CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES OF 11 SACRED GROVES AND 20 PRIESTS

Introduction:

According to Best and Kahn (2008), the Case Study examines a unit as a whole. This unit may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution or a community. The case study is an in-depth longitudinal approach, showing the development of the unit over a period of time. The purpose is to understand the lifecycle or an important part of the lifecycle of the unit.

The Case Study thus, is a way of organizing data for the purpose of viewing social reality. It probes deeply and analyzes the interactions between the factors that explain the present status of the unit or those factors that influence change or growth of the unit.

This chapter focuses on Eleven Case Studies of sacred groves which have been selected by Systematic Random Sampling Technique. Out of 85 sacred groves covered by the researcher, every 8th Grove was selected. Thus, eleven groves were randomly chosen for study purpose, over 12 Talukas of Thane District.

These Case Studies allowed the researcher an in-depth analysis of the groves from the location, ownership, deities, legends, right up to the threats presently faced by the groves. Viewpoints of the priests and caretakers have been included and opinions of the people living in and around the grove have been added wherever possible. Photographs of every case study have been included to give a clearer picture of the same.

It is hoped that these case studies, while giving an idea of the lifecycle of the sacred groves, highlight the factors that are helping to conserve, as well as those that are posing a threat to the sacred groves of Thane District.

Interviews of 20 Priests have been compiled manually to indicate that the Priest/Shaman is a very strong factor in the conservation of the groves. In the people’s movement to protect the sacred groves, thus, the priests/shamans play an important role as the primary data reveals.
“The people still believe in her energy…….”

4.1) TALUKA: BHIWANDI      VILLAGE: KAASNA
GROVE: GAONDEVI MANDIR    DEITY: GAONDEVI

Location: This grove is located off the eastern express highway, about 3 – 4 kms in the interior. In fact, had we not searched a little, asking all the local people and the brick kiln workers; we would probably have missed it. It is not visible because of the foliage. It is evident that about 10 years ago, this grove must have been very thickly forested indeed.

The Temple, called Gaondevi Mandir, has been covered with a brick structure. The structure is open from the sides and the deities are placed on a stone slab covered with modern tiles. This temple is owned by a Hindu Agri who is also a hotel owner.

The grove is quite untouched for the Agri Community and the Katkari’s who come there are not allowed to cut trees nor take branches from there. Despite this rule, many of the villagers complained that people do not obey and take branches and Palash (Butea frondosa) leaves for personal use.

There are a variety of trees there viz. Sheedha (Bauhinia racemosa), Amba[mango] (Mangifera indica), Aina (Terminalia tomentosa), Saag[teak](Tectona grandis), Palash (Butea frondosa) and Karvanda (Carrissa carandas).

Fig. 4.1 - Gaondevi Mandir at Kaasna, Bhiwandi

Tribes visiting the grove are the Katkaris and the rural people are the Hindu Agri community. The temple and the grove is maintained by the owner of Gurudev Hotel, Kaasna, who is also the pujari or priest. He is a staunch devotee of the Saint Shirdi Sai Baba.
Women (as per FGD) are permitted inside the grove and can perform puja (prayer ceremony) and make ritualistic offerings. However, during menstruation and for a month after delivery of a child, they are not allowed to enter the grove. Otherwise, it is the women, who prepare the naivedya (offerings).

Light the lamps, sing songs, change the clothes of the goddess, and collect flowers (white star flowers called taggar) for the goddess.

Menstruating women are not allowed to touch water, salt, grains nor the sacred trees. It is believed that the Gods do not accept anything from menstruating women.

Values revolving around the grove and the Goddess remain unchanged. All the tribal and rural people firmly believe that the trees belong to the Goddess and they should not cut them or else problems will befall them. There are stories of how people suffered because they tried to cut trees. Some 30-40 years ago, some thieves cut the grove around the temple and stole the jewellery that adorned the Goddess. They also tried to cut the deity into two parts. Till today, the deity stands with a support (repaired by the villagers). The people believe that the thieves who stole the jewellery were affected by some disease, but were not able to specify which, and they died.

The Youth of Kaasna Village, (as per FGD), all go to school. Some of them go to college. For this they have to travel some distance of about 11 kms to Vasind and Shahpur. They spend over Rs. 1000 – 1500 per month on travel and feel it is too steep.

The youth showed much enthusiasm about the grove. They say it has been there for generations and it is part of their tradition and should continue. They want the environment to be conserved. They obey all the rules of the grove. But most of them wished to move out of the village and go to the cities as they feel that there is no scope in their village for their future.

All the people of the village firmly believed that the grove and the deity cannot and should not be shifted, moved or changed or else a major calamity will befall them. They also wished they had more support to save the grove from depletion. Collective worship is carried out every year and Animal sacrifices of goats, cocks along with other offerings of coconut and fruit are made by the villagers to appease the Goddess.
Researchers View on the Sacred Grove at Kaasna Village:

i) **Great and Little Traditions Co – exist.** Applying Robert Redfield’s view, one can analyze the sacred grove at Kaasna Village. The grove is owned by a member of the Agri Community, who is a non – tribal. He also owns a hotel in the village. Many Katkari tribals also visit the sacred grove. These Katkari’s own and work in Brick Kilns near the grove. Despite this, the grove is in very good condition, though the villagers complain that the branches and leaves are stolen on the quiet for firewood. Collective worship also takes place on an annual basis with animal sacrifices and other rituals. **An idol of Lord Ganesha is placed next to Gaondevi and the Chheda.** This indicates that the idol may have been placed much later. Worship of Lord Ganesha is a part of the Great Tradition of Hinduism. Here, however, without replacing the elements of the Little Tradition, both Ganesha and Gaondevi exist side by side and the local villagers regard both as old and indigenous. Though many rituals from the Great Tradition have been added on, no one has thought of replacing elements of the Little Tradition with the Great.

ii) **Values and Technology have had an impact on the Youth of the Village.** Interview results with the youth of Kaasna village indicated that they would like to go to cities for better prospects as they feel their growth chances in Kaasna Village are rather remote. As advocated by L.P. Vidyarthi in Nature – Man – Spirit Complex, with every change in productive technology, there will be a corresponding change in man’s dependence on the environment. In line with this, the youth of Kaasna are losing faith in the energy of the goddess and are turning towards the urban areas for a higher standard of living. As their beliefs change, their religious practices are also changing. Thus, their interest in maintaining the “Hirva Mukut” (Green Crown) of the Goddess is declining.

Asks the Goddess........ “Where have all my trees gone???

4.2) **TALUKA – WADA VILLAGE – WAGHOTA DEITY – GAONDEVI, WAGHOBA GROVE – GAONDEVI MANDIR**

Location and Ownership –
This sacred grove is located 16 kms from Wada proper, on Wada – Manor Road, [left from Khandeshwar Naka and 1 km after Kanchad]. The grove is on agricultural land. This land was given to a Warli tribal by the Forest Department under the land ceiling act. He cut many trees to enable himself to cultivate there. The villagers say that there has been much illness in his family after he cut the trees, but they cannot for certain attribute it to the same cause. 6 – 7 gunthas have been left untouched by the owner. Behind the grove there is a complete forest land belonging to the government Forest Department.
The temple is under a Mango Tree (*Mangifera indica*), and a Jambhul Tree (*Syzgium cumini*). This researcher made two trips to Waghota Village i) July 2011 ii) February 2012. In the six months, several trees around the temple grove had been cut down and the land cleared for cultivation.

3 hamlets are found in Waghota Village, viz. Waghota, Rinjadpada and Kaulepada. These are occupied by Agri’s, Warli’s and Malhar Koli’s, all living together. Totally, there are about 29 – 30 houses with approximately 185 people in these hamlets who worship Gaondevi and Waghoba in this sacred grove.
Deities and Worship –

The villagers meet every year before planting and here in the grove, they offer sacrificial offerings to the Goddess and the Tiger God, who are believed by them to be very fierce deities. According to the people, their Goddess wants the grove intact. She has not liked them cutting the trees. She asked them – ‘Where have all my trees gone?’ Though all the villagers assured her that they would do their utmost to replant and reforest the area, nothing as yet has been done.

The villagers appeared to be quite progressive, living in cement structures with electricity and water supply available to them.

The villagers stated that it was only when they objected to the Warli owner cutting trees that he stopped and earlier was cutting and selling wood all the time. Since their village falls into the forest department area, they have helped us a great deal with water, electricity and lighting.

Legends and stories –

‘If there was a disease, the tiger god would come and roar from the forest. Then we knew that we were safe. Today, no such thing happens. Since the forest is being cleared, the tigers also are going. Women are not allowed in the grove when menstruating, if she does enter, all the gods turn black in colour. The Bhagats are from the Warli Community. They are strict, but what is the use? People know the rules, but they do not think it necessary to obey. Even if they are punished they do not understand it is a punishment. The youth go there because the parents go. But their faith is declining.’

