

Title

Between Tradition and Transformation: Sacred Groves, Land Governance, and Indigenous Knowledge of the Munda Tribe

Name of the PI

Dr. Parul Rani, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kaveri University, Gowraram, Telangana

Abstract

The Munda tribe possesses a distinctive indigenous knowledge system and ways of governance to engage with the environments that they live with. Among such systems, Sacred Groves (*Sarna*) represents an enduring institution for Munda tribe that integrate their community customs, meaning attribution to the forests, methods to govern the land, and their cultural-ecological conservation ethics. Rather than emerging merely as cultural relics, Sacred grove functions as the socio-political institution for them to regulate their resources, establishing authority, transfer of land ownership, nature worshipping, collective responsibility and decision-making. Building on this understanding, this project aims to study the relationship between Munda tribe and Sacred grove in the contemporary changing times. First, it aims at examining the ways in which indigenous knowledge about sacred grove and land governance is produced, transmitted, and preserved across the generations. Secondly, the study advances on examining how these tribal people respond or adapt to technocratic changes to dismantle a well-established binary of nature vs culture. The study documents the oral collective memory, ritual practices, customary laws, and community coalition of Munda tribe associated with *Sarna*. It foregrounds indigenous epistemologies that focus on the intersection of man with nature, and the sacred. The project explores the ways in which such notions are practiced and guide social, political, ecological, and moral responsibilities of the natives in everyday life. Simultaneously, this study maps the change that such practices have undergone in response to the state forest governance, development projects in their area, livelihood imperatives, and the generational changes. The study adopts qualitative ethnographic methodology for data collection. The participant observation, interviews, and oral narration are mainly focused to make a contextual analysis for understanding the continuity and change of sacred grove for Munda tribe.

Objectives

1. To analyse the role of sacred groves (*Sarna*) in regulating land and forest resources through customary norms, ritual authority, and collective decision-making among the Munda tribal people.
2. To document and analyze the indigenous knowledge traditions (oral narratives, ritual practice, land governance, social responsibility, and community memory) and how such knowledges are transmitted to next generation and community's peculiar ways of preserving such knowledges.
3. To analyze how sacred groves maintain continuity and also adapt to change by responding to contemporary socio-economic pressures such as state intervention, economic gains, and generational shifts.

Technical Details

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic methodology supported by oral traditions and contextual textual analysis. Altogether, the study derives anthropological, environmental, and political ecological approaches to understand the indigenous knowledge about non-human nature and the ways in which they govern it. In this research, knowledge production is exhibited through the concept of relationality between the Munda tribe and their land, forest, and sacred groves by challenging the nature-culture dualism (Descola, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 1998).

Project Duration: 2 Years

Expected Impact

- The project strengthens the visibility of indigenous knowledges. Through the institutions of sacred grove as potential modes of governance, it imparts to society an alternative way to fight the notion of tribes as fundamentally primitive, illogical, and barbaric. The outcome of such interactions and documentation can foster a more congenial ambience regarding the different communities in India.
- By studying the indigenous communities' collective land ownership and ethical use of land restrain the extractive ways of land uses. The study emphasizes sustainable resource use. It provides the insights on the new pathways where the indigenous communities can rely on their own ways of livelihoods than the dependency on external market sources. It altogether protects the communities from the economic vulnerability.
- The study makes a space for showing that there can be ethical engagements with biodiversity and forest preservation and reverence can function parallelly. By documenting the ways in which such practices have adapted to the modern state-led forest regulations, the study highlights the indigenous inclusive way of environmental protection.

Collaborating Partners (Institutions)

Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ranchi, Jharkhand, India.

Funding Agency

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Division, Ministry of Education, New Delhi, India

Budget

20,15,000