passed from generation to generation. The tribal culture is acquired basing upon the belief system and myth. The socio-cultural belief systems plays an important role in the life of tribal people to make them bind and take collective decision. Their behaviours and actions are exhibited as belief system through collective manner by group or society. These actions are represented through trees, spirit and animals as they treat as god and so on. The study of beliefs and values play a crucial role in sustainability. **E. B. Tylor, the father of anthropology defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society”**. For tribals forest and sacred groves play in religious and social governance point of view. It is believed that forest and tree are God who will bring happiness among the life of tribal people. The forests and specific trees are renamed as God and goddess as per tribal deity who protects them various evils as believed and predicted by tribal people. It describes the love and regards among tribal people towards forest and trees which is good practice towards sustainability. The Kandha tribal people of Odisha believed that mother earth is goddess “*Dharni Penu*”, to get better yields and better crops the mother is to be satisfied, so the Kandha tribal people worship mother earth every year, which indicates their strong love and belief towards earth. They offer new crops first to mother earth by organising various rituals before their consumption. The Kandha people apply organic manure in their farm field, they never apply chemical fertiliser and pesticides in their field. It is believed that chemical fertiliser will make their mother earth barren. It is good sign of care towards earth and sustainability, as need of the hour. Prof Tirtha Jani is being a kandha tribal says that the kandhas’ worship the mother earth to get bumper crop, they offer the first crop to the mother earth. Commonly the Kandha people practised organic farming to maintain in their daily life and livelihoods. This practice of kandha tribal people describe the love, respect and care towards mother earth and which is need of the present and future time.

The tribal groups of Odisha claims that the lord Nilamadhava is the deity of tribal people, was incarnated as lord Jagannath who was initially worshiped by the Savar King Viswabasu in the dense forest. As per tradition after each and every twelve year the idols of lord Jagannath, lord Babhadra and Devi Subhadra are constructed out of timber of neem tree. So these deities are called “*Daru Debata*” (*God of tree*) . In

each year car festival is organised where the cars of three idols are constructed out of specific timbers supplied by the forest department, government of Odisha. It indicates that there is strong relationship of culture and mythology linked with sustainability. As per Kandha tradition the marriage is conducted on mutual understanding between bride and bridegroom. There is no dowry system in the marriage. The bridegroom pays bride price to the father of bride for this marriage which is opposite in comparison to other caste marriage in our society. It is a good practice and exceptional in case of Kandha tribal groups.

Customs and Traditions:

Customs and tradition of tribal people narrates their way of life, their social governance system and community ownership of community properties, etc. In tribal groups the community organisation is very strong. Observation and celebration of customs explains the sustainable practices in their society. Shifting cultivation by tribal people is one of the traditional practices where they clean a particular field and cultivate it for specific period. This cultivation facilitates some rare crops in specific geographic condition which are in danger and threat. If shifting cultivation will not be undertaken by the tribal people then some rare crops and seeds will be vanished. So shifting cultivation by tribes is a way towards sustainable farming. The social organisation of the tribal people based on the some basic principle of common ownership and utilisation of resources is based on subsistence economy. The forest, water bodies, grazing land, shifting cultivation etc are efficiently used, managed and governed on the principle of customs and tradition.

Religion is the belief of supernatural power. Religion is the core subject of tradition. “No tribal society could have live without religion. Rituals are related to religion. Religion is belief and rituals are mechanisms through which beliefs are fulfilled. Indian tribes gives a central place to religious belief”⁸. Durkhim considers society as god and the sacred thing is religion. The respect and sacred related to the supernatural power which is most powerful thing in religion. The religious practice of tribal people unite then to live in a healthy and peaceful society which is leading to sustainable society.

Forest and Natural Resources Management:

Our ecosystem consists of human beings, environment, culture, plants, animals and organisms. As forest and natural resources play important role in the life of tribal people to maintain a sustainable livelihood, so the study on indigenous knowledge of tribe is the need of the hour. The tribals are custodian of traditional knowledge as they practice the local knowledge in various field including forest and natural resource management. Mainly the oral knowledge is passed from the older generation to next generation which enrich the society to live a happy life. Forest provides different foods in shape of tuber, stem, leaf to the tribal people. From the health point of view forest provides ethnomedicines to the tribal people, the tribal people use and practice various parts of plants on their daily life. Protection of different species of plants is very important task as it bears tradition knowledge which will also guide us for the future generations.

