

Local Cultural Beliefs and Practices of the Indigenous Communities Related to Wildlife in the Buffer Zone of Chitwan National Park

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Abstract : Cultural beliefs and practices have been shaping indigenous community's resource use and attitude toward the conservation of natural flora and fauna around them. Understanding these cultural dimensions is vital for identifying effective strategies that align with conservation efforts. This study focused on investigating the wildlife-related cultural beliefs and practices of two indigenous communities: Bote and Musahars. The study applied ethnographic methods that included Key-informant interviews, Focal Group discussion, and Household survey methods. Out of 100 respondents, 51% were male and 49% female. A significant portion (65%) of the respondents confirmed animal worship, with a majority worshipping tigers (81.5%), rhinos (73.8%), crocodiles (66%), and dolphins (40%). Additionally, 16.9% disclosed worshipping Elephants, while 10 % affirmed animal worship without specifying the particular animals. Ritualistic practices often involve the sacrifice of pigs, goats, hens, and pigeons. Their cultural ethics place a significant emphasis on biodiversity conservation, as the result shows 41 % refraining from causing harm to wild animals and 9% doing so for ethical considerations, respectively. Moreover, the majority of the respondents believe that cultural practices could enhance conservation efforts. However, the encroachment of modernization and religious conversion within the community poses a tangible risk of cultural degradation, highlighting the urgent need to preserve the cultural practices. Integrating such indigenous practices into the National Biodiversity Strategy and conservation policies can ensure sustainable conservation of endangered animals with appropriate cultural safeguards.

Keywords : tribal communities, societal belief, wild fauna, "barana", safeguarding

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