

Review Article

Extinct Sustainable Practices: Desert Based Traditional Indian Enterprises and Traditional Societies

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A B S T R A C T

This paper explores the urgency of addressing the current climate change crisis by revisiting extinct sustainable practices prevalent in traditional Indian societies, focusing on the case study of Western Rajasthan. Despite facing harsh desert conditions, the communities in this region have historically prioritised environmental conservation. However, these practices have gradually disappeared due to the influence of Westernization. The paper documents specific practices that have become extinct and argues for their revival as valuable tools in combating the climate crisis. It emphasises the significance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for global collaboration and highlights the need for a balanced developmental path that aligns with environmental sustainability and coexistence.

Keywords: Climate, Crisis, Environment, Resources, Sdg, Sustainability

Introduction

It is expected that the Earth will become non-livable after a hundred years due to rising temperatures and climate changes. It is expected that due to rising temperatures, life itself will become difficult on our planet. The rise in temperature has been due to increased carbon emissions and rising pollution, which are largely man-made creations and could have been avoided. The rising temperature, rising public unrest, rising gap between the rich and the poor, rising instances of power crises, and rising instances of natural calamities are all indications of our inability to move in the right direction. Our own policies are responsible for our own difficulties and challenges today. There is a need to reorient our path towards a balanced approach to development. We have to create an appropriate path considering the overall requirements of the environment, sustainability, and co-existence. We need to relook and

reexamine our path of development. The rising risks put greater stress on these issues.¹⁻³

The Importance of SDG

The world is full of challenges like poverty, hunger, energy crises, etc. These challenges can be handled through the combined efforts of everyone for a better society. The world has agreed upon sustainable development goals, which can help us overcome these challenges. Sustainable development goals have become the most important goals for the survival of this planet. There is a need to emphasise these goals because they alone can ensure the survival of our planet. We have witnessed adverse climatic conditions and natural calamities due to our exploitative approach to the environment.

Society exists in a very intricate relationship with nature. There is continuous interaction with nature and various

facets of nature. Nature provides opportunities for every living being to grow and provide opportunities for existence and survival. Nature has a wonderful balancing system to survive and enable growth for everyone. We have yet to appreciate the beauty and functionality of nature. We have not yet appreciated the intricacies of nature and its different dimensions. We have failed to create any mechanism for the protection of nature.^{4,5}

Social Practices are key to the Developmental Agenda

Lockie (2023) mentions social practices, which can play an important role in mitigating the climate change crisis. Societies need to be studied on the basis of their practices so that we can evolve social practices that can help society improve its existence.

Introduction to the Western Rajasthan Region

The Western Rajasthan region is a part of the Thar Desert. This region has always experienced extremes of temperature and climatic conditions. It has always received the bare minimum of rainfall. It has received the most sunlight. The temperatures touch the extremes of the plain regions. It may touch 0 degrees during winter and 50 degrees during summer. This region is also called Marwad or Marwar. The people of this region migrate to other parts of the country in search of business opportunities. These people are often called Marwari or Marwadi. They have displayed their ability to survive in difficult conditions because they hail from the difficult climatic conditions of the Thar Desert. There are many practices that have made them distinct, and these practices have enabled them to survive in spite of difficult conditions.⁶⁻⁸

The balance between Economic Conditions

The economy is a combination of many resources and many practices. The economy denotes the exchange process in society. Society is a group of different people who have different expertise and capabilities. People exchange their expertise for some money. They are trading their products and services, which are based on their capabilities and expertise. These capabilities and expertise are driven by the overall belief system of society. Society is able to experience growth through the involvement of people in creating harmonious relationships within themselves and other living beings.

Challenges to the Environment

Human beings have progressed through a harmonious existence with other living beings. However, in the last few decades, we have witnessed a tendency to treat others as materials, and the only goal seems to be the well-being of human beings. However, this is a narrow approach, as it ignores that we are only one part of this planet out of

many other beings who are also living and surviving on this planet. There should be an approach towards harmonious existence. There is a need to revive the old theory of "Vasudhev Kutumbkam," meaning "the entire world is a family, and every being is a part of this family." There is a need to revive this approach to the environment.

The Water Crisis

Drinking water has now become a scarce commodity. There is wastage of water by some people, resulting in crisis situations for others. Some people are using tap water to wash their cars. Some people are using tap water for gardening. Some people are using tap water to spray water on their roads. They are unable to understand that water is a scarce commodity and should be used very carefully. They are unable to appreciate the initiatives for water conservation. Traditional societies have always placed stress on the conservation of water. These practices have now disappeared due to rising westernisation in Indian society. Saberifar (2023) mentions the water crisis and the role of communities in raising consciousness about water conservation.⁹⁻¹¹

Material Progress Against Environmental Neglect

The material progress of our society has put us in a position to start using resources at any pace. We have gained expertise in using material resources, and we have used this capability to our fullest. The outcome of this expertise is visible in the reduction of resources. We are depleting the resources at an alarming pace. We are spewing waste at an alarming pace. The world is now our consumption basket, and we are all set to consume everything on this planet soon. We are turning everything into garbage with our voracious consumption capabilities. We are eating almost every other living thing. We are using almost every resource available on this planet. Our ability to consume our planet has resulted in a major threat to our own existence. We have to find ways to minimise our resource use. There is a need to revive some of the traditional environmental protection practices that we used to follow in earlier times.

