

From Ṛgveda to Tribal Ritual: Sanātana Discourse and the Sacred Cow in Indigenous Traditions

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Abstract:

It is the mediation of the relationship between tribal traditions and the larger Sanatan civilisational structure of Bharat through colonial and post-colonial anthropological terms that assert discontinuity, isolation or religious discontinuity. This paper revisits such an assumption through exploring a common symbolic and ecological axis: the sacredness of the cow and cattle between Vedic literature and the tribal practices of the indigenous tribe in Bharat. Instead of defining tribal religiosity as pre-Vedic, animistic, structurally distinct, this paper suggests that **tribal traditions are engaged in a more fundamental grammar of civilisation which can be referred to as Sanatana discourse**, a transforming ethical and cosmological mythology of ecology, economy, and ritual life.

The textual mimamsa of significant passages of the Vedas is the starting point of its analysis, such as 8.101.15 of Rgveda, which speaks of the cow as the mother of the Rudra, daughter of the Vasus, sister of the Aditya, and the navel of immortality, and Atharvaveda 1.16.4, which invokes defense of cattle as well as humans and horses. Such early compositions place cow in a cosmic and moral order and make it aghnya i.e., inviolable, life-giving. Later Smruti literature, such as Manusmriti 5.51, builds the ethical set of actions by later clarifying responsibility action in the case of harm, making the protection of bovines a part of dharma ethics.

In the paper, the next focus is the ethnographic and anthropological observations of tribal communities in few tribal traditions of Bharat, where cattle hold top roles in the ritual economy, bridewealth exchange, harvest festivities, clan symbolism, and sacred ecology. Bovine reverence is not only utilitarian but also cosmological, with cattle associated by the pastoral and forest-based communities with ancestry, fertility and continuity amongst community members. The ecology of the sacred grazing practice, ritual milk offerings and taboos against slaughter give an echo of the Vedic inviolability and nurture articulations.

Relevantly positioning Vedic textual sources and tribal ritual practices in comparative discourse, this study presents that the **sacred cow is a civilisational bridge symbol- it shows continuity without necessarily having to pass through textual transmission**. The Sanatan discourse which in this context means a dynamic civilisation that is based upon ṛta (cosmic order), dharm (ethical obligation), and yajna (reciprocal sustenance) seems to be operating in both the textual and oral traditions throughout the historical strata. Tribal practices are therefore not marginal survivals but is an ecological way of living, breathing life into a holistic ecology.

Lastly, the paper contextualizes such a **continuing symbolism with the wider institutional history of the temple village economics, in which instances of institutionally**

codified cow protection and cattle prosperity were integrated into forms of agrarian governance. The temple village system can thus be construed as a system of institutional crystallisation of values that had initially been implicated in local and tribal lifeworlds.

This research study can be used to contribute to the current discussions of ingenuity, continuity, and civilisational discussion in Bhartiya Upkhand by reframing the tribal-Sanatan relationship in terms of sacred ecology and symbolism of the bovines. It hypothesizes that tribal traditions are not to be interpreted as disjunctive units but as discursively active elements of an evolutionary and ancient cosmology of Sanatana.

Introduction: Why Revisit Tribal Traditions?

The study of tribal customs in Bharat in a long-standing tradition has been presented in the interpretative paradigms that emerged in the colonial era. Colonial rulers and anthropologists were keen to codify the complex socio-religious fabric of the subcontinent through dogmatic categories that were mostly reflective of European epistemological beliefs but not native facts. The primary result of this classificatory urge consisted in the division of what **colonial scholarship was to call Hindu religion and tribal religion**. Such a dualistic categorization would in turn produce a tint on academic rhetoric and policy paradigms, often blurring the synchronicities of history and the common cultural base that has long bound these traditions together.

Colonial anthropology played a central role in developing such differences. Colonial authorities attempted to bring order to the polyglot population of India through administrative reports, ethnographic surveys and census operations into neat hierarchically separated religious and social units. This categorical practice brought fluid cultural practices to life as fixated identities. According to Moran (2019), colonialism brought a conceptual division between the institutional religious and secular divisions of power, which, as Moran notices, segregated communities (previously deeply integrated within overlapping cultural matrices) reluctantly into a **stratification between a caste Hindu society and a tribal one, which had never existed in the pre-colonial societies**.

