

NATIVE EXPERTISE AND ECO-ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATIONS IN THE FOSTERING OF FOLK TRADITIONS THROUGH TIME

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The particular concept like native expertise is exclusively based on close-set and deep-based monitoring over the vast exposure of nature with its multi-faceted diversities. It is this continuous process of zealous inquisition to apprehend the vast open nature around themselves through the continuous process of drawing the sustenance for day to day living the native communities anywhere and everywhere dedicate themselves not only to collect the necessary ingredients for life but also they develop a unique urge to show proper respect and thereby adore those natural traits through songs, dance, tales, myths as well as various indigenous conceptual ideas leading to the broad perspective of folklore and traditions. There is no denying of the fact the folk categories of people here in India and elsewhere throughout the world are provided with an integrated and comprehensive mastery oriented with indigenous perceptions and on the basis of which they develop such beliefs and ideas that ultimately have become the causes for flourishing the different traditions. The roles of the natural surroundings and the influence of ecology and environmental situations on these have been elucidated here with various illustrations from folk life.

Native expertise is universal in its nature and extent which is processed with activity-oriented roles within the social setting concerned. People in the indigenous cultural state gather knowledge and day to day know-how directly from the eventualities of the natural milieu. The phenomenon of comprehension is activated by direct observations on multifarious circumstances of the life situation subsequently processed by deep-based feelings and sentimental orientations. The native expertise incorporates into the tradition-bound cultural expressions processed through music, dance, proverbs, folk narratives as well as symbolic presentations. Folklore is such a crisis-crossed phenomenon of human reflections which exhibits a situation of an efficacious media to transport the age-old conceptual understandings to the generations to come. The native expertise and folkloric understandings are specifically based on tradition-bound conceptual activities and thinking patterns of the common people and because of this fact these understandings are processed in an incomparable style. Of late, it is seen that there is a conspicuous development in awakening of the global philosophy as regards the age-old nature expertise. Now after a much turmoil it has been crystal cleared that the so called kept away mentality on the native prowess is a misleading attempt. At present the time has come and not only so a global consensus has already been developed dynamically to attach specific importance to the traditional cognition of the native groups of people who have been in close association of nature from the time immemorial.

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The folk categories of people throughout the world have got a wide range and deep-based comprehensions on the various world phenomenon which they elucidate in their own way according to their integrated philosophical patterns of understandings. The subject-matters of the contemplation are operated with the integrated ways to have an assimilative ground which form and present the traditional perspective of the work of thinking patterns through time. In this situational context through a continuous process of thinking and explaining the various materials of folklife and understanding there develops the base line of specific conceptual ideas which ultimately give the shape of traditions. Tradition, so to speak, is derived from *tradere* which is characterized by the general meaning "to transmit". Thus, in the domain of social science the tradition is regarded as the deployment of social practices which are set to celebrate and inculcate the behavioural norms and values. These are characteristically associated with the various patterns of widely accepted rituals and different symbolic behaviour-patterns. In this specific background the observations of Sarat Chandra Roy, the Father of Indian Anthropology, are needed to be referred. He deserved the specific credibility to focus the inner recess of folkloric materials in his voluminous work on the *Oraon Religion and Customs* (1928). After four years of the publication of this book he tried to point out the specific implication of the term tradition used in folkloric study and analysis of the various concepts. Through the study of traditional materials in the domain of folklore Roy could explore the inner significance of the term tradition and he remarked tradition is valued for the light, however faint and dim, that it may shed on the prehistory of human events. Tradition, either oral or recorded in ancient books like the Hindu Puranas and the Mahabharata, is based, more or less, on actual events of the distant past. It thus becomes a recognised source of history when contemporary authentic records or other sources are wanting (Roy, 1932). While working among the Mundas of Chotanagpur Roy came across a particular tradition which depicted and analysed the conflict between the Mundas and an ancient 'race' of 'giants' whom they named Asurs. After collecting the detailed data on the nature and extent of the social conflict Roy could discover a very ancient civilization in the soil of Chotanagpur. Thus Roy remarked that the popular tradition could serve as a clue to guide our steps to archaeological fields. In course of his research work Roy could understand that traditions of the people, if these are analysed and assessed properly, these could explore the various conditions of the remote past of the people concerned.

