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## Research Article

# Worldview of Tribal Communities in Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India

## Abstract

Tribal communities living in the far flung areas, including forests and forest fringes, derive a set of inferences and assumptions about the world around them, over the years. The present study, therefore, aims to document such worldview of tribal communities living in the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India. The questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted in the villages dominated by tribal communities and information on their worldview was gathered. Two dominant tribal groups such as Gond and Korcu were identified in the study area. The social organization of Gond and Korcu reveals that they are divided into clans. They have developed various stories about the natural resources, ecosystem, environment and environmental phenomenon. The younger generations though generally disagree with worshipping totemic objects, the taboo attached to them are still respected. The tribal people collect medicinal plants for therapy as per the customary norms, and there are only limited days which they consider auspicious for such collection from the wild. Mahua (*Madhuca indica*) is one of the important plant species which is used for multiple purposes, including prediction of weather and agriculture yields. The Korcu tribe broadcasts and sows the seeds as per the position of rainbow during rainfall; if the rainbow is in the east of the village it is considered good to broadcast seeds for their good growth. The worldview of tribal communities is based on the nature, its resources and functions accordingly the present study describes such naturalistic worldview of tribes.

## Introduction

The human–environment relationship is strongly influenced by the existing natural resources. The linkages between forest dwellers or tribal communities with nature depend on the community perceptions, needs and activities associated with their religion, beliefs and customs [1,2]. Being the important pillars of tribal societies, the surrounding environment and its various components have got special position and reverence in their religion and culture. Such associations of community with environment and ecosystems have evolved various myths and stories over the years and centuries, which are evident still today in the form of different customs, stories and folklores related to the environment and ecosystem.

The tribal people are known to have strong worldview. The way they perform, perceive and explain the natural and supernatural phenomenon, social and cultural events, relationship within themselves and outside, and diseases and grievances reflect a manifestation of their concept of different aspects of life that is often referred to as 'worldview'. The concept of worldview is analyzed by various researchers [3–7]. Sol Tax defined worldview as a 'mental appreciation of reality' [3]. According to Redfield the worldview is 'the way, a man in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else and

involve both secular and sacred sphere of life and activities and includes both stated and unstated conception of the people towards everything as it comes to them' [4]. In recent decade, the worldview has been defined more systematically. Accordingly, Sire in 2009 defined worldview 'is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story, in a set of presuppositions, that we hold consciously, subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being' [7].

Thus, the worldview is a total vision and conception of everything. The essence of worldview is a set of inferences and assumptions that the people derive or make about their own world and the world around them including human beings. Further it is expressed not only in belief but also from custom, ritual and action and there is a close relationship between the beliefs and the context they arises [8,9]. It can also be understood in terms of cognitive aspect of the people on the environmental phenomenon [10]. Folklore is one of the most important sources to study the worldview. Since such assumptions or inferences may not always reflect the reality, the concept of worldview may be of scientific and the ontological. Tribal communities, generally, being living in remote areas, have developed their worldview mostly in isolation. They

still have faith in the code of internal self determination, including respect of customary rights, resources for survival and their own socio cultural practices. With this background, the present study was conducted in the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India, which is dominated by tribal communities. The study attempts to document the worldview of these tribal communities.

## Methodology

### Study area

The Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve (PBR), the present study area, was established on March 3, 1999 in the Satpura Mountain Range of Madhya Pradesh state of India. PBR lies between 20° 10' to 22° 50' N latitude and 77° 45' to 78° 56' E longitude. It spans over 3 districts of Madhya Pradesh – Hoshangabad, Betul, and Chhindwara. The total geographical area of PBR is 4926.28 sq km, of which 524.37 sq km is under the core zone and remaining 4462. 93 sq km comprises the buffer zone [11]. PBR endows with rich biodiversity within two major forest types such as subtropical hill forest and tropical moist deciduous forest [12,13]. PBR is well known for its cultural diversity, as it is inhabited by number of tribal and non-tribal communities. The major tribal group is Gond who dominates the central parts of India and therefore in past, this part of India was also called as Gondwana state.