This process of categorisation was more solidified by the imperial census. Fuller (2015) illustrates how colonial anthropologists increasingly treated caste and religious groups as small, quantifiable groups, which are applicable to counting and bureaucratic examination. This static cultural relations were reduced to a definite demographic category and this, in turn, triggered a reification of social identity. Similarly, Sengupta (2021) demonstrates that enumerative practices, especially in Assam, created new religious identities by pre-determining the

allocation of communities as a member of a specific religion (Hindu, or tribal), therefore, refurbishing previously syncretic ritual landscapes.

However, a group of academicians have challenged the validity of this hard-line dichotomy. According to Singh (1993), tribal religions in Bharat cannot be isolated of the larger cultural context, and therefore, tribal communities still enjoy significant levels of religious autonomy and at the same time are having a vast number of civilisational networks. Instead of existing as wholly discrete systems, tribal traditions are less a stretch to see as interlocutors within, and contributors to, the broader cultural tapestry that has in the past characterised Bhartiya civilisation.

The tribal-Hindu divide colonialism, which has always been condensed by the modern conception of tribal belief systems in the form of animism. Theories of early anthropology, especially those inspired by the evolutionary schema of religion set out by E. B. Tylor, placed the traditions of the tribes, especially their sacralisation of material objects, in a pre-modern or primitive position. In this paradigm, the tribal religions were seen as remnants of a lower phase in the history of religious development of humanity.

This legacy has, however, been challenged systematically in modern scholarship. Bird-David (1999) redefines animism, by making the claim that it is not a primitive belief system but instead it is a relational epistemology. In this perspective, animistic cultures describe complex social networks of relationships among humans, wildlife, landscapes, and transcendent energies and would not subscribe to the illusion of assigning life to lifeless things. This re-interpretation recognizes the indigenous cosmologies as complex ontological systems that derive into the ecological and sociocultural networks.

The latter paradigm shift is supported by recent ethnographic studies. Marla (2026) now illustrates how animistic worldviews amongst the **Apatani, Gond and Koya** are adaptive socio-cultural systems that uphold ecological knowledge and community building. These systems are intricately linked to environmental ethics, ritual praxis and social mores and serve as comprehensive architectures in the management of human-nature interrelations. The tribal belief systems, therefore, ought not to be dismissed as a remnant of a pre-modernistic view of the world but should be acknowledged as a dynamic cultural system that is capable of adapting to the demands of the modern world.

However, there are still discursive debates of nomenclature in the field of anthropology. **Sedgwick (2021) doubts the usefulness of the term of animism in describing the complete complexity of tribal religious systems in Bharat. Through the study of communities like the Bhils, Sedgwick observes the adoption of the ancestor worship and symbolic**

representations of gods and practices that engage with the more broad Hindu customs. What these insights suggest is that the tribal cosmologies can not be comfortably warped into a single conceptual framework.

The speculations in these discussions highlight an acute methodological dilemma that is the disposition to view tribal practices as cultural islands independent of the wider civilisation. As per history, the tribal groups all over Bharat have been in contact with the agrarian communities surrounding them, with pilgrimage paths, and with ritual practices. This type of interaction has created a cultural environment that is characterized by exchange, adaptation, and common symbolic vocabularies.

This research paper, therefore, **aims at reconnecting with tribal traditions in terms of the civilisational perspective.** Instead of seeing tribal belief systems as being disparate or primitive, the **study is enquiring whether these traditions share a larger cultural grammar which can be described as belonging to the Sanana civilisational paradigm.** This style does not reject the domestic heterogeneity and autonomy of tribal customs; it simply tries to shed some light on the historical connections by which they are connected to other cultural and religious manifestations that permeate the Bhartiya sub-continent.

