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Avinash Hemrom
Junior Research Fellow, State
Forests Research & Training
Institute, Raipur CG.

K.C.Yadav
APCCF, Forests Head Office,
Aranya Bhavan, Raipur CG.

Festivals, traditions & rituals associated with sacred groves of Chhattisgarh

Avinash Hemrom, K. C. Yadav

Abstract

Tribals or communities associated with this grove have deep faith on their deity. Any important work is started after their worship; the Betel leaf, nuts of Areca catechu, Joss stick and Hadiya liquor made up of Rice) etc. are dedicated to the deity at the time of worship. The work of worship is done by Baiga (local priest) any kind of religious works are also done by the priest. They conduct many socio-religious ceremonies, prayers, sacrament in the festivals. They follow many rituals like singing in a group like tribes of Jashpur region celebrate together Sarhul festival, by singing and dancing in a group on the maturity of the crop. Bheema dev is deity, when there is no rain in the village or not much rain in the village during whole year, and then villagers use to pray to this deity. After the prayers and rituals, villagers use to sing and dance in a group .Every year, at the month of Magh of the Hindi calendar i.e. on the January-February two-fair is conducted by the villagers which is famous by the name as Punni mela and Madai mela. Bastar Dushhera begins with the ritual known as the 'Kachangadi' in which a virgin girl is swing in the bed made up of thorn. They also use to make many food items or dish in these festivals like Bada, Chila, Tikhurpak, Madia page & many drink items also like Hadiya, Landa etc.

Keywords: Sacred groves, Biodiversity conservation, Presiding deity, Rituals, Festivals etc.

1. Introduction

Many communities or tribes practice different forms of nature worship in India as elsewhere in many parts of the world. . They usually have a significant religious connotation for protecting this forest fragments or patches of forest dedicated to their deity. These forest fragments or patches are termed as Sacred Groves. Tribals associated with these groves have a deep faith in the deity resides in the groves. They believe that the deity will protect their community and forest. People also believe that the deity would be offended, if anybody causes damage to the plants and animals in such places. The tribal communities also comprises of several cultures, traditions, festivals & rituals associated with these groves.

They had constructed many temples of the female deity of that locality and nearby forest such as 'Shitala Mata', 'Silpat Mata', 'Kankalin Mata' and conduct many prayers and religious ceremonies on different occasions in these temples. Tribal people of Chhattisgarh also perform many rituals of 'Aama tihar', 'Aama Jogani' i.e. the praying of many trees and sacrament is conducted beneath the trees like *Mangifera indica* and 'Bhaji jogani' i.e. the prayer conducted for the deity and after this ritual farmers use to plant the Gram or 'Bhaji' in their farm field.

They also utilize this forest fragments and their produce like collection of honey, fruits and they also use to eat forest produce like tribes of Bastar region used to eat the culms of *Dendrocalamus spp.* as vegetable and fauna such as one big red ant known as Chapda (local name). And they also drink juice of *Caryota urens* (sulphi) and *Phoenix sylvestris* (chind) which is a very good energy booster and stimulator. They also utilize this forest produce for economic and social purpose like they make paper plates of leaves of *Shorea robusta* and *Bahunia vahlii* etc. They also make many equipments for their hunting and daily life purpose like Dutti, Bow-arrow and musical instruments like Mohri, Bansuri, Nagada etc.

