

THE PRACTICE OF SACRED GROVE: A CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Introduction

A significant tradition of nature worship is that of dedicating and according to protection of patches of forests to ancestral spirits/ deities. These vegetation patches have been designated as Sacred Groves (SGs). Although there is a variation in the way these groves have been defined/described, most of the scholars emphasize the near natural nature of the vegetation and the preservation of vegetation and/or biodiversity through local taboos and sanctions that entail spiritual and ecological values since the sacred grove serves the purpose of biodiversity conservation by way of allowing more than one species of tree and at the same time strict prohibition of felling those trees. Thus, sacred groves are segments of landscape, containing vegetation and other forms of life and geographical features that are delimited and protected by human societies under the belief that to keep them in a relatively undisturbed state is an expression of important relationship to the divine or to nature. However, apart from the magico-religious and environmental significance, Sacred groves also play a key role behind the socio-political and economic

organization of the tribals through some ethnocentric customs.

Materials and methods

The present paper makes an attempt not only to explore the practice of Sacred Grove across the time and space but also to present an ethnographic account of the different roles of sacred grove found among a particular agriculture practicing tribe (the Santals) of the Purulia district of West Bengal, India.

Conclusion

Since the practice of sacred grove is a cultural heritage found across the time and space all over the world therefore, the present paper may be of use to get an understanding about the role of social cultural anthropologists behind the education of the common people about the importance of preservation and maintenance of sacred grove which is an important cultural heritage of India. The intrinsic social cultural value of the sacred grove in the life of the people, the change that is taking place due to modernization and spread of urbanization will give an important understanding of an age old heritage in the backdrop of social change.