One particularly telling comparative prism is the **symbolic and ceremonial importation of the bovine in both Vedic literature and in the traditions of indigenous people.** Vedic texts frequently describe the **cow as a source of nourishment, prosperity, and cosmic order, while many tribal communities maintain rituals and cultural practices centered around cattle and pastoral life.** Through some examination of these symbolic continuities, it is possible to investigate how ecological values and ritual practices could have created cultural interactions between people of different social classes.

Out of this question comes two questions which are interconnected. First, do tribal traditions represent entirely independent cosmological systems, as suggested by earlier anthropological frameworks? Second, **can these traditions not serve as part of a more general civilisational discourse embracing a wide range of cultural manifestations in a common ethical and ecological spirit?** The answers to these questions are necessary in order to develop a more advanced concept of the historical interactions between tribal peoples and the overall culture of Bharat.

Sanātana Discourse and Sacred Ecology: Cow Symbolism as a Civilisational Bridge between Vedic and Tribal Traditions

Within the civilisational imagination of Ancient Bharat, the cow occupies a central position as both a **sacred symbol and an economic foundation of agrarian life**. References to the cow appear extensively across Vedic hymns, ritual manuals, and Smṛti literature, where the animal is not merely portrayed as a productive asset but as a **manifestation of cosmic nourishment, ethical order, and social stability**. This multidimensional representation reveals a distinctive worldview in which ecology, economy, and spirituality are integrated within a broader framework of Sanātana Dharma. By examining textual evidence from the Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda, Śrī Sūkta, and Manusmṛti, the symbolic and material significance of the cow can be understood as part of a larger civilisational discourse that shaped the cultural landscape of ancient Bhartiya society.

Ancient Bhartiya literature consistently presents the cow as a living embodiment of prosperity and cosmic harmony. In the agrarian economy of Vedic society, cattle wealth formed the foundation of rural life, supporting agriculture, nutrition, and ritual activity. Yet the reverence accorded to the cow extended far beyond its economic utility. Vedic and post-Vedic texts frequently associate the cow with sacred values, ethical conduct, and divine symbolism, thereby transforming an essential economic resource into a symbol of social and cosmic order (Sharma, 1968). The integration of cattle protection within the normative structures of dharma suggests that ecological stewardship and moral responsibility were deeply intertwined in the Sanātana worldview.

One of the most significant articulations of this sacred symbolism appears in the Ṛgveda. The following mantra from Ṛgveda 8.101.15 describes the cow using profound cosmological imagery:

माता रुद्राणां दुहिता वसूनां स्वसादित्यानाममृतस्य नाभिः ।
प्र नु वौचं चिकितुषे जनाय मा गामनागामदितिं वधिष्ट ॥
(Ṛgveda 8.101.15)

In this verse the cow is described as the “mother of the Rudras, daughter of the Vasus, sister of the Ādityas, and the navel of immortality.” Such expressions elevate the cow from a mere livestock animal to a cosmic entity embedded within the divine order. The term **aghnyā**, meaning “one who should not be slain,” reflects a normative ethical injunction embedded in Vedic thought. By associating the cow with divine lineage and cosmic sustenance, the hymn establishes a sacred ecological principle: the protection of life-sustaining beings is essential for maintaining harmony between humans, nature, and the cosmos (Kane, 1974).

Further elaboration of this ethical framework appears in the Atharvaveda. A passage from Atharvaveda 1.16.4 highlights the moral and social importance of protecting cattle:

यदि नो गां हंसि यद्यश्वं यदि पूरुषम् ।
तं त्वा सीसेन विध्यामो यथा नो ऽसौ अवीरहा ॥
(Atharvaveda 1.16.4)

The mantra groups cows alongside horses and humans, emphasizing that these beings form the foundation of social survival and collective prosperity. The ethical injunction against **harming cattle is therefore not merely religious in nature but reflects an understanding of the interconnectedness between ecological resources and human welfare.** Such passages illustrate how Vedic society recognized the protection of cattle as a necessary condition for maintaining agrarian productivity and social stability (Altekar, 1958).

