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'Kesar Chhanta Pratha' and Nature Conservation In Udaipur and Dungarpur District, Rajasthan, India

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Abstract-

All the natural resources are very valuable and important for our life. For this reason, our society has been conserving these resources from ancient time. The Khejadli Movement, the Chipko Movement, the Appiko Movement etc. are vigorous examples in India for forest resources conservation by the communities. In the same way, in Udaipur and Dungarpur district of southern Rajasthan state (India), a custom named 'Kesar Chhanta Pratha' (Saffron Sprinkle Custom) has been going on since ancient time for forest conservation. People of these areas sprinkle saffron on the name of God 'Kesriyaji' and take oath not to cut the forest. By this act, a threat prevails among the people that if they cut trees/forest, God will ruin them. Thousands of hector forest is still safe due to this practice in this area. This custom has been studied through observation of the area and collecting primary data through interview of concerned people. Major objective of Research is to study the practice of Kesar Chhanta Pratha for nature conservation in Udaipur and Dungarpur districts.

Keywords-*Bishnoi, Chipko & Appiko Movement, Kesar Chhanta Pratha (Saffron Sprinkle Custom), Kesriyaji, Khejarli.*

Introduction-

Nature has provided us many valuable resources, such as - air, water, soil, climate, earth, sunlight and energy, mineral, vegetation, etc. Human being and other living creature spend their whole life in the lap of Mother Nature. So nature is equally as important to the human as for other organism. The value of nature was recognized in ancient times. Men knew very well that he can't exist without nature, so from that time he has learnt to conserve nature. Laws in the ancient times were not so strict, so people used to follow the laws related to nature conservation through various customs. Udaipur and Dungarpur districts of southern Rajasthan are practicing a custom named Kesar Chhanta Pratha related to nature conservation from ancient time.

Vegetation is a very important resource for all of us and we are conserving this resource from centuries. Indian rural people were aware to the importance of vegetation and they sacrificed their life for its conservation. For Example in the year 1730 A.D. under the guidance of Amrita Devi Bishnoi (Gottlieb, 1996), 363 men and women sacrificed their lives in Khejarli (A Village in Jodhpur district, Rajasthan). Other major movements related to forest conservation are- in year 1972 A.D. the Chipko Movement (Bandyopadhyay, 1999) in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh under the guidance of Mr. Sundar Lal Bahuguna and Gaura Devi, in 1983 A.D. the Appiko Movement in Karnataka under the guidance of Mr. Pandurang Hegde. In the same way Kesar Chhanta Pratha is an age old custom to conserve forests in many villages of study area. It's still ongoing.

Study Area-

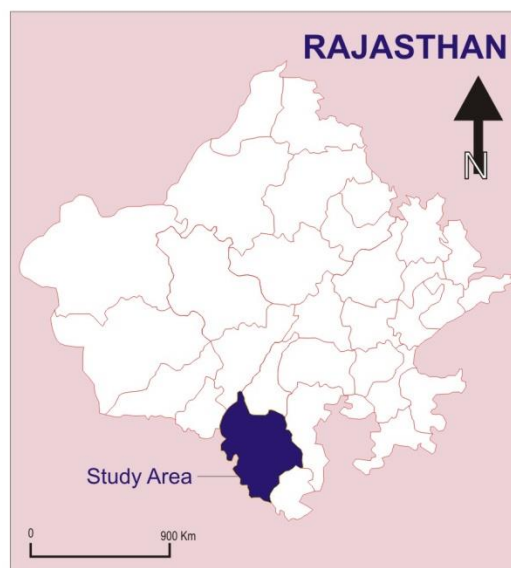
Study areas are located in the southern part of Rajasthan state. From cultural approach Udaipur, Rajsamand, Bhilwara and Chittorgarh districts are called 'Mewar' and Dungarpur and Banswara districts are known as 'Vagad'. Kesar Chhanta Pratha is practiced since ancient times in many villages of different tehsils of Udaipur and Dungarpur districts. These two districts are situated in South part of Rajasthan State (India) between 23°20' to 25°05' North Latitude and 73°09' to 74°35' East Longitude. Total area of Udaipur district is 11631 km² and of Dungarpur district is 3770 km². Total population of Udaipur district is 3,068,420 and Dungarpur district is 1,388,552 according to census 2011.

