

Cultural Coexistence of the Tribal Communities Within and Outside their Natural Habitat

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential contributions of historic institutions and practises to modern conservation initiatives. Overexploitation of resources can be regulated, disputes between preservation authorities and local residents can be defused, enforcement costs can be kept to a minimum, and contemporary scientific understanding of how ecosystems work may be complemented. Traditional tribal conservation methods provide substantial barriers to the widespread implementation of such activities. The difficulties of gaining access to indigenous knowledge, the persistence of old conflicts, the exponential growth of the human population, the crushing weight of poverty, and the indifference of conservation planners and managers all work against the progress made by indigenous peoples in the name of conservation.

Keywords: Traditional societies, Ethnic groups, conservation, sacred spaces, taboos, indigenous knowledge, sustainable utilization

Introduction

It's sometimes debated whether or not indigenous or tribal communities effectively preserve and manage their resources. The "invisible systems of local resource management and biological conservation" are social taboos, according to those who advocate for their preservation among traditional cultures' beliefs, rites, traditions, and more (Akama, 1998). They believe that despite these organisations' fundamental role in directing human behaviour towards the natural environment, they get limited acknowledgment. In his study, Murombedzi (2003) acknowledges the existence of successful indigenous conservation strategies in Southern Africa prior to colonial times, as well as attempts to set aside specific regions for conservation. However many of these customs have been eradicated due to colonial preservation efforts.

Communities based on long-established cultural practises have always shared their environments with various forms of animals. While there are logistical challenges to implementing this cohabitation, it is important to acknowledge its significance in advancing modern conservation efforts. The following research questions are examined:

- (i) How did premodern peoples relate to the outdoors?
- (ii) How do the many traditional management organisations that oversee human interaction with animal species, resources, and ecosystems function?
- (iii) What forces have led to the decline of conventional organisational structures?

(iv) How can we use and improve upon historic traditions, as well as the limits of these methods in the context of modern conservation initiatives?

Review of Literature

The favourable impact of legendary beliefs for biodiversity conservation in Africa is well supported by the available research (Mwihomeke et al. 1998). Nonetheless, there is a plethora of evidence indicating that not every one of them are helpful to conservation. Some of them could even cause species to vanish forever.

Around 920 units of traditionally protected woods, ranging in size from 0.125 to 200 ha, were mapped out by Mwihomeke et al. (1998) in the North Pare Mountains (Ugweno and Usangi) and in 23 communities of Handeni District. Several native tropical tree species can only be found in these holy units, making them vital to biodiversity conservation efforts. In the Miombo forest of Central Tanzania, the wanyamwezi people preserve holy groves and ceremonial locations that are important for the preservation of biodiversity (Mgumia & Oba, 2003).

In Guatemala, mythological values have helped ensure the survival of the Resplendent Quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*), whereas in Madagascar, the Aye aye (*Daubentoniamadagascarensis*) is on the brink of extinction due to widespread fear of the species among locals. African civilizations are rife with such examples. The spotted eagle owl (*Bubo africanus*), for example, is linked by several Tanzanian tribes to witchcraft. Thus, the species is endangered, since there is no motivation for humans to protect it or keep its habitats intact. In areas with a low population, ritual slaughter by young Maasai (Morans) to prove their masculinity (Olamayio) might be harmful to the species.

That "biodiversity protection is not always the purpose of the practise but a byproduct of it," as Berkes et al. (2000, p. 1254) phrased it, is exactly right. To be considered conservation-oriented interventions, projects must originate in ecological contexts where the long-term benefits exceed the short-term costs.

The key to "identifying conservation," according to Alvard (1998, p. 64), is "demonstrating purpose on the side of the agent or design through natural selection." Because of this, the mere act of identifying holy groves and forests or instituting sustainable harvest and dietary limitations (food taboos) cannot be used as proof of conservation without the underlying motivation to protect the environment.

Environmentalism is presented as both a collection of activities and a philosophy by Cunha and Almeida (2000). Three possible outcomes may be drawn from this discussion. The first is a situation in which ideology is present without corresponding action; in this instance, just lip service is paid to the concept of conservation. Secondly, we have a scenario where eco-friendly methods coexist with cosmology. In this scenario, which the writers refer to as "culture conservation," people are given the means to behave in accordance with their ideology via the transmission of beliefs, the establishment of taboos around food and hunting, and the threat of institutional or supernatural punishments. Cultural acts without ideological presence provide a third possibility.

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that taboo species are not always protected because of their conservation value. People often make use of the "exception rule" to justify their consumption of a normally forbidden food. In Cameroon, for instance, researchers discovered that 29 different species

were either completely or partly banned due to concerns that they may cause the loss of a pregnancy or birth defects in the kid. Nevertheless, they only impacted a small percentage of customers, so individuals could still hunt and sell banned animals to others who weren't affected by the ban (Roe et al. 2000). This is because, despite appearances, both taboos and religion serve purposes other than preservation.

Methods

Researchers in this research conducted in-depth interviews with important informants to learn more about the historical context of natural resource valuation, use, and administration. Elders (those 60 and above) from all of the different forest-dwelling ethnic groups in Madhya Pradesh were surveyed. Elders who were selected were thought to have a deeper understanding of cultural norms and practises. The initiated elders got the opportunity to participate in the discussion of cultural and ecological concerns. The political climate and economic climate are not favourable to seize this chance at this time. To ensure the reliability of the data, we interviewed many members of each ethnic group. This allowed us to verify for internal consistency within each group's responses. In addition, they were asked for feedback on whether or not they thought it would be possible to incorporate the traditional methods into ongoing conservation efforts.