The traditions in the domain of folklore, it is to be noted, are specifically characterized by the varied experience-oriented phenomena of the native expertise. The natives in any locality are deeply concerned with their immediate ecological and environmental situations with which they try to adjust themselves and not only so they develop the strategy for the well-maintenance of their life situation as a whole. It has been possible through the close understanding of importance of the

immediate eco-environmental situational contexts in the day to day life activities. Their philosophy of life is thus moulded in the line of ecological principles and environment requirements. Thus the ideology of the native people governed by the native expertise is fashioned as per settings of the direct nature. It is this specific ideology which ultimately give rise to the traditions of the people concerned that are loaded with various psycho-social and philosophical conceptual ideas. The traditions are inherited through generations and in course of their travel through the time the addition and assimilation of new ideas become significant in the perspective of changing situations.

Native consciousness, so to speak, is rooted to the soil conditions, natural diversities and environmental situations which constitute the total ecological settings. The native communities living and drawing their sustenance from neighbouring eco-environmental situations which constitute the total ecological settings. The native communities living and drawing their sustenance from neighbouring eco-environmental circumstances are well-acquainted with all the nook and corner of their surroundings. The specific truth is that man is undoubtedly the part and parcel of the animal kingdom and, therefore, he can be highlighted in the background of the organic dimensions. But, it is to be noted with deep concern that human line of action is not restricted to the organic situational context only-it proceeds further and in a different way unlike other animals. Human life and activities are attuned to the two fold dimensions i.e. biology and culture. The former is essentially an organic concept and it is shaped by the actions and reactions of various bodily features. The latter one is called super organic and it surpasses the organic matters though it is rooted to those. It is for this reason culture is recognised as a biological event and, it is the product of the evolutionary forces. It is a matter of great significance, in the study of man, that biology and culture are the two reciprocal concepts and one can be understood properly with the help of the other. The biological events and cultural matters are so closely intermingled that if this organised whole is not assessed conceptually and evaluated properly the human life and work can never be explored in a balanced dimension. Biological adaptation is regarded as the basic tool in the living world for ongoing biological evolution. Unlike other animals, human biological adaptations have been very much effectual with the close-set impact of cultural modification through time and space.

Ecology is devoted to the study of organisms in the natural and social settings as well as of their relationship to these situational contexts. Man is regarded as the unique species in that they are found in almost all settings of the world, and what is more important is that they can create their own cultural setting. The basic unit of study in ecology is the ecosystem which is characterized by a set of interrelated species of organisms and their physical environment. Thus the ecosystem practically constitutes the effective union of biology, behaviour, organisation and functioning of man, other animals as well as plants together with the inorganic components

within a single framework. Culture is not only a unique creation of man but it helps him in differentiating himself from other animals as well as it contributes a lot of ways and means to adjust with the surroundings through the devising of active behavioural patterns. Human culture is constituted by many structurally different parts that interact and in addition they react to one another within an overall cultural system. There always existed a relationship between a human cultural system and its natural environment, and the system is constantly adjusting to environmental changes. It is this totalistic study in which human population adapt to as well as transform their environments by socio-cultural ways and means is known as cultural ecology. The concept of cultural ecology indicates the interactional analysis of environment-cultural relationships. Man's mark on the land is not uniform rather it indicates diverse perspectives - a multi-coloured canvas. The place of living of man is as varied as human activities. Place includes the site of his settlement. The physical features associated with place are recognised as environment which is formed by many factors like climate, landforms, soil, water, natural vegetation and minerals. The environmental features formed by these units constitute various living conditions. Right from the prehistoric stages of culture human life has confronted with different environmental situations in the background of which various cultural features have developed, Continuous ice-influenced climatic conditions help in the development of a way of life which characteristically differs from the culture that develops in a draught-hit-climate. It has been observed through continuous search of human nature that has developed in the perspective of various physical environments that the life-ways and thought-ways of the people concerned are directly related to the concerned physical setting. The overt and covert behaviour patterns of human communities are directly affected by the immediate setting of their environment. Everywhere man tries to adjust himself to the surroundings and when the situation requires he modifies himself accordingly. It can be regarded as a basic point that the life in this world is nourished as well as perished by the environment. A large group of animals with diverse features and, variegated nature appeared on this earth and lived for a conspicuous period, and then departed once for all due to unfavourable environmental conditions. This picture becomes very clear when one looks into the life of a man and other animals that developed through the prehistoric period. It is strongly evidenced by the arrival and departure of many animals and plant forms conditioned by favourable and unfavourable environmental perspectives. A section of them could survive through generations by devising special means to struggle with the adverse environmental situations. Man has successfully attempted to alter his position in the earth's ecology by virtue of gaining more and more control over the physical environmental conditions through his culture. Therefore, it can be easily said that man has not only tried to remodel his physical surroundings but also his principal activities have aimed at the adaptation to his cultural background. Therefore, the systematic