Later Vedic and post-Vedic literature further reinforces this symbolism by linking cattle wealth with prosperity and divine blessings. The Śrī Sūkta, a devotional hymn dedicated to Goddess Lakṣmī, invokes prosperity in the form of livestock, grains, and agricultural abundance:

पुत्रपौत्र धनं धान्यं हस्त्यश्वादिगवे रथम् ।
प्रजानां भवसि माता आयुष्मन्तं करोतु माम् ॥
(Śrī Sūkta)

Here, the **cow appears within a broader symbolic framework of prosperity that includes grains, progeny, elephants, and horses.** The prayer reflects an agrarian worldview in which wealth is understood not as abstract accumulation but as the harmonious flourishing of human communities, livestock, and agricultural resources (Kramrisch, 1946). Within this context, the cow becomes a central symbol of nourishment and abundance, sustaining both ritual practices and everyday life.

The normative dimension of this worldview is further articulated in Smṛti literature. Manusmṛti 5.51 addresses the ethical responsibilities associated with acts of violence:

अनुमन्ता विशसिता निहन्ता क्रयविक्रयी ।
संस्कर्ता चोपहर्ता च खादकश्चेति घातकाः ॥
(Manusmṛti 5.51)

This verse extends moral accountability beyond the individual who performs the act of killing, emphasizing that those who approve, facilitate, or benefit from such actions share ethical responsibility. In the broader context of cattle protection, the passage illustrates how Smṛti literature sought to regulate social behaviour through moral discourse rather than through purely legal mechanisms (Olivelle, 2005). The ethical protection of BOVINE life thus becomes embedded within the broader framework of dharma.

From a socio-economic perspective, cattle were indispensable to the functioning of Vedic agrarian society. The Sanskrit term **go** frequently appears in Vedic literature not only as a reference to the cow but also as a metaphor for wealth and prosperity. Cattle provided **draught power for agriculture, dairy products for nutrition, clarified butter (ghṛta) for ritual offerings, and livestock for exchange and gifting practices.** The frequent references to cattle wealth in Vedic hymns indicate that agrarian prosperity and social stability were closely linked to the health and protection of livestock populations (Sharma, 1968).

This ecological and economic significance of cattle also provides an important bridge between Vedic traditions and indigenous tribal practices across Bharat. Many tribal communities maintain ritual systems in which cattle occupy central positions in agricultural cycles, harvest ceremonies, and clan symbolism. In several agro-pastoral societies, cattle represent both material wealth and ancestral continuity, reinforcing social bonds within the community. Such practices reveal a shared sacred ecology in which livestock, land, and human life are integrated within a moral universe.

Rather than representing separate religious systems, these parallels suggest that tribal traditions and Vedic cosmology may share elements of a broader civilisational grammar rooted in ecological ethics and agrarian life. Within this framework, the cow functions as a symbolic bridge connecting textual traditions of Sanātana Dharma with indigenous cultural practices grounded in local landscapes. The reverence for cattle thus reflects not only theological symbolism but also a civilisational recognition of ecological interdependence.

The sacred status of the cow in Ancient Bharat illustrates how Sanātana discourse integrated cosmology, economy, and ethics into a unified worldview. Vedic hymns present the cow as a cosmic mother and life-sustaining entity, while Smṛti texts articulate ethical norms that protect cattle within social life. When viewed alongside tribal traditions that similarly revere cattle within agrarian and ritual contexts, these textual traditions reveal a shared sacred ecology that transcends rigid religious categories. The cow therefore emerges as a powerful civilisational symbol—one that embodies the ethical and ecological foundations of Bhartiya civilisation.

From Sacred Cow to Sacred Landscape: Ecological Continuities between Vedic Agrarian Thought and Tribal Environmental Ethics

The symbolic respect given to the cow in the Vedic literature is impossible to fully appreciate unless it is put into context of the context of the ecological worldview which dominated Ancient Bharat. Through studying the Sanatana intellectual tradition, it can be seen that the cow is a part of a vast sacred picture, in which humans, animals, plants, rivers, and

cosmic forces are united by the laws of *ṛta*, or cosmic order, and *dharma*, or ethical responsibility. As a result, it was an ecological consciousness that was expressed by this worldview that informed agrarian practices, social norms, and ritual life. Understanding it in this broader perspective, the Vedic cow worship can be seen as an element in a larger system of sacred ecology, which related the well-being of human society to the well-being of the natural ecosystem.

