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Research article

Understanding Totemism of Oraon in the light of environmental conservation

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The present paper explores how traditional knowledge of totemism of the Oraon tribe of Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere supports the conservation of biosphere. Naming of the clan totems after plants, animals, and other objects of their daily needs or ecosystem reveals their special necessity to the bio-diversity inevitable for their survival and the need for their conservation. Each clan group has its own faith, taboos and other practices which protect these species expressed in the form of clan totem which supports conservation of bio-diversity and natural resources. Genealogical study also reveals the inextricable role and functions of clan totems in the social system of the Oraon community.

Keywords: Clan, Biodiversity, Oraon, Biosphere, Totemism, Genealogy

Introduction

The terms 'Traditional Knowledge System' (TKS) refers to the complex bodies and system of information, practices, knowledge, know how, and representations that are developed and maintained by communities in their unending interactions with their surrounding environment. The term "Traditional Knowledge" is used to identify data, knowledge, technology and practices applicable in the preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, using them synonymous as aboriginal expertise (IK) (Jasmine, Singh, Onial & Mathur, 2016).

TK practices are associated with biodiversity and cultural diversity (Greiner, 1998). TK has helped in conservation of biodiversity. Local people have knowledge about fauna and flora, their utility, interactions between the fauna and flora, the seasonal variations in the ecosystem. The definition "biodiversity" refers to the number, abundance and variation of plants, animals, micro-organisms and their ecological complexes (Rawat & Agarwal, 2015).

Traditional knowledge on clan and totemism which constitute an important part of social structure has its contribution in integration of social-system as well as conservation of biodiversity.

A clan may be the largest possible lineage recognized in a society. But frequently the lineage is a subdivision of the clan, in which alone common ancestry can be traced by actual genealogical steps. In such cases the clan may consist of a group of lineages, each genealogically independent of other but all claiming to be descended from a remote ancestor, who may be mythological figure (culture hero) or a totemic ancestor (Notes and queries in Anthropology, 1967).

The ethnographic Survey of India under the direction of Sir Herbert Risley (1885) collected relevant data on totemism. Data on this institution reveal that Santhals have more than 100 clans all named after plants, animals and material objects, whereas Hos and Munda have 50 and 64 exogamous clans respectively. The various tribes of the Munda racial stock own similar totems and most of these are found in their habitat and have some usefulness in the form of food like fruits, roots, plants and animals (Nulkar and Muthumani, 2013) Frazer (1910), Levi Strauss (1962) and Murdock (1965) in their anthropological works have explained the importance of clan and totemism which is linked to belief, faith, religion, social system and environment of the indigenous communities.

A totem is a group of material objects having awe by the savage who believe in the special relationship and identifying as the common descendants of same blood with the totemic group. Of the three kinds of totem, clan totem, sex totem and individual totem, the first one is the most important as we speak totem and totemism without qualification, we refer mainly to clan totem. Apart from common bond, an obligation exists between the same totemic group. Totemism is thus both a religious and a social system (Frazer, 1910).

Levi Strauss (1962) has given his view on Totemism which signifies the relationship between nature and culture. The primitive relationship exists between two systems: one based on distinction between groups and other on distinction between species in such a matrix that it is possible to find out the existing correlation and opposition in between plurality of groups and plurality of species. Justifying the choice of animals and natural objects as symbols of clan or families Levi Strauss concludes that these are useful as linguistic and classificatory devices to order relationship between groups.

Emphasizing on function of totemism, Murdock (1965) is of the opinion that the elements of the totemic complex are doubtless diverse in kind and origin which is meant for sustaining the social unity of the consanguinal kin group in connection with marital alliance which is one of the principal means for evolving of lineages and sibs. Providing example of Lowie (1920) he

has explained, if social groups are to receive names, animal designations are as obvious as any. Consanguinal kin-groups have names which are derived from not only animals, but also from plants, natural objects, localities, chiefs and ancestors. Naming is important because a common name can identify a member of a kin group who resides apart from his relatives, thus helping to keep alive the consciousness of group membership. It is probable, indeed, that the extension of a distinguishing name to all persons born in a locality, and its retention by those who have left.

Studies in totemism in India reveals that how different tribes in India have different names for their totemic symbols which play an important role for having close proximity with nature and group solidarity.