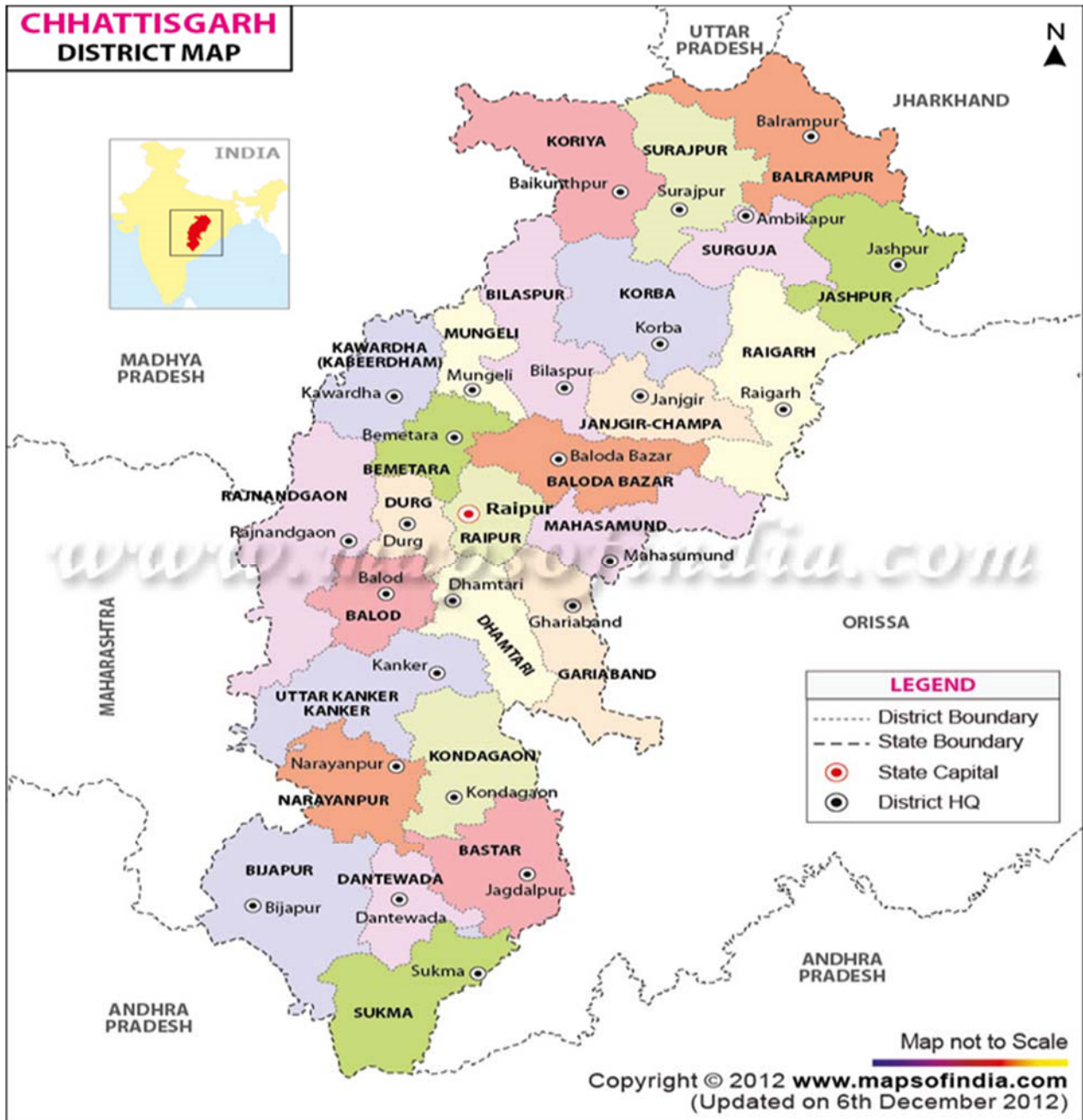
2. Objective

The key objective of this paper is to study its different festivals, rituals, traditions, socio-cultural and economic activities taking place in Sacred Groves of Chhattisgarh.

Correspondence:
Avinash Hemrom
Junior Research Fellow, State
Forests Research & Training
Institute, Raipur CG.

Study area: Chhattisgarh is a state located in the centre of India at 21.2700° N, 81.6000° E. It is divided into six circles i.e. Raipur, Durg, Bilaspur, Surguja, Jagdalpur and Kanker. It constitutes with a vast area of forest and the forest cover area

in this state is approx. 44 percent. The mean annual rainfall in this area 1300 mm and temperature varies between 23 °C to 45 °C.



Map 1: Political map of Chhattisgarh with its boundary and neighboring state borders and boundaries, district boundaries and its headquarters.

