

## Conservation of Sacred Grooves in India