



**ROLE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE FOR BETTERMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND MANKIND: SPECIAL REFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF FAUNA IN CHHINDWARA DISTRICT OF MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA**

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### ABSTRACT

Religious beliefs and practices have long influenced human perceptions and uses of nature. Animals in particular play a prominent role in magico-religious practices and given the historical and cultural depth of these relationships, understanding human-faunal relations is often fundamental to the cause of meaningful wildlife conservation. This study investigates the domestic and wild harvested species used for spiritual and religious purposes by tribes and rural people of Chhindwara district. Faunal resources have played a wide range of roles in human life from the earliest days of recorded history. In

addition to their utilitarian importance, animals have been recognized in religion, art, music and literature and other different cultural manifestations of mankind. The variety of interactions between humans and animals is the subject matter of ethnozoology. Ethnozoological studies can be a valuable asset to increase our understanding of the cultural, economic, social, and traditional roles of played by animals. In this context, they have a central role in conservation and management. This work provides a review on the main forms of interactions between humans and the fauna along history, and their ecological implications, and discusses the role of the ethnozoology in animal conservation. We identified a total of 30 species of animals (or animal derived products) used for magico-religious.

**KEYWORDS:** Religious, Conservation, Faunal resources, Traditional.

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional cultural practices often represent the foundation of sustainable resource use and environmental conservation. Because cultures have shaped and in turn, been shaped by local ecosystems and their constituent biotic and abiotic elements. Biocultural diversity bears a close and increasingly appreciated relationship with environmental resilience and sustainability. Traditional knowledge systems and practices sustain the ability to anticipate, recognize, and respond to change and as indigenous and other local communities respond to the multiple impacts of modernization, land use change, and climate change they draw necessarily on the wealth of ecological knowledge and practices held by individuals to adapt and survive. Among the most relevant cultural features, religious beliefs and practices have long influenced human perception and use of natural resources cultural diversity and spiritual needs have long been connected to the ways humans use and interact with biodiversity and in many parts of the world belief in a sacred nature underpins people's relationship with land and resources, Alves (2012).

Animal occupy and important position in culture and religion of traditional societies all over the world. In this context, many of the useful animals are given sacred status because of their important roles in human culture and religion. Examples could be cited of various domestic cow species which are worshipped by the traditional Hindu societies on a regular basis in recognition of their values of mankind. Not only this, even products such as excreta and urine of these animals are smeared in the floor areas of their houses with a belief that these products would sanctify their dwellings, Lohani (2010).

Ethno-zoological study is concerned with persuasiveness, management, classification and use of animal species by mankind through human of animal interrelation and interaction in the surrounding environment where they live. It is generally observed that the tribals are hardly selective in their animal food except to those animals related to religious belief, folk lore and myths and this vary widely from one community to another. On the other hand, some of the common animals like wild boar, chital, sambar deer; cows, monkey, tortoise, frog, crab, prawn, insects, molluscs etc. are by or at the behest of non-tribals or in great demand, Bagde (2015).

India is gifted with immense faunal and floral biodiversity, because of the extreme variation in geographical and climatic condition prevailing in the country. There are about 45000 species of plants and 81000 species of animal, MoEF (1994).

## STUDY AREA



**Map 1: Map of Chhindwara District.**

Chhindwara district was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956. It is located on the South-West region of Satpura Range of Mountain. It is spread from 21.28 to 22.49 Deg. North (longitude) and 78.40 to 79.24 Deg. East (longitude) and spread over an area of 11,815 sq.km. This district is bound by the plains of Nagpur District (in Maharashtra State) on the South, Hosangabad and Narsingpur District on the West and Seoni District on the East. (Map-3.3)

From the Geographical point of view Chhindwara district can be divided into three main regions – The plains of Sausar and Pandhurna, The Satpura mountain region is central region and the third region is mostly the Northern region comprising of hilly terrain.

There are five major rivers which flow through the district namely Kanhan, Pench, Jam, Kulbehra, Shakkar and Doodh. It is believed that once upon a time the Chhindwara District was full of “Chhind” (Date-Palm) trees, and place was named ‘Chhind’- Wada( wada means place). There is also another story that because of the population of Lions (In Hindi it is called ‘Sinh’), it was considered that making entry into this district is akin to passing through the entrance of Lions’den. Hence it was called ‘sinh Dwara’ (means through the entrance of lion). In due course of time it becomes “Chhindwara”.

District has majority of tribal population. The tribal communities include Gond, Bharia, Korku, Mawasi and Pardhan. Majority of the tribals speak in Gondi and Hindi mixed with Marathi. Festivals in the district are Pola, Bhujalia, Meghnath, Akhadi, Harijyoti Gyarus, Amawas and Diwali etc. On Shivrathri day Mahadev mela will be celebrated each year on Choudagadh.