It would be relevant here to point out though most of the Ho clans have lost much of their totemic nature, yet a few are able to identify their clan symbols which they term as *Killi anka*. Such symbols are of significance, for they are mostly of natural objects like birds, trees, animals etc., thus demonstrating the close association with nature and the clan and its individual members. Thus, the Ho has tried to maintain their proximity to nature even at the level of their social structure. The clan's link with the supernatural world is also still observable, even though it has lost its totemic significance (Dasgupta, 1981).

Cipriani (1966) observed complete absence of any form of taboos among the Onge, Mann (1981) reported the existence of totem and taboos among the natives of Little Andaman. They trace their descent from some of the birds, the later are considered as sacred and tabooed to be killed or eating. The belief is that so doing would annoy their ancestors and spirit might harmful to the population in a vengeance.

Studies also have revealed about the non-significance of totemic practices in some of the tribes like Pando and Sholiga.

The Pando tribe though have one hundred eleven clan (*goti*) though have totemic characteristics, yet the Pando society cannot be said to be totemistic, as they do not have taboo associated with such objects (Sinha, 1981). Morab (1981) is also of opinion that the Sholiga, one of the Particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Karnatak state having six clans do not show any totemic practice. In all probability, the clans are fictitious and are not eponymous in their origin.

However, in the case of the Oraon tribe studies reveal the significance of clan and totemism in their social system as well their close proximity to the nature.

One of the prominent tribal communities of Chotnagpur, Bihar, the Oraon migrated to the southern part of their original habitation which forms the states of Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Kurukh is their dialect, though they speak in Sadri language which is the lingua franca of their original settlement. The Oraon have two divisions based on their religion, one who follow their own religion and the other who have converted into Christianity. The community is divided into clans and sub clans. For example, topo (a bird) clan is divided into sub-clans like Angal topo and Cheel topo (People of India Project, 1991)

The latest data reveal that Oraons are a tribe of approximately 1.8 million living in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Assam states (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013). They are linguistically of Dravidian origin (Maitra, 2016). They follow totemic practices. The hunting and pastoral stages of Oraon culture, which formed the basis of the social and political organization of the Oraons, are still the fundamental characteristics of kinship, marriage and gender relation and their social organization. For their livelihood, Oraon traditionally depend upon the forest. Some Oraons have adopted settled farming (Sharma, 2015). The entire tribe is divided into a multiplicity of clans for exogamy purposes

(Vidyarthi, 1981). Totems can be as many as natural objects exist (Lucy Mandillah & Ekosse, 2018). Approximately 67 Oraon clan names are registered but they are now rarely prevailing (Jay, 1973).

Currently we found 22 clans in the study area. True to the observation of scientists that 'tribe and forest have a symbiotic relationship,' the researchers observed that tribal and other people living in remote forest areas are largely dependent on it for their food, fuel, fodder, herbs, materials for making their homes and other daily needs like tools and equipment. Since time immemorial they have developed several ways, based on their traditional knowledge, intuition and creativity to save natural resources from rampant destruction, thereby preserving biodiversity. This traditional knowledge system includes faith, totem, avoidance and totemism, such as naming their clan totem after plants, animals, and certain items of urgent daily needs. A particular name of the clan has a special relationship and association with the animal or plant whose name is based on their clan name (Nielsen, Durkheim & Fields, 1996). They do not harm these animals or harm these plants and try to maintain and improve their population. Many plants and animals of this kind are considered sacred and also economically significant (Timasheff, 1945).

Conservation of biodiversity as a practical and ethical necessity

One of the 21st century's critical challenges is to halt the unnatural rate of decline in biological diversity-species, ecosystems, and genetic diversity. There are many practical reasons for biodiversity conservation, the benefits that it can bring to us in terms of new nutrition, drugs and other resources, and the environmental services offered by natural ecosystems. Traditional knowledge systems should play an important role in the development of conservation and management strategies of species due to the close relationship between cultural diversity and biodiversity (Caldecott, J. & Ferriss, 2005).

Totemic knowledge and its contribution to biodiversity conservation

A variety of consistent resource conservation and management strategies have been developed in Achanakmar-Amarkantak biosphere reserve by its inhabitants. Totems are frequently used as the base for legislation. To hunt, kill or hurt an animal or a plant totem violates cultural and spiritual life. The system is that gods protect the members of the community, among other things, against harm, famine, powerlessness, drought and epidemics.