In Odisha the community people protect the forest by the principle of “*Thenga Pali*” (Thenga means “stick” and Pali means “turn”). The local people of Nayagarh district preserve the forest as per the

⁸ Doshi S.L., Jain P.C., 2013, Social Anthropology, Rawat Publications.

decision of the community by rotation basis. Each household takes the responsibility to watch forest on particular day with a stick which was assigned by community members. After finishing the duty of the particular day, the particular family hand over the stick to next family who will take care of the forest of coming day. As a result, the forest is protected by the villagers for future generations. In case of agroforestry the tribal people know which species are suitable for their climatic condition and the process of farming, these techniques are inherited from their previous generations. For example, some specific types of millets and rice are grown by tribal people by their own, so these seeds are to be preserved and recorded for future generations. In case of social forestry, the role tradition knowledge is given priority during selection of species of plant and protection of forests as the local people know the method of seedling raising and its growth. For conservation of water the traditional knowledge is ensured as they know to conserve water and utilise less water in drought prone area. The role of tribal lady can not be ignored as they are practitioner of traditional knowledge.

Loss of Indigenous Knowledge:

Due to several reasons the indigenous knowledge is in the process of decay. Due to modern development purposes like establishment of industry, construction of buildings, roads and dams the tribal people are displaced from their natural habitat. As a result, the traditional people lose their practice as well as indigenous knowledge. Due to land issue like deforestation, conversion of forestland for other purposes, the indigenous knowledge is in the process of decay. The conflict among various tribal groups and ethnic groups the traditional people do not want to continue the indigenous practice. If government agencies will not give proper support to the traditional practices then gradually the indigenous knowledge loose its fragrance. Now it is seen that the elderly people are reluctant to share the indigenous knowledge to the younger generation, due to communication gap the indigenous knowledge is not transferred to younger generations. Due to the negative impact of commercial agencies, external agencies the traditional people are demotivated towards their own culture and tradition as result the indigenous knowledge is in threat. Due to climate change the traditional knowledge is not practised by the indigenous people.

How to incorporate the TK in to practice ?

In the changing world still there is need to conserve and preserve the traditional knowledge for future generation for productive and sustainable use. The indigenous knowledge is to be incorporated in various field in preparation of village micro plan to make a sustainable society. The indigenous knowledge is to be translated into scientific language and multiplied in various relevant field. Education learning materials are to be designed on indigenous knowledge as a result the younger generation people will be trained to follow these practices. Digital library are to be established where digital knowledge on indigenous knowledge are to be recorded and preserved for future generation members.

Conclusions:

Indigenous knowledge is referred as the unique, traditional and local knowledge practised by people of a particular area. Indigenous knowledge is proved as scientific knowledge as it meets the local as well as global requirements now and also for future generations. The indigenous knowledge is transferred from generation to generation by the way of oral communication and practice. As the indigenous practice is ecofriendly it attracts people towards safe and secure future which is termed as sustainable development. As a result of the descriptive analysis of sustainable practices of indigenous people (based in Orissa state),

the paper concludes, that indigenous knowledge is transferred from generation to generation by the way of oral communication and practice. As the indigenous practice is ecofriendly it attracts people towards safe and secure future which is termed as sustainable development.

Several factors are leading to declining of indigenous knowledge and is in the process of decay. Due to modern development purposes like establishment of industry, construction of buildings, roads and dams the tribal people are displaced from their natural habitat. As a result, the traditional people lose their practice as well as indigenous knowledge. Due to land issue like deforestation, conversion of forestland for other purposes, the indigenous knowledge is in the process of decay. The conflict among various tribal groups and ethnic groups the traditional people do not want to continue the indigenous practice. If government agencies will not give proper support to the traditional practices, then gradually the indigenous knowledge loose its fragrance. Now it is seen that the elderly people are reluctant to share the indigenous knowledge to the younger generation, due to communication gap the indigenous knowledge is not transferred to younger generations. Due to the negative impact of commercial agencies, external agencies the traditional people are demotivated towards their own culture and tradition as result the indigenous knowledge is in threat. Due to climate change the traditional knowledge is not practised by the indigenous people.

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