study of these attempts of man to cope with the surroundings by devising various cultural activities brings to focus many aspects which have been of interest to many anthropologists in recent years. Many attempts have been made by man to face the adverse physical environment and a new and specialized branch, viz., environmental anthropology takes account of it. It focuses its attention on the human achievements for devising tool-technology and also establishes inter-relationship between man and technology. Besides, man has resisted to the unfavourable situation by warding off dangerous conditions caused by natural and supernatural phenomena. Various thinking patterns, value-attitude systems and psycho-social understandings, help man to cope with the adverse situations. It is seen that the particular way of life of a community is characterized by such thoughts, ideas and activities that are directly influenced by physical surroundings and their exploitation to protect itself from natural calamities or activities. The devices adopted are in the form of various cultural activities which shape the cultural features of the human community concerned. Thus we see that the people living in the midst of mountainous range have a cultural tradition where mountains play a dominant role. The folkways and mores of these people are highly influenced by mountainous atmosphere. Sometime these inanimate objects of nature become pulsated with life and affect human activities. Similarly, people drawing sole subsistence on the sea and the aquatic animals develop a reverential attitude towards them. Investigations into the integrated life of these communities reveal that the natural surroundings have played crucial roles in the development of their mythological aspect. The techno-environmental transactions give shape to different ecological patterns. Man must acquire a clear-cut knowledge about his environment from which he draws his daily necessities. The acquaintance of man to his environment helps him to direct his activities towards finding a solution to various problems.

Environment plays the most essential role in both biology as well as culture. But in the case of man it is culture which has been continuously fighting with the environment. Culture in most of the cases has been able to put resistance not only on the unfavourable but also devastating environmental situations. This specific effectual attempt for central adaptedness has all through the time made congenial surroundings to facilitate adjustment of the biology with environment so far unsuitable to run an active life. Man is biologically the least specialised animal and, therefore, he most of the time fails to cope with the unfavourable surroundings only through the biological organs. But in spite of this fact man is found to be distributed throughout the diversified environmental niches in the different corners of the globe where other animals fail to make their living. It has been possible for man to prepare himself befitting for any environmental condition without any sort of biological specialisation only because of cultural achievements. Culture, as is understood by the human scientists, is the man-made part of the environment. Environment is, in turn, characterized by two specific domains – the natural

environment and the social environment. The total patterns and perspectives of social environment is his culture, because of the fact, that, it is created by man himself.

There is no denying of the fact that since the day of his appearance on the face of this earth, man has constantly been trying to adjust himself in accordance with his surrounding environment. One man-environment interactions right from the primary stages have been processed through multidimensional ways and means, and under that specific situational context, there has developed an integrated environment-culture relationship pattern. The environment encircles all the living as well as non-living embodiments in multifarious forms. It is to be noted here that biotic as well as abiotic environments are in the process of interrupted interactions resulting in an integrated perspective which in the long run develops into a specific conceptual idea like ecology. Ecology, so to speak, is a complicated comprehension which is related to the study of plants and animals (including man) in connection with each other and to the environment. The analysis of each of the items of ecology provides us with a clear understanding to make a thorough search into the nature and modes of adjustment of man in course of his life and activities governed by physical, bio-social, cultural and psycho-philosophical factors. Thus the study of ecology though principally dominated by the environmental issues, it is centred round holistic, integrated and multi-disciplinary features of action orientations.