There are attempts to do reforestation, but no one is taking keen interest. If the ‘Hirva Mukut’ (green crown over the gods) of trees is removed, people will be troubled…..
Researcher’s View on Sacred Grove of Waghota Village

i) **Grove under threat** The sacred grove of Waghota Village is visited by mixed communities, both rural and tribal. (Agri, Katkari, Koli Malhar). The grove now comes under the land allotment by the Government and was given to a Katkari Tribal who stripped the land of many trees so that he could cultivate. The other villagers were upset and they prevailed upon him to stop doing so, and after a while he listened to their pleas. By then, much of the land had been cleared for cultivation. The villagers are frightened because at a religious ceremony, the goddess entered one of the tribals and asked the people where her trees had gone. The people promised the goddess that they would plant more trees once again. They say that if they do not do so, they will face the wrath of their goddess.

ii) **The villagers and the sacred grove are mutually dynamic** The researcher observed that the people of Waghota village appeared to be quite progressive. At least 25% of the people had permanent cement and brick houses with tiled floors. Many of them even owned tractors. Despite all this, their faith in the goddess is very strong. Here, it is important to look at the Intermediate viewpoint of James Anderson wherein he states that there is reciprocation between people living and building in local population and the organic and inorganic components with which they interact. The people and the sacred grove of Waghota are still a part of one ecosystem. Also, as Bennet and Tumin state, man’s adjustment to the environment makes individual biological survival possible. At all times, the people of Waghota Village are in interaction with their sacred grove. Their patterns of adjustment to the changes have been successful and this has allowed the survival of the grove as a unit. But, they ask…. For how long?

iii) **Sacred Grove of Waghota as an Isolated Whole** Here, the viewpoint of Robert Redfield becomes important, wherein he stated that little communities may be viewed as isolated wholes. The sacred grove of Waghota village may be taken as an example. Despite so many changes, the people of Waghota continue to worship their indigenous gods, to try and conserve their grove as best they can by themselves.
“Our Goddess is a free – flowing energy.....”

4.3) TALUKA – WADA VILLAGE – GAIGOTA SACRED GROVE – GAONDEVI

MANDIR DEITIES – MAANDPADEVI, WAGHOBA

This grove is located about 5 kms from Ganeshpuri on an interior road towards Wada. It is on top of a hill about ½ km from the roadside. This is a large grove, very thickly forested and quite untouched. Area right on top of the hill is about ½ an acre and very thickly forested. The cave like structure is dedicated to the village goddess – Maandpa Devi i.e. Goddess on a Pedestal. The cave is a natural formation, with a large Humba tree (Euphoria longan) rising from behind and sheltering the cave. This tree is believed by the villagers to be sacred and they are not permitted to cut branches of the same. There are other trees around which they do not cut either. Kakad (Gargua pinnata), Ain (Madet, Terminalia tomentosa), Palash (Butea frondosa). To cut any tree, they have to take special permission of the goddess.

The Priest, (Shantaram Jhipru Bhoir), is a Malhar Koli. He says that his family is the ancestral priests and has been so for generations. The entire land belongs to his family.

The Goddess, according to the priest is a free moving energy and has no particular place. If her name is taken during problems like diseases, she appears and cures immediately. But she is fierce and requires animal sacrifice of male goats and cocks.

The priest stated that the annual ritual of ‘Saath’ before agriculture work started changed to a seven yearly ritual because of lack of funds. The villagers collect money from every house and all of them meet at the grove for the ritual. The money is sufficient only for the rituals and feast. No money is utilized for reforestation. The villagers are planning to build a small temple on top of the cave.

The village gets its name (Gaigota) from a legend which says that many years ago, there used to be fresh manure every morning near the grove, but no cows were to be seen at all. The cave of the deity was occupied by tigers earlier when the forest was thicker; they came to sleep there at night.

During the Saath year, no women are allowed inside the grove or in the village temple below. The men carry out the rituals throughout the year. Also, menstruating women are not allowed to enter. If any woman disobeys this rule, she gets fever and starts shivering. In the same year, sacrifices are made in honour of the tiger god, for Mahsasar (Lord Shiva) and for all the warriors or protectors of the land they live on called Zageche Veer.

The head priest stated that thrice a week, he goes right up to the grove on top of the hill. He feels closer to ‘Ayee’ (Mother goddess) when he is among the trees. There he lights the lamp and burns the incense stick.

Villagers say that the government has built two wells and installed one hand pump on the priests land for the villagers. Even though the area comes under the surveillance of the forest department, the officers are hardly seen there. In the midst of so much poverty, reforestation becomes very difficult, though the villagers would like to plant more trees.
Elements of Hinduization were observed in Gaigota village. The festivals celebrated are very Hindu …viz. Naagpanchami, Diwali, Navratri. Also, during these festivals, vegetarianism is observed. Symbolic Ritualism is observed in sacrifice other than the Saath year. E.g. they only puncture the nail of the cock and let the drops of blood fall after which the cock is set free.

Fig. 4.8 - Sacred Grove at Gaigota Village in Wada Taluka.

Fig. 4.9 - The Humba Tree rising from the top of the cave, believed by villagers to be sacred.
Inside the Cave of Maandpa Devi there are natural rock formations, smeared with rice paste and saffron.

Talking to the villagers

Rice Grains and Saffron, asking for prosperity
Fig. 4.13 - The Grove is in very good condition and very majestic looking.

Fig. 4.14 - A small temple in the village below, as villagers find it difficult to climb up to the cave daily.

Fig. 4.15 - In the house of the head priest of Gaigota village.
Researcher’s Viewpoint on sacred grove of Gaigota Village -

**Tribalization of Hinduism** – The grove is dedicated to Maandpadevi, the goddess who is a free – moving energy (as in Manaism). The Priest is an important role holder with respect to the village and the grove. His word is very important. This is an all tribal grove. The local people worshipping here are Koli Malhar and Warli. Here, Little and Great Tradition appear to co – exist. There are however, changes of what has been adopted from the Great Tradition. These can be outlined as follows.

i) Both Gaondevi and Waghoba are worshipped. Other Hindu deities are also given importance. Lord Shiva (of the Hindu Trinity) is called Mahsasar. In the house of the Priest, pictures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses viz. Dattatreya, Laxmidevi, Santoshimata.

ii) However, rituals and ceremonies indicate that there is a tribalization of Hinduism. E.g Animal sacrifices conducted for Mahsasar. Hindu festivals like Nagpanchami, Navratri and Diwali are celebrated with great fervor. Symbolic Sacrifice is conducted here. E.g. The cock to be sacrificed is set free after one of its nails is cut, letting the blood flow for some time.

iii) The tribal people fear the tiger god and want their children and animals and poultry to be safe. They do not consider him as a predator or as man’s ego as in Hinduism but more as a protector.

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4.4) **TALUKA – VIKRAMGAD** VILLAGE – **MALVADE**

**SACRED GROVE – HATHOBA MANDIR**  
**DEITY – HATHOBA (LORD SHIVA)**

**Location**

This sacred grove is located on the Jawhar Malvade road 10 kms from Jawhar. The land was presented by the Jawhar Raja to the family of the priest who are the owners of the grove. The priestly families are Malhar Koli’s. Their surname is Bhagat. The present priest is Ankush Ganpat Bhagat. He stated that over 8 generations of Bhagats have been taking care of this grove. The grove is situated next to the Jawhar – Pinjal river meeting point (Sangam).

**Fig. 4.16 - Hathoba Sacred Grove, Malvade, Vikramgad.**
According to legends, several hundred years ago, some large stones came rolling down from the mountains behind the grove and settled one on top of another. Trees grew around them. Then from a Bel Tree (*Aegle marmelos*), the formation of Hathoba emerged. The deity is shaped like the Pinda (Lingam of Lord Shiva).

**Legends further state that Hathoba does not want any temple built around Him.** Whenever they try to build it, He throws off the roof. The material was brought to the area to build the temple, but they ended up building dharamshalas instead. In Hathoba village, no one closes doors or locks and goes away. In a manner similar to Shanidev of Shingnapur, Hathoba does not allow any robberies to happen.

**There are legends about the river.** Outsiders are not permitted to fish in the river or even stay on the banks after sunset. The priest stated that there is some energy that pulls them into the water. There have been many deaths due to this. God’s permission is not there for anyone to use that water except the villagers of Malvade.

There are many trees around the grove. Ain (Madet, *Terminalia tomentosa*), Neem (Margosa, *Azadirachta indica*), Chafa (Pagoda tree, *Plumeria rubra*), Chincha (Tamarind, *Tamarindus indica*). **Cutting of trees is forbidden.** However, down below the temple, near the road, the area was so thickly forested 10 years ago that people could not see the grove and feared to walk in the area after sunset. Tigers used to come to the Pinjal River to drink water. This is rare now. The priest stated that the tiger still is in the forest and is the protector of the forests. Sometimes at nights he comes down to drink water from the river. But he does not harm anyone.

The Villagers stated that The Forest Department says it is carrying out reforestation. But they are never seen around the place. There is no electricity around the place, no water, no wells, no borewells. The government had a 10 ft. structure dug like a well but nothing has been done to it so far. It has been left muddy and gets very dirty. The water cannot be used for anything. There is only talk about reforestation but no action.

Pilgrims flock to the Hathoba Shrine. **Every Sunday is ‘Hathoba’s Day’**. People ask for health, to recover from illnesses, for children. Those who want a child have to place a wooden figure of a child before Hathoba and the priest performs the ‘Kaul’ ceremony viz. placing betel nut on deity’s eyes, and asks the deity what the devotee should do. As the betel nut falls, right or left or both, the devotee gets the answer from the priest. The devotee has to strictly adhere to the code of conduct for a whole year (Navas). If the wish is granted then the devotee must come and thank Hathoba and show Him the result. E.g. a devotee came to thank Hathoba for a son and said that his ‘Navas’ would be complete only when he brought his wife and baby son to the shrine. Another devotee came to ask Hathoba to help him find his wife who had left him in a fit of rage. He had searched everywhere for her in vain. Finally, he came to Hathoba grove. “I do not know how Hathoba will punish her”, he said, “I am worried for her”.

Animal sacrifices are also conducted. The priest does not conduct the sacrifice. There is a cult spot where the devotees themselves have to conduct the sacrifice. Exorcism is also conducted in the grove.

There is no endemic species here, nor any medicinal plants that are being specially protected according to the priest and the villagers.
There are no funds available for reforestation. Yearly collections take place for Navratri, Diwali and Mahashivratri. The priest only accepts coconut offerings, flowers and sweets like sheera and kheer. Meat is not touched by him in the shrine.

Even though Hathoba is an open structure, the rain and wind do not fall on the icon of Hathoba. He has remained the same for generations.
All the devotees interviewed stated very emphatically that this is a “Jagruth Deosthan” (A grove that is vibrating with energy.). This researcher had the opportunity to speak to devotees who came from far off Talukas like Wada, Jawhar and even from Mumbai city for solace.