Significance of the study: The present research has both theoretical and practical significance. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992 in its Art. 8 (j) explains about preservation, promotion and maintenance of traditional knowledge system and their application with community participation. It also emphasizes about benefit sharing of the community which arises from application of such traditional knowledge (UN, 1992, 2010).

Apart from the theoretical importance the present paper has equal importance for its application part associated with action plan as propounded by UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). Annex II of UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity says on action plan for the implementation emphasized on acknowledgement and safeguard of traditional knowledge of indigenous people particularly with regard to environmental protection and the management of natural resources, and fostering combined efforts between modern science and local knowledge. The annexure of the Expert committee also advises that cultural heritage of indigenous

people are comprised of all objects, sites, plants and animal species, customs and practices, expressions, beliefs and knowledge, the nature and use of which has been transmitted from generation to generation, and which are regarded as pertaining to a particular people or its territory (Human Rights Council of UN, 2015).

Objective: The paper has the following objectives

- I. To document the clan totems of the Oraon in their own language;
- II. To find out how the Oraon conserves environment through their traditional knowledge of totemic system in the Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere.

Study Area: Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve is our study area. The present paper deals with the names given to some clan totems based on local Oraon names of animals and plants, etc. in the Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve. The range of this biosphere reserve includes the districts of Anuppur, Dhindhori, Bilaspur and Mugeli districts and adjacent areas of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh (Roychoudhury & Gupta, 2016).

This BR lies between 21°15' North latitude -22°58' North latitude and 81°25' East longitude to 82°5' East longitude (UNESCO, 2012). It is spread over Maikal hill range to the confluence of Satpura & Vindhyan hill range in a triangular shape. Bilaspur, Gaurell-Pendra-Marwahi (Newly formed district, 2019) and Mugeli forest divisions of Chhattisgarh state & Anuppur and Dhindori forest division of Madhya Pradesh state surround the core zone of BR. Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary is located in this BR. It has been established in 1975 (Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) and declared a Tiger Reserve (Tiger Project - 2009).

Methodology: Apart from Focused Group Discussion (FGD) data are collected through interview and case study methods. The key informants are elderly Oraons and traditional tribal leaders who are considered to be store house of knowledge on totemic beliefs. Data are collected from selected biosphere reserve's forest villages mostly inhabited by Oraon tribe, namely Surhi, Jakad Bandha, Danganiya, Mahamai, Jamunai, Ghameri and Babutola, Amadob, Kube (Oraon para), Keunchi and Banghat Pidha. Data collected from one village are verified in the next village until a unanimous answer is found out on the data collected on their totemic beliefs and practices.

Diagram 01 below shows relationship among the traditional knowledge, Clan totem, and Biodiversity Conservation.

A clan is a group of families with the same ancestors (Jain, 1988) that are associated with humans, plant or animals. Human clan-related belief and faiths lead to social control which is represented by traditional knowledge. This knowledge contributes to biodiversity conservation in the form of totemic belief and ethical necessity which is their way of life.

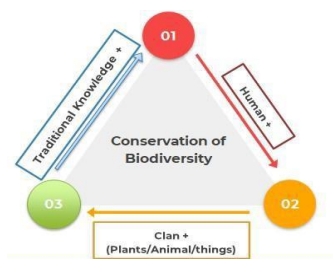


Diagram-01

The social structure of the Oraon tribe through its clan totemic relation is given below in the diagrammatic forms.

Social Structure and Clans of Oraon tribe: Some genealogical pedigrees in Oraon.
Genogram of Patrilineal Clan System and Nath (affinal kin) Bhai (consanguinal kin) clan.

