



Creation of Universe And Sarna Mythology: An Educational Aspect

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Abstract:

The study explores the creation of the universe in Sarna mythology and its educational implications within indigenous communities of Eastern India, particularly among the Munda, Oraon, and Santal tribes. Sarna belief, centred on the sacred grove (Sarna Sthal or Jaherthan), portrays creation as a divine act by Thakur Jiu, Dharmesh, or Sing Bonga (the Supreme God), establishing moral and ecological harmony among humans, nature, and the sacred. Through myths, songs, and rituals, Sarna cosmology functions as an indigenous educational system transmitting values of cooperation, humility, and respect for the environment. The research adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, interpreting religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, and social dimensions of Sarna narratives as frameworks of value-based and ecological education. Findings reveal that Sarna mythology integrates religion with education by fostering moral discipline, environmental awareness, and communal harmony. It demonstrates that indigenous knowledge systems preserve ecological ethics and moral values through oral and experiential learning. The study concludes that Sarna mythology offers a holistic educational philosophy relevant to contemporary issues of sustainability, ethical living, and cultural preservation, providing timeless lessons for moral and environmental education in modern society.

Keywords: Sarna Mythology, Indigenous Education, Creation of the Universe, Dharmesh, Sing Bonga, Moral Values, Ecological Harmony, Tribal Religion, Spiritual Education, And Environmental Ethics.

Introduction:

Human civilisation has always sought to understand the origin of the universe, life, and consciousness. Every culture, ancient or modern, has constructed cosmological narratives to explain the mystery of creation. Among the indigenous communities of Eastern India, the *Sarna religion* presents a deeply ecological and spiritual worldview. Practised by the Munda, Oraon, and Santal tribes, Sarna worship is centred around the *Sarna Sthal* or *Jaherthan*, the sacred grove that symbolises the unity of earth, water, forest, and spirit.

Sarna mythology narrates that the Supreme Being, *Dharmesh* or *Sing Bonga*, created the world out of water and light. Land, trees, animals, and human beings emerged in a divine order, governed by moral harmony between nature and spirit. This cosmology is not only a myth of creation but also a philosophy of education, teaching reverence for life, balance, and responsibility toward the environment.

The present study explores the *creation of the universe and Sarna mythology* from an educational perspective. It aims to reveal how religious and spiritual ideas embedded in Sarna narratives transmit moral values, ecological wisdom, and social ethics, making Sarna mythology a living educational system within indigenous life.

The Objectives of the Study:

To study the creation of the universe in Sarna mythology and explore its educational significance in understanding indigenous belief systems and values.

Review of Research-Related Literature:

The exploration of Sarna mythology as an educational framework finds its roots in earlier studies of tribal cosmology and indigenous education.

Tripathi & Bhandari (2025) discuss the broader framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in India, including their transmission, value, and integration with formal systems. Though not limited to creation myth or Sarna cosmogony, the article is relevant because it shows *how indigenous systems teach ecological balance, spirituality, and ethics* through ethnomedicine, biodiversity practices, and oral tradition. They find that indigenous narratives about nature include cosmological elements (spirit, sacred lands, moral obligations) which underpin practices of conservation. In particular, they note that oral knowledge (stories, songs, rituals) plays a major role in teaching younger generations about relationships with land and healing practices. The educational aspect of these systems is emphasised as being holistic, interweaving spiritual, moral, and ecological dimensions.

Khan & Monika (2023) examine how adherents of the Sarna faith act as stewards of forests and natural fire regimes in Jharkhand and neighbouring regions. The study documents how religious rituals and mythic beliefs tied to Sarna reinforce norms that prevent forest degradation and wildfires. They show that sacred groves (*Sarnasthans*), tree festivals (like *Karam*), and the veneration of nature spirits help sustain ecological balance. These practices are not simply ritualistic but embed educational values transmitted through story, ritual participation, and communal norms that teach conservation, respect for biodiversity, and long-term environmental responsibility. The authors argue that preserving the Sarna religion is vital for local ecological resilience and that its educational dimension deserves acknowledgement in conservation policy. This paper supports the view that Sarna mythology plays a crucial pedagogical role in environmental ethics.

Marty (2023) explores how Sarna adherents are reconstructing their religion in response to modern political pressures, especially the push for constitutional recognition, identity assertion, and resisting cultural assimilation. The paper argues that myth, ritual, and cosmological beliefs are being reframed to align with modern values such as environmental protection and social justice while preserving ancestral cosmology. Through interviews and ethnographic observation in Chotanagpur, Marty highlights how younger generations are being taught through both traditional ritual practice and public discourse to understand their faith as something that contributes to societal well-being. Education here is informal but powerful: the religious narrative of creation, nature spirits, and sacred groves becomes symbols of identity and ethics. This article underscores how Sarna mythology is not static, but educationally alive, providing moral, spiritual, and ecological lessons in changing contexts.