Every individual spoken to state that they would be very happy if reforestation was successful. But with nonexistent funds and no real water source, this seems to be a difficult task.

**Fig. 4.17**- Iconic structure of Hathoba inside the shrine (shaped like a lingam of Lord Shiva)

**Fig. 4.18**- Stone Lingam and Nandi Bull

**Fig. 4.19**- Saffron Marks above Hathoba
Fig 4.21 - Wooden Body parts offered to Hathoba for various reasons (similar to Mount Mary, Bandra, Mumbai).

Fig. 4.22 - Two giant stones one on top of another, with Bel Trees (Aegle marmelos) growing from within.

Fig. 4.23 - Animal sacrifices are conducted by the devotees themselves in the cult area.
Fig. 4.24 - Left...
Devotees from Mumbai come for Hathoba’s blessings. Right...
Tribal from Parali Village, Wada Taluka come to ask Hathoba to help find his wife who left him in a fit of rage.

Fig. 4.25 - Every Sunday devotees throng the grove and there are long queue’s at the shrine. People of all communities visit the grove not just the 4 hamlets in Malvade Village. According to the priest, the whole of Sunday is a very busy day due to devotees continually pouring in to pay their respects to Hathoba.

Fig. 4.26 - Before conducting a sacrifice, the devotees must go to Hathoba and pay their respects and seek the blessings of the priest also. Only then can they go towards the cult area to carry out their sacrificial ceremony.
Fig. 4.27 - This researcher had to wait patiently for the devotees and the priest to be free to talk.

Researcher’s Viewpoint on Sacred Grove of Hathoba at Malvade –

1) Moving towards the Great Tradition –
   i) The Priest stated that Hathoba is a manifestation of Lord Shiva (as in the Hindu Trinity). The deity is shaped like a Pinda (Shivlingam). Important Hindu festivals like Navratri, Diwali and Mahashivratri are celebrated here. People flock to the grove every Sunday to ask Hathoba for blessings for children, for health, for cures.
   ii) Only vegetarian offerings are accepted at the Hathoba Shrine. Thus Coconuts, Sweets, flowers and fruit are offered here. Bel Trees (*Aegle marmelos*), are revered by the villagers.
   iii) Placing of wooden figures of children (if one wants a child), of hands, feet, head etc. (if one wants to be cured) was noticed. This does not figure in the Great Tradition of Hinduism. However, it is apparent in Christianity and is seen at Mount Mary Basilica at Bandra, Mumbai. The tribal priest of Malvade, however, stated that this tradition has existed for generations.

2) McKim Marriott stated that both Little Communities and Great Communities are mutually necessary conditions of each other’s existence in their present forms - The question that arises is
   i) To what extent can we view the sacred grove of Hathoba as an indigenous whole apart from Hinduism?
   ii) To what extent can we understand Hinduism through the study of the sacred grove of Hathoba?

3) The Sacred Grove of Hathoba may be viewed as an Isolated Whole – The grove of Hathoba is unique with respect to several factors. The Priest and the people insist that Hathoba does not want any temple constructed around him. All efforts to build a temple have failed. Trees and foliage around the grove is being conserved. Usage of the Pinjal River flowing below the grove is not open to outsiders. People fear legends which
mention an unseen energy dragging outsiders into the water. Tiger God worship is still conducted at the grove. Animal sacrifices take place but they are carried out by devotees themselves in the cult area which is some distance away from the altar. Exorcism is also conducted in the grove.

…… Our Deity is the protector and the peace of the people………

4.5) TALUKA–VIKRAMGAD VILLAGE – DEHERZE GROVE – GAONDEVI MANDIR

DEITIES – GAONDEVI, WAGHOBA, CHHEDOBA, PATLIN DEV.

This grove is located on Vikramgad – Jawhar road, in Deherze Village, some ½ km away from the main road. It is dedicated to the village Goddess, Gaondevi and to the Tiger God, Waghoba, who is the ‘Raanshivara’ (the protector of the forests). It is also dedicated to Chhedoba, the ‘Rakshak’ (protector of Gaondevi and the absorber of evil). There is a fourth icon in the temple which is ‘Patlindev’ (a memorial of the first owner of the grove). Today, the land belongs to the government and the part where the grove is situated falls in the area of the ‘Katkariipada’ which is one of the eleven hamlets in Deherze. Deherze comprises of around 287 houses and about 965 people. Since the grove falls in the plot of the Katkari owner, he and his family look after the grove. Several trees have been cut and the land cleared by him for cultivation. The villagers finally impressed upon him that he should not cut for fear of the wrath of Gaondevi.

There are several trees found in the grove. Ain(Madet, Terminalia tomentosa), Saag (Teak, Tectonia grandis), Neem (Margosa, Azadirachta indica), and thick bushes of the Karvanda Creeper (Carissa carandas). No endemic species were being protected in the grove. Several trees were smeared with saffron to prevent cutting and a penalty was imposed on those who did cut trees.

In the same grove one observes several stone icons smeared with saffron. On counting the same they numbered over 85 stones. They are the ‘Zageche Veer’ (the protectors of their individual lands who had died and their families had placed stones in their honour next to Gaondevi to allow their spirits to rest in peace.)
Fig. 4.28 - Gaondevi Mandir at Deherze Village, Vikramgad Taluka, Thane District.

Fig. 4.29 - Wooden Icons of Gaondevi, Waghoba and Chhedoba
Fig. 4.30 - Left to Right – Gaondevi, Waghoba, Chhedoba, Patlindev and several stone memorials

In the same grove the researcher observed saffron smeared on trees around the grove. The reason was that they should not be cut by anyone. All the trees belong to the goddess and she may reside in any one of them. Cutting trees is forbidden and there is a penalty imposed on those who disobey. In this grove one had to tread very carefully, even though one was barefoot. The reason being one was never sure whether one was stepping on a spirit icon.

Fig. 4.31 - Several trees were smeared with saffron to prevent cutting and indicate that the Goddess resided in them also.
People from 11 small villages all collectively worship Gaondevi, Waghoba and Chhedoba once a year during Dassera time. They collect money (Varghani) per household. Animal Sacrifice is carried out in honour of the Gods and at the same time people pay their respects to their ancestors.

The priest informed that the Vajreshwari Sansthan (Trust) used to give them a payment (Bidagi) to maintain the grove and carry out the animal sacrifices in honour of the Gods. But today, this money no longer reaches them All they receive is 45 coconuts.

There is a Group Panchayat in charge of Deherze along with another village called Hathne. The Panchayat is doing nothing for reforestation. It looks after roads, houses, and electricity. Solar Cells have been placed for electricity on roads but they do not work.

Water is a major problem. Panchayat has tried to make bore wells but the soil is hard (khadkal zameen) and the attempt was unsuccessful.

Villagers say that 40 years ago, the Jawhar Raja used to come here on horseback. The villagers themselves could only go on foot, the forest was so thick. All that is lost today. The people want the forest and the grove as it was earlier, but they have no funds to maintain and conserve. They are too poor.

There is very good scope for reforestation here if arrangements are made for water and financial help.

**Researcher’s Viewpoint on the Sacred Grove of Deherze Village –**

As Mckim Marriott states – “a primary and indigenous civilization is one which grows out of its own folk culture by an orthogenetic process, by a straight line of indigenous development”.

The “Great Tradition” which is developed by such a primary civilization is a carrying forward of cultural materials, norms and values that were already contained in local “Little Tradition”. Given such a primary continuity, the ‘Little Communities’ would almost cease to exist as distinctive wholes. Yet, at the same time, Marriott is compelled to say that such communities are like living things by themselves.

The same may be said of the sacred grove at Deherze Village. **This grove is like a living thing, a distinctive whole by itself.** Reasons for this view can be outlined as follows:

i) The grove is dedicated to the village goddess, Gaondevi and to the tiger god, Waghoba, who is given the title of “Ranshivara” viz. the protector of the forests. This approach to the tiger does not appear in the Great Tradition, where he symbolizes the ego and pride of man.

ii) An important deity is Chheda (or Chhedoba), who is the “Rakshak” (protector and vigilante) of Gaondevi and the absorber of evil. Villagers fear the Chheda more than the goddess.

iii) A fourth deity is “Patlindev” who is the first ancestor and owner of the grove.

iv) Very unique is the existence of a Spirit Grove next to the Gaondevi Icon, with about 80 – 85 stones all smeared with saffron, representing the land owners, whose spirits
are laid at rest next to Gaondevi. These are called “Zageche Veer”. Being placed next to the Gaondevi altar will bring their souls peace as per the beliefs of the local people.

v) Saffron is smeared on trees to prevent the people from cutting the same, or taking any branches. All the trees belong to Gaondevi and she could be residing in any one of them at any point in time.

vi) Deherze is a large village with 11 hamlets, 287 houses and 965 people. For such a large number of people of mixed communities to have faith in Gaondevi and Waghoba speaks volumes about the status of the “Little Tradition”.

**4.6) Our Deity is Korthuba – The Invincible……..**

**TALUKA – JAWHAR**  **VILLAGE – KORTHUD**  **GROVE – KORTHUBA UGAMSTHAN**  **DEITY - KORTHUBA**

Fig. 4.32 - TALUKA – JAWHAR  
VILLAGE – KORTHUD  
DEITY – KORTHUBA  
SACRED GROVE – KORTHUBA CHE UGAM STHAN.

(The village Korthud is believed to be the birthplace of the Tiger God of the tribal people of Thane District).

