

Adult Education: Fostering and Conserving Sacred Groves at the Grassroots Level

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Abstract:

Education is the biggest pillar of society as well as the nation. It is playing an important role in the field of inclusive and sustainable development of society. Similarly, Adult Education is a form of non-formal and formal education. It is a systematic and organized educational activity that is aimed at a particular objective for the universal development of humankind. It is more productive and eco-friendlier for all young minds who have not received any formal education due to the age barriers, financial issues, lack of facilities, and lack of educational awareness, as well as parietal awareness, etc. It is providing life skill education for holistic development, and it is empowering the young mind for their harmonious lives in society. Similarly, a sacred grove is a patch of trees that is protected by local communities due to its cultural and religious significance, and it is directly associated with their local deities due to the sacred bonding. These sacred groves, known as sacred forests and merely sacred groves, play an important role in the field of nature biodiversity conservation for the sustainable development of the environment as well as the nations. The present study has critically analysed and provided an overview of the significance of adult education and sacred groves in the context of the modern era. It provides a holistic understanding of the significance of adult learning and sacred groves for the betterment of society.

This research Paper has addressed how adult education provides direction and enables the young minds to protect and promote sacred groves at the grassroots level for the inclusive and sustainable development of society. The present study was carried out on the Bhatra Tribe of Nabarangpur district, Odisha. The researcher has taken a qualitative method for a holistic understanding of the importance of adult education and the sacred grove in the field of sustainable development. This paper has chosen the population of the Bhatra tribe of Nabarangpur district, Odisha. Likewise, Sample techniques have been based on the basis of stratified sampling. Data has been analysed with the qualitative analytical method.

Keywords: Inclusive. Life skill education, Sacred Groves, Adult learning.

1. Background of the Study:

Education is the lighthouse that is sparkling and directing human beings to their healthy lives, and it plays an important role in the field of holistic development of society. This paper has critically studied the importance of adult education and sacred groves for the holistic understanding in the field of nature conservation. In this context, both adult education and sacred groves play a pivotal role in fostering the life span of the earth and reducing the environmental problems for a sustainable world. Adult education not only conserves the sacred groves but also provides equal opportunity to all to get education without any social barrier, as well as organizational barrier. It is helping and boosting human beings for a healthy

life in society. Adult education has been helping to empower individuals with their basic needs. Similarly, it is conserving and promoting sacred groves due to their cultural and environmental significance in the present context. The present conditions of sacred groves have been gradually losing their importance due to the lack of proper conservation by the local communities, as well as the local authority.

2. Theoretical Outlook of Adult Education and Sacred Groves:

2.1 Adult Education

The concept of adult education has been rooted in the Vedic and Buddhist period of India. It is culturally rooted in the cultural tradition, which is expanding the educational opportunities to individuals and empowering the youth's minds for the fulfilment of basic needs. The adult education system not only started in India but also in other nations such as the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), etc. In 1661, Adult education was well-known in the Evening Schools at New Amsterdam, New York [Homer Kempfer 1955]. Basically, Adult education became more popular after World War II due to the educational significance in American Education. Similarly, gradually, this concept became more familiar to educators from the various developing and underdeveloped nations in the world. In the context of India, Adult education was started from different periods, such as the Vedic Age, Puranic Period, Buddhist Era, British colonial era, and also modern times. The following pictures showcase the history of the adult education system in India-

2.2 Sacred Groves

When we look at the chapter on indigenous culture in India, we can briefly touch on all segments of tribal communities. Generally, India is a culturally diverse nation where more than 1.40 billion people live, according to the Press Information Bureau of India, and similarly, more than 700 ethnic communities live in different parts of India. Most of the Hindu people and ethnic groups strongly believe in supernatural power and nature worship due to the cultural and religious significance. Similarly, Sacred groves are the core part of Hindus and Indigenous communities for their religious beliefs. The sacred groves are patches of trees that are protected and worshiped by the tribal communities due to their religious and cultural significance. Sacred groves play an important role in the field of biodiversity conservation. The sacred groves known by different names in different places in India also world. In Odisha, a sacred institution known as **Jaherthan**, **Sarna** and **Thakurani**, Similarly, in Chhattisgarh, known as **Devgudi**, **Sarn** and **Devrai**, in Himachal Pradesh, **Dev Van** (God's Forest), etc. Similarly, in the Bhatra community, the sacred groves known as **Kaladharani**, **Thakurani**, **Dharani**, and **Mata Gudi**, etc. The sacred culture is the essence of the Bhatra community due to the close relation with their customary law and cultural significance. The sacred groves are known by various names in Nabarangpur and Koraput districts, like **Maa Kantabausuni**, **Dal Khai Devi**, **Deo Dongari**, and **Manda Dongari**, etc.