The Vedic literature often depicts nature as a living sacred sector with divine powers. Rivers, forests, mountains, and animals are all called upon as a representation of cosmic order, thus showing a perception of the natural world as a moral whole. The example of the hymns to rivers like Sarasvatī, Sindhu, and Ganga, in which the rivers are not just the physical water bodies but the living beings with their own rights to be worshiped and preserved, can be given (Singh, 2010). Equally, the invocation of animals and plants is commonplace in ritual settings, which indicates that the early agrarian societies of Bharat acknowledged the mutual dependence of human wellbeing and the ecological balance.

In most of the tribal societies, cattle and other domesticated animals hold centre stage in ritual and economic life. Among agro pastoral communities, cattle are linked with fertility, social prestige and continuity of the ancestors. Rituals associated with the harvest seasons, the wellbeing of the livestock and the seasonal festivals commonly involve representative offerings or ceremonial acknowledgment of cattle. These customs show that there is deep recognition of the importance of animals to the existence of human communities based on the Vedic view of cattle as sources of agrarian wealth.

The ecology of the tribal cultures also makes the concept of sacred landscapes even stronger. Informal conservation areas in the tribal lands include sacred groves, sacred forest areas, as well as ritual locations associated with spirits of the ancestors. The use of these spaces is controlled by religious taboos and ritual prohibitions that effectively control the use of natural resources. Researchers have observed that these practices are indigenous mechanisms of environmental management that existed before the modern conservation structures (Marla, 2026). The tribal communities protect the ecological systems by establishing ethical restrictions to preserve nature.

Striking continuities can be observed when tribal ecological worldview is contrasted with the Vedic agrarian thought. The two traditions value the dependence of human societies and natural ecosystems, and focus on ethical accountability to animals and landscapes, and incorporate environmental practices into ritual systems. Here, the cow is an effective symbolic connection between the textual traditions of Sanata Dharma and native environmental ethics.

The importance of cattle as an essential component of agrarian ecosystems is also reflected in its sacred status, as well as its symbolic meaning, theologically.

This reinforces the idea of the connection between tribal cultures and the wider Bharati civilisation. Instead of specific and primitive religious systems, the ecological activities of tribes can be viewed as an expression of a collective sacred ecology which has historically defined the cultural context of the subcontinent. This concept of Sanana Dharma, which is formed as an emerging civilisational discourse based on harmony between man, nature, and order of the universe, offers the conceptual framework against which these continuities may be viewed.

In this perspective, the veneration of the cow is not only a sacred decree of the religion but an expression of a larger ecological ethic that is inherent in Bhartiya civilisation. The cow serves as a civilisational signifier to sustainable living, through its ability to connect agrarian wealth, moral duty and sacral symbolism. Environmental ethics of the tribes and Vedic agrarian thought therefore find some commonality in their appreciation of nature as a divine companion to human lives.

These indigenous traditions are a source of insights in the modern world of the discourse of sustainability and environmental ethics that provide an alternative model of ecological governance. A combination of secular and religious values with the planning of the environment testifies to the fact that cultural traditions can be used to build a sustainable relation with the nature. The reevaluation of these historical approaches allows the scholars to value the ecological wisdom contained in these Vedic literature and tribal traditions and therefore draw conclusions on the relevance of the texts in contemporary discussions on environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Beyond Colonial Categories: Reinterpreting Tribal Traditions within the Sanātana Civilisational Framework

The colonial anthropological categories used to artificially distinguish tribal religion and Hindu religion have contributed to the translation of tribal traditions in the Bhartiya subcontinent. The ethnographic works of the 19th and early 20th century often depicted tribal societies as primitive or animistic societies that lived outside of the mainstream of the Bhartiya civilisation. These interpretations were formed under the influence of colonial administrative interests, such as census classification and administration approaches, which demanded the establishment of strict social categories (Fuller, 2015). These classificatory systems allowed colonial anthropologists to create a distinction between a tribal society and a society of caste

Hindu, even though there was a long history of cultural contact between these two groups of people historically (Moran, 2019).