The economic concept is specifically intelligible in the domain of exploring man-environment interactions. The ecology is not a new term in the sphere of environmental studies but its categorical application in finding out varied facets of environmental situations influencing human behaviour-patterns is of recent origin. Human life is the direct result of the uninterrupted interactions with the natural environment and it has been patterned in accordance with the situation arising out of the interactions. Therefore, the human scientists during the mid-fifties of the last century became very much enthusiastic in highlighting the effect of environmental situation in human life and activities through the application of the ecosystem concept which is believed to highlight profitably the multiple facets of bio-socio-psycho-philosophical interactions with the natural environment. The ecosystem concept, in the study and analysis of human way of life and the connective activities, has been put forward with methodological illustrations by the anthropologist like Julian Steward. In his analytical discourse he has very perfectly shown the patterns of assessment of the multiple facets of the bio-socio-psycho-philosophical interactions of human being with the natural surroundings conditioned by environmental situations. On the basis of this particular line of thinking Steward's presentation of the scientific concept like cultural ecology is of specific importance in the evaluation of the processes underlying man-environment relations. It depicts the mechanistic procedures prevailing in the background of human efforts for

adaptation to the environmental circumstances as well as the connected endeavour to transform the environment to satisfy the primary needs for the life and work.

From the study of the history of the past we understand that a large group of animals with diversified biological characteristic features and multifarious behaviour-patterns appeared on the earth. After living for a considerable period many of them took departure from the earth as they could not, for some obvious reasons, cope with the unfavourable environmental conditions which they had to face, many a time, due to global atmospheric change. On looking into the various evidences of life forms so far excavated from the different strata of the earth we readily develop an idea that these are characterized by the arrival and departure of many animals as well as plants forms conditioned by favourable and unfavourable environmental circumstances. Though a good number of them could not survive but many others were able to maintain their existence through generations by devising special biological characteristic features which helped those actively to struggle with the adverse environmental situations. Man was successful in his effort to alter his position in the earth's ecology by virtue of gaining more and more control over the physical environment and it was made possible through a specific means contrived and actionuated exclusively by the human species.

Like biological adjustments to the environmental situations cultural adaptiveness has brought forth a picturesque dimension of human efforts to cope with the adversities creating hindrances in the domain of life and activities. It is very interesting to note the various measures adopted by man through the ages to resist the adversities in the surroundings and also to make an amicable understanding with these through cultural adaptation. It is a complicated process of trial and error, of challenge and understanding and all these features have led to the development of a new branch of knowledge known as Environmental Anthropology. All through the time man has resisted the untoward environmental situations by warding off dangerous conditions caused by natural and supernatural phenomena. Various thinking patterns, value-attitude system and psycho-social understandings have come in direct assistance of man to cope with the adverse situations of life. Looking into the way of life and thinking patterns of any community it becomes clear that it is characterized by various thoughts, ideas and belief-patterns that are directly influenced by physical surroundings and their exploitation to protect itself from natural calamities. The devices adopted in this regard are in the form of different cultural traits that shape cultural realm of the community concerned. In support of this assessment we may put forward a few examples of human communities adapted to the different ecological contexts and then find out their specific effort of understand the environment and thereby to adjust with it culturally. It is seen that the people inhabiting in the close-set mountainous ranges develop a specific cultural tradition in which mountains play the dominant role. The folkways and mores of these people are processed by the mountainous atmosphere. The

mountain-oriented environmental perspectives influence the life-situation of the concerned people. The inanimate mountains become, pulsated in the life-philosophy of these people which affect all the dimensions of existence. Likewise, the people, who draw their sustenance exclusively from the sea and the aquatic animals become their only means of subsistence, develop a reverential attitude towards these. An effective investigation into the inner recess of life and thought of the people reveal that the natural surroundings have played crucial roles in the development of their mythological sphere. In human science it is always taken for granted that the relationship between man and environment has always been a major force of human thought. Ecological conceptualisation of this relationship pattern has added new dimension to the thinking principle. In this specific moulding of thought pattern, it is held that the natural environment directly exert influence on the psychological perspectives, philosophical principles as well as the working habits of the people which ultimately shape the specific dimension of cultural patterns.