There are 1984 villages in the district, out of which 1906 villages are habitated. As per census 2011, the total population of the district is 20, 90,922 out of which 15, 85,739 belonging to rural areas. The scheduled tribes' population is 769,778 in district. (Map - 1)

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work is based on information gathered through interview with the village headman and village elders through questionnaire. The villages selected for information were from semi-urban and rural localities where the local beliefs and indigenous practices are performed and have knowledge of identifying the wild life and their traditional use in their society.

Information was also obtained by semi-structured interviews and supplemented by free interviews which were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Information provided by participants was cross-checked at various points of the interview. Most questions involved the species of animals used for magical-religious purposes, the body parts used, how they were used. Animals mentioned by respondents were visually identified during the interviews as well as through photographs of the animals or their parts taken during interviews and identified later with the aid of specialists and the relevant literature.

## OBSERVATIONS

**Table 1: Religious Practices Of Fauna In Chhindwara District.**

S. No.	Common name	Scientific Name	Local name	Uses
1.	Leech	<i>Hirundo medicinalis</i>	Gonch	Ash mixed with kumkum and make a smooth paste. The paste is applied on person for hypnotize. <b>(magico- religious )</b> . Ash mixed with food and food is given a person for revenge. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
2.	Honey bee	<i>Apis spp.</i>	Madhu Makkhi	Honey bee is worshiped as kuldewta by Gotra "Vithika",Bhor", and " Bhalavi". <b>(Socio-religious)</b> .
3.	House fly	<i>Musca</i>	Makkhi	Tattoo of house fly is found on the body

		<i>domestica</i>		parts of tribal woman is called gudna. <b>(Socio cultural).</b> Many house fly buzzing in house. Indicate rain fall continues 3-4 day. <b>(Weather forecast).</b>
4.	Lac insect	<i>Lacifer lacca</i>	Lakh	Lac fume use for children their general well being and that drive evil spirits away. <b>(magico religious).</b>
5.	Scorpion	<i>Palamnius spp.</i>	Bicchu	Tattoo of scorpion is found on the body part of tribal woman and girl, it is called gudna. <b>(Socio religious).</b>
6.	Milliped	<i>Julus spp.</i>	Ginjai (Gay golan)	Herder protects their cattle from hailstone by cloud of fume (Fumigation). Fume is produced from ash and burned dung cake of cow. <b>(Socio-religious).</b> Bunch of animal indicated good rain fall. (Weather forecast).
7.	Cypria	<i>Cyprea spp</i>	Bittan	Shell use as ornamental and decorative material. <b>(Decorative).</b> Shell ornaments use by Ahir in important festival Diwali. <b>(socio religious)</b> The tribals believe that keeping shell in purse people gets blessings. <b>(socio religious).</b>
8.	Catla	<i>Catla catla</i>	Catla	Fish is worshiped as Kuldewta by gotra Halmi, Hurlpundi and Sori. <b>(socio-religious).</b> Tattoo of fish is found on body parts of tribal woman and girl. <b>(socio religious).</b>
9.	Frog	<i>Rana spp.</i>	Mendak	For pleasing <b>Indra</b> for good rainfall, marriage of frogs are arranged by tribes. <b>(socio-religious).</b> When small frogs enter houses it indicates that rainfall will be continue for 2-3 days. <b>(megico-religious).</b>
10.	Wall lizard	<i>Hemidactylus spp.</i>	Bamhani	It is believed commonly among the rural folks that a animal if touches any body part then it could be bad omen. <b>(omen indication).</b>
11.	Chameleon	<i>Chameleon zeylanicus</i>	Harasap	Local people used tail and nail to make charm, which are normally worn to ward off their enemies. <b>(magico religious).</b>
12.	Cobra	<i>Naja naja</i>	Nag	It is believed that male and female seen in coiled condition then they are covered with cloth so that they changes to <b>Gold.(magico-religious).</b> It is believed that if a snake crosses the path of a pregnant woman her chance for aborting the child increases. <b>(omen</b>

