



Informal Education Fostering Unspoken Learning Practices of Sacred Groves

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ABSTRACT

Informal education plays an important role in the field of conservation and promotion of biodiversity through several channels, such as observation, rituals, taboos, oral storytelling, folklore, religious activities, and ecological stewardship in society. Similarly, the sacred groves are a living heritage of the local communities that play an important role in the field of promotion of biodiversity in the landscape. It plays like an informal educational repository where unspoken learning practices continue to shape community life for the harmonious development of society. Equally, Unspoken learning generates moral values and critical thinking among pupils and individuals for meaningful lives in society. These learning approaches bring inclusivity in society, and it builds a strong, harmonious relationship between individuals and nature. In this study, the investigator utilized a qualitative research approach, and data were collected from secondary sources. Similarly, data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method for a critical understanding of the role of informal education and sacred groves. The findings of this study indicate how informal education fosters the indigenous unspoken learning activities across generations. The

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implications of this study are promoting and conserving indigenous ecological knowledge and cultural unspoken learning practices across generations for the inclusive development of society.

1. Introduction

Education shapes the future of the lifespan of biodiversity. It is a driving force that helps us to know about the responsibilities toward our homeland. A nation cannot achieve universal development without quality education. Quality education determines the future of nations, and it helps to make a sustainable future for living beings. Similarly, the forms of education have three types: formal, non-formal, and informal. Informal education plays an important role in the field of conservation and promotion of biodiversity through several channels in human society. Informal education happens through doing, interaction with nature, talking with peers, conversations with parents, community leaders, etc. It is a community-based education system that takes place throughout the community. In the tribal context, informal education is the basic channel of tribal communities. This education is popularly known as an experiential learning approach that has been rooted in the tribal community for thousands of years. This paper has illustrated the importance of informal education and sacred groves. Similarly, how unspoken learning practices shape the sacred groves of various cultural forms. The present condition of sacred groves has been jeopardized due to the high impact of modernization and a negative attitude among modern people. Most of the sacred sites has threaten, basically, in urban areas of the country. due to the lack of understanding among youth in the urban zones as compared to the rural parts of the country in India. In Odisha, approximately 2166 sacred sites are documented by various tribal communities (Rath and Ormsby, 2020). Indian Indigenous Knowledge System (IIKS) is directly associated with nature and some philosophical paradigms, such as perennialism and functionalism. Similarly, the belief system of indigenous people is deeply rooted in nature and the supreme deity. Indigenous people recognized and worshiped nature, and they conveyed the supramental concept through cultural and religious practices. Also, they maintain a harmonious relationship with nature and establish a sacred relationship with the ancestors. Their strong belief systems and traditions are passed down from one generation to another through informal education.

2. Theoretical Understanding of Informal Education and Unspoken Learning

Education is a dynamic process that happens from the mother's womb to the last moment of death. The famous naturalistic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote about education and nature. According to



him, “Nature, Human, and Physical environment are the sources of education”. Education is a more comprehensive process that cannot be defined with a single sentence, and it is a lifelong process that happens throughout one's life. Generally, we know that education has three agencies, that is, formal, non-formal, and the last one is informal education. This study has emphasized the role of informal education in the context of human society. In simple terms, “Informal education occurs outside of a formal education setting. This learning happens accidentally among the interactions of the individual and the environment in society. Similarly, it refers to “forms of learning that are intentional but are not institutionalised. They are less organised and structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, in the workplace, in the local community, and in daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed, or socially-directed basis” (UNESCO, 2010). Learning not only happen in verbal communication between the teacher and student in the school environment. It happens outside formal education through interaction, observation, imitation, and affection with nature and taboos. Is called unspoken learning. Unspoken learning creates moral values and critical thinking among pupils and individuals for meaningful lives in society. These learning approaches bring inclusivity in society, and it builds a strong, harmonious relationship between individuals and nature. Basically, unspoken learning is deprived in the current education settings due to the lack of space and lack of understanding. In tribal contexts, unspoken learning plays a crucial role in the indigenous community due to its socio-cultural significance. Similarly, it is a perennial process that has been practiced by tribal communities for decades. Unspoken learning happens during nature worship, cultivation, observation of natural phenomena, and interaction with human society. It helps promote equality, inclusivity, and sustainability in society. Thus, the contribution of indigenous works, voices, and literature is facing a threat due to the lack of space in mainstream education curricula and the lack of documentation and archives in written forms. This study has highlighted the importance of unspoken learning in education.