Sustainability may be a new term, but the movement towards sustainable development is not new. For ages, mankind has been conscious of the environment and its requirements. There have been many initiatives in the past that have been ignored or forgotten. When sustainability has become very important, it is also very important to recognise and appreciate the amazing contribution of traditional management principles towards sustainable development. The wisdom of traditional societies has always highlighted coherent coexistence with the environment. The elements of the environment have been isolated, identified, and recognised for their contribution. There

have been many business practices that have highlighted the role of the environment, and their contribution has been appreciated.¹²⁻¹⁵

Documenting the Traditional Practices

The change in our society is reflected in changes in our practices. Our society is constantly changing, and these changes are often based on the adoption of the practices of developed societies. The present-day transformation of Indian society is based on the imitation of Western societies, i.e., westernization. These changes are often at the cost of local practices, which have been followed by these societies for generations. These practices are now considered backward practices, but these practices have relevance for our study considering the fact that they were evolved to meet the challenges with minimum resources. This research is an attempt to document traditional practices that have been practiced in the Western Rajasthan region for many generations. However, with modernization, these practices have now become less popular or extinct. The reasons for their lower adoption can be attributed to increased trends of westernisation and modernization in Indian society.¹⁶

Modern business organisations are undertaking environmental audits to identify their impact on the environment. Similar practices existed in traditional societies, where people used to be very cautious when using water and other natural resources. Traditional societies in the Marwar region (Western Rajasthan) always appreciated the conservation of water. People in these regions always practiced water conservation in their day-to-day lives. A careful listing of these practices is presented herewith: -

1. **Bawdi, Jal Kund, and Rainwater Harvesting:** there used to be rainwater harvesting, whereby there used to be Jal Kund, which used to store rainwater. This practice has been followed for many generations now.
2. **Simplicity was the Key to the Marwari Enterprises;** the Marwari enterprises always followed simplicity, and their business enterprises were always simple business enterprises. They used to wear white dresses and kept white "gadda," or plain sitting mattresses, in their offices instead of the wooden furniture of the present day. They adopted simplicity as their basic ideology, which has now been neglected and ignored. We may realise in the future that these practices were environmentally friendly, in contrast to present-day practices.
3. **Shubh:** traditional Indian societies always emphasised the word "shubh," which is the goodness of everyone, including the environment. This is highlighted in business dealings. Every business enterprise makes the ultimate goal of business "shubh" and "labh."
4. **Support for the Goshala:** every business enterprise would spare some money for helping the local goshala, which will try to provide food and care to the ageing cows and other animals. This practice is still continuing.
5. **Gochar Land:** there are pastures near every village and city that are kept for the cows. These are plain lands where grass can be grown. These areas are suitable for cows, and the cows are able to get their food from these regions.
6. **Conservation of Water:** the traditional societies of these regions give importance to reduced use of water. They try to ensure that everyone uses only one bucket of water for daily operations. They ask their children to start using less water while doing daily activities like bathing, washing clothes, etc.
7. **Protection of Trees:** many types of trees are protected by some or other traditional beliefs. For example, the peepal tree is never cut in any case. This tree is considered very pious, and therefore no one is allowed to cut it.
8. **Protection of Wild life:** many societies considered it a sacred practice to protect wild life. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan doesn't allow the killing of any bear. They also don't allow the cutting of any trees. There are many such communities, which ensure that the wild life is
9. **Non-Violence:** Jain philosophy has highlighted non-violence. The Jain Saints visit every village, propagate the principles of non-violence, and ask the villagers to follow non-violence.
10. **Aparigrah—the Jain Philosophers highlight Aparigrah:** non-accumulation. Everyone should focus on reducing resources. There should not be an unnecessary accumulation of resources. If there is any accumulation of resources, that should be discouraged. Everyone should try to encourage equal distribution of resources, and excessive accumulation by a few can cause huge disparities. These should be avoided. There were many practices to reduce the accumulation of wealth.
11. **Group Marriage System:** there used to be a group marriage system where a large number of marriage functions were organised together. This saved resources. Waste of food and other resources was ensured through these group marriage systems.
12. **Joint Food Taking:** everyone in the family in the Marwari community takes food together. All males take food on one plate (called Thal or Thali). Everyone takes the food together and ensures that there is no waste. Everyone eats together, and at the end, the plate is cleaned and all remnants are eaten up so that not even

a grain is wasted. This is particularly true in the Jain community, which doesn't allow any wastage of food.

- 13. Tap or Tapashya:** Tap or Tapashya refers to fasting. People in western Rajasthan do intermittent fasting. They fast for 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 8 days, 15 days, and 30 days. These These practices are common practices in this region. These practices are often undertaken under the guidance of Jain saints, who keep guiding people about these practices and how to practice them. These practices place importance on the conservation of resources and the conservation of the use of resources in everyday life.
- 14. Jatra or Padyatra:** Padyatra means walking. Walking, or padyatra, has always been considered a very important activity. The traditional society in Western Rajasthan required people to adopt Padyatra, whereby the people would visit their tirth (holy places) walking barefoot. These practices are very important in connecting communities and preserving their culture, heritage, and environmentally friendly practices.
- 15. Pata or Gatta Panchayat:** there are Pata (wooden platforms) or Gatta (peepal trees) where people of the nearby region would sit together to solve their own problems and to create basic rules for their lives. This type of practice has been part of democratic social practices for ages. These practices are helpful in creating a true democratic society. Every mohalla has one Pata or Gatta where the male members of nearby homes will gather in the evening to discuss and finalise the issues.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

Conclusion

The survival of societies is dependent on their vision, practices, and ability to adapt to changing conditions. Societies that have valued the environment have survived and grown. There is a need to revive those practices that are environmentally friendly. Many practices have completely disappeared, but there are a few that can still be revived through the involvement of the people. The present study has tried to document extinct practices that used to be followed by the people of the Western Rajasthan region. These practices can still be revived. These practices can help in our movement towards a sustainable society. There is a need to revive the age-old practices that have enabled us to live a nature-friendly existence. There are many environmentally friendly practices in other parts of India that need to be identified and documented. These practices can help us create an environment-friendly roadmap.

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