An article in *IJRAR* (2023) gathered interviews with leaders and elders in the Munda community, exploring how they view Sarna religion as an “addi dharma” (original faith), distinct from Hinduism or Christianity. The nomenclature, festivals (Sarhul, Sohrai, Karma), sacred groves, and orality are explored. Importantly, the paper discusses creation myths such as “Creation of Earth and Human Beings,” “Creation of Birds,” etc.

It reveals that these myths are narrated by priests or heads of families during festivals and rites, serving to reinforce community identity, moral values, and respect for natural beings. The myths often illustrate human beings' dependence on and connectedness with nature. This entry supports the educational aspect of myth as teaching values implicitly through religious practice.

Kumari and Pandey (2023) explore the eco-cosmological perceptions of the Ho tribal community in Jharkhand, focusing on how their worldview integrates environment, cosmology, and ritual practice. The study reveals that for the Ho, cosmology is inseparable from ecology: sacred beings, celestial bodies, and natural phenomena are part of moral and spiritual teaching. Rituals associated with seasonal changes, planting, and harvest serve as educational moments for younger members of the community. Their narratives teach respect for forests, rivers, and animals, reinforcing moral obligation toward non-human beings. The authors argue that eco-cosmology functions informally but powerfully as value education, shaping community action toward conservation and harmony. This article supports the view that indigenous cosmologies are not archaic beliefs but active pedagogical systems.

Carrin (2022) examines how Santal identity and ecological ethics are intertwined with myth, ritual, and representation. She traces how creation myths, especially stories about *Maran Buru* (the creator) and nature spirits, continue to shape a moral relation with the natural world. The article shows how myths are embedded in oral and written forms and how sacred sites, groves, and rituals carry educational messages about care for the environment, equity, and justice. One example: the myth where women secretly learn healing from Maran Buru, and the symbolic message about knowledge, gender, and taboo (Carrin, 2022, pp. 1440-1445). This work underscores that indigenous cosmology not only informs identity but also acts as moral and ecological education.

Munda (2014) studies the Oraon tribe in Jharkhand and how their Sarna religion interacts with identity, culture, and community structure. The work explores how the religious mythologies, including creation beliefs, shape social norms, governance, and communal rituals. It also shows how the sacred grove (*Jaher*) functions as both a spiritual and social institution: a site for learning, ritual, and collective decision-making. In the processes of festival observance, storytelling, and priestly instruction, younger members absorb values of cooperation, respect for elders, interdependence with nature, and spiritual morality. Although the article does not focus solely on the educational dimension, it provides rich ethnographic data showing that orality and ritual performances are central to how moral and environmental knowledge are transmitted among the Oraons. It thus serves as a strong basis for understanding how creation myths in Sarna Christianity are lived and taught in practice.

Tripathy (2004-05) provides a detailed documentation of Santala (Santal) creation narratives from Mayurbhanj, Odisha, via interviews and field recordings. The study records the myth as told by Banamali Murmu, describing how the world began as desert and water, then life emerged: directions existed, though people did not, followed by divine creation via *Thakur Baba*. Key elements include earth creation, the emergence of water creatures, the earthworm fetching soil from the seabed, and the first human pair (Pilchu Haram & Pilchu Buri) emerging from eggs laid by birds. These accounts are orally transmitted, rich in symbolic imagery (e.g., water, mud, earthworm, eggs) and serve to educate listeners about origins, relationship with nature, and cosmological order. The narrative also underlines value: humans' dependence upon non-human creatures, respect for natural elements, and moral cosmology. This source is crucial for understanding how oral myth functions as a repository of both cosmology and education among Santals.

Hembrom (1996) compares the Santal creation myth with Biblical creation narratives. He analyses how the Santal myth, especially the version recorded by missionaries Skrefsrud and Bodding, depicts an origin involving water, the emergence of land, the role of earthworm or creature in bringing soil, and then the

creation of humans, often emerging from eggs or via indirect means. Hembrom argues that the Santali myths are not merely folklore but theological statements that provide moral and spiritual education: ideas of sin, divine intention, and human responsibility. The work shows that Santali cosmology teaches values like humility, stewardship of the land, respect for non-human beings, and communal interdependence. By offering reflections both anthropological and theological, Hembrom situates Santal myths in dialogues with more global creation beliefs, emphasising their educative import for spiritual formation and ecological ethics.