3. Sacred Groves as Sociocultural Learning Spaces

In the Indian context, sacred groves are integral to the country's biocultural landscape, embodying centuries-old traditions that intertwine ecological stewardship with religious devotion (Amrithesh, 2025). Sacred groves play a crucial role in the tribal community due to their religious and cultural significance. In communities where sacred groves exist, a system of religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices is often used to manage and sustain these sites (Aniah and Yelfaanibe, 2016). Similarly, sacred groves are the holy places of Indian society, particularly in tribal communities. These places play a significant role due to their cultural and religious aspects. It plays like an informal learning spaces where both tangible and intangible learning processes happen, and also, it is a way of learning where human beings learn from interaction with



nature. These learning skills shape human values, critical thinking, and build strong relations with nature, etc. Thus, it safeguards and transforms the ecological learning values from one generation to new generation.

4. Review of Literature

Aniah, P & Yelfaanibe, A. (2016). Sacred sites are recognized as one of the most important forms of culture-based conservation strategies for the protection of biodiversity and key ecosystems, especially in communities worldwide. This study examined the role of sacred groves in the field of sustainable environmental governance and practices. In this study, the investigators found eight sacred groves and shrines in the Bongo district. The paper has highlighted prior management experiences that have sustained and promoted sacred natural groves for millions of years, which offer a valuable lesson for improving present nature practices.

(Banda & Morgan, 2013). In this study, the investigators emphasized the role of folklore of the Chewa people of Zambia as an instrumental form of education. The Knowledge was imported (Deswal, 2024). In this study, the investigator considered that the sacred groves are a mini-biosphere of the region and are of immense ecological significance. Similarly, this study has suggested sacred sites as a conservation model for an excellent strategy for any regional planning for sustainable development, and it helps in harnessing ecological services and other benefits of the community. Also, this study has considered sacred groves to be important repositories of flora and faunal diversity that have been sustainably conserved by local communities (Eagle, A et al, 2021). This paper has critically understood the importance of informal education in the context of learning practices. Similarly, the investigator tries to define “Education happens inter-and intra-generationally around dinner tables, in community gatherings, in tribal ceremonies, in movement spaces, and beyond the confines of schooling spaces that center the lives and challenges, knowledges, stories and transformative actions for those involved”. The present study has criticized colonial education systems in terms of colonial logic and hegemonic norms (Supriatna, K et al, 2019). This study has investigated 3 social roles of folklore practiced in the field of character building (Mack, E et al, 2012). This present study emphasizes the effective practices for using the native way of knowing to strengthen informal science education (ISE) programs encompassing both the Western scientific method and culturally relevant traditions. Similarly, the ISE combination of science and land management has been growing in the materialistic community and the scientific education field for a few years (Upreti, B. M. et al, 2017). The study was conducted in 6 sacred groves located in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand state, India. This study comprises 17 religious plant species belonging to 14 families (13 Angiosperms and 1 Gymnosperm)



used by the local community around the sacred forests of Pithoragarh. The investigator has documented 53% of the space tree, where most of the species are followed by shrubs (29%) and herbs (18%).

5. Rationale of the Study

The present condition of the Earth is moving towards the end of biodiversity due to rapid geo-climate change, environmental degradation, urbanization, and high industrialization. Similarly, the contemporary education system has failed to achieve sustainable development completely due to the poor standardized curriculum pedagogy and the lack of quality human resources. Our education system focuses only on formal learning and is not active in the overall development of human beings. This contemporary education system has placed less importance on informal education for a long time. A nation cannot achieve full inclusivity in human society with an equal pattern of the education system. This paper has critically examined the role of informal education in the present scenario. Informal education plays a crucial role in shaping a sustainable future. It provides a holistic and multidisciplinary learning approach that brings holistic changes in human society. It promotes and contributes to numerous fields, such as creating a quality and productive education system for the holistic development of the nation. Informal education fosters traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and learning practices for the inclusive development of society.

6. Research Question

1. How do sacred groves contribute as informal learning practices for local communities?
2. What role do sacred groves play in sustaining traditional ecological knowledge and values?
3. How do community practices teach environmental and cultural values?