Genogram	
Sign	Meaning
	Male
	Female
	Male Death
	Female Death
	Sibling
-	Marriage

Clan	
	Tirki
	Tigga
	Toppo
	Beck
	Lakda
	Ekka
	Minj
	Khalko
	Kujur
	Kerketta

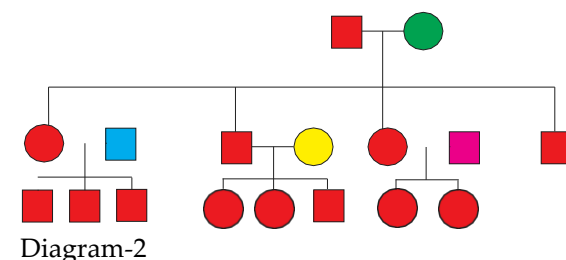


Diagram-2

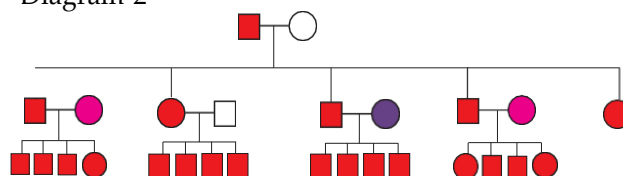


Diagram-3

Patrilineal Clan System is prevalent among the Oraon tribe. An Oraon can marry all other Clans (*gotis*) except his own *goti*. A Oraon person who can marry a person should be from Nath clan and his consanguineous kins are from *Bhai* clan.

In the Diagram-2, Tigga, Toppo, Beck and Lakda are *Nath* clans of Tirki.

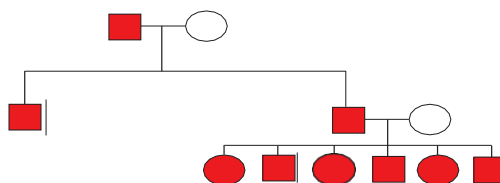


Diagram-04

In the Diagram-3, Ekka, Lakda and Minj are *Nath* clans of Tirki.

In the Diagram-4, Ekka is the *Nath* clan of Tirki.

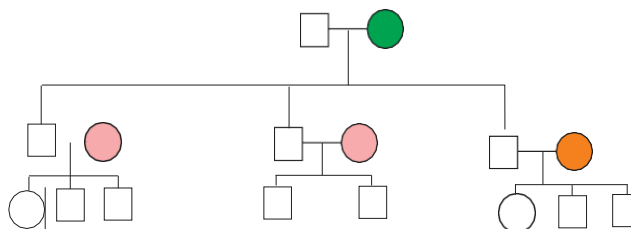
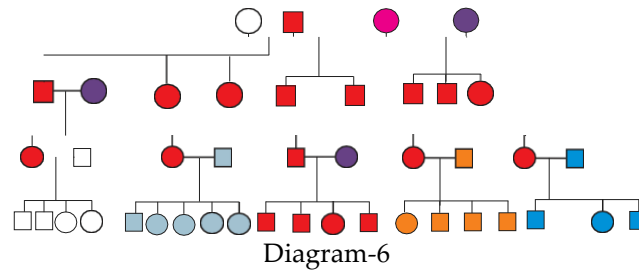
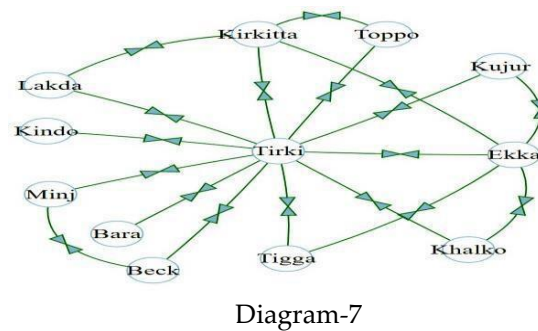


Diagram-5



In the Digram-5, Tigga, Khalko and Kujur are *Nath* clans of Ekka.






In the Digram-6, Ekka, Lakda, Minj, Kerketta, Kujur and Toppo are *Nath* clans of Tirki.















Digram-7 shows the affinal kinship relation or *Nath* clanship of the Tirki clan which is having major marital alliance with other clans.


The name of the clan totem (Tirkey & Jain, 2006), source of clan name in Oraon, scientific names and traditional knowledge like: myth, belief, folklore (Sumner, 2019) about the clan have given in the table no-01. Conservation status is shown as per the list of International Union for conservation of Nature or IUCN Red List or Red Data List as it is recognized as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity.