**Location** – This sacred grove is located on Jawhar – Silvassa Road, 23 kms from Jawhar proper in Korthud village. The path to the village is very rough and it took our vehicle some time to maneuver its way to the village. The grove is approximately ½ acre in size and belongs to the entire village (Gaonthan). There are several trees around the grove. Trees observed were Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Toran (*Zizyphus rugosa*), Shirish (*Albezia lebbeck*), Padhal (*Stereospermum personatum*), Karvanda (*Carissa carandas*), Bamboo (*Bambusa arundinacea*). Korthud Village has 12 hamlets, with 987 houses and a population of about 2000 people, all belonging to the Warli Tribe and some to the K – Thakurs.

The foliage around the temple showed signs of depletion. However, the tribal people stated that they had cut some Khair (*Acacia catechu*) trees with the permission of the Gods to build a
temple for Korthuba, but they had already begun reforestation and new saplings were seen planted around the grove.

The Korthuba Ugamsthan is very famous as it is believed to be the birthplace of the tiger god. Korthuba is the head of the tiger gods and has 12 disciples (chelas). The wooden iconic structure of Korthuba is very ancient “more than 1000 years old”, in the words of the priest who spoke to this researcher. Though the structure is falling apart, the tribal people are superstitious about changing the same and have steadied it with wooden planks.

![Fig. 4.33 - Korthuba Ugamsthan in Village Korthud, Taluka Jawhar, District Thane](image)

There is foliage around the temple, but signs of depletion are visible. The local tribal people stated that this foliage ten years ago was so thick that the grove could not be seen at all. The Bamboo (Bambusa arundinacea) and the Karvanda Groves (Carissa carandas) were so thick that they had to cut some of it. Later large sections of the bamboo grove died. Some years ago, the people had cut some Karvanda groves to make way for people to enter.

![Fig. 4.34 - Part of the Karvanda Creeper (Carissa Carandas) at Village Korthud outside the Korthuba Shrine](image)
Legends – The priest stated that about 5 years ago, a lair of snakes emerged from under a Shirish (Albezia lebbeck) Tree. They are not sure about the reason. But it was not a good sign. “Maybe it was because we cut large amount of trees, or there must have been some mistake in our worship”. But the snakes just refused to go. Only when they begged forgiveness of Korthuba and Mahalaxmi, did the snakes return back to the earth. After this experience, the people are very careful not to anger the gods and about carrying out reforestation.
The people of Korthud do not face any water problems. They have the support of their ‘Aamdar’ (MLA) viz. Shri Hemant Thackeray at the Legislative Assembly and the ‘Khaasdar’ (MLC) at the Legislative Council Level. The MLC wanted a ticket for elections. So he took the blessings of Korthuba and donated Rs. 5 lakhs for the sacred grove. That gave them the funds to improve the structure and arrange for water facility also. Today, the people have tap water facility and they have to pay only Rs. 50 each house per month as water charges. Also, they have started reforestation on a very large scale.

The Priest at Korthuba Ugamsthan who was interviewed by this researcher was young (35 years) and belonged to the K – Thakur Community. He informed that he had taken over as head priest only 4 years ago. But he belonged to the ancestral priestly family in Korthud. His name was Mohan Dhavloo Govind. Before him, it was his uncle who was priest, viz. Janu Soma Govind.

According to him, the deity is very fierce, and wants people to obey, respect and worship him. He needs animal sacrifice. The deity (Korthuba) gets very angry if we cut trees because he wants the jungle and the grove to remain as it is. To cut trees we have to take special permission from him.

How do you take permission from the deity?

The priest stated that only he can perform the ceremony. It is called “Kaul Lavna”. He places betel nut (supari) on both eyes of Korthuba and sits in front of the deity, praying, calling him to respond. If the betel nut remains in the left eye then there could be problems. If it remains in the right eye, then the deity has agreed to help and all will be well. If the left eye betel nut remains, the priest tries the whole procedure again. If it repeats itself, then it has to be understood that the deity is not happy with whatever is being done.

Fig. 4.38 - The ceremony of ‘Kaul Lavna’ being conducted by the priest at Korthuba Ugamsthan, Village Korthud, Jawhar Taluka, District Thane.
Funds for the festivals are collected from the villagers. Each family gives anything between Rs. 50 – 150 depending on their capacity. Totally about 15,000 – 20,000 is collected for the festival. They need to buy male goats and cocks for the sacrifice. All the 12 hamlets come together for the festival and food is eaten together. No funds remain for anything else.
If there are going to be problems, the priest stated that they see tiger footprints at the water source at Ozharpada (one of the 12 hamlets). Then they have to keep a 2 day fast and sing songs to appease the tiger god. They place the offerings at his feet and then sing for forgiveness. The priest stated that belief is increasing in the tiger god and faith is more today. **According to him, the tiger god wants peace, more greenery (Hirva Mukut) and a thicker jungle. All of them together are working towards the same.**

**The Legend of Korthuba – The Tiger God**
(as related to the researcher by the priest and other villagers who were interviewed.)

Several generations ago, a young girl from Korthud Village went to Ozhar Village to fetch water from the river there. A group of Bhil tribals (much feared), who were passing by asked her to give them water as they were thirsty. Though she was frightened, the girl gave them all water to drink and to wash themselves and waited till they all felt refreshed. They were very pleased with her and granted her a strange boon. They promised her a unique child. Soon after, though she was unmarried, she found herself to be with child. The villagers accused her of treason and called a Panchayat to sort the matter of the unwed mother to be. She assured the Panchayat that she had been granted a boon by the Bhils and that her child would be different. Nine months later, she gave birth to a tiger cub.
The tiger cub grew up to be very naughty and began troubling all the villagers. He would ransack their homes and eat their poultry and other animals. The people of Ozhar and Korthud begged him to go into the jungle and promised that they would worship him and conduct sacrifices for him on a regular basis. In return, he should protect them and the jungle from harm.
Thus, the tiger came to be worshipped by the people of the area and slowly all over, tiger worship became very popular. Korthuba, the tiger cub, born to a woman of Korthud became the protector of the jungle, the people and the animals. He was the tiger god… The Invincible!!
Researcher’s Viewpoint on Korthud Village –

1) The sacred grove dedicated to the tiger god is a unique example of an indigenous primary ‘Little Tradition’. This can be outlined with the following points

i) The tribal people of Maharashtra believe this village to be the birthplace of the tiger god. (Korthuba)

ii) Korthuba is believed to be born to a virgin lady.

iii) Korthuba is the head of all tiger gods and has 12 disciples. Tremendous powers have been attributed to Korthuba.

iv) Korthuba wants the jungle and grove to remain intact and does not give permission to cut trees.

v) Every year, during the month of December, the villagers observe “Korthuba cha Saath” (the collective festival of Korthuba). Villagers from all over Maharashtra travel all the way to Korthud to seek Korthuba’s blessings. Without this, no other ‘Saath’ (collective worship) in honour of any deity can begin. This is a 4 day pilgrimage (Jatra).

2) Strains of the ‘Great Tradition’ in the village of Korthud are observed – This is evident in the worship of the Hindu Goddess Mahalaxmi. This temple is about ½ km. away from the sacred grove of Korthuba. Mahalaxmidevi is the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. Unlike Goddess Durga, who rides the tiger, Mahalaxmi has no connection with the tiger. Lord Vishnu (part of the Hindu Trinity) who is the consort of Mahalaxmidevi, also has no connection with the tiger. For, some reason, the people of Korthud have connected the two deities for their worship.

3) Korthud as a ‘Little Community’ is a sub system within a larger system – Korthud Village appears to have much political support. The sacred grove of Korthuba received donations up to 5 lakhs from the MLC, who regularly seeks the blessings of Korthuba and Mahalaxmidevi. With all this help, the people of Korthud have managed to install a water pipeline with taps and a gobar gas connection. They have started reforestation around the grove on a large scale.

…….. Our Goddess is the unseen energy ………..

4.7) TALUKA – SHAHPUR  VILLAGE – SAATGAON

DEITY – ANNAHISHIDEVI  SACRED GROVE – ANNAHISHI CHA DONGAR

Location – This grove is located on top of a mountain about 5000 feet above sea level at Shahpur Taluka. It took this researcher with the team almost 3 hours to reach to the top. The grove belongs to Saatgaon Village, about ½ an acre right on top of the mountain. Rest of the forestland has been taken over by the Forest Department of the Government, Thane.
The Village gets its name from the term “Saathiashra” or “Saathdevi” (meaning “Seven Divine Sisters”). The concept of Seven Sisters is found even in North – East India. The Seven Sisters of the Western Ghats are Kalikadevi, Vajreshwaridevi, Mahalaxmidevi, Renukadevi, Dharaeedevi, Annahishidevi and Ambikadevi. Annahishi means “The Unseen”.

Ownership – The grove of Annahishidevi is said to date back to the Epic Age. The local villagers, comprising of a mixture of communities viz. Kunbi, Buddhist, Thakur and Katkari, stated that the grove has been there for many generations, but it has belonged to the whole village. There are 2 hamlets in the village i) Gavlyanchapada ii) Varchapada. The whole village helps with the upkeep of the grove.

The Priest goes every Friday to the mountain top to pay respects to the goddess and to perform puja. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, he holds the prayer meetings and puja at his residence which is called the ‘Pujaristhana’. He stated that he would like steps cut into the mountain to make the 5000 foot climb easier for the villagers, especially those who were ailing, but the Forest Department is not agreeable to this. Also, he declared that he would like to permanently go up to the mountain top near the goddess and set up his home there. But the Forest Department is not willing to grant permission. He added that if he were up there living in the sacred grove, the tree cutting would stop.
Fig. 4.43 - The Iconic Structures of Annahishidevi at Saatgaon, Shahpur Taluka, Thane District.

