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Tribal Traditions and their World View

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ABSTRACT

A worldview can be considered as comprising a number of basic beliefs which are philosophically equivalent to the axioms of the worldview considered as a logical theory. Tribal worldview practices are always integrated with indigenous knowledge and tradition has its own rationality. Tribes believe in the relationships among the Supreme Being, people and nature. The relationship between the material, social and spiritual worlds is one of the key principles in the tribal worldview. The tribal belief in the existence of a spiritual world and its influence on their daily life is their age old animistic philosophy.

KEYWORDS: World view, Tribal, Socio cultural, Relationships

In tribal socio-cultural life, myths and traditions act as the framework for indigenous knowledge. In this way, tribal culture provides a basis for knowing the observable world as an integral aspect of the 'unseen' world. Because of its integration of mythic, intuitive and spiritual way of knowing, indigenous knowledge is not considered scientific by the modern western worldview. Some scholars suggest that religious or philosophical belief systems should be seen as worldviews rather than a set of individual statements or views.

The term world view originated from the German word 'weltanschauung', meaning "a look on the world". It refers to the frame work through which and individual interprets the word and interacts in it. A world view provides a basis for generating, sustaining and applying knowledge. Commonly there are two predominant worldviews- linear and relational. The linear is very temporal, and it is firmly rooted in the logic that says cause has to come before effect. In contrast, the relational world view see's life as harmonious relationships where health is achieved by maintaining balance between the many inter-relating factors in one's circle of life. The term "world view" generally used to describe the collective thought process of a people or culture, thoughts and ideas are organized into concepts, concepts are organized into constructs and paradigms link together to create worldviews. The linear world view is logical, time oriented and systematic and has its core the cause and effect relationship. To understand the world is to understand the linear cause and effect relationships between events.

Historically, however, Indian peoples have not used linear cause and effect thinking. Rather, the approach could be called a relational or cyclic view. The relational world view, sometimes called the cyclical world view, finds its roots in tribal cultures. It is intuitive, non-time oriented and fluid. The balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables, including spiritual forces, make up the core of the thought system. Every event is understood in relation to all other events regardless of time, space or physical existence.

A world view generally comprises seven elements.

1- A descriptive model of the world.
2- An explanation of the world.
3- A futurology, answering the question "where are we heading?"
4- Values, answer's to ethical question "what should we do?"
5- A methodology or theory of action "How should we attain our goal?"
6- A theory of knowledge "what is true and false?"
7- A constructed world view should contain an account of its own "building blocks, its origin and construction."

Famous thinker James W. Sire defines a worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world" and suggests that " we should all think in terms of worldviews, that is, with a consciousness not only of our own way of thought but also that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in pluralistic society". The notion 'worldview' denotes a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well. Worldview provides people with a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place, and felt sense of continuity with a tradition which transcends the experience of a single lifetime and a tradition.

However there are forms of indigenous knowledge that can be considered scientific in that they are "systematic or exact, recorded knowledge". This indigenous science is embedded and recorded in the very language of a culture, in its stories and practices all of which are reproduced accurately through many generations. Similarly for development 'worldview' is also a highly essential way. A community's all round development can possible only when their ideas, socio-cultural habits and their worldview are taken into consideration while formulating any development plan. The worldview of tribal people provides the non tribal's more or less 'a stable and abstract picture' of their own world. Generally tribal people always understand themselves as an integral part of nature. In the world view of tribal people 'space' is the basis of all realities. For the tribal people space understood as totality of creation is the point of reference and the key to understanding human selfhood and liberation. Tribal people have an intimate relationship with nature. Wati Long Char writes, "The tribal world of culture can be explained only in term of the world of nature. We cannot understand tribal culture adequately without understanding the world of nature. They are inseparable related. Once we divorce, we lose the meaning of life. For tribals, nature is not only a mechanical system, but it includes everything that is qualitative and spiritual." It is believed that a tribal person exists because others exist. The others are ancestors, the community, the created world and God. A tribal person simply knows that his/her existence is possible only in relation to his/her community including the ancestor and the created world, the trees, animals etc. as well as God and the spirits. In tribal community both men and women are treated as equal and work together in fields, sing and dance together in the open dancing ground as a community. 'Worldview' simply refers that how people view the world around them is an integral part of society and culture. Throughout the world, various groups of people hold many different worldviews. A tribal worldview may be characterized as polytheistic and animistic. The term 'animism' means "soul and a belief in spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming men's interests." Tribal worldview practices are always integrated with indigenous knowledge and very ritual has its own rationality. People of tribal communities believe in the existence of human, nature and spiritual worlds and the continuous interaction between these three worlds is well established and maintained. Indeed, their strong belief in the influence of a spiritual world and divine beings is the main basis for their sustainable livelihood activities. The development oriented worldview practices and indigenous knowledge are the cultural mechanisms of the tribal communities. The animistic philosophies form the basis for evolution and socio-cultural identities. But due to detribalization the tribals have almost forgotten their hereditary customs. The disintegration of the traditional organic tribal worldview begun with the new political climate of colonialism, which in its wake brought about a new infrastructure including urbanization and its allied processes. In addition, the non tribals introduced a new faith,

a new worldview, along with literature and education which paved the way for the initiation of the process of modernization in the tribal society. Inter-tribal and intra-tribal village and clan conflicts over the issue of land and commercialization of land are new phenomena in the tribal society. These problems are partly the impact of detribalization and modernity.

Insights into how tribal people view the world are contained within the tribal's traditional cosmological narratives. The narratives have been orally transmitted from one generation to the next and continue to apply to the everyday experiences of tribal people in their respective communities. As a result of which the tribals reinforce the position, status, and role of women as powerful autonomous, independent and as bearers of traditional knowledge. The cosmology of tribals not only provides the key to an understanding of how traditionally the tribals viewed the world and their place within the world; but also informs tribal views about themselves. It therefore continues to shape practices and beliefs in tribal societies. The cosmological narratives, orally transmitted through the generations contain messages of the tribal world view of power relations between women and men. They reveal the equal importance of male and female elements to exercise. Therefore the cosmological narratives provide the blueprint for power relations between women and men - a relationship that is equal and complementary.

Redfield opined that "Worldview does not start from any choice of a particular cultural life. It does not emphasize economy or social structure of personality or even ethos, system of moral norms. It enters seriously into the possibility of devising a form of thought for general use of the real whole of the little community that awaits the insider's total vision and conception of everything." The tribal people believe that every natural phenomenon is animated and presided over by supernatural spirits. They talk of a number of such spirits each of whom has a definite area of activity in nature. Both the tribal men and women respect the aged and the old persons of their family as well as in community; because they believe that aged persons are repositories of traditional knowledge about nature. In terms of language, population, cultural peculiarities and level of economy the tribal people represent several diversities, though in contrast to the non-tribal world they appear to be a different kind of humanity particularly in case of their characteristics outlook to life. Now a day's tribal people after came in to the contact with their neighboring non-tribal societies, and are variously exposed to the forces of modernization as well as globalization. As a result of which there have been tremendous changes in the way of life of tribals particularly of the tribal women, for which the elements of their worldview are also undergoing changes. But still in many tribal communities have been constructing meaningful world views for the maintenance of their identity and asserting their own tribal identity through various kinds of practices as per their age old traditions and customs.

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