In the total perspective of the basic principles and working patterns of cultural ecology, environmental determination and adaptational endeavour to the unfavourable circumstances the development of various folk cults in the way of life of diversified humanity can conveniently be analysed to open up a specific dimension underlying the perception of the interacting patterns between man and environment. The folk cults are the collective expressions of the folk mind. These have been developed centering round specific cultural zones and in the background of identical belief-patterns and thought-situations. The development of these cults is specifically characterized by the joint enterprise of the people irrespective of caste groups and religious inclinations to cope with the unfavourable as well as, dreadful circumstances which is inevitable for existence. When the people are made to understand, through the observations of the situational context, that some dreadful circumstances cannot be resisted through the realistic procedures, and by the adoption of natural means, with the help of technological devices, those are regarded as the factors out of humanity's reach. Thus those are not controlled by no other alternative but to resist those through the devising of supernatural and unrealistic methods which go beyond the domain of technological devices. This trend of mind has given rise to the development of different folk deities which are thought to govern various spheres of human life and work. Variegated rites and rituals in connection with these deities are observed with utmost sincerity and deep devotion. The human communities working in the fields and forests make an effective endeavour to save themselves from the attack of snakes and tigers by paying respectful homage to the deities like Manasa and Dakshin Roy who are believed to be the presiding deities of snakes and tigers respectively. These are two of the large number of examples of folk deities who are worshipped irrespective of castes, classes and religions.

There are sufficient evidences amongst the human communities in relation to the active efforts for bringing the adverse environmental circumstances, physical

as well as biotic, which cause human existence troublesome. Amongst the various population groups we meet with the devices for material-based cultural adaptations to exert an effective control over the unruly atmosphere and dreadful surrounding circumstances for making the adverse environment friendly to a considerable extent to help solve the problems of living and work. But when it is felt that the material adjustment cannot be made effective because of the nature and extent of the problems, the people take refuge to the non-material aspect of adaptation which is, by nature, based on psycho-philosophical methodology completely oriented with non-material adjustment patterns. To cope with the conditions beyond natural happenings there has developed supernatural methods to protect the people concerned from multifarious calamities. All of the folk beliefs and attitude systems are specifically oriented with the patterns of thinking that very naturally go beyond the spheres of realistic procures. Like technological achievement to combat the adversity of environment the rural folk have designed their way of life to devise various cultural patterns for the same purpose. The cultural-environmental transactions focus a conspicuous dimension of the rural folk and establish a close linkage between environment and culture, depicting the folk philosophy conditioned by environmental situation.

A few concrete examples would illustrate the total situation. The deltaic region of Bengal is highly influenced by the vegetative growth. Through the length and breadth of the southernmost part of the Gangetic delta a continuous growth of dense forest is seen. This forest serves as a shelter for numerous animals, some of which are of special importance. These animals, such as tigers, are ferocious, clever and very powerful which creates problem for making use of the land for cultivation of crops, specially paddy. During the process of reclamation, human habitations were established in the midst of the Sundarban - the renowned and graceful forest in West Bengal. The people living in these Sundarban villages eke out their subsistence by the cultivation of paddy and vegetables in the reclaimed lands. A large section of them engage themselves in fishing in the rivers, creeks and shallow water of the numerous channels. Some of the inhabitants are wood cutters or honey collectors, who go to the interior of the forests regularly to serve different purposes. Amongst various notable animals, the tigers of Sundarban top the list. The tigers living in this forest belong to a special species which is a class in itself. These animals have a majestic look and they possess grandeurous behaviour-patterns. The Sundarbans are affected by tigers who pose a continuous threat and terror to the inhabitants of this region. In order to get rid of the sudden attack of tigers the people in the locality identified the presiding deity of tigers, named Dakshin Roy. Regular worship of Dakshin Roy and the earnest prayer to him is believed to root out all the possibilities of attack by the tiger. On the 1st day of the Bengali month, Magh (January-February) the worship of Dakshin Roy takes place throughout the region of Sundarban and adjacent territory. The worship of the deity of tigers has