According to Geological Time scale this area was formed 700 Million years ago in Pre-Cambrian era with the Aravalli Mountain Range, where Granite, Gneiss and Schist etc. rocks are found in majority. The climate of this area is subtropical and average rainfall is 70 cm per year. Approx. 95% of rainfall is due to Monsoon wind in rainy season.

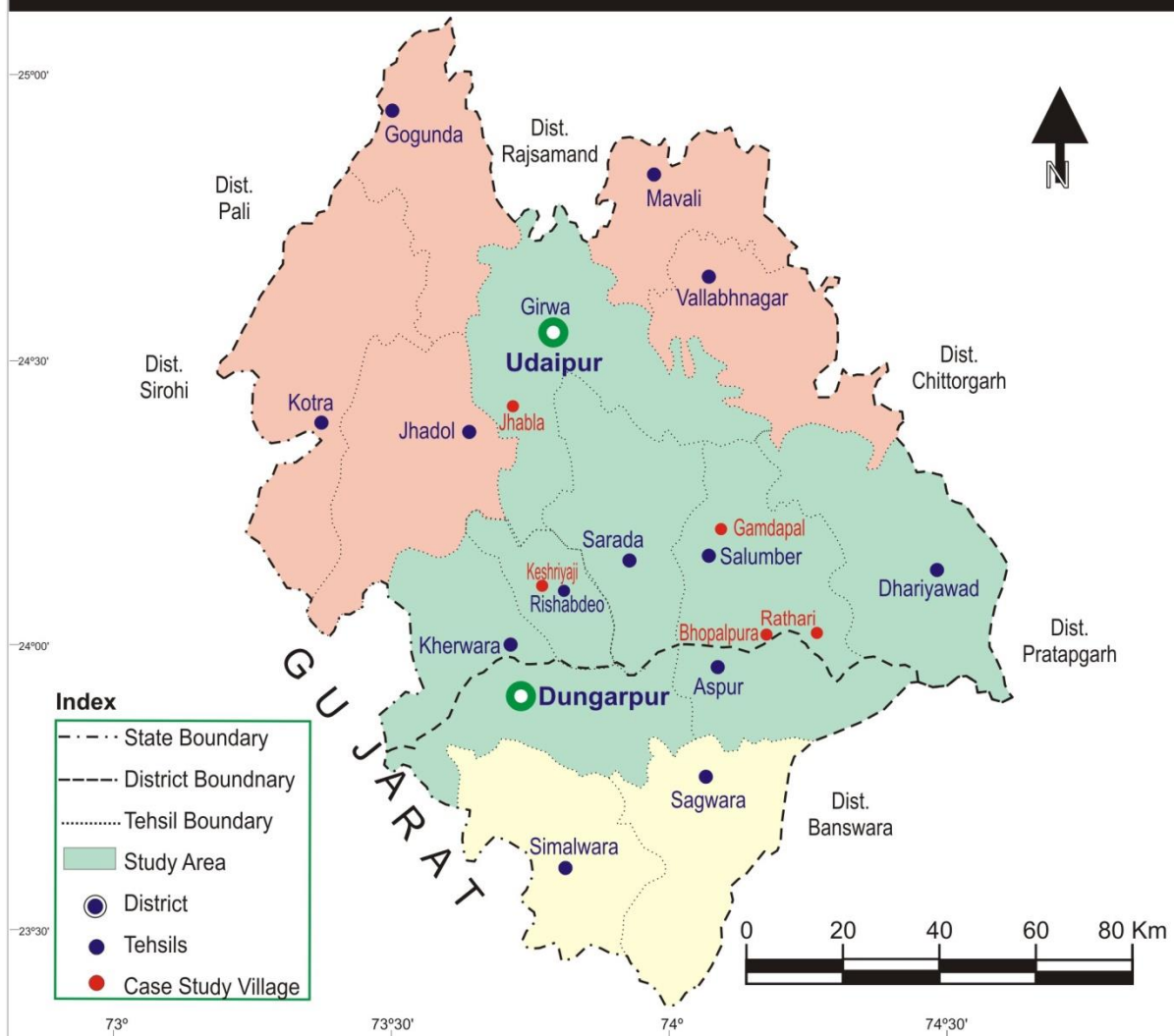
Importance of Research: -

Several efforts of societies to conserve forest in India have been studied earlier as- the Khejarli movement, the Chipko movement, the Appiko movement, etc. but a custom named Kesar Chhanta Pratha in study area for forest conservation ongoing since ancient time has not been studied yet. This is a major effort of the local communities for forest conservation in the study area. A very important custom of forest conservation is being studied in this research.

LOCATION MAP



STUDY AREA (UDIPUR & DUNGARPUR DISTRICT)



Note : Dhariyawad Tehsil has been merged in Pratapgarh district in 2008

Vegetation and Forest:-

Trees, shrubs and grasses of different species in a specific area are collectively called vegetation of a region that develops in a specific Eco System. A wide land portion covered by trees and shrubs in a region is called Forest Area. The importance of forests for any region could be understood by the fact that it is called the 'green gold' of that area. In study area Tropical dry deciduous forests are found.

Customs Prevalent in the Study Area: -

Many customs are prevalent in study area since ancient times, some of them are good and some are not so good. In that line a good custom Kesar Chhanta Pratha (Chouhan, 2012) is still prevailing here.

People of study area have unwavering faith in many local deities since ancient times. Usually some ancient customs are not considered good and are being strongly opposed, so they are gradually becoming extinct from this area. The custom Kesar Chhanta Pratha (Rathore, 2002) emerged as a blessing for nature conservation but now it is being extinct, so to save our nature from deforestation it is very necessary to adopt this custom again.

Kesariyajji:-