Fig. 4.44 - Thatched Structure where the Priest stays

Fig. 4.45 - View of Annahishidevi Mandir under the Teak Tree
Up on the mountain top, there are 5 icons smeared with “kumkum” (vermillion), representing the goddess. The villagers state that these icons have been there for generations. Near the altar, about 10 – 15 meters away, is the hut of the priest (Gavli Baba). A green flag denotes the ‘Gavlibabasthan’. There are a range of trees all along the mountain and also at the top. Saag(*Teak, Tectonia grandis*), Bel (*Aegle marmelos*), Khair (*Acacia katechu*), Palash (*Butea frondosa*), Umbar (*Ficus racemosa*), Bahava (*Golden laburnum, Cassia fistula*), Karvanda (*Carrissa carandas*), Chafa (*Pagoda, Plumeria rubra*), Kandole (*Sterculia urens*), Awla (*Emblica officinalis*), Apta (*Bauhinia racemosa*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Vad (*Banyan, Ficus bengalensis*).

No endemic species is being protected and there is no water source at the top of the mountain. The villagers stated that there are caves at the back of the mountain and perennial cold water holes are there, but they feared wild animals and hence were reluctant to venture that side.

Activities – Twice a year, collective worship is performed on the mountain top for Annahishidevi. Once, before sowing starts, in July (during Aaghot) and the second time during Navratri i.e. in October, before Dassera. The goddess wants only vegetarian offerings and so coconuts, sweets, flowers and incense sticks are offered. The villagers pray together for the prosperity, good health and safety of all in the village, including their animals and crops.

Government Help – Saatgaon is part of a group Panchayat scheme. Three villages have regular meetings to discuss issues like water, education, roads, gobar gas etc. With the help of their MLA, they received a sum of Rs. 2 ½ lakhs from the government for water and gobar gas. There
is a Primary School in Saatgaon upto the 4th standard, after which the children have to travel upto a Village called Shenva about 1 – 2 km. away. Children find it rather cumbersome in the heat, walking the 2 km. to and fro unless they have bicycles.

**Villagers are happy with the help** they have received from the Government, but feel that it is not sufficient. They need support if they are to maintain the forest and their village at the same time. They have firm faith in their goddess, who has always looked after them in sickness and other problems. They do not touch trees all along the mountain, fearing the wrath of the goddess. 

Asked what they would want if the goddess granted them 5 boons, the villagers said they would want good health and prosperity of their children, who were the future of the village.

“Our goddess looks after us. She has saved us from sickness and even from death. Only we wish we could go up to the mountain more often. It is a very difficult climb, specially for older people.”

**Legends** – The first Priest of Annahishidevi Mandir was Sarang Gavli. He lived in the Epic Age. The present priest related that Sarang Gavli used to move up and down on horseback. He was the Nandkari Rakshak (The Protector) appointed by the goddess herself. He always carried a “ghunghurkathi” (stick with bells) with him. People heard the horse’s hooves and the “ghunghurkathi” and they were afraid. But he came down to take water from the village well, since there was no water on the mountain top, where he lived. People still hear the ghunghurkathi today. They say that Sarang Gavli still takes care of the mountain and the sacred grove. No one dares to cut anything there except with the permission of the goddess and the present priest (gavli).

**Visionary Experience** – The present priest related his divine experience to this researcher. He stated that at the age of 8 years, he went with his friend, Kisan, whom he called ‘Bandhu’, to fetch sticks for firewood. Both of them went to the foot of the mountain. They tied the sticks into bundles and were about to leave. When he lifted his head and looked around, Bandhu was nowhere to be seen. He started calling out to him. Just then, he heard a voice – “Your friend has gone, are you searching for him?” The boy suddenly saw the God Energy in the Karvanda Grove. *(Carissa carandas)*. It was a man, dark complexioned, wearing half pants and a vest and wore a belt round his waist. He ventured out of the grove and asked the boy if he had some tobacco. To which the boy replied, “I don’t eat tobacco, but I am carrying some ‘masheri’ (roasted tobacco used to clean teeth). The man laughed. The boy was frightened and tried to pick up his bundle of sticks and run away. But the sticks were so heavy; he could not budge the bundle. Suddenly, from the grove, 3 ladies emerged, wearing green, red and yellow nine yard traditional saris respectively. They began to circle round him. Suddenly the bundle of sticks became very light. The ladies smiled and disappeared. The boy picked up the bundles and began to run. The man began to follow him and as he moved, he changed appearance. His complexion became lighter and his clothes changed to a dhoti. The road which had closed on the boy, opened
and straightened and everyone disappeared. Within a week’s time, once again, the goddess appeared before him. He would suddenly find himself on top of the mountain he had not climbed at all. He also does not remember how he got back home. After this many times he was called by the goddess – ‘Nandkari!!’ she calls him. Till today, she calls out to him. He has made a small tent like structure on top of the mountain near the altar. The Forest Department Officers tried to remove the structure, but their hands got stuck to the bamboo and were released only after they begged forgiveness and made coconut offerings.

Researcher’s View on Sacred Grove at Saatgaon –

i) Saatgaon Village gets its name from ‘Saathi Ashra’ (Seven Divine Sisters) who are worshipped by Hindus. It is thus part of the ‘Great Tradition’. However, as Robert Redfield stated, the ‘Little and the Great Tradition’ mutually co exist. There are mixed communities who worship at the grove viz. Kunbi, Katkari, Buddhist and Thakur. All of them live in harmony. The priest is a Kunbi. All the communities look up to him and he conducts ceremonies including all of them. Worship is collective and no animal sacrifices are conducted. The priest stated that the goddess demands only vegetarian offerings. All the communities obey this rule.

ii) Taking the Intermediate View of James Anderson, it may be stated that it is a wholistic perspective adopted by the people of Saatgaon, wherein man and nature are mutually dynamic. The entire forest mountain is described as ‘Annahishi cha van’ meaning the forest and mountain of the goddess. All nature is sacred to the local people of Saatgaon and living in harmony with nature is part of their lifestyle.

iii) As advocated by Arne Naess in 1972, The Deep Ecology Movement projects the Central Idea that we are a part of the Earth rather than separate from it. The Gaia Hypothesis advocated by James Lovelock states that the Earth is alive and projects energy. The 5 stone icons on the mountain top, represent the deity, who is the Unseen Energy of the Earth. The priest claims to have had several divine experiences and in most of them, the deity appeared from within a grove or a thicket of trees. The priest stated that the relationship between God and trees is very close and hence conserving trees keeps us closer to God.
4.8) When people sit by our Deity and talk to her, she listens to them

TAULKA – MOKHADA  VILLAGE – DHONDAMARYACHIMETH  GROVE – GAONDEVI MANDIR  DEITY – MARIAYEE

Location – This grove is located on the Khodala – Dolara Road of Mokhada. It covers about 2 – 3 acres of land. It is at the entrance of the village. On the Khodala road, one can see rows of karvy trees on the way to Dhondamaryachimeth. Karvy is used by the tribals to build their huts. The grove is near the Wathvade Mountain, where the karvy trees bloom every year. Ordinarily, the karvy tree blooms every eight years, but Mokhada is an exception to this rule of nature. There are several trees around the grove. Peepal (Ficus religiosa), Safed Chafa (Pagoda tree, Plumeria rubra), Palash (Butea frondosa), Bel (Aegle marmelos), Karvanda (Carissa carandas), Ain (Madet, Terminalia tomentosa). Two tribal villages are connected to this grove viz. i) Dhondamaryachimeth  ii) Khadkichimeth.

Ownership – The grove is frequented by two types of communities. Viz. Koli Malhar and Katkari. It is owned by the whole village (Gaonthan). There is no priest. The villagers themselves perform the rituals and ceremonies. If necessary, they call a Bhagat from outside.

Legends and Myths – Cutting trees is forbidden. They all belong to Mariayee. People who cut and break tree branches etc. stand to face the wrath of the goddess. They fall ill, suffer mental trauma, their children suffer, their animals may die and in extreme case of disobedience, the deviant also can face death. About ½ km. away from the grove along the road, is an Ain (Madet, Terminalia tomentosa) tree, which the villagers claim belongs to Mariayee. Cutting this tree leads to severe problems. Villagers stated that the bark bleeds when cut. Some 3 – 4 years ago, a man from the village had tried to cut it and he died soon after. Sick people also talk to Mariayee and she listens to them.
Fig. 4.48 - The road leading to the village, Dhondamaryachimeth

Fig. 4.49 - The Sacred Grove from a distance

Fig. 4.50 - Going inside the Sacred Grove of Mariyee at Village Dhondamaryachimeth, Taluka Mokhada, Thane
Fig. 4.51 - Inside, the stone icon of Mariayee

Fig. 4.52 - Karvanda Creeper Grove grows thickly around the grove.

Activities – Collective worship is carried out annually before planting (ropni) takes place. Funds are collected from every house and animal sacrifices are made for both Mariayee and Wagheya (the tiger god) whose grove is some ½ km distance away from the Gaondevi Mandir, facing the Wathvade Mountain. Both the villages participate in this very actively.

Fig. 4.53 - Ain Tree whose bark is believed to bleed if cut

Fig. 4.54 - The Wagheya Shrine ½ km away from the grove of Mariayee

Government Help – The local villagers stated that till about 10 years ago, the jungle was very thick. But now, it is much less. 2 years ago, with the help of the Group Panchayat, they have
begun to ban the cutting of trees. In fact, they have even stopped truckloads of wood and questioned the people in it about the wood and made them empty the trucks.

The Government constructed a dam at Koch some years ago. After that water problems have reduced to some extent. But the villagers have only few perennial wells from which they draw water. No bore wells can be constructed as the land is rocky (khadkal). The Government has tried but the efforts failed. The Wathvade River flows below the mountain, but it not so near for the villagers. Basically, water is a problem and it has still not been sorted out.

The Researcher asked the villagers if the goddess granted them 5 boons, what they would want. The tribal people asked for i) water ii) health iii) good rains iv) children’s happiness and prosperity v) area improvement. They did not ask for wealth or money. But they did state that they find it very difficult to maintain themselves and keeping the grove in a healthy state is becoming increasingly difficult.