3. Methodology

A survey has been conducted to know the different Sacred Groves present in the Chhattisgarh and also to know about the different Socio-cultural, Rituals, Traditions, Festivals and Beliefs of the tribal communities situated in this Group. A Proforma has been devised & filled by the Research Scholar to get details of this Sacred Groves and personal interview have been also conducted with local people and priest of the village.

3.1 Status of Sacred Groves in Chhattisgarh: This state Chhattisgarh is a one of the castle of sacred groves and more than thousand sacred groves are present here. These are apparently distributed in almost all the villages of the Chhattisgarh and dedicated to various male and female deities. The area occupied by the sacred groves in Chhattisgarh is more than 11,000 hac. There are many deities present such as Buddha dev, Lingo dev, Bheema dev, Sarna dev and Mavli Mata, Shitala Mata are major the major Male and Female deities respectively

4. Result

Socio-cultural, rituals and festivals of Sacred Groves of Chhattisgarh: There are many rituals, traditions and festivals of Chhattisgarh, people celebrate these festivals by worshipping their deity of the sacred groves. Some of the Festivals celebrated by the people, at different places of Chhattisgarh are:

Hareli: the deity is known as Kshetrapal, and prayer is going on during Rainy season i.e. on July or August. During this day, Sacrifice of Goat and Liquor and also tubers of *Asparagus racemosus*, wild onion i.e. *Habenaria marginata* and Keokand i.e. *Costus speciosus* is boiled and dedicated to their deity in the form of sacrament. And after prayer this sacrament is eaten by the people and some of it are also Crushed and water solution of it is made and given to the cattle's. Roaming outside during this night is prohibited and tribals use to pay their tools of Agriculture. There is a belief that Black magicians known as Tantric, Ojha, Guniya in local language use to pray this night. Due to this reason, villagers use to hang the branches of *Azadirachta indica* and *Semecarpus anacardium* outside the home because they believe that this branch does not allow evil spirit to enter in the house.

Pola; In this festival villagers use to pray the Statues of ox and also the cattle's in their home is also worshiped. Usually this festival is celebrated in the month of Bhado; according to Hindu calendar i.e. on the month of Aug-September.

Navakhani; during this day Deity known as Buddha dev is worshipped and Deity is delighted with new grains of the season.

Bheema dev; Bheema dev is deity, when there is no rain in the village or not much rain in the village during whole year, then villagers use to pray to this deity. After the prayers and rituals, villagers use to sing and dance in a group.

Janmashtami: This festival is celebrated during Rainy season; in this lord Krishna is worshipped.

Nagpanchami; This is a festival of Rainy season. On this day tubers of *Madhuca latifolia*, *Coccinia grandis*, *Holarrhena antidysenterica*, *Acacia catechu* is crushed and served to villagers as sacrament.

Sarhul: This festival is celebrated by the tribals of the Jashpur region on the maturity of the crop and they dance and enjoy this festival. Sarhul sarna is one of the prominent deity of the Jashpur, also named as Sarna bhuria or Chala Pachhao also named as Mata Bai in the village, a Female deity. This is also considered as the deity of the village production system. Many of the deities are also situated under the Sal tree or Sal forest. Usually, most of the deities are also situated in the northern place of this place. The area of this type of Sarna is usually approx 6 acre. This festival is celebrated in the Groves and other rituals of vilagee agriculture and social system is also celebrated I this groves. All the rituals pertained to the Sarna is performed by the

Baiga's. No taboo or prohibition is associated with this Sarna.

Magh purnima: Every year, at the month of *Magh* of the Hindi calendar i.e. on the January-February in this festival a Fair is conducted by the villagers which is famous on the name of Punni mela

Madai mela: Every people of the village, in the month of *Magh* of the Hindi calendar i.e. on the January- February celebrate this festival. A fair is conducted by the villagers and villagers take their deity to this fair and people use to wear new clothes and worship their deity known as "Sharna devi".

Holika dehan: On this day, woods of *Mangifera indica*, *Achyranthes aspera*, *Zizyphus mauritiana*, *Shorea robusta*, *Terminalia tomentosa* etc are fired by rubbing the stone.

Cherchera: When new crops are brought in the home, then every home use to donate some food materials or grains. Then all the people's use to cook food at public place and eat.