Later scholarship has continued to criticize this dichotomy. The anthropological research studies on native religious systems illustrate that the tribal religious traditions tend to have cosmological theories, symbolisms of rituals and also ethical systems with the common Sanata traditions (Singh, 1993). Not as discrete systems of belief, tribal cosmologies often reflect types of sacred ecology that are echoed in Vedic literature. This attitude to animals, forests, rivers, and ancestral spirits shows the nature of the relationship worldview where humans live in the same moral environment with other forms of life (Bird-, 1999).

In this context, the cattle play a significant role in most Bharati tribal cultures. It is impossible to diminish their importance to the level of economic utility; more often, cattle are regarded as the indicators of prosperity, ritual purity and ecological stability. It is also through the study of cattle practices in the tribal societies that one can find out more about civilisational continuation between the practices of the indigenous society and the Vedic approach to sacred ecology.

Cow and Cattle in Bharati Tradition of Tribes.

A. Cattle as Property in Tribe Economy.

In many tribal groups throughout Bharat, cattle has been a traditionally important part of the economy. Tribes that relied extensively on cattle both as a source of subsistence and as a means of social organisation included pastoral and agro-pastoral tribes like the Gonds, Todas and various central Indian tribes. The livestock supplied milk, dung to change the land, and draught to till the land, hence supporting the agrarian economy of tribal settlements.

Cattle were also regarded as a wealth in the tribal societies. The anthropological research writes of the use of cattle to establish bride-wealth systems in which cattle were exchanged between families as part of a marriage negotiation process. These were not purely economic exchanges but they also enhanced social bonding of clans and lineages (Sedgwick, 2021). In this regard, cattle were both material possessions, and signs of the continuity of the family.

This economic significance resembles the economic significance of cattle in Vedic society, in which the Sanskrit word go often referred to economic prosperity. Vedic hymns commonly referred to prosperity as abundance of cattle, as this is the central activity in agrarian life (Sharma, 1968). Therefore, tribal and the Vedic societies identified cattle as the basis of an economic stability.

B. Ritual Centrality

Other than their economic value, cattle takes center stage in the ritualistic life of most of the tribal groups. Festivals and seasonal rites are often supplemented with cattle rituals to honour them, or ask them to bring a bountiful harvest. Cattle are also ceremonially decorated and worshiped in the harvest festivals in various areas as a sign of gratitude for the role they played in the sustainability of agrarian living.

Rituals are also significant in relation to milk and milk products. In the tribal and Vedic belief, dairy products, including milk, curd, and clarified butter are considered purity and auspiciousness. Ghr̥ta (clarified butter) in Vedic ritual is one of the main offerings in the yajna, ritual purée that represents food given to the god. On the same note, the native rituals performed by the tribes usually use milk products during rituals related to fertility, healing and wellbeing of the community.

There are also some tribal practices which are rather totemic of the bovine species in which certain clans identify with animals symbolically. These totemic systems represent a worldview where the animals are seen not only as economic resource but as spiritual relatives as one of the family members with the ancestors.

C. Sacred Landscape

The tribal attitude towards cattle is further incorporated in a grander idea of sacred landscape. The grazing lands, forests and water sources used by livestock are usually regarded as the sacred place in the tribal cosmology. Ecological balance is achieved through the existence of ritual taboos that govern the utilization of such landscapes so that natural resources are not over-exploited.

These environmental taboos are native mechanisms of environmental management. Some pastures or forested lands can be set aside as a sacred region whereby hunting, logging, or farming is limited. These practices are very effective in preserving grazing lands, and ensuring sustainable human community, livestock and non-living environmental relationships.

The status that the cattle is given in tribal cosmology is a reflection of a more profound ecological philosophy. Instead of looking at animals as mere resources, the tribal traditions place cattle in a moral universe where there is an element of reciprocity between the human and nature.

Comparative Hermeneutics: R̥gvedic Cow and Tribal Cow

A comparative examination of Vedic texts and tribal traditions reveals striking parallels in the symbolic roles assigned to cattle. These similarities suggest the existence of a shared cultural grammar underlying Bhartiya civilisational traditions.