A famous temple of the first Tirthankar of Jain religion is situated in Rishabhdev town of Udaipur district, situated on bank of river 'Koyal'. Because he was the first 'Tirthankar' so he is called 'God Adinath', saffron is used in huge quantity so he is also known as 'Kesariyajji', (in India saffron known as 'Kesar') the statue is made of black marble so the tribal people call him 'Kalaji' (Black God). Both Jain and Tribal communities believe it to be their own temple that's why both communities' priests worship the God together. So for religious harmony this temple has its own importance. It is believed by the tribal people that, if somebody cuts the trees on which saffron is sprinkled (on the name of Kesriyajji), the God will punish and curse that person. So he is called the 'God of Tree' by the tribal people.



Image-Kesariyajji

Saffron:-

Saffron is a spice derived from the flower of *Crocus Sativus*, commonly known as the 'Saffron Crocus.' Saffron is considered very sacred in India. That's why saffron is offered to most of the Gods related to Hindu and Jain religion.



'Kesar Chhanta Pratha' and Forest Conservation: -

The English word 'Conservation' is derived from Latin word consisting of two words 'Con' and 'Servate'. In which 'Con' means 'Together' and 'Servate' means 'Guard'. In other words 'To keep Secured' is called Conservation.

'Conservation' word is new to us. But the concept of nature or environment conservation is not new to us. An age old custom named Kesar Chhanta Pratha (Chouhan, 2012) is prevailing in the study area for environment conservation.

The Process of Saffron Sprinkle:-

At first, it is decided to sprinkle saffron on common land. A day is decided for it unanimously and a night awake is organized on previous night, prayer/hymens are sung on the name of Kesariyaji (or any local deity). In next morning under the guidance of village head, some representatives go to Kesariyaji temple and pray to him to become witness of their deeds. These representatives bring saffron of Kesariyaji to village. This saffron is placed in front of all villagers and oath is taken that we neither cut trees nor encroach the saffron sprinkled land. Other conditions are also announced in front of all. If someone cuts tree or encroach the land, what kind of punishment is to be given is also decided. Then saffron is sprinkled on the trees of pre decided land with beating of drums.