Ramnavmi: On this day deity, Thakur dev is worshipped and flower of *Madhuca latifolia* is also used in the worship. And also tree of *Mangifera indica* is also worshipped and from this day *Mangifera indica* is conserved and liquor is made up of *Madhuca latifolia*.

Akti: This festival is celebrated on the Jaith month of Hindu calendar i.e. in the month of May- June and worship of soil is done by the farmers at a place in the village and only after this new seed- crops are sown.

Maati tyohar: This mostly celebrated in the Bastar area of Chhattisgarh and at the month of May end. In this festival people used to take out the seed which are sown and also used to sown the Rice seed. Here, Maati dev is the main deity, present and usually celebrated by all the tribes of this area.

Bastar Dushhera festival: Bastar Dushhera is still very famous and for this royal festival of Bastar tribals has very much faith and reason for this faith is Goddess Danteshwari. She is the deity of the Kaktiya Royal family of Bastar. Bastar Dushhera is started with the ritual known as the 'Kachangadi' in which a virgin girl is swing in the bed made up of thorn. This is a festival celebrated till 75 days. From 1 Ashwin Shukla of the Hindu calendar Navratra function of the Bastar Dushhera is started. On this day, there is a tradition of Jogi sitting in the Sirasar Chowk of Jagdalpur and Jogi is use to sit continuously for 9 days. And simultaneously next day after the Jogi Sitting, pulling of Chariot (Rath); is started. This Chariot or Rath is decorated with flowers and also known as Flower Rath. In this Chariot king Aarudh is present and in whose head Durban made up of flower is bound. There is a belief or faith that there is a Shade & grace of the Goddess Danteshwari on this Chariot. Till the day of Saptami a Chariot made up of four wheels is

revolved and the next day Durgasthami is celebrated. And in this a function known as Nishajatra is also conducted in which Jogi is made to stand after the function. Then, at night the Mavli mata which is bought from the Dantewada is devotionally and respectfully is taken which is called as Mavli parghava. And people take it to the Danteshwari and of the day of Vijaydashmi, there is a function is organized known as Bhitrani. On this day of Vijaydashmi, a Chariot of eight wheels is run. On the day of Bahar rani, King uses to take his Kuldevi to a place known as Kumdhakot at Jagdalpur and dedicated the new food grains to the deity and also used it as a sacrament. At last; a function known as Muriya durbar Bastar Dushhera is completed or end.

Aama Jogani: In this villagers use to conduct the prayer in the month of April and only then, they use to plug the fruit when there is proper flowering and fruit is mature in the *Mangifera indica* (Mango) tree. Before, this plugging of mango from the tree is strictly restricted.

Bhaji Jogani: This is a festival celebrated in the month of Oct-Nov and after doing prayer to their deity, villagers use to plant the Grams or Bhaji.

Silpat mata: Silpat mata is treated as the Deity of the village and any special work is started only after her prayer. Prayer to this deity is conducted in the Chaitra i.e. on the Month of the March- April. Tribals after praying to this deity start their marriage function and *Amarhophyllus moschatuos*, Pitaboda (local name) etc. is dedicated to the deity.

Patangudi mata: Sacred groves in which prayer is started in the month of Feb- March and tribals of this region use to protect these sacred groves. In the worship or in the sacrament of this Sacred groves Egg of hen and goat is dedicated.

Bahurani: The deity known as Kankalin mata is worshipped outside the village.

Diyari: On this day Bhandar Devi or deity is worshipped and Indian dish made up of rice known as Khichdi is given to the cow and goat.

Aama tihar: This festival is celebrated where the deity Mempatgudinmata and Undi Mata is present and tribals use Mango in the sacrament in the worship and dedicated to these deities.

Sarna dev: Tribals of Jashpur region believe that Sarna Dev is the deity of the village. Nearby this deity there are many trees grown by the villagers like *Shorea robusta*, *Mangifera indica* and flower like Marigold etc. and any kind of activities like Thinning, pruning of the trees are prohibited in this area. Any important work is started after their worship and in worshipping the Betel leaf, nuts of *Areca catechu*, Joss stick and *Hadiya* (a liquor made up of Rice) etc are dedicated to the deity. This whole work of worship is done by *Baiga* (local preist) any kind of religious works are also done by the preist.