Researcher’s Viewpoint on the Sacred Grove at Dhondamaryachimeth –

i) **It is a clear instance of indigenous tradition.** There is no activity pointing out towards the Great Tradition. For generations together, the tribal people of these villages have been following their animistic religious beliefs and this continues till date.

ii) **The grove functions as an isolated whole.** It is a distinctive entity by itself. All activities and rules and regulations are for the benefit of the village and the grove and the people who come to worship there.

iii) **Socio – religious norms have a strong hold on the people.** Mariayee cures if one talks to her and follows the rules that she has set for the people. Waghaya will protect if they honour and worship him. Animal sacrifices for both these fierce deities are a must. The villagers state that if there is any problem facing them, they hear the tiger roaring in the distance from the Wathvade Mountain. The people are afraid to disobey.

iv) **The Sacred Grove is a sub system within a larger system.** The villagers of Dhondamaryachimeth are well aware what they need to get from the Group Panchayat. They emphatically mentioned water, health, education and the need to conserve the forests and the grove. They have started an **Action Group** that keeps vigil in turns to see if anyone is entering the forest to cut trees. Thus, though it is like a sub system within a larger system, it still retains its individual identity.
The Trees in this Sacred Grove bleed if cut........

4.9) TALUKA – MURBAD VILLAGE – UMBROLI KURDH

DEITY – SHEDHOBA GROVE – SHEDHOBA CHE VAN.

Location – This sacred grove is located on top of the mountain, about 4000 feet above sea level, which the local villagers call “Shedoba cha Dongar” (Shedoba’s Mountain). The village Umbroli Kurdh, is in the interior of Murbad via Mhase road 35 kms from Murbad proper. It is one single village with 350 houses. The entire mountain has been taken over by the Forest Department with the exception of the sacred grove area which is about 2 acres.

The grove is pristine, untouched. All the various trees are intact. Kalamb (Mitragyna parvifolia) are Shedoba’s sacred trees. Other trees are Bel (Aegle marmelos), Amba (Mango, Mangifera indica), Safed Chafa (Pagoda, Plumeria rubra), Ain (Madet, Terminalia tomentosa), thick Karvanda bushes (Carissa carandas), Coconut (Mad, Cocus nucifera), Peepal (Ficus religiosa), Vad (Banyan, Ficus bengalensis). Several Banana trees had been newly planted and were growing well. All along the mountain route there were varied plants and trees, many of which the local people said were medicinal.

There is a perennial river running from the top of the mountain alongside the sacred grove, right to the bottom of the mountain. The river water on top, near the sacred grove is used only for drinking and for religious ceremonies. As it flows below, it is used for drinking and bathing, cultivation and washing clothes and vessels by the local people.

Several giant bee hives were noticed on mango trees. The local people do not touch them.

Ownership – 2 acres of the land on top of the grove still belongs to the Priestly family. They are Kunbi Maratha’s by caste. They are the original ancestral owners of the grove and have been so for generations. Their surname is Suroshe. Earlier, they were one large joint family, but they have now separated into four priestly families. The priestly duties are handled by them on a monthly rotation basis.

The Deity – The presiding deity of the grove is Shedoba. He is believed to be a manifestation of Lord Shiva (from the Hindu Trinity). The icon is placed inside the temple, shaped like a Lingam (symbol of Lord Shiva). Other icons next to Shedoba symbolize Nandi Bull (vehicle of Lord Shiva) and Ganesha (son of Lord Shiva).

Outside the temple, under the Kalamb tree is an unusual icon representing “Baaya” (Parvati, the Earth Mother in Hinduism and consort of Lord Shiva). All the icons are smeared with saffron.
Offerings to both Shedoba and Baaya are different. For Shedoba, only dry coconut can be offered with incense sticks. For Baaya, only wet coconut can be offered with incense sticks. The offerings have to be only vegetarian.

Shedoba is believed to be a strict deity. Sunday is believed to be Shedoba’s day. So, the villagers come up to the mountain on Sundays to pay their respects and make their offerings. One of the four priests from the priestly family always goes up to the grove every Sunday.

![Sacred Mountain of Shedoba in the distance and the forested path to the top](image)

**Activities** – Local people go up to the shrine every Sunday. They have to make all their offerings through a priest. The ritual of “Navas” is strictly followed. (Penance for asking favours). Only the priest has the authority to mediate between the deity and the devotee. The priest uses 2 special betel nuts and places them on the left and right eye of the deity respectively, and speaks to the deity. As the betel nuts fall, or remain intact, the priest gives advice to the devotee advising him/her what penance to observe and what rituals to follow.

Once a year, before the agricultural season starts, the villagers go to the grove and pay their respects to the deities. At this time, sacrifices are conducted by each individual family respectively. There is no collective fund. Also, the locals do not kill the animals themselves. Teli Muslims are called to cut the animals for sacrifice. Each family cooks its own meal and eats it separately afterwards.
Government Help – The Forest Department has taken over the entire mountain and forest area except for the 2 acres of land around the grove. Cutting of trees is banned both by the forest department as well as according to the rules of the sacred grove. Also, in the village, there is electricity and water through bore wells. There are however, only 4 bore wells for 350 houses.

The Panchayat is seeing to the road and the education of the people in the village, but the villagers are of the opinion that the road is not usable anymore, it needs to be repaired. Also, for high school, the children have to walk about 1 – 2 kms. Distance, which they find very tiring.

Gender Discrepancy in the Grove – Women are not permitted to enter the shrine of Shedoba. They can make their offerings from outside through the priest, of dry coconut and agarbatti (incense sticks). Menstruating women cannot enter the grove at all. They cannot participate in any activity even at home. On other days, women are expected to pay their respects at the shrine of Baaya, which is outside the main shrine.
Fig. 4.58 - The Shrine of Shedoba with other icons next to it.

Fig. 4.59 - The Shrine of Baaya outside the main Shrine of Shedoba
Legends – The trees on the mountain and the grove all belong to Shedoba. They cannot be cut. The priest stated that 2 years ago, 2 Government officers tried to have some trees cut as they were in the pathway. All the trees began to bleed and the cutting was stopped in a hurry.

5 years ago, a Kunbi man from the village by the name of Moreshwar Rawat broke some big branches of a Kalamb tree which is Shedoba’s sacred tree. He urinated blood and passed blood from his stools for 2 months. No doctors could cure him. Only after he begged forgiveness of Shedoba and offered dry coconut and agarbatti, did the bleeding stop.
People have lost their eyesight while stealing wood from the grove, and also while stealing objects from the shrine.

Even the youth, when interviewed stated that they wanted the grove to remain intact and were frightened of cutting anything there.

The villagers call it a “Jagrut Devasthan” (A temple that is vibrating with energy). They strongly believe that it is this energy that keeps the village protected, the grove and the forest green and vibrant and the river flowing perennially.

**Researcher’s Viewpoint on Sacred Grove at Umbroli Kurdh Village –**

1) **Living in harmony with Nature** – Guy Sorman, in his book ‘The Genius of India’ states – “The Indian tradition is that men submit to nature and form part of it. There, nature preserves its sacredness, lost in the West since the Industrial Revolution.” In traditional Indian Culture, human beings are not separate from nature, and **earth has the same relationship with man as mother with her child.** In Ancient Indian Culture, nature was sacred since man entirely depended on it. Thus, all elements of nature were sanctified.

   Such a view may be applied to the sacred grove at Umbroli Kurdh Village in Murbad Taluka of Thane District. Dedicated to Shedoba (a manifestation of Lord Shiva), this grove is in pristine condition, on top of a mountain that is called “Shedoba cha Dongar” (Shedoba’s mountain). All the trees are sacred here. No one cuts them. Giant bee hives are not touched. The perennial water of Dhoiphodi River is used for drinking on top of the grove.

2) **Robert Redfield and Milton Singer have introduced the concept of Orthogenetic cities** as those in which the moral order of the countryside is elaborated into the ‘Great Tradition’ of Indigenous Civilizations. According to Redfield and Singer, civilization emerged out of the folk societies (rural communities) of Paleolithic times.

   Applying this view to the sacred grove of Shedoba, the Researcher is of the opinion that such kind of religious worship in natural surroundings must have been the indigenous worship in the little traditions which gave way to the Great Traditions. Lord Shiva in Hinduism is associated with penance, meditation and yoga on mountain tops. He is visualized as seated on a tiger skin in meditation, the Ganges River flowing from the top of his head. The Sacred Grove of Shedoba is also on top of a mountain and there is a river flowing perennially from behind the main shrine. The icon of Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva is just outside the main shrine.

3) **Observing Gender Discrimination** – Rules in Shedoba’s sacred grove appeared to be much more stringent compared to the Great Tradition. Women are not permitted in the main shrine. They are expected to pay their respects from the outside and make their offerings through the priest. They can only freely go to the shrine of Baaya. Women are also not permitted to eat the ‘Prasad’ of dry coconut from Shedoba’s shrine.
They can only eat the ‘Prasad’ of wet coconut from Baaya’s shrine. In the Great Tradition of Hinduism, women are permitted in the temples of Lord Shiva. Thus, the Researcher found this gender discrimination rather strange in an indigenous primary tradition.

4.10 – Our Deity sees that no one goes hungry…..

TALUKA – DAHANU VILLAGE – THERONDA

DEITY – BARKAT DEV GROVE – BARKAR DEV MANDIR

Location – This sacred grove is located about 35 kms off the Jawhar – Dahanu Road. It can be seen from the road. It is located on about 2 – 3 acres of land in Morepada Hamlet and it moves straight on to the agricultural land. This is a banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis) grove. The villagers stated that it grew from a single banyan tree. This banyan tree spans about 80 – 100 feet today. Below the grove runs the Surya River. This is a perennial source of water supply. The priest stated that since the Kudos Dam construction was almost complete, the Surya River would soon not run from under the grove any more. The local villagers stated that there are many white owls in the grove and they are trying to protect the species. They also mentioned a snake species which they called ‘Andhala’

Ownership – The grove is owned by a private individual family viz. The More Family, whom the hamlet is named after. They have been the owners of the grove for generations. They stated that the grove may be 1400 years old. Thus, the grove is ancestral and the pujari is always a More. They belong to the Koli Malhar Community.