been evolved through the threat by the dreadful animals. The continuous atmosphere of terror has made them to arrange for appeasing the tigers through the creation of a presiding deity of the tigers. At present the influence of this deity is seen to spread throughout the length and breadth of southern 24 Parganas district of West Bengal where Sundarban has flourished elegantly. People belonging to all communities adore the deity who has become the protector of the people as a whole. Thus the people of Sundarban have devised supernatural methods to protect themselves from the natural calamities and other objects. This specific methodology of Supernaturalism to adjust with the surroundings is highly befitting and effectually working in the life-philosophy of the hunting-gathering tribe. The life of the hunter-gatherers is full of uncertainties. They are directly dependent on the mercy of nature and their exploitation of natural wealth is conditioned by multifarious ways and means. The life of the hunting-gathering people is always in most intimate contact with their habitat and, therefore, the interaction between nature and man is very explicit amongst these population groups. Hunter-gatherers are always in a tense situation because of food but they are not at all afraid of it. It is simply a challenge to the situational perspective. In order to make the challenge a success they are to adjust themselves with the total circumstantial condition. Most of the time these people adopt nomadic life because of instability of their economy. They are always on the move; in some communities it is limited while in others it may be unrestricted. To them life is regarded as a constant struggle and this struggle in continuous perspective has made these people adjustable to all unfavourable circumstances.

The Birhors of Chotanagpur in Jharkhand is a tribal group of such a pattern. They are completely dependent on forest products in every step of their life. Thus forest ecology has shaped their way of life which is highly conditioned by wandering philosophy. Their patterns of wandering are not haphazard but these are characterized by systematic producers following definite routes through the jungle covered regions. The anxiety for uncertainties and the fear of supernatural wealth are the, two conspicuous factors which govern their world views specifically conditioned by supernaturalism. As a practical step towards uncertainties and disastrous phenomena arising out of both natural and supernatural sources Birhors have devised various indigenous ways to tackle the problem. The development of a folk cult named *Bonga Ora* may be taken here as a case in point. It is a clan deity and is represented by a piece of stone of unusual shape. The *Bonga Ora* is believed to exert multidimensional influence on their totalistic way of life. During their wanderings through the regions in search of food zones the *Bonga Ora* is regarded as the path finder. At the dead hours of night when the Birhors are in deep slumber it is the *Bonga Ora* which resists the injurious evil spirits to make an entry into the Birhor huts. In order to find out the cause of illness and for suggesting proper medicines for treatment this deity is consulted in a supernatural way by the *mati* - the traditional medicine man of the community. The *Bonga Ora* is credited with

certain powers over nature such as that of causing and stopping rain and storm. The *Bonga Ora* is occasionally worshipped for the general welfare of Birhor settlements as well as to keep these free from all sorts of ghostly powers abound in the forested environment and surrounding hill ranges. Therefore, it is seen that the Birhors are solely dependent on the folk cult centering round *Bonga Ora* to cope with all their uncertainties and disastrous happenings in their daily mode of life. The total perspective highlights a concrete joint endeavour to adjust with the unfavourable circumstances in which the life of the Birhors is activated.

There are ample evidences amongst the human communities in connection with the active efforts for bringing the adverse environmental circumstances - both physical and biotic - which raise the question of human existence. We find various materials based cultural adaptations to bring the unruly atmosphere and surrounding circumstances under effective control so that the non-conducive situations can be made to some extent friendly for life and living. But when the material adjustment fails because of complexity and vastness of the problem, the people concerned try to apply psycho-philosophical methodology completely based on non-material adjustment. These attempts to cope with the situation have penetrated into the value-attitude system of the people. In its long journey through generations this cultural phenomenon borrows numerous elements from other spheres and the process shades-off various indigenous elements. This develops folk culture characterized by the presence of various elements. All these elements and features have been added and amalgamated together in course of attempts for controlling the environment affecting human life. The structure and function of folk culture has to be understood in the background of its multi-dimensional development. In doing this various dimensions of folk culture are to be examined and analysed separately. In short, it can be said that the environmental conditions shape different dimensions of indigenous cultural patterns, which in their totality, help a great deal in the adjustment of the society concerned with the bio-physical environment.

We must, then, come to the conclusion that folklore and the related traditions that have evolved and flourished through time and space are the outcome of the common people's close-set observations and necessary expositions in the background of their own perceptions. Our country is specifically characterized by the diversified rural and tribal communities which have adopted the vast treasures of the surroundings. The direct implication of these precious resources on the life and living pattern of the native communities has got a unique value orientation that is highly commandable through the ages. These conceptual ideas and the allied line of thought is still relevant to the human society even in this era of globalization.

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