3. Significance of the Study:

The present paper briefly critically studies the importance of adult education and sacred groves in the present context. This study addresses the role of adult education at the grassroots level for the preservation and promotion of sacred groves for an inclusive life and sustainable development of the environment. This paper would be helpful for the government in the maintenance of biodiversity. because it is providing a community-based conservation system without threatening the laws of nature. It is a sustainable and eco-friendly indigenous-based method. Similarly, in these contexts, the adult learner would be a participant in the field of nature practices by the sacred groves. This paper would be helpful for the policy developer

and the government to break down the environmental problem. Similarly, these major finds will be helpful for the government to enhance adult education at the grassroots level for the inclusive and sustainable development of humankind as well as the environment.

4. Review of Literature:

The present study has focused on the role of adult education and sacred groves in the field of inclusive and sustainable development of the environment, along with the role of nature conservation for the well-being.

4.1 Role of Adult Education:

Adult education plays an important role in the field of biodiversity conservation. It has a significant impact due to its educational relevance. It is providing equal opportunities to those who do not get any formal education due to some reason, such as financial problems, parental awareness, age barriers, etc. They can get lifelong education for their holistic lives. Adult education has been a big contributing for the nation's development, and also, adult education has played a significant role in nature conservation and empowering young minds and raising awareness about the responsibilities of the environment.

Bishnoi and Godara (2024). This present paper has been exploring the importance of inclusive education and adult learners. Similarly, the paper has briefly discussed the characteristics, needs principle, and national framework of adult learners for their inclusive development and holistic lives in society. Equally, the study has highlighted major challenges and problems faced in implementing inclusive education for adult learners, and also the paper has found the key problem such as socio-cultural barriers, digital divide, and psychological and extrinsic motivation challenges, time management, etc. Also, the paper has recommended the improvement of inclusive education for adult learners.

4.2 Relevance of Sacred Groves:

This paper has an in-depth study of the significance of sacred groves in the field of biodiversity conservation.

Behera and Pradhan (2015). The present study was carried out in the Phulbani Forest Division of Phulbani district, Odisha. This study has focused on the importance of sacred groves in the context of biodiversity conservation and religious significance in the Kondh tribe of Phulbani district. Here, a sampling method was used to critically study the biodiversity and growth of trees. A questionnaire survey method was used for a proper study about the relevance of sacred groves and protector communities in Phulbani district. This paper has identified that most of the sacred grove's places are known as local deity name such as **Sal** (*Shorea robusta*) and **Rohini** (*Somida febrifusa*), which have been worshiped by the local communities. The present study has covered 6 important forest ranges of Phulbani division, such as Phulbani, Sudurupa, Tikabali, Raikia, and G. Udaygiri. This study has found the sacred forest in different places in the Phulbani Forest Division. Five sacred groves are conserved and managed by the Kondh tribe out of 10 sacred forests. Similarly, the Kondh tribe is celebrating different festival-related sacred groves, such as **Mati Yagna** and **Indra Yagna**, during the rainy season for a good harvest and timely rain.

Trehan and Trehan (2024). The paper has an in-depth study about the importance and various roles of sacred groves in the field of safeguarding biodiversity and addresses the significance of sacred groves in conserving and promoting biodiversity for the sustainable development of the environment. This paper has examined the ecological significance, cultural values, and conservation challenges associated with the sacred groves. Similarly, the paper analyses the conservation challenges faced by sacred groves in the context of modernization, urbanization, and globalization. This paper has identified the key major threatened

of the sacred groves, such as deforestation, land-use changes, encroachment, and inadequate legal protection, which have been jeopardizing the ecological integrity of these invaluable ecosystems. Similarly, the paper has discussed the policy implications of sacred groves within the national biodiversity conservation frameworks and land-use planning policies.

Dakapraska and Behera (2025). The present paper critically studies the role of sacred groves in the field of expanding inclusive education and empowering the tribal women in Odisha for their harmonious development. This paper has stressed the protection of sacred forests and the sharing of this intergenerational knowledge through the traditional roles. The tribal women have played a significant role in the field of maintaining cultural identity and nature conservation for the inclusive development of the society. This paper has analysed on the basis of secondary data, such as government reports, ethnographic fieldwork, and policy documents. This study has recommended community-centric education for the conservation of sacred groves and empowering the tribal women with sustainable and inclusive development.