Pastoral is prohibited in this area and some separate area is decided for this purpose. After a specific time period when all plants of that area grow in trees then, pastoral is started in that area and saffron is sprinkled in the area where previously pastoral was allowed. Area where pastoral is not allowed people can cut grass but a single person is not permitted to do this. The whole village do this work altogether. In some villages, saffron is sprinkled for a

specific period of time (5 or 10 years) and after completion of the time period it is sprinkled again.

It is believed that Kesariyaji will punish the person who tries to cut trees secretly. A threat prevail in the people of the area that if we cut trees the God will harm or curse us. Many folk stories afloat in the villages about misshapen happened with the people who have cut trees or encroach this area. Some villages practicing Kesar Chhnata Pratha in the Study area are- Rathdi (450 hactor), Manpur (300 h), Sajnot (200 h), Amalwa (100 h), Salaiya (100 h), Dal (60 h.), Limboda (40 h.), Salkawaton ka Gura (15 h.), Bhopalpura (10 h.) of Salumber tehsil; Surkhand Khera (60 h.), Karkela (60 h.), Bhimpur (50 h.), Badawali (20 h.) of Sarada tehsil; Jhabla (150 h.), Som (100 h.), Shyampura (60 h.) of Girwa tehsil; Anat (100 h.), Charpotiya (50 h.) of Dhariyawad tehsil, Vasundar Bari (100 h.), Tonkwasa (80 h.), Fatehpura (75 h.), Kamla Amba (75 h.) of Aspur tehsil etc.

The above examples show that it is a very important custom for forest conservation in study area. But last years of the discharge of this custom shows that this age old custom is likely to end now. It's not like that, that this custom has lost its value completely. This custom is being promoted again in the study area.



Image-Forest conserved by saffron sprinkle in Salkawaton ka gura (15 h.) and Rathari village (450 h.)

Efforts by Forest Department:-

According to 'Indian National Forest Policy' 1988, efforts to join local people and N.G.O. to forests and their management could be done by 'Joint Forest Management Plan'. In that order, the Central Ministry of Forests and Environment have instructed State governments (on 30 June' 1990) to join local people with development and management of forests. So, Rajasthan State

Government has issued an order on 18 March 1991 that, deforested land and barren land should be made green again with the help of local people and N.G.O.'s. 'Village Forest Protection and Management Committee' (VFPMC) is framed for subjection of this order. These committees are registered by Deputy Conservator of Forest (D.C.F.). It tried to make the barren land green again by framing such committees, in many villages. The committee is responsible for protection of these forests.

The committee is taking proper care of these forests but, some people are still cutting trees from there. So the ancient Kesar Chhanta Pratha has been used in Salumber, Sarada, Girwa and Kherwara tehsil of Udaipur district to get rid of this problem. Presently the 'Forest Protection Committee' has been planting trees on common land of this area, by help of forest department. Saffron is sprinkled on these forests and because of this dread nobody tries to cut trees. The credit for this work, goes to Deputy Conservator of Forest, Udaipur (Mrs. Shailja Dewal). Under her guidance Forest department and the Forest Protection Committee altogether celebrated 'Kesar Chhanta Mahotsav' (Saffron Sprinkle Festival) in May' 2011, where saffron was sprinkled (on the name of Kesariyaji) on approx. 10,000 hector area of total 107 villages of Salumber, Sarada, Girwa and Kherwara tehsil's of Udaipur district and oath was taken to not cut trees. Here is a some villages from it-Gamra Pal (800 h.), Rathdi (450 h.), Bedawal (400), Kewra Kala (400 h.), Kewra Khurd (400 h.), Manpur (300 h.), Khatwara (300 h.), Bhanor (300 h.), Hadmtiya (300 h.), Sati (300 h.), Malpur (300 h.), Handi (200 h.), Odwariya (200 h.), Jhadap (200 h.) etc.