Fig. 4.63 - The Sacred Grove of Barkat Dev, at Theronda Village in Dahanu Taluka, Thane District.
The Deity – Barkat Dev is the God of Prosperity [Compared to Goddess Annapurna in Hinduism]. As stated by the priest, he is a fierce deity. He demands that people work hard on their farms. They should not waste food. Only vegetarian offerings should be made to Barkat Dev, e.g. coconuts, fruits etc. Rules have been laid down by Barkat Dev for the people to follow.

i) No one can cut branches of the trees or take anything from there without the permission of the deity.

ii) There is annual collective worship before planting in July, but no animal sacrifice is demanded by the deity. They have to offer the first Kauli Bhaji (*Smithia Setulosa*), a vegetable that grows at that time and is valued by the deity.

iii) Barkat Dev does not want a temple. He wants this thatched roof and simple open temple. No one can enter unless he allows them to. Last year, 4 monkeys came and wrought havoc in the village, but they could not enter the temple, much as they tried.

iv) Barkat Dev is very protective of children. Our children climb this tree and many times they have fallen from the top to the bottom, but no harm has come to them ever. Barkat Dev protects.

Legends – (as related by the Priest)

As per legends, the earlier generations were such staunch meat eaters that they had no value for food grains. They would kill animals and waste grain. God was angry and manifested himself in the form of Barkat Dev. He stated that all those who wasted grain would soon have nothing to eat. They would suffer. Nothing would grow on their lands. Soon, people began to realize their mistake, they begged forgiveness. Barkat Dev was kind, he promised them prosperity if they never wasted grain.

**No one can cut the banyan tree without permission of the deity. If this happens, the tree bleeds.** The person who has cut the branches begins to vomit violently. Even fallen branches cannot be picked up by us without permission.

If people disobey, they suffer illness, children fall ill, and no hospital treatment will work till they beg forgiveness of the deity.

If mistakes occur in our worship tigers and wolves come to the village. Till today, we have seen the tiger roaming the village. We have to offer sacrifice in another area to the tiger.

Barkat Dev moves on a horse, but he does not want us to worship the horse.

If Barkat Dev has fulfilled wishes a thanksgiving must be made. If this does not happen, the person falls ill, suffers or has further problems.
The grove extends for quite a distance through the Banyan tree right up to the Agricultural land. The More Family grows rice, but only for consumption. Nothing is sold in the market.
**Government Role** – The Government has constructed the Kudos Dam which is nearby for us. Water now is not such a problem. The Group Panchayat is at Talwada Village and never comes to Theronda. So they cannot even address their grievances. They take property tax of Rs. 105.00 per house per annum. The Forest Officers only go to Kasha Village. They do not visit Theronda.
The villagers want to solve the problems of electricity and transport. There is no Bus Stop at Theronda. They have to walk 8 kms to Kasha Village. They cannot afford Auto Rickshaws or private vehicles.

The priest stated that he would like with his village people to preserve the grove. They want to plant more trees like Safed Chafa (*Pagoda, Plumeria rubra*) and Palash (*Butea frondosa*). But all this is costly and not affordable by them. If the government gave them free saplings they could grow and maintain these trees. There is a lot of place around the grove.

The priest mentioned that he once asked Barkat Dev – “Why am I so poor? I have so many children and no money.” To which Barkat Dev replied – “This is your wealth… your children and your farm… what more do you want?” After this, the priest stated that he has never felt that he is poor.

The priest stated that there is a close relationship between the Grove, God and all the people. If there are any problems, Barkat Dev appears in their dreams and says – “I am here. Why do you want to go anywhere?”

Theronda Village has 4 hamlets and a total population of 1350 people. All the villagers believe in the energies of Barkat Dev. The younger generations, even though they have ideas of migrating to cities, are very proud of their grove and their deity.
Researcher’s Viewpoint on Sacred Grove at Theronda Village –

1) Applying the viewpoint of Bennet and Tumin to the Sacred Grove in Theronda Village, one can state that the people’s adjustment to the environment has made their biological survival possible. People of Theronda are in continuous interaction with their Sacred Grove. Their deity, Barkat Dev, interacts with them. He talks to them and he listens to them. The people obey the rules and taboos of the sacred grove and in turn, they too, are assured of safety and good health. As the priest stated, the children of Morepada play on the banyan tree, they climb up its branches and many a time they fall down headlong from heights. But till today, no one has been harmed in any way.

2) Using L.P. Vidyarthi’s model of Nature – Man – Spirit, one may apply it to the sacred grove of Theronda Village. Here, the efficiency of technology is low and the quantum of energy produced is less. The people of Theronda thus are very dependent on Nature and consequently, on Barkat Dev, the God of Food grains. Since productive technology has not changed, the people’s dependence on the environment remains and the sacred grove also remains untouched.

4.11) ‘We are all one... God, Earth and Man...’

TALUKA – PALGHR VILLAGE – POLA

GROVE – GAONDEV MANDIR

DEITY – GAONDEVI, WAGHOBA, CHEDA

Location – This village is located in the interior of Palghar Taluka, some 6 – 7 kms away from the main road. The path to the village is roughly cut through dense jungle. While passing through the researcher observed much depletion in the jungle due to tree felling as well as forest fires. To reach the grove, one had to cut across fields.

The entire grove is on Agricultural land, but it is well maintained. The land covers 20 – 25 acres out of which ½ to 1 acre is reserved for the grove. On the same area, the house of the owners has been constructed.

There were thick trees around the grove. Particularly noticeable were, Ain (Madet, Terminalia tomentosa), Nilgiri (Eucalyptus globulus), Khajur (Wild date palm, Phoenix sylvestris), Bibla (Semecarpus anacardium), Kumbhi (Careya arborea), Bor (Zizyphus manritiana), Saag (Teak, Tectonia grandis), Palash (Butea frondosa), Kakad (Garunga pinnata), Pangara (Indian Coral Tree, Erythrina variegata), Vehela (Terminalia bialata), Karvanda (Carissa carandas), Hed (Haldhu, Haldina cordifolia), Chincha (Tamarindus indica).
No endemic species were found. The villagers stated that snakes roam around the grove. Mention was made of pythons and cobras.

Ownership – The entire 20 – 25 acres of land along with the grove is owned by the Rokhada Family. They belong to the Warli Community. Their hamlet is called Rokhadpada and it comprises of 40 houses having about 200 members. This researcher spoke to Yashwant Laxman Rokhada, who stated that this grove was ancestral and has belonged to the Rokhada Family for generations. It goes back 20 generations or maybe more. There is no priest for daily rituals. During annual rituals and ceremonies, they call about 20 – 25 priests from outside. Otherwise, the villagers themselves light the lamp and the incense sticks.

Deities – The grove is dedicated to Gaondevi (the village goddess), Waghoba (the tiger god) and Chheda (the protector of Gaondevi and the absorber of evil).
Fig. 4.72 - Deities of Sacred Grove at Pola Village, Palghar Taluka, Thane. L – R Waghoba, Gaondevi, Chhedad

**Annual Activities – Before planting** (lavni), the villagers observe the collective worship called “Saath”. However, no sacrifices are made in the beginning of the year before planting. Only one coconut per family is offered to the Gods. But during the Saath at **harvest time**, animal sacrifices of male goats, cocks are made by the villagers to the deities. People from all 7 hamlets attend this function. **During weddings**, couples from all 7 hamlets have to come to this grove to seek the blessings of the deities.

**Gaon Baandhani** is observed to remove all diseases from the village and to pray for health. During this function, all the women and children are sent to the edge of the village, near the riverside the day previously. The men have to fast and observe “Jagran” (keep awake together, praying and singing praises of the deity, invoking help). The next day, the men join the women and children by the river and they all come up to the grove. Each family makes a “Toran” (a garland of marigold flowers and mango leaves) which they tie at the entrance of the grove. The whole family must break through the Toran together. When all the families have finished this ceremony, sacrifices are made and the whole of Pola Village with all 7 hamlets feasts together. For this ceremony, 25 priests are invited who conduct the entire ceremony.

Women are allowed to enter the grove if they are not menstruating, but they cannot break coconuts or conduct rituals and ceremonies.
**Economic Use** – The researcher observed a date palm grove next to the Gaondev Grove. The villagers stated that it belonged to the Rokhada Family and dates and date palm toddy was sold by them. This was an additional source of income for the family.

![Image of Date Palm Grove next to the main Gaondev Grove](image)

*Fig. 4.73 - Date Palm Grove next to the main Gaondev Grove – An additional source of income.*

A **second Grove** – was maintained about 4 kms below. Since the people of all 7 hamlets found it difficult to climb up regularly, an identical grove has been made for Pola Village by the people at the bottom of the hill. This grove too, had several trees around it. Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Bamboo (*Bambusa arundinacea*), Mahua (*Madhuca indica*), Kalamb (*Mitragyna parvifolia*), Khair (*Acacia katechu*), Vehela (*Terminalia bialata*), Hed (*Haldina cordifolia*) and Paar (*Thespesia populnea*) had entwined together and were growing as one. Here, the researcher noticed large ant hills climbing up on to the deities. Villagers stated that as they have come, they will go. They do not touch them. They leave this to God, since the ant hills are inside the grove.
Fig. 4.74 - A Second Grove at Pola Village, Palghar Taluka, Thane District, for the villagers who cannot climb uphill

Fig. 4.75 - Deities at the second Grove at Pola Village… L – R Waghoba, Gaondevi and Chheda. Note ant hills on deities

**Government Action** – The villagers state that the government does nothing to help them. They ask – ‘who will come up here?’ According to them, their Panchayat is not very interested in doing anything for the village. 8 years ago, they constructed a road, but that road is badly in need of repair today. They feel that the people of the government only come before elections for votes and no real help is given to them.