### Survey methods

For the present study, the villages in buffer zone areas of PBR were surveyed. A total of 10 villages in buffer zone of PBR namely Sabarwani, Shahwani, Fatepur, Singhpur, Anthoni, Badaldhana, Deokho Badalkachhar, Khara and Taperwani were selected for intensive study on worldview of local people. The selected villages were dominated by tribal communities, mostly Gond, Korku and Mawasi with their offshoots. The questionnaire survey was conducted in these villages of PBR. In most of the villages, generally, the male members were available for interviews, however, female were also cooperated during the interviews. Through questionnaire information was collected on the worldview of tribal people, especially on the surrounding natural resources and ecosystem in which they live. Group discussions were also conducted to collect and verify the information. Participant observation methods were employed and information was also collected by participating in various activities of the local tribal people.

## Result

### Worldview of gond

Gond is one of the major tribe communities in India and highly concentrated in central India including parts of western Orissa, southeast Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (Figure 1). The famous epic of Ramayana acknowledges the presence and leadership of Gond tribe. Gonds are the original inhabitants and rulers of the central India. The social organization of the Gond reveals that they are divided into clans, such as, Arpanche, Bariba, Dhurwe, Erpachi, Imne, Kakoria, Karskoley, Naure, Padram, Sarbeyan, Sarada, Sivarsaran, Vallabey, Barkare,



Figure 1: A Gond family in Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India

Barkey, Batti, Eke, Kumre, Porta, Tekam and Wike. Though the Gond community has scattered in different regions, they possess almost similar worldview on the origin of human beings and environmental phenomenon.

Gonds perceive and divide the cosmological objects on the different gender. They indicate sun, moon, sky and star as male and earth as female. They consider east and north direction as auspicious and west and south as inauspicious. They divide the whole year into three seasons such as garmi (summer), barsat (rainy) and jara (winter). They divide the whole year into twelve months viz; chet, Besakh, jeth, ashad, savan, bhodo, kuwar, kartik, aghwan, push, mow, and fagun, which is almost similar to the Hindu calendar.

Gonds have developed various stories about the environment and environmental phenomenon. They view and divide land, river, water and sky into different living and non-living things. The land, river and sky are perceived as living however water is placed in the non-living category. They divide land into different categories as per the color and texture of the soil. River is considered as a religious entity and the water flowing in it is always cherished as sacred. Bathing in river is considered a holy activity through which all sins are made to wash away. The water is believed a gift of god Indra, the water god. On almost all special occasions they take bath in the river. The clan name of Gond is often derived from the name of plant, animals and places (Table 1 & 2). With the help of these names they can trace their ancestors.

During study, the veteran Gond people pointed out that a massive flood before four decades ago taken away most of the tortoises, which had affected their totemic object. The younger generations though generally disagree with worshipping totemic objects, the taboo attached to them are still respected. They have now started worshipping the Lord Shiva. Thakur Gonds do not cut *Terminalia tomentosa* rather they worship and use it in their religious ceremony. Similar beliefs are attached with *Tamarindus indica*, *Madhuca indica*, *Tectona grandis*, *Ficus religiosa* and *Ficus benghalensis*. While constructing a house two

**Table 1:** Relationship of different clans of Gond with plant species

Gond clans	Local name of associated plant species	Latin name of associated plant species
Temak	Sagon	Tectona grandis
Uikey	Tendu	Diospyros melanoxylon
Dhurwe	Mahua	Madhuca indica
Parteri	Mahua	Madhcuca indica
Pandharna	Saja	Terminalia tomentosa

**Table 2:** Relationship of different clans of Gond with animal species

Clan	Associated animal species
Wiky	Boar
Kumura	Goat
Basepalia	Tiger
Marrapa	Peacock
Seipalia	Porcupine

poles of a sacred plant species, preferably *Terminalia tomentosa*, is used after worshipping it by offering locally prepared liquor and coconut.