Bodding (1925) remains one of the earliest and most detailed ethnographic sources on Santal cosmology, folklore, and traditional knowledge. Through extensive fieldwork among Santal communities, he documented oral myths concerning the creation of the universe, the origin of human beings, and the moral order established by divine beings such as *Thakur Jiu* (Dharmesh) and *Marang Buru*. In the creation story, the cosmos begins as water and void, followed by the emergence of land, animals, and humans, a process mediated by divine will and natural agents. Bodding interprets these myths as both religious explanations and moral instructions, embedding lessons about humility, cooperation, and respect for the environment. His work demonstrates that Santal mythology functions as a cultural curriculum, transmitting health practices, ethical conduct, and cosmological understanding through oral tradition. The text remains foundational for scholars examining the educational and spiritual aspects of Santal and Sarna belief systems.

Methodology of the Study:

This study uses a qualitative and descriptive approach to understand the creation narrative and cosmological beliefs of Sarna religion, focusing on their religious, moral and educational meanings. It relies on both primary sources like oral stories and songs, and secondary sources such as books, journals and reports. Using documentary and thematic analysis, the study interprets how Sarna creation myths reflect indigenous education that promotes social, moral and ecological harmony. The research is limited to the Sarna tradition of the Santali, Munda and Oraon communities of Eastern India, emphasising their educational and cultural significance.

Findings:

Religious Aspect:

Religion forms the foundation of the Sarna worldview, shaping the moral and cultural fabric of tribal life. The Sarna faith, practised mainly by the Santal, Munda, and Oraon communities, centres on the worship of nature and the belief that divine power resides in all elements of the universe. The term *Sarna* refers to the sacred grove (*Sarna Sthal* or *Jaherthan*), where rituals are performed to honour the Supreme Being, *Dharmesh* or *Sing Bonga*, and the guardian spirits of nature such as *Marang Buru* (Great Mountain Spirit) and *Jaher Era* (Lady of the Grove).

According to Sarna mythology, the creation of the universe was a divine act that brought harmony among earth, sky, water, and life. The rituals performed at the sacred grove reaffirm this cosmic order, expressing gratitude to nature for sustenance and protection. The Sarna religion does not separate the divine from the natural; rather, it perceives nature as the living embodiment of God's spirit. Religious practices such as *Sohrai*, *Baha*, and *Karam* are not mere festivals but expressions of faith in the unity of creation. Through prayer, sacrifice, and song, the community seeks to maintain balance between humans, nature, and the divine. This religious understanding instils reverence, humility, and moral discipline, core principles that guide individual conduct and collective harmony. The religious aspect of Sarna mythology thus functions as a spiritual education system, teaching believers that the natural world is sacred, interconnected, and deserving

of respect. Worship becomes both an act of devotion and a form of learning, reinforcing the ethical relationship between humanity and the cosmos.

Spiritual Aspect:

The spiritual dimension of Sarna mythology extends beyond formal worship; it represents a philosophy of harmony and balance that connects the human spirit with the natural and divine realms. In Sarna's belief, spirituality is not confined to prayer or ritual; it is a way of living in communion with nature. Every tree, river, mountain, and creature is seen as a manifestation of divine energy. This worldview teaches that life is sacred and that human beings are caretakers, not owners, of the earth.

The Sarna spiritual philosophy is rooted in the concept of oneness, the idea that all forms of life originate from the same divine source. The myth of creation illustrates this unity: from the primordial waters arose the land, plants, animals, and humans, all interdependent and sustained by divine will. Through this spiritual understanding, Sarna followers learn the values of humility, compassion, and interconnectedness. Sarna spirituality is experiential rather than doctrinal. It is lived daily through reverence for the environment, cooperation within the community, and the observance of festivals that celebrate natural cycles. The performance of rituals such as *Sarhul* (worship of trees and new blossoms) and *Sohrai* (thanksgiving for harvest) symbolises gratitude toward the Creator and reinforces a spiritual consciousness grounded in the rhythm of nature. This spiritual aspect carries profound educational significance. It nurtures a moral relationship with the environment, promotes peace and respect among individuals, and guides the community toward ethical living. In the Sarna tradition, spirituality serves as a continuous form of education, teaching self-discipline, awareness, and balance between human needs and ecological well-being.

Value:

The value system embedded in Sarna mythology forms the ethical core of tribal life. Values are not abstract principles but lived realities, transmitted through myths, songs, rituals, and collective experiences. In Sarna belief, the universe is created and sustained by a moral order established by *Dharmesh* (the Supreme Creator). To live in harmony with this divine order, individuals must uphold virtues such as honesty, humility, cooperation, and respect for all living beings.