**Relationship between The Sacred Grove, God and the people** – The villagers stated that there is a very close relationship between the Gods, the Grove and themselves. The Gods reside in the
grove. In each tree, any of the gods may be there at any point in time. We dare not cut the trees. If at all we need to cut, we must first take permission of the gods. We have to be sure that any of the gods is not staying there. For this, we need the advice of the Bhagats.

The villagers pointed out that one of the Bhagats was buried under a Paar tree (Thespesia Populnea). This was the tree under which he used to sit and meditate. Thus, the Bhagat too becomes a Chheda (a protector).

The Villagers want to preserve the grove. They are planting more trees. Several trees also grow on their own. Many new Palash and Date Trees were seen growing around the grove. The villagers say that funds are insufficient. Water is not so easily available. Though there are wells that are perennial, they can draw only for personal use. They do not think it is possible to draw so much water for trees also. Some other method must be thought of. But they want the groves to flourish. As they state – “We are all one

God, Earth and Man

They look after us

We look after them.”
Researcher’s Viewpoint on Sacred Grove in Pola Village –

1) **Arne Naess**, who coined “Deep Ecology” in 1972, stated that – “Life is fundamentally one”. The statement made by the owner of the sacred grove at Rokhadpada in Pola Village of Thane District, supports this in all totality. He said – “The Sacred Grove is the “Green Crown” [Hirva Mukut] of our Gods. It is also their home. From here, they look after us. So we have to also look after them. After all, we are all one”. The people of Pola Village, thus hold the view that they are not separate from the sacred grove, but that they are one living entity.

2) **In line with the above, one can also apply the Systems Approach advocated by James Anderson to Pola Village.** The people of Pola Village view their grove, not as external, but as an integral component of the total ecosystem. Thus, there is reciprocation between the people and the organic and inorganic components with which they interact. That they are part of one ecosystem is exemplified in their celebration of their annual festival – Gaon Baandhani, when all 7 hamlets comprising of 800 people walk from the edge of the village to the sacred grove praying to the deities together for protection from hunger and disease.

3) **Again, Pola Village is an Isolated Whole, taking the viewpoint of McKim Marriott into consideration.** The local villagers attribute tremendous powers to the deities of their sacred grove. The village is the nexus of all informal activity among them. It is thus like a living thing by itself, right up on the mountain top, having a vital nucleus because of the agricultural land and the sacred grove. The grove is the meeting point for the people and it was observed that they come here, rather than rest at home, to enjoy the peace, the greenery, the bonding with each other and a sense of well being, all at close quarters with their beloved deities.

4. 11 – Case Studies of 20 Priests

**According to L. N. Chapekär (1960)** – “A Bhagat is one who is proficient in Bhakti, which is the esoteric art of establishing contact with the supernatural and of divination.”

**According to Dr. Robin D. Tribhuvan (1998)** – “A Bhagat is the principle medical specialist among all the other specialists. He is a professional socio – ritual curer, a diviner and an interpreter of supernatural phenomenon. A Bhagat is one who is proficient in Bhakti, which is a meaningful art of establishing contact with the supernatural beings and hence carried out by a Bhagat because he is culturally assigned to serve his society members.”
In the Encyclopedia of World Religions it is stated that The Shaman is a dominating figure in the magico-religious life of indigenous populations. Since the ecstatic state is considered as the religious experience par excellence, the shaman is very important, being the master of ecstasy.

Shamans are separated from the rest of society through –

i) Their ability to communicate with the dead, demons and nature spirits without becoming their instrument.

ii) Their religious experience is very intensive and it resembles the mystics of ancient historic religions.

iii) The shaman is the mediator between the people and their gods, whether celestial or terrestrial.

iv) The shamans are the great specialists in human souls. They alone can see a soul and know its form and destiny.

Powers of a shaman are obtained by hereditary transmission or by spontaneous vocation – through the call of gods and spirits.

The Shaman is primarily a healer and is indispensable in any ceremony that concerns a soul of a human. The shaman can go in search of human souls that have strayed from the body and make them return to it. While the shaman is in a state of ecstasy, his/her own soul can safely leave the body and roam through distant regions – rise to the sky or penetrate to the underworld.

Researcher’s View – It is important to note that Priests/Shamans/Bhagats are principle role holders in the Sacred Groves. Their task is irreplaceable; no one else can perform the same. They are important mediators between the deities and the people. Theirs is the undivided rule from the start of the religious ceremony to the end.

As such, since the rural and tribal people place so much value on religion, the Priests/Shamans are given a very important place in the daily life of the people also. During fieldwork in Thane District, this researcher noticed that the Bhagats/Shamans were consulted for issues other than religious also viz. issues regarding marriage, children, property etc. This is probably because the local people feel that God talks to them through the Priest/Shaman.

Thus, it clearly indicates that the rules in the Sacred Groves to be followed and the Punishments in case of disobedience have been laid down by the Priests, many of whom have claimed to have seen the deity in their dreams or had a visionary experience.

It is largely due to these rules that most of the sacred groves still remain in good condition. The climate of fear that the priests/Shamans create, helps a great deal in preserving the grove and thus contributes to the biodiversity of the area.
This Researcher conducted Interviews of 20 Priests over 12 Talukas in Thane District. Some of the information given in Tabular Form below indicates the Role of the Shaman/Priest in contributing to Sacred Grove conservation.

**Table 4.1 – Points out that the age group of the Priests does not matter.** The priests need not be very aged to be respected and capable. Priests between the ages of 30 – 40 were also given due respect by the people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 – 40</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 50</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 60</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 70</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 – 80</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 90</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.2** indicates that 60 per cent of the priests were ancestral. Thus, for them, priesthood or shamanism runs in the family for generations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Priest</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancestral</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non – Ancestral</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed by Trust</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tables 4.3 to 4.6 indicate the relationship of the Priest with the deity.**

i) **In Table 4.3,** 80 per cent of the priests stated that the deity was fierce in nature and did not like disobedience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity is fierce</th>
<th>Deity is kind</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ii) **In Table 4.4,** 85 per cent of the priests mentioned that the deity does not want the people to cut trees, break branches or pick up leaves.
iii) In Table 4.5, 65 percent of the priests state that the deity demands animal sacrifice. It must be noticed that this 65 per cent was largely from the areas where the tiger god was worshipped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deity does not want trees cut</th>
<th>Deity does not object</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deity wants animal sacrifice</th>
<th>Deity wants vegetarian offerings</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iv) Table 4.6 - 80 per cent of the priests say that the deities punish if trees are cut.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deity punishes if trees are cut</th>
<th>Deity does not punish</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

v) Table 4.7, 85 per cent of Priests state that the deity wants a grove and not a temple.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deity prefers a grove not a temple</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to build a temple</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi) Table 4.8 is indicative of the fact that according to 70 per cent of the priests, the same reverence is not felt by the youth of the local population, though they do experience fear at disobeying rules as the punishments prescribed are quite violent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Same Reverence</th>
<th>Less Reverence among youth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It becomes thus important to point out the kind of punishments that the priests say the deities will mete out to those who disobey rules and cut trees and break branches from the trees in the sacred groves. Chart Number 4.9 has outlined such punishments.
**Chart 4.9**

*As related by the Priests – How would the deity punish those who cut trees in and around the sacred groves?*

| 1)  | The Trees would bleed from the bark |
| 2)  | Men will menstruate for 2 – 3 months |
| 3)  | Diseases will spread in the village |
| 4)  | Relationships in the home (of the one who breaks rules) are destroyed |
| 5)  | The person will urinate blood |
| 6)  | Whole village will suffer problems like epidemic, some calamity etc. |
| 7)  | The persons cattle will die |
| 8)  | The persons children will fall sick constantly |
| 9)  | The person will face much poverty |
| 10) | Persons harvest crop will be ruined |
| 11) | The person will begin vomiting and then fall violently ill |
| 12) | The person will have property problems |
| 13) | The person can die |
| 14) | The person will hear a tiger roaring constantly |

The punishments stated above are sufficient to create a climate of fear in the minds of the villagers. Thus, unofficially, and through a force like religion, the priests are able to prevent the people to a large extent from cutting trees. The Priests/Shamans, then play an important role in conserving the grove and thus contribute to biodiversity.

In the future, while planning biodiversity conservation, the priests of sacred groves can be taken into confidence by the government authorities. Not only would they be a major support, but they would ensure that reforestation takes place, if they were given the kind of help they seem to be asking for, viz. water facilities, funds and transport facilities.
Chart No. 4.10

In table no. 4.6, it was observed that 85 per cent of the priests stated that the deity wanted to be in a grove and not in a temple. The reasons given by them have been outlined in the following chart.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1)</strong> The Deity wants shade and green environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2)</strong> Never wants to be locked up in a temple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3)</strong> Wants a forest only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4)</strong> The deity is a roaming god and thus wants to be free</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5)</strong> Deity will not allow a temple to be built. It disintegrates. Wants to be open to the sky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6)</strong> Wants to see the village and keep vigil over it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7)</strong> Likes to be among trees. They are the home of the gods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8)</strong> Is a free moving energy and thus never has a fixed place</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9)</strong> Does not want a permanent roof over head. The roof falls off. Wants hay and grass</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10)</strong> Is a Nature God, so must have forest and jungle around. Wants to be among trees</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11)</strong> Relationship between trees and gods is very close. Gods keep moving among trees and can be staying in any tree at any point in time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12)</strong> Wants the “Hirva Mukut” (the green crown)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References:


9) **Tribhuwan R.D**: Medical World of the Tribals, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010.