7. Statement of the Problem

A quality education determines the future of the nation. This study highlights the role of informal education in the field of conservation and the promotion of learning practices of sacred groves. We know that most of the tribal community has interacted with and transformed their learning practices through informal education for thousands of years. Learning practices happen throughout life in the community through nature worship and interaction with elders, community leaders, peer groups, etc. In the present context, indigenous learning practices significantly differ from one generation to another due to the impact of modern philosophical thoughts and the changing mindset of the indigenous youth. The principles of community and customary law are gradually being eroded in a materialistic society due to the lessening importance of the young mind.



To get answers to the questions raised above empirically, the following research problem is formulated:

“Informal Education Fostering Unspoken Learning Practices of Sacred Groves.”

8. Objective of the Study

1. To explore sacred groves as informal learning spaces.
2. To identify unspoken learning practices in the community.
3. To understand how values, norms and ecological awareness are transmitted.
4. To examine the educational significance of traditional practices.

9. Methodology

In this study, the investigators have adopted a qualitative approach to critically explore the role of informal education and learning practices of sacred groves. The researcher has utilized secondary data for a critical understanding of the role of informal education and learning practices of sacred groves.

9.1 Sources of Data

In this study, the investigator has collected information (data) from secondary sources such as Scopus, Odisha e-resources, Google Scholar, thesis and government websites etc.

10. Results

10.1 Unspoken Learning Practices within Sacred Groves

Learning by observation

Education is a multidimensional process that is never static within a particular boundary. A child learns from interaction with nature, peers, and observation of their environment. Similarly, in the tribal context, most of the tribal people are occupied with mastery in various fields such as agricultural activities, hunting, forest food collection, and shifting cultivation by observation and imitation in their surroundings. They are competent to fulfill their basic needs for their livelihood. These skills are achieved through observation in the natural setting.

Active participation in the ritual practices

The human child learns independently from the various ritual activities in their natural setting, and they actively participate in such types of activities in their community. They learn various skills and activities from cultural participation, and individuals recognize various norms, rules, and regulations of the society.



These types of learning activities promote critical thinking, enrich moral values, produce qualitative results, and cultivate good human beings.

Learning through taboos

The sacred sites are important places of local communities due to their religious significance, and it has been continuously protected by the communities through their customary practices. Similarly, most of the tribal communities convey that these places are culturally restricted due to their religious beliefs, and no one can easily enter without religious purposes. It is encompassed by the local community properly for the protection of these places. The individual or child learns from taboos and acquires knowledge regarding culture. Thus, the human child can recognize the relationship between nature and human society, and also, they can learn about the learning practices and protection of taboos.

Learning through oral tradition

Learning happens in various forms, such as verbal and nonverbal channels, in any place. In the tribal context, most of the tribal people learn and acquire knowledge from their tradition through oral traditions. They learn about the norms, roles, and regulations of society. Similarly, human beings acquire skills to adapt to their society. Thus, individuals learn about culture, religion, and principles from this tradition through oral communication.

Learning through ecological guardianship

It provides insightful learning that brings holistic changes in society, and it also gives several responsibilities to conserve biodiversity. It helps in the conservation and promotion of biodiversity for a sustainable future.

11. Discussion

In this study, the investigator has used a thematic analysis method for a critical understanding of the role of informal education and unspoken learning practices in sacred groves. The sacred groves are a living, informal educational and cultural heritage center where indigenous knowledge is produced across the generations. These sacred sites make it meaningful in contemporary society to see how education can exist outside of formal educational boundaries. Informal education plays a significant role in the field of conservation and promotion of biodiversity, and it shapes the future of indigenous knowledge practices for the maintenance of sacred traditions for the holistic development of human society.



Some of the important features are discussed, which are given below-

12. Conclusion

The sacred groves are a living heritage of the local communities. It is important in the field of education, especially in the conservation and promotion of biodiversity. It plays like an informal educational repository where unspoken learning practices continue to shape community life. It happens through observation, rituals, taboos, oral storytelling, folklore, ecclesiastical activities, and ecological stewardship, etc. Similarly, the knowledge is transmitted through the oral tradition in the tribal community for decades. It plays a pivotal role in nature conservation for a sustainable future. Informal education has been protecting and transmitting unspoken knowledge through sacred sites. Thus, it is protecting a living pedagogy of community, nature, and continuity.

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