Sarna's values are deeply communitarian. Every person is taught that individual welfare is inseparable from the well-being of the group and the natural world. The sacred grove (*Sarna Sthal*) serves as both a place of worship and moral instruction, where elders remind younger members of their responsibilities toward the earth, ancestors, and society. This collective orientation nurtures social harmony and environmental responsibility. Festivals such as *Karam* (celebration of labour) and *Sohrai* (festival of gratitude for the harvest) teach the values of gratitude, equality, and cooperation. Through participation in these rituals, members learn to honour nature's generosity and recognise the importance of community unity. The educational value of Sarna mythology lies in its ability to shape moral character through lived experiences rather than formal instruction. Its oral and ritual traditions continually reinforce moral virtues, guiding people to live truthfully, share resources equitably, and maintain balance with nature. Thus, Sarna mythology serves as a timeless source of value-based education, nurturing integrity, empathy, and ecological consciousness in both personal and communal life.

Ethical Aspect:

Ethics in Sarna mythology arise from the belief that moral conduct sustains harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. The Sarna faith teaches that wrongdoing disrupts not only social order but also the balance of the cosmos. Every action, whether in relation to people, animals, or the environment, has moral

consequences. Thus, ethical living is not imposed through written law but guided by the inner awareness of duty (*dharma*) toward all forms of life.

According to Sarna creation mythology, when *Dharmesh* created the universe, He entrusted human beings with the responsibility of protecting and preserving the natural world. This divine command forms the foundation of Sarna ethics, emphasising truthfulness, justice, cooperation, and respect for the sanctity of nature. The ethical code also discourages exploitation, greed, and violence, teaching that moral integrity ensures community well-being and environmental stability. Rituals such as *Sohrai* and *Baha* embody ethical teachings through symbolic acts of sharing, purification, and thanksgiving. These practices remind participants that moral behaviour is essential to maintaining divine favour and ecological balance.

In educational terms, Sarna ethics function as moral pedagogy, an indigenous system through which younger generations learn right conduct, compassion, and collective responsibility. Ethical principles are not taught through formal instruction but internalised through participation in community life and rituals. Therefore, Sarna ethics represent a holistic educational model where morality, spirituality, and ecological awareness are intertwined in daily living.

Social Aspect:

The social dimension of Sarna mythology reflects the deep interconnection between religion, community life, and moral order. In Sarna society, the community is not merely a social structure but a sacred collective bound by shared beliefs, values, and responsibilities. Social harmony is viewed as a reflection of cosmic harmony. When people live truthfully and cooperatively, the universe remains balanced and prosperous.

Sarna mythology promotes collective living rather than individualism. Every ritual, festival, and ceremony reinforces the idea that human beings thrive through mutual support and cooperation. The sacred grove (*Sarna Sthal*) serves as both a spiritual and social centre where decisions are made, conflicts are resolved, and traditions are taught. The *Pahan* (village priest) and elders play vital roles in guiding community members according to customary laws and moral norms derived from mythological teachings. Festivals such as *Karam*, *Sarhul*, and *Sohrai* bring the entire community together, fostering unity, equality, and shared joy. These celebrations also act as informal educational spaces, where children and youth learn social etiquette, gender roles, cooperation, and respect for elders through observation and participation. The Sarna worldview emphasises social ethics rooted in equality and mutual respect. Every member, regardless of age or gender, has a defined role contributing to community well-being. Disrupting social harmony is considered not only a social offence but a moral and spiritual imbalance.

Hence, the social aspect of Sarna mythology functions as a practical form of education that nurtures collective identity, civic responsibility, and cultural continuity. It teaches that a harmonious society depends on truth, cooperation, and reverence for both human and natural life.

Conclusion:

The study of the creation of the universe in Sarna mythology reveals that this indigenous belief system is a comprehensive philosophy of life and education. It presents an integrated worldview in which religion, spirituality, morality, and social responsibility coexist in harmony. The Sarna faith teaches that the entire universe, earth, sky, water, and all living beings are sacred, sustained by divine balance and moral order. Religiously, Sarna mythology emphasises devotion through nature worship and thanksgiving rituals that link humanity with the divine. Spiritually, it promotes harmony, humility, and reverence for all forms of life, guiding individuals toward inner peace and ecological awareness. The moral and ethical aspects teach truth, justice, and cooperation as the foundations of right living. Socially, Sarna practices unite communities

through shared festivals and collective responsibilities, creating a living form of education rooted in experience and participation. Thus, Sarna mythology functions as an indigenous educational system, transmitting values, environmental consciousness, and moral discipline across generations through oral traditions and rituals. In a world facing environmental and ethical challenges, the Sarna worldview offers timeless lessons for sustainable and value-based education. It reminds us that true learning lies not in possession of knowledge alone, but in living harmoniously with nature, humanity, and the divine.

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