Table no-01

Totemic beliefs among the Oraon and their conservation effect on Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve						
S. R.	Name of Clan Totem in Kurukh language	Hindi and English name	Scientific Name	Conservation status	Traditional Knowledge	Effect on Biodiversity
01 *	Kujur	Bela Creeper	<i>Celastrus paniculatus</i> - Willd	Least Concern	“A myth has it that an Oraons female was sleeping under a plant named Kujur. A plant branch was twined around the body and guarded it against discomfort.” Her husband had taken the plant Kujur as his totem, and now her descendants are the clan totem of Kujur.	The fruit of the creeper is highly preserved and has high demands for its ethno medicinal value.
						
02	Bara	Bargad /Banyan	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L	Least Concern	A belief that the Bara clan totem people do not eat the bara fruit by splitting it in parts, but may eat the bar fruit in its entirety.	Fig seeds passing through the digestive system will germinate and sprout earlier.
						
03	Kiro	Bhelwa-tree/	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i> L.f	Least Concern	This clan group avoid eating the fruits of this tree. “It is the belief that eating the fruits induces abortion.”	The preservation of the tree. Because it is scantily available.
						
04	Tirkey	Chuha/Mouse	<i>Ratus ratus</i> L	Least Concern	Killing or hunting mice is a taboo among the Tirkey.	The rat species will not be extinct as it is rarely killed.
						
05	Xess	Dhan/Paddy	<i>Oryza-sativa</i> L	Least Concern	The people of the clan refrain from eating thin scum or rice-water because it is indigestible, due to belief of bad effect on health.	The essential part of the cooked rice is a taboo
						
06	Khakha	Kawa/Crow	<i>Corvus-brachyrhynchos</i>	Least Concern	Killing or hunting crow is a taboo among the Khakha.	The crow species will not be extinct as it is

						rarely killed.
07	Tigga	Bandar /Monkey	<i>Macaca mulatta Laccpede</i>	- <i>Least Concern</i>	Killing or hunting monkey is a taboo among the Tigga.	The monkey species will not be extinct as it is rarely killed.
						
08	Barwa	Sonkutta, Wild-dog	<i>Cuon alpinus Hodgson</i>	<i>Endangered</i>	A taboo among the Barwa clan people. They never pursue the hunting of wild dog and protect the wild dog.	The dog species will not be extinct as it is rarely killed.
						
09	Lakra	Bagh/ Tiger-	<i>Panthera-tigris L</i>	<i>Endangered</i>	The Lakra clan is not allowed to eat tiger, wolf and squirrel flesh or fur. They have other tiger-taboos.	The non-killing of tiger, fish, wolf and squirrel are helpful to conserve and aid in the preservation of biodiversity.
						
10	Kerketta	Bird	<i>Passer Rutilans (L.) Brisson</i>	- <i>Least Concern</i>	Hedge sparrow looks like a king crow with a long tail as well. "This bird's chirping indicates a beginning of rain." This bird is not hurt by people according to folk belief	This traditional knowledge is related to the knowledge of season, thereby conservation of biodiversity.
						
11	Ekka	Kachhua /Tortoise	<i>Trionyx spiniferum Geoffroy</i>	- <i>NA</i>	Folktale exists in the Ekka clan. Some people wanted to catch a tortoise. A tortoise said that "I come from your own <i>Jati</i> ,". I means that I am your clan ancestor. Since then people of this clan do not harm the tortoise.	Restriction on hunting will lead to stable tortoise population in the area.
						
12	Xalxo	Machh-ali/Fish	<i>Ophiocephalus -punctatus Jerdon</i>	- <i>Least Concern</i>	The myth is that "An Oraon was fishing in a river. A fish caught in his trap, Xalxo, succeeded in escaping. From then onward Xalxo fish became a totem for the man, and the clan was called Xalxo by its descendants."	There is large fish population and the Xalxo people do not kill the fish.
						

13	Minj	Machhali/ Fish	<i>Amphipnous - cuchia L</i>	<i>Least Concern</i>	Folk of the Minj clan totem never hunt the Minj fish.	There is a large fish population and the people do not kill the fish.
						
14	Nag	Nang /Snake	<i>Naja naja L</i>	<i>Least Concern</i>	Nag's clan folks protect and don't hunt cobra.	When it is seen, it is not killed. The species are preserved.
						