5. Objective of the Study:

1. To explore the role of adult education at the grassroots level.
2. To examine the relevance of sacred groves in the field of sustainable and inclusive development of the environment.
3. To explore the role of the Bhatra tribe in the field of nature conservation.
4. To identify the key threats to sacred groves in contemporary society.

6. Delimitation of the Study:

The present study was carried out in the Kosagumuda block of Nabarangpur district, Odisha.

7. Methodology:

7.1 Research Design

This research paper has adopted a qualitative analytical method for a holistic understanding of the relevance of adult education and sacred groves among the Bhatra tribe of Nabarangpur district. The researcher has briefly discussed the importance of adult education in the present scenario. It aims to investigate the importance of adult education in the context of sacred groves and the Bhatra tribe for an inclusive development of the society.

7.2 Population

Similarly, the population has been chosen from one village (*Jagatududa*) of Kodinga Panchayat under Kosagumuda block in Nabarangpur district, Odisha.

7.3 Sampling Technique

The present sampling technique is based on the simple random sampling technique for the holistic understanding of the relevance of Bhatra communities in the context of nature conservation.

7.4 Sample

The sample was chosen from the households of 20, elders of 15, community leaders of 10, and local priests of 2 out of 150.

7.5 Method of Data Collection

Data has been collected through the following sources-

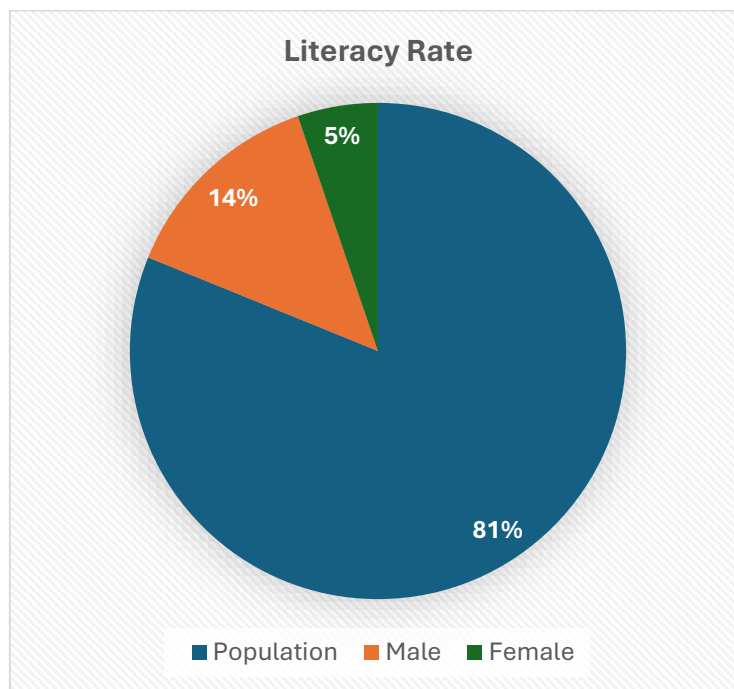
1. Primary Source
2. Secondary Source

7.5.1 Primary Source

Data has been collected through Focus group discussions, and focused on mapping of sacred groves.

7.5.2 Secondary Source

Similarly, annual record data, district gazetteers, and governmental record data/documents.



8. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The present paper has used both qualitative and thematic methods for a holistic understanding of the significance of adult education and sacred groves in the tribal contexts. The study was conducted on the Bhatra tribe of Nabarangpur district, Odisha. Data has been collected from one village of the Kodinga panchayat under the Kosagumunda block, Nabarangpur, Odisha. The study has investigated the importance of adult education and sacred groves. Equally, Adult education has been fostering and conserving biodiversity for harmonious lives. The present status of the Bhatra population is very small in Jagatuguda in comparison to another village of Kodinga Panchayat (GP). The total number of houses is 35, where approximately 150 people have been living in respective village. In the context, most of the Bhatra people are formally not educated due to the lack of awareness about education and financial problems. Similarly, parental support. The pie chart shows the current educational literacy rate of the Bhatra community. This information has been collected door to door. Similarly, this educational information has been collected from both young and adult respondents from the village. Equally, data has been collected from the householder, village leader, and local priest about the sacred groves. The nature worship is the core principle of the Bhatra community due to the cultural utility and religious significance relationship between nature. Nature is a way of life because people are strongly dependent on nature. They are continuously conserving and protecting nature, also indirectly supporting biodiversity through their own cultural practices. They have developed eco-spiritualism and a community-based management system in society through the sacred tradition, such as sacred groves. The sacred groves have been given high places in the Bhatra tribe due to the strong relationship between nature and the local deity. In the

Bhatra community, sacred groves are known by different names such as **Maa Kala Dharani** (*Mother goddess of the Universe*), **Matha Gudi** (*Temple of Goddess*), **Dharani Mata** (*Goddess of Cosmic World*), **Raja Chaunrai** (etc.). All these are the important holy places in the Bhatra community, and also others. They are very strongly committed to their own cultural heritage and religion, and the Bhatra community is conserving and promoting this unique tradition through community-based education, which has been transferring the knowledge through the oral method of teaching. Presently, there have been numerous positive impacts in the field of nature conservation and promotion for the holistic and inclusive development of the environment.