				<b>indication).</b>
				On the festival of Nag panchami it is important to attend nagdwari yatra for rituals. <b>(socio religious).</b>
				Nag is worshiped as kuldewta named Kaloduga by gotra of Made and Nuroti. It is believed that the snake was their ancestors. <b>(socio religious).</b>
13.	Rat snake	<i>Ptyas mucosus</i>	Dhamna(Ghodapachad)	It is believed that if a woman see the snake by chance evil spirit will enter her body which can only be cure by witch craft. <b>(magico religious)</b>
				It is believed that the thread passed through nostril of snake and that thread is tied to bull's nose, the bull become as active as snake. <b>(magico religious).</b>
14.	Python	<i>Python spp.</i>	Chitti	Charms are made out of spine (copulatory organ) and is wore to hypnotize dangerous wild animals. <b>(magico religious).</b>
15.	Tortoise	<i>Testudo elegans</i>	Kachua	Animal is worshiped as Kuldevta by <b>Netam</b> gotra they believe that tortoise are their ancestors. <b>(socio religious).</b>
16.	Domestic fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Murga	On the festival of <b>Gyaras, Diwali</b> and <b>Amavasya</b> it is supposed to give offering of red/white fowl to <b>Muthua Dev, Mal Dev</b> and <b>Chandi Mata.</b> <b>(socio-religious).</b>
				Both incident such as crowing of the cock at a time other than morning and crowing of hen are though to be bad omen indication. <b>(Megico religious).</b>
17.	Pea fowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Mor	Tattoo of animal is found on body parts of tribal woman and girl. It is believed that the gudna protect them after death. <b>(socio religious).</b>
				It is believed that amulets made of feather of bird have the power to protect the bearer from evil spirits. <b>(magico- religious).</b>
18.	Domestic crow	<i>Carvas spp.</i>	Kaua (Kumot)	Crow indicated traibals gotra <b>Usendi</b> and <b>Kumoti</b> . It is believed that crows are their ancestors. <b>( socio religious)</b>
				If crow touch any person to its beak that is bad omen, dispute in close relation. <b>(Omen indication).</b>
				If a crow crows early in the morning facing a house, it indicate some news for the family. <b>(Omen indication).</b>
19.	Horned Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	Ghughu/ ullu	Animal is used as omen indicator. If it is found to be hovering above a particular house, it is believed that there is sure going

				to be sad demise of one of the family members. In other words, the owl predicts death of one of the person of the area. <b>(omen indication)</b> .
				If it makes a sound like hoon-hoon, it indicates bad news. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
				Bones of bird used in making charms, which are protects evil spirit. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
20.	Pegion	<i>Columba livia</i>	Pareva	It is a common belief amongst the rural folk that pigeons are domesticated it is bad luck in future and predicts the death of person. <b>(omen-indication)</b>
				It is believed that amulets made of feathers of bird have the power to protect the bearer from evil spirits. <b>(magico-religious)</b>
21.	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Bagula	Claw rubs with water and drink used for killing enemy (revenge). <b>(megico-religious)</b> .
22.	Indian roller Blue joy	<i>Coracias bengalensis</i>	Neelkanth	Bird worship by tribes in Dushhera. <b>(socio-religious)</b> .
23.	Bull	<i>Bos taurus</i>	Bail	Bull is worshiped by farmers in the festival called Pola. <b>(Socio- religious)</b> .
24.	Ass	<i>Equus asinus</i>	Gadha	Charms are made of dried placenta and it is believed that these drive evil spirit away. <b>(Magico-religious)</b> .
25.	Pig	<i>Sus scrofa domestica</i>	Sungar	Offering is given to god during important festival. <b>(Socio-religious)</b> .
26.	Horse	<i>Equus hemionus</i>	Ghoda	Iron Nall of toe convert into ring, which are thought to bring strength and vigor to the wearer and frighten the enemy. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
27.	Cat	<i>Felis bengalensis</i>	Majri	Charms are made out of placenta, these drive evil spirits away. <b>(Magico-religious)</b> .
28.	Sloth bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>	Richh	Charms are made out of nails, hairs, and bone and worn to drive off evil spirits. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
29.	Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	Hatti	Fume of dung is use to drive off evil spirits away. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .
30.	Jakal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	Siyar	Howling of this animal is considered as sing of impending bad luck. <b>(magico-religious)</b> .

## RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

Knowledge of various uses of 30 animals has been documented and given is Table-1 fauna are given with their zoological names along with their local names. Magico-religious knowledge of the studied community reveals various uses of 30 genera. Total numbers of

animals 7 belonging to the invertebrate groups and 23 to the vertebrate groups. Out of 7 animals from the invertebrate group, 1 animal is annelid, 5 animals are arthropods and 1 animal is molluscan. In the vertebrate group, 1 animal belongs to the series pieces, 1 animal belongs to the amphibian, 6 animals belong to the reptiles, 7 animals belong to the avian fauna and 8 are mammalian fauna.