Major Aim to Sprinkle Saffron:-

1. To save trees from being cut. (Forest Conservation)
2. To do sustainable development of the village.
3. To conserve Bio-diversity.
4. To protect common land from encroachment.
5. To develop grazing land. (After the trees are grown up)
6. To arrangement diet for cattle during drought and starvation.
7. To gain medicines and herbs.
8. To gain fruits, flowers and leaves.
9. To prevent water pollution (Bhopalpura village)
10. Socio-Economic development of village.

Case Study of Jhabla Village:-

In the southern part of Udaipur district a village named 'Jhabla' is situated in approx. 10 km's radius. The village contains approx. 3000 people of 450 families (year 2014). Whole population belongs to Meena tribe. People of village have formed a 'Forest Protection Committee' in year 1996, under the guidance of Sh. Bheem Raj and Sh. Ramesh Meena and has started forest conservation. The process of Saffron sprinkle was started in year 2005 on the name of 'Kesariyajji' and 'Magra Baba' (Local Deity). February 2014 was the last time when saffron was sprinkled on approx. 150 hectare area in the village and oath was taken to not cut trees. An Udaipur based NGO is also working in this village. Pastoral is also prohibited in this area. A rule is made in the village that if, somebody do any kind of pastoral activities or any harm to forest, then the 'Forest Protection Committee' will impose penalty on him according to damage.

Direct Benefits of Forest:-

1. One lack bundles of hay were produced in year 2005, earned approx. 5 lacks for village. This is done every year.
2. Rain was much delayed in year 2014. In starvation like situation pastoral was allowed which was very beneficial. Pastoral and other activities like to bring grass and leaves are allowed in starvation like situations and drought, but after the permission of the committee. Whenever condition of starvation come this is done.
3. By selling the seeds of a kind of grass named 'Puaad', the village collectively gets income of 5 to 20 thousand per year. This Grass grows in forests during rainy season.
4. The people of the village can collect honey for their own eating and to sell from the beehives found in forest. It is not prohibited.
5. The forests are enriched with many kinds of Herbs, fruits, flowers, leaves, glue, etc.

Efforts Done for Forest Conservation by the villagers:-

1. Approx. 25000 trees have been planted on 150 hector land by collective labor of villagers, from year 1999 to 2014 and are being taken care.
2. If any person is interested in plantation on his barren or non-fertile land then the villagers help him in plantation and to conserve it. The land owner has all the rights on the products of these trees.
3. It is the owner's responsibility to water these plants. A 'Watershed Development Committee' is formed in year 2009 by the villagers for

water conservation. By collective labor and efforts of the committee Check dams and Trenches are made of mud and stones in forest area, non-fertile land and other possible land. So the rain water gets collected in them and trickling of it increases the underwater table. Hence there is no need for watering the trees.

4. Cutting trees and green branches is strictly prohibited.
5. Two persons of the village are appointed as watchmen and their salary is given by 'Village Development Fund' (VDF). VDF is created by villagers.
6. A village meeting is organized on 21st of every month. The status of all the work done, problems and future plans are discussed in it.
7. Financial penalty is taken to the person whoever cut trees.
8. Protection from Wildfire. Somebody lit a fire in the forest during night that spreads in approx. 20 hector of area (in year 2004). After the cries of watchman and neighbors, the whole village gathered including men, women, children and old persons. With the collective efforts of all the fire was controlled in the night only. The people believe that the fire caught a large area but they could control it only with the blessings of 'Magra Baba' (Local Deity).
9. If the boundary wall around the conserved forest falls somehow or is broken by somebody then it is repaired by the collective efforts of the whole village.
10. Land between two forests area is left for pastoral. Hence uncontrolled pastoral has been controlled by this.

Case Study-Rathari Village:-

Approx. 450 hector forest area in Vijaytalai (situated in Rathari village of Salumber tehsil) was conserved by sprinkle of saffron, approx. 50 years ago. This forest area was conserved again through saffron sprinkle by 'Rathari Forest Protection and Management Committee' with help of Forest department, in year 2011. Big challenge for this purpose is the people of neighboring village. Most of people have fear and don't cut trees but, some anti-social elements still tried to cut them.