During monsoon they do not collect medicinal plants realizing that monsoon is the period of reproduction. Only a few specific days and period are considered auspicious to collect most of the medicinal plants. For example, the nine days of worshipping goddess Durga (a local deity), full moon night or moon less night, Tuesday and Saturday are considered auspicious for collecting plants in the genuine case. It is called 'jari-jagana' which literally stands for activating the plant species. Only Bhumka clan can cut down the plant on Wednesday or Sunday. Medicinal plants are collected before sunrise but after taking bath.

A few Gond clans also consider themselves as Nagvanshi and therefore they do not kill snakes rather they offer milk to snakes, especially cobra, in Nagpanchami day. There is ambiguity in history of worshipping snakes by Gond as some local people believed that it has started later on after introduction of the Lord Shiva as a God in their community. Some of them worship sun and moon stating them as Surjavanshi and Chandravanshi, respectively.

They attribute supernatural spirit or evil spirit for any misfortune takes place in the family. They believe that in case of not worshipping the clan deity regularly and in a definite period of time the family members may get sickness and may suffer from some unfortunate incidences. Diseases like small pox, typhoid and cholera are extensively correlated to such unfortunate happenings as an outcome of local deity's anger. On the basis of some natural processes the Gonds predict some forecasts. If bamboo flowers, it is predicted as the indication of severe famine.

Traditionally, the frog is believed to be a mediator between the earth and the God of rain. When frog croaks in the season they believe that it gives message to the God to shower rains. Sometime they collect frog and drop them in the pond and water

bodies so that the increasing volume of croaking brings more rains. Shifting of a group of ants from one place to another with their eggs and eatables' is predicted the possibility of rain within a day or two.

Mahua (*Madhuca indica*) is one of the important plant species by observing it they predict weather and agriculture yield for the next year. While worshipping mahua flowers during Chaitra (April–May) the shades of its flowers predict some events. The agricultural production and raining is assumed to be unaffected if the flower colour stands deep yellow. If it is light yellow and seems to be turning reddish then the yield from agriculture is predicted to be not good and the crops are considered to be infected by some insects. It is believed that if the mahua does not flower at all it indicates famine and harmful to other forest plants. Gonds believe that like ant some other animals also store grains to eat in the rainy period. They follow these creatures and sometime collect such grains to eat. They perceived that mango and teak is the first tree species appeared in the universe.

Some predictions are also made by putting five stones either beneath the saja (*Terminalia tomentosa*) tree or khedapati (local deity) temple in a season. Based on the increase and decrease of pebbles, their positions and changes in the shape, color and texture some predictions are made. This shows that traditionally Gonds believe the presence of soul in pebbles.

### Worldview of korku and mawasi

Korku is, generally, believed to be an offshoot of Mawasi tribe. The constitution of India has placed them in a separate category - Korku. They mainly inhabit in Chhindwara, Betul, Hosangabad, Raisen, Khandwa and Sehore districts of Madhya Pradesh (Figure 2). Earlier, korku was considered mainly a hunting gathering community dwelling in the forests of Satpura mountain range on either sides of the river Tapti [14]. The term Korku literally stands for man. They are divided into two subgroups: Raj Korku and Patharia Korku. There are four territorial groups of Korku namely Mawasi, Bawaria, Ruma and Bondoya. Mawasi or Mowasi Korku enjoys the highest position in social hierarchy. Bondoya Korku lives in Pachmarhi area, Bawaria in Betul district and Ruma group is found in Amravati district of Maharashtra. At present, Korku is primarily an agriculturist community. Apart from agriculture, a few of the Korku tribes are engaged in rearing livestock, forestry, fishing, etc. Women play major roles in the household economy, as they work as agriculturists and agricultural wage laborers. Mawasi is a small tribal community. The name of Mawasi is derived from a place name - 'mawas'. Mawasi mainly worship the Lord Shiva of Pachmarhi along with some other deities.