Man resource relationship at all levels material; cultural, spiritual etcetera contributes to overall well being of human being. Tribes have cultivated relationship with the animals at the spiritual level also. Spiritual relationship with animals is overt as some of the animals usually of strong and fearful nature such as tiger, bear, deer etc. are sources of charms and amulets. It is believed that the wearer of such charms and amulets is well protected from the perceived bad effects of unseen elements. The wearer thus gets emotional security. This practice underlines the importance of certain animals to the tribes in their day to day life activities. Such notion is the result of their positive attitude towards animals. It can be argued that such notion towards fellow animals if managed properly could contribute to their conservation. Also, a number of animals are used in faith healing therapy to appease the deity believed to govern their health. Some animals are used as magico-religious spheres. Only the hard part of the animal which does not decompose easily such as endoskeleton and exoskeleton are used as charms. These charms are worn normally in the forms of amulets and pendants which are locally called Tabij to ward off perceived 'evil eye' effects.

Animal parts and products such as bones and claws of the eagle (*Ictinectus malayensis*), placenta of ass (*Equus asinus*) and cat (*Felis spp.*), claw of cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and crow (*Corvus splendence*) tail of *Chameleon zeylenicus*, bones of owl (*Bubo bubo*), spines of *Python reticulates* is used for making charms and tied around the neck and arm to ward off perceived "evil spirit and disease causing elements".

Traditional societies use a number of animals in their magico-religious sphere. Normally animal parts are used a pendants and amulets to ward off the perceived evil spirits, Lohani (2010). Jirels have cultivated relationship with the animals at the spiritual level also. Spiritual relationship with animals is overt as some of the animals usually of strong and fearful nature such as tiger, rhinoceros, bear, musk deer etc. are sources of charms and amulets, Lohani (2011).



In entire northeastern region in general and particularly in the hilly states, the local trade of the wild animals, different cultural as well as magico religious uses of animals is commonly practiced, Borang and Thapaliyal (1993), Borang (1996), Harit (2001, 2002), Solanki *et al.* (2001), Solanki (2002), Solanki *et al.* (2002), Kumar and Solanki (2003).

Fume of feather of *Bubo bubo* are used to drive evil spirits. Iron nail of leg of horse (*Equus spp.*) is convert into ring and worn to drive evil spirit. Ash of *Julus spp.* and cow dung fume use by herder to protect from hail stone. Shell of *Cypria spp.*, keeping shell in purse people gets blessings. Canine teeth of *Sus scrofa* used in making charms. In the rural it is believed that amulets made of skin or nails of bear or owl or hairs of bear and feather of pigeon (*Columba spp.*) and peacock (*Povo cristatus*) have the power to protect the bearer from evil spirits. In this way, the tribal and rural animal relationship is observed not only at humaterial level but also at a spiritual level. Relationship of the tribal and rural people with the animal at the spiritual/cultural level is also reported from different parts of the developing world, Alves *et al.* (2009), Solanki and Chutia (2004). Animals used in such magico-religious sphere are *Python molurus* (reptile), *Corvus spp.* (bird), *Columba spp.* (bird), *Gallus gallus* (cock), Similar kind of man animal relationship at spiritual level is found among the Yi people of China, Hong (1990) and some tribal groups of India and abroad, Borang (1996).

Four categories of socio cultural uses of animals are prevalent among tribes. These are animal worship (ox, snake, tortoise, honey bee and peacock) sacrificial animals (pig, buffalo and fowl) and animals for tattooing (scorpion, house fly, peacock etc.)

Tattooing is a common culture in rural and tribal peoples. Tattoo of scorpion (*Palamnius spp.*), house fly (*Musca domestica*) and peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) are commonly found in body parts of male and female tribes. It is believed that only tattoo (gudna) help them after death.

Honey bee (*Apis spp.*) worshiped by gotra bhor and bhalavi, fish (*Catla spp.*) worshiped by gotra "Halmi, Sori and Hulpundi." Cobra (*Naja spp*) is worshiped as kuldewta named called kaloduga by gotra of "Made and Nuroti". Tortoise (*Testudo elegans*) is worshiped as kuldewta by gotra 'Netam'. Crow (*corvov splendence*) is worshiped by gotra "Usendi and Kumoti". Tribes believed that snakes, tortoise, fish, cows and honey bees are their ancestors.

Sacrificial animals like domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*), is used in festival diwali, amawas and gyaras offering for god Muthua dev, Maldev and Chandi mata. Buffalo (*Bos spp.*), pig (*Sus scrofa domestica*) are also offering in important festivals.

In many places it is a common practice to offer animal sacrificial offerings are regarded as gifts to the deities that are supposed to maintain health and general well being of those involved in this process, Lohani (2010). Wildlife has spiritual significance in cultures around the world, and animals and their products are employed as sacred and sacrificial elements in numerous religious rituals, Sanderson (2006).

Only live animals are used in faith healing therapy. These animals are either set free live as augury as in case of pigeon or even offered to the deity as sacrificial offerings as in case of cocks and goats. Sacrificial offerings are made to please the deities or ancestral spirits which are supposed to control the life of people, also used by Tamang and Jirels people of Nepal, Lohani (2010; 2011).

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