Food items: Tribal's people have a special faith in the deities and have many traditions and festivals and some food items made in these festivals have special significance. On the arrival of any festival or Guest many dish or food-items are made by the tribals who have a special importance in all these festivals. Food-items made in the different regions or areas of the Chhattisgarh are *Bada*, *Cheela*, *Thikhurpakh*, *Madia page*, *Gulgulla etc* and liquors are *Hadiya*, *Landa etc*.

5. Discussion

A sacred grove in this area varies from small area to acres with temples & pond in some places. These groves are protected on the belief of the local deity residing in that place. The name of the god, goddess or the deity of the grove is given by the tribals or the community people of that grove. Many groves are located inside the forest and some of them are near village, some of them are also found on the Highland or Plateau region and they still remain fairly inaccessible by road. A tribal person of Chhattisgarh still resides in these types of areas and preserves these sacred groves for their social, cultural and religious purposes. Their festivals, marriage ceremonies, fairs, rituals and other cultural aspects are closely associated with these groves. Most of the jungles which have been disappeared from our state are however protected in these sacred groves due to religious & tradional beliefs. This belief of sacred grove had played a vital role in protecting and conserving the forest. This is also a unique repository in conserving unique, rare & endangered species of both flora & fauna. This also maintains the biodiversity of our country & state. This belief of protecting and conserving forest is deep-rooted in the tribals or the community residing there in the villages & cuts across caste and communal barriers. This also acts as a barrier for soil erosion and for conserving water such as pond, sustenance for the villagers. These small thickets or patches composed of woody, herbs & shrubs and insects, birds, reptiles, animals etc. is an important source of ecological, cultural, tradional rituals, festivals, belief's and biodiversity etc. The festivals, rituals and beliefs associated with the groves are one the important & regular activities for the people connected with them. There are many ancient tradional rituals and also celebration for the Festivals. People enjoy sing, dance and express their joy and happiness in these festivals. They also make many food items like Bada, Chila, Tikhurpak, Madia page, Hadiya, Landa etc. Many of the Festivals of the sacred groves are mostly Hindu religion like Holika dehan, Dushhera, Janmashtami etc. Some of the festivals are also associated with agriculture like Hareli when agricultural crop is green and environment is green, Navakhani is celebrated when new grains are grown and they consumed by the villagers etc. Bheema dev, Nagpanchami are celebrated during Rainy season or before rainy season when there is no season. This is also a medium to pray to their deity when there is no rain in the village.

6. Conclusion

This paper explains different festivals, rituals, traditions, socio-cultural and economic activities taking place in sacred groves of Chhattisgarh. Sacred groves are also useful for

conservation of many medicinal and endangered species. So, species component and bio-diversity is important factor in our sacred groves. But still in many places cutting of trees is going on in many places of our country and strict measures should be taken to stop this action. Because in this stage of global warming this is the best method of conserving forest and saving our environment.



Fig 1: Aama Jogani Festival ceremony at Vishrampuri, Kondagaon, Chhattisgarh



Fig 2: Aama Jogani Festival ceremony at Vishrampuri, Kondagaon, Chhattisgarh



Fig 3: Harra *deepa* Sarna situated at Jashpur area of Chhattisgarh

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Fig 4: A statue of lion placed at sacred groves Durbhat area of Keshkal, Chhattisgarh



Fig 5: Sacred grove situated at the Manora, Jashpur



*: In this villagers use to conduct the prayer in the month of April and only then, they use to plug the fruit when there is proper flowering and fruit is mature in the *Mangifera indica* (Mango) tree. Before, this plugging of mango from the tree is strictly restricted.* **Fig 6:** Sarna dev situated at the Kanker, Chhattisgarh



Fig 7: Sacred grove of East Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh



Fig 11: Sacred Grove situated at the Manora, Jashpur



Fig 8: Sacred Grove at Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh



Fig 12: Aanga dev situated at Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh



Fig 9: Shitala Mata temple at Pithora range, Chhattisgarh



Fig 10: Sacred Grove at Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh

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