The following pictures are the holy places of the Bhatra community, which is known by a different name in various regions in Nabarangpur, as well as Koraput district and Bastar district of Chhattisgarh. It is the sacred places of the Bhatra tribe that have been protected and promoted by the Bhatra people for millennia due to their religious significance. These sacred groves are located on the north side of Jagatuguda village. Similarly, this place is associated with a local goddess, who is locally known as **Maa Kala Dharani** (*Mother goddess of the Universe*), who has been worshiped by the Bhatra community for their healthy lives and wishes for the welfare of mankind. Most of the oldest trees have been covered around the sacred places. The eldest tree is given in the following box-

SI. No	Name of the Tree	Botanic Name
1	Indian Butter Tree	Madhuca Longifolia
2	Jackfruit Tree	Artocarpus Heterophyllus
3	Plumeria	Frangipani Flower
4	Mengo Tree	Mangifera indica
5	Peepal Tree	Ficus Religiosa

6	Jujube Tree	Ziziphus Mauritiana
7	Bamboo	Bambusoideae
8	Tamarind Tree	Tamarindus indica

These are the oldest trees that have been protecting and promoting the Bhatra tribe for their religious and spiritual significance. It has been indirectly protecting and maintaining the ecosystem for the harmonious lives with the cosmic order. This place is a completely protected area for its cultural relevance, where the Bhatra community is never allowed to cut the tree without the community's permission because it is a holy place of the Bhatra community, and it has been maintained for thousands of years from generation to generation through the community-based education system.



Similarly, another sacred grove popularly known as **Mata Gudi** (*Temple of the Goddess*) is located in the western part of the village. It is an important religious place of the Bhatra community and also other communities of Kodinga Panchayat. This holy place has been protected by Bhatra, Paraja (*Jani*), and other communities of the three villages, such as Jagatuguda, Nuaguda, and Chendiguda. This place is strongly associated with the people due to the cultural significance, and it is a restricted area because this place has played an important role in the field of fostering and conserving nature through adult education for an inclusive and sustainable development of the environment. In this context, the local people have been protecting these holy places from ancestor to this day. It is a community-based knowledge sharing process where the local people transmit their own traditional knowledge through the oral method without any formal education, but this paper has found the knowledge gaps among the tribes. The present is aware of the educational and environmental significance.

9. Major Finding:

The present paper has found key relevant findings about the role of adult education in the field of conserving and promoting sacred groves. The studies have investigated the major challenges and advantages of sacred groves in the context of biodiversity/ environment. The present condition of sacred groves has been threatened due to the impact of modernization. The contemporary education system has neglected the educational significance of sacred groves due to a lack of understanding of their relevance of sacred groves. The literacy rate of the Bhatra tribe is very low in comparison to the other tribe because

most of the Bhatra people do not get formal education, due to various barriers such as economic condition, lack of educational awareness, parental support, language, age barrier, etc. 30% below adult and younger people are literate, and out of 100 percent. Similarly, there are no adequate educational facilities for adult learners due to the local authority and the government's poor attention to adult education. 14% of males are formally educated, and 5% of females are educated. Similarly, only a few adult learners have been participating in the field of protecting and promoting their holy places due to the negative attitude and lack of understanding about the relevance of sacred groves in the present context. Equally, other parts of the Bhatra people, who have not received any formal education, are actively conserving and promoting sacred groves by the community-based education method through oral and experiential teaching. This paper has found more than five sacred groves in different places in the study area.

10. Conclusion:

The condition of the environment is gradually jeopardized due to the quality of policy and the effective curriculum framework on the environment. Now, the situation has been out of control due to the rapid geo-climate change. This paper would be helpful for the policy developer and the government to break down the environmental problem. Similarly, these major finds will be helpful for the government to enhance adult education at the grassroots level for the inclusive and sustainable development of humankind as well as the environment. In this regard, the Bhatra people have been highly contributing to the field of conserving and promoting sacred groves for an inclusive and sustainable life.

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