Korku, in general, trace their origin from the great mythological snake 'karkotaka', however a few of them relate themselves to as 'nagvanshi' - worshippers of cobra snake. Besides, a very few trace their origin from king Ravana. Korku also believe that soil is the origin of human beings. They believe that they have been divided into clans since the beginning of their community. They are associated with some animated and unanimated things such as plants and cave (Table 3). These

plant species and unanimated things are still worshipped by Korku. Korku believed that Jamun tree and Dhikar tree were grown together. Therefore, Korku clans belong to these trees are considered themselves as brothers and marriage is not possible among them. They respect equally both the animated and unanimated things of their origin, as per the traditional beliefs. And they follow certain rules in using such objects. Deogaonkar and Deogaonkar [15] have also reported that Korku community traces the origin of their clan name from different elements as given in (table 4).

During rainfall depending on the position of rainbow they broadcast and sow the seeds. Generally, if the rainbow is in the east of the village it is considered good to broadcast seeds for propagation. If black clouds are seen in the south it is believed the indication of heavy rainfall within a short period. They divide some cosmological objects into different gods and goddesses such as dinai (sun god), chandama (moon goddess), tara (star goddess) and badal (cloud goddess). River Anjan and Denwa flowing in the vicinity of the study area are considered sacred and trace their origin from the land of the Lord Shiva. The other water bodies such as pond and surface streams are also considered the blessings of gods or goddesses.

### Discussion

The worldview of tribal communities is based on the nature, its resources and functions, hence tribal worldview is naturalistic. They belief and worship the supernatural power



Figure 2: A Korku tribe village in Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India.

**Table 3:** Relationship of different clans of Korku tribe with natural objects.

Korku clan	Associated matter
Sokam	Sagon or Teak ( <i>Tectona grandis</i> )
Tikhar/jambu	Jamun ( <i>Syzygium cumini</i> )
Kasoda	Cave
Mausi	River
Kora	Man
Saraku	Monkey
Bana	Bear

**Table 4:** Association of different clans of Korku with respect to their origin

Korku clan	Matter of Origin
Bethe	Bilwa tree ( <i>Aegle marmelos</i> )
Jambhu	Jamun tree ( <i>Syzygium cumini</i> )
Bhusum	Grass
Kasda/ kasa	Soil
Mausi	Bargad (Banyan) tree ( <i>Ficus benghalensis</i> )
Dhikar	Tree
Selu	Tree
Chilati	Creeper of <i>Caesalpinia sepiaria</i>
Sokam	Leaf
Totha	Maize ( <i>Zea mays</i> )
Chuthur	Honey
Takher	Cucumber
Koliya	Soil
Chathwa	Wooden ladle
Mara	Peacock

in both animate and the inanimate substances. Earth, river, water, hills, forest, birds, animals and plants are inseparable from the life of tribal people, as their knowledge, folklore, and culture are based upon such natural resources [16,17]. Traditionally, they believe that the forest is eternal as the earth and the universe. The belief of living in present rather than saving for future, in past, made them to refrain from overexploitation of resources, as there was no dearth of natural resources for daily sustenance and they were sure on the plenty of resource availability by the grace of the God. With experience and imagination these forest dwellers integrated the nature and its resources into their culture, religion, belief systems and myths [18]. Religion still occupies a most prominent place in the worldview of tribal communities. Some knowledgeable persons who perform various cultural and religious activities are made accountable for the welfare of community by worshipping forest, water, land and other natural resources. The worldview of tribal community seems to be nature-centric and pro for the conservation of natural resources, ecosystem and environment.

The present materialistic approach of overexploiting resources for creating happiness and wellbeing for humanity does not have any empirical evidence to support. Knowledge is organized in two great streams – science and religion. Science gives tools for material progress but it may not direct communities what is and should be their ultimate purpose on the earth. On the other hand, religion being a source of values, insights and energy addresses the basic questions of human existence on this earth. Together, science and religion may provide the fundamental principles for sustainable development of the society and conservation of nature and natural resources. The traditional culture and worldview, which provide self-confidence and self-belief within the framework of spiritual principles, may be important if a sustainable development strategy is to succeed.

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