Vedic Framework

Cow as cosmic mother
Aghnyā (inviolable being)

Source of ghr̥ta in yajna

Symbol of dharma and prosperity

Tribal Framework

Cow as clan protector
Ritual prohibition on killing

Source of milk in ritual
ceremonies

Symbol of ancestral continuity

In the Rig Vedic corpus, the cow is represented as a cosmic being that is in contact with divine powers and the life giver. The theme is repeated in the hymns indicating that the worship of the bull was central to ancient ideas of the universe and food.

The Sanskrit word, known as, aghnya, is an overarching concept of an inviolable creature, whose defense is considered critical to the maintenance of the order of things in the universe. It has been observed many times by scholars that this lexical designation implies a juridical sanctity that goes beyond the mythical reverence to include socio-ecological ethics.

On the same note, the case of a number of tribal communities imposing ritual bans on the slaughter of cattle shows that a series of moral codes that may be trying to protect the livestock under communal systems. The uniformity of these bans in widely spread organizations highlights the common moral framework that puts the responsibility of livestock in the spotlight of social control.

These similarities are in themselves not sufficient reasons to believe that Vedic literature was transmitted in a linear manner to tribal traditions. Instead, they refer to the fact that there is a common civilisational grammar whereby cattle are treated as an iconic mix of food, flourishing and ethical duty. These convergent symbolisms indicate that there was a shared ecological worldview which influenced agrarian life in heterogeneous cultural backgrounds of Bharat.

Temple Village System and Tribal Continuities.

The temple based agrarian structures of the ancient Bharat institutional development is one of the major milestones in the history of the development of this sacred ecological worldview. The villages that played the center of my current study work served not as a simple unit of agriculture but as a socio-economic institution fused land management, ritual and social wellbeing.

In these temple villages, cattle played a dual role: they were the key to agrarian production and ritual activity. Dairy items, such as milk, curd and clarified butter were essential elements of temple offering, whereas the manure of cattle was an essential element of agricultural fertility. The temple establishments frequently included livestock and pastoral

lands as part of their economic infrastructure as being granted under the doctrine of devadana, or land grants to temples.

This resulted in the protection of cattle being institutionalised in an organised economic and ritual framework the Temple Village System. Combining agricultural production with religious organisations, temple villages developed what could be described as a sacred economy a system in which economic activity supported ritual life and in which ritual authority supported moral conventions to regulate agriculture and animals.

Curiously, the ecological principles were preserved in the same way by the tribal communities despite the lack of formal temple institutions. The traditional norms, ritual taboos, and community forms of governance were used to ensure that the sacred associations with cattle were propagated in tribal villages. These traditions guaranteed the protection of animals and pastures in the larger ecological environment.

Historically, the temple villages can, thus be viewed, as the institutionalisation of already existing agrarian ethics, which were at local and tribal levels. Cow sanctification, the implementation of livestock in the life of rites, and the ethical control of land usage are all indicative of more traditional civilisational values that exist within Bhartiya society.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the tribal traditions in the broad context of the Sananatana civilisation disrupts the colonial discourses according to which tribal religions were marginal to the cultural centre of Bharat. According to anthropological data, the tribal practices reflecting forms of sacred ecology prove to have a deep connection to Vedic ideas of nature and animals and cosmic order.

The ritual and symbolic pre-eminence of cattle provides a very informative illustration of such continuities. In the Vedic canon and tribal traditions, the cow is a symbol of sustenance, wealth as well as ethical accountability towards the natural environment, hence exposing a civilisational worldview that unites ecology, economy, and spirituality.

The Temple Village System, which is discussed in the given research, is one of the institutionalized forms of this worldview in agrarian society. Linking bovine prosperity, culturally important ritual activity, and land management, temple towns specialized in converting the spiritual ecological motives to a long-lasting social framework.

The knowledge of these continuities provides new insights into the cultural history of Bharat. Instead of seeing tribal traditions as peripheral accessories to civilisation, they are to be seen as being central to the civilisational spirit of Sanata dharma, which is the spirit of being in agreement with humans, animals and nature.

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