Image-Villagers patrolling in forest (Rathari)

To solve this problem the committee has initiated a unique arrangement. To keep watch on such a big area, the committee has not only appointed two watchmen but 6 people of village are also appointed as guards to work in pairs; every day they keep on roaming in the whole area with sticks in their hands. Next morning these 6 people give their liability to next 6 people and thus this string goes on daily. During their watch if they notice any unwanted activity, they catch the one and handover him to the committee. The committee decides a penalty for him, by a unanimous decision.

Case Study-Bhopalpura Village (Water Conservation):-

Kesar Chhanta Pratha is used not only to save forests but also for water conservation, in Bhupalpura village of Salumber tehsil (Udaipur district). Last century there was a shortage of drinking water in the village. The only source of drinking water for the villagers was a well. It is approx. half km away from the village and quenches the thirst of whole village. The other activities like–washing of clothes, bathing, etc. were done on this well only, because other water sources were very far from the village. But these activities were done on a platform next to the well and not inside it. So it didn't cause water pollution.

Some youngsters of the village used to plunge into the well to have bath. So many warnings were given to them but, they didn't consider. So the villagers decided to sprinkle saffron into the well. Saffron was sprinkled and it was also announced that, now onwards who ever jump into the well become the reason of God's anger and God would bite that person in form of snake. All youngsters has got scare and stopped jumping into the well. Thus the problem of water pollution vanished. It's a very good custom for water conservation. Water of various wells, ponds, lakes, dams, etc. could be saved from pollution by this custom. Activities like–washing of clothes, cleaning of cattle, etc. are often seen at ponds and lakes, could be prevented.

Major Reasons of Reduction in Use of Kesar Chhanta Pratha:-

1. People are getting literate and reducing faith in all this.
2. Intention to encroach common land.
3. Developmental works.
4. People need wood to make Houses, Furniture and Agriculture equipment.
5. To fulfill need of firewood.
6. Pressure on land is increasing due to population growth.
7. Rapid change in Land utilization.
8. Luxurious life & Robbery economy.

9. Forest Right Act-2006.

Conclusions:-

1. This tradition is very important for sustainable development of villages. So, it should be linked with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005 (MGNREGA program), social forestry and agro-forestry. NGOs working on natural resources in various villages should also join this custom for better result.
2. To protect trees and to prevent water pollution (nature conservation) Kesar Chhanta Pratha is an effective custom.
3. Unlike the Khejdli movement, the Chipko movement and the Appiko movement, Kesar Chhanta Pratha is not violent and fierce. All activities under this custom are performed with non-violence and peace. So nobody oppose it.
4. It's an important custom to stop common land encroachment. Because nobody tries to encroach the saffron sprinkled land.
5. Any sort of investment or Government legislation is not required.
6. In ancient time this custom was popular in all kind of villages, but in present it is more popular in tribal majority villages.
7. Its practice is declining day-by-day. But with the efforts of Deputy Conservator of Forest, Udaipur (South), this custom is being promoted in Udaipur and Dungarpur district.
8. To motivate people the Govt. should reward and encourage the villages currently working on this custom and the villages that are adopting this custom.
9. Various branches of Forest Department should insist on adoption of this custom in each village located in their area.
10. It is necessary to boost public awareness, the village representatives and common people should be linked with this.
11. This custom is needed to be promoted more and more.
12. We should adopt this tradition as a technique of forest conservation. This could be done on the name of Gods and religions in each and everywhere. Such as the followers of Christianity on the name of Jesus, the Hindu on the name of Ram/Krishna, the followers of Islam on the name of Allah, etc.
13. The government should help these villagers through remote sensing to monitor these natural resources.

It is pretty clear from the above description that, with the increase of literacy people's belief in this custom is reducing and even these people are cutting trees/forests to fulfill their own purpose. The society that is so concerned towards environment conservation since ancient times is going away to it, is very surprising. We not only have to adopt this custom again for environment conservation but should promote it like the Khejdli movement, the Chipkko movement and the Appiko movement in the whole country, so that this custom of study area could be used in the whole country for forest resources conservation. Whereby sustainable development take place in our country and our future become safe and sound.

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