Results

People's spiritual and totemic ties to certain plant and animal species, their habitats, and the ways in which they've historically been used in human culture—including in food, rituals, commerce, and medicine—have all helped shape the nature-human connection. To maintain harmony between people and their natural surroundings, taboos arose as a means of control. Most of these taboos had a good impact on nature conservation because they were followed without being questioned or disputed and because they were designed to safeguard species and ecosystems from destruction. All the wise men and women agreed that the taboos were excellent ways to regulate the distribution of scarce resources while yet maintaining social order.

Indigenous Places and Ameliorative Steps

Protecting biodiversity relies heavily on holy woods and groves. Most of these protected areas, however, were established for cultural or religious purposes, such as burial grounds or initiation sites.

Knowing these ancient activities and mythological ideals, especially how they influence biodiversity, is crucial whether or not they have a conservation focus. Inadequate consideration of these factors may be undermining existing conservation efforts. It is crucial for conservationists to comprehend how local populations engage (or interacted in the past with); what they know about their environment; how conservationists may use this information; and what are the anticipated constraints (Berkes, 2003). Such knowledge may be used in conservation planning and as a jumping off point for integrating historical methods with modern management techniques.

Even if these taboo animals caused economic and social expenses, such as property damage and injuries to humans, they were protected from wanton destruction since they represented a clan or a tribe and had ceremonial or religious importance to the society. When a totemic or holy creature

accidentally entered human territory, they were treated to a feast of milk, meat, and other treats. This went on until the animal finally got bored and departed. Some individuals have taken holy animal or plant names as a sign of respect for certain species. While the totemic animals are not as tightly revered as they formerly were, they are nevertheless held in high esteem. Sacred species hunting is only permitted under strict customary protocols. Punishment for the intentional killing or injury of a holy animal is likely to be harsh.

The respondents did not support an intervention that sought to eradicate the holy species, despite the fact that a rise in the population of certain sacred animal species like crows or monkeys in Districts of Madhya Pradesh was associated to deteriorating issues of property destruction. They opted instead to notify wildlife officials, scare the animals, defend the farms, use deterrents like chilli for elephants, and plant buffer crops around the fields. All human activity, including settling, fishing, gathering firewood, cultivating, and grazing cattle, are forbidden on ceremonial grounds. Sites are off-limits to menstruation women and other potential sources of contamination due to human waste (urine and faeces). The places were found to have higher levels of biodiversity and lower levels of pollution compared to neighbouring regions. People of all clans pay their respects at these locations.

Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Hunting Practices

Wild animals and their byproducts were important sources of nutrition and other resources, including raw materials for making everyday objects and compounds used in witchcraft, protection, and medicine. Hunting had several functions, such as a form of exercise, a means of entertainment, and a symbol of social standing. Hunting was seen as an expert vocation, and those who practised it were held in great esteem.

Use patterns, management, and indigenous knowledge systems may all provide light on the pre-colonial period of peaceful cohabitation between humans and animals. While these activities were not always the agreed conservation approaches (Alvard 1998; Berkes et al. 2000), they may be effective in increasing conservation of biodiversity. But, owing to changes in society, the economy, and government policies, certain established procedures may no longer be as successful as they once were.

Traditional practises and institutions (taboos and religious connections) have been shown to be effective in preventing species overexploitation and habitat loss. The ecologically significant species, such as endemics and keystones, are among those who benefit from these behaviours and systems. For instance, Colding and Folke (2001) identified 70 taboo species, of which 21 were included on the IUCN redlist book of endangered species. The 21 species included 4 endemics and 5 important components. Campbell and Hofer's (1995) study on illegal hunting found no instances of poaching of endangered species, despite the fact that its flesh is often consumed in certain regions of the rainforest belt.

There has been a rise in attention paid to indigenous knowledge by preservation biologists, ecological anthropologists, ethnobiologists, and other academics for a variety of practical, social, and scientific reasons. According to Berkes et al. (2000), this knowledge is "a cumulative body of knowledge, practises, and beliefs, going to evolve by adaptive processes and forced to hand down through generations by cultural transmissions," and it is a crucial resource for the observation, response, and

management of resilient ecosystem processes and functions. “The knowledge had also received political attention internationally as a valuable resource for biodiversity conservation through the *World Conservation Strategy* (IUCN [1980](#)), and Brundtland Commission’s *Our Common Future* (WCED [1987](#)) and the Earth Summit (UNCED [1992](#)).”

Balances Between Wildlife and Indigenous Communities

There is a lot of optimism for the future of conservation efforts in the literature describing the effectiveness of indigenous knowledge (see e.g. Berkes et al. 2000; Berkes 2003; Becker and Ghimire 2003; Colding and Folke 2001; Moller et al. 2004). In this article, many methods are proposed for recovering long-lost customs, taboos, and beliefs. Even though something makes a lot of sense in theory, it may not be feasible in practise due to current social, economic, and political conditions. It's possible that some of these methods aren't practical at the moment, while others may only become useful if certain present restrictions were removed.

The indigenous body of knowledge has been passed down over the ages through cultural transmission. Traditional methods of preserving this information included folklore or storytelling, constant observation, practise, and dependence on natural resources. Yet, the current state of affairs makes these strategies less successful. In order to absorb the information, the receiver (young) has to spend sufficient time engaging with the relevant authorities and materials. Due to traditional regulation, most of the resources are placed within protected zones, making access impossible.

Conclusions

When used to community conservation efforts, a mix of modern and traditional monitoring techniques is seen as a political incentive (empowerment) with the potential to provide positive results (Berkes 2003; Moller et al. 2004). Additionally, the information allows indigenous resources users to verify sustainability via their own kinds of adaptive management and critically assess scientific projections on their own terms.

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