15	Kis - potta	Suara ki anta /Intestin e (potta) of the Pig (Kis)	<i>Sus Scrofa L</i>	<i>Least Concern</i>	According to the myth, an Oraon killed a pig and threw his <i>Potta or</i> intestine. In the intestine, the life of the pig continued, therefore, Oraon and his descendants later taboo the killing of the pig.	Hunting activity for pig is increasing; hence for the stable pig population in the area it is a taboo to kill this animal species.
						
16	Toppo	Bird	<i>Gracula</i>	<i>Least Concern</i>	According to the myth, The Toppo clan does not kill or eat this bird.	Non killing of the bird is conservation friendly and contributes to the preservation of biodiversity.
						
17	Kindo	Seula- Fish	<i>Fish</i>	---	Folk of the Kindo clan never hunt the Kindo fish.	There is a large fish population and the people do not kill this fish for conservation purpose.
						
18	Baxla	Ghass /Grass	<i>Grass</i>	---	Folk of the Baxla clan never cut the grass.	The grass is not used as fodder for the conservation purpose
19	Beck	Namak /Salt	<i>Salt</i>	---	As a belief the beck clans Oraons don't take crude salt and don't eat or drink raw salt. Salt is only used when cooking.	Direct salt as it is avoided, but can be added only as a cook item.
20	Panna	Loha/ Iron	<i>Iron</i>	----	As a belief the men of the Panna clan do not brush	It is tabooed to waste the metal by its

					their lips or tongue with metal. In other cases, they use metal.	contacts in the mouth.
21 *	Bakhl a	Saja Chhali /Bark of tree	<i>Terminalia Tometosa</i>	<i>Least Concern</i>	As a belief the Bakla clans Oraons don't remove the bark of the sal tree and don't cut it. The saja tree is only used when it became dry.	The preservation of the Saja tree.
						
22	Khalk o	Macchali /Fish	<i>Fish</i>	--	Folk of the Khalko clan never hunt the Khalko fish.	There is a large fish population and the people do not kill this fish for observation purpose.

*In situ Photographs from Village 'Kube'

Discussion:

There are 22 clan totems commonly known and recorded among Oraon tribe. The majority of the clan totems consist of five animals and six Plants while three birds and four fishes where are documented apart from two constituents, one amphibian and one reptile each. This implies that animal species, Fish species and plant species have equal cultural protection in the Oraon tribe. It has also been observed a part of the plant or animal is also a taboo to eat or harm. For example, the intestine of the pig and bark of the tree are protected for the sole reason that the particular species should not be harmed for any reason implies that it should be conserved by the tribe. Each totem has high security since the people fully comply with and defend the beliefs. Oraon has been told that traditional knowledge is valued because they each have penalties or religious ideals so that people prefer to follow the beliefs instead of breaking them.

A case study in village Banghat Pidha, which is 12 K.M. from Keunchi, in the main road of Pendra to Bilaspur, the district head quarter that goes inside the AABR revealed that the Oraon strictly maintained the clan totem exogamy. Informant Bhagat Ekka, age 60 revealed that his son fell in love with a girl from Ekka clan totem and subsequently married her. When the community members urged him for a penology, he tried to justify the marriage giving the reason that Ekka clan totem or tortoise clan totem are of two types, one who lives in water is higher in rank than one who lives in jungle. As his daughter in law belongs to Ekka clan totem who lives in jungle is lower in rank than his own Ekka clan totem who lives in water, hence there is not much harm and the marriage is not incestuous. Even then he was compelled by the community members to provide the community feast to the own community members from five villages. The community feast consisting of rice, dal and goat-mutton which is quite a high pecuniary punishment to the members of the Oraon community who violate the clan totem exogamy.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Totemism is a key tool in the protection and management of biodiversity in the Oraon tribe. It is a true tool for the conservation of natural resources, as local institutions and systems protect clan totems entirely. It should be encouraged as no dimension of coercion exists in this method of conservation. In order to identify plants, animals, and sites under cultural conservation and protection, the documentation of totemic beliefs is highly recommended in all ethnic groups.

Study of totemism is a part of cultural heritage of the people. Human Rights Council of UN (2015) also in its thirtieth session, in agenda item five emphasizes on 'promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous people with respect to their cultural heritage.' Hence, the documentation and dissemination of this cultural heritage is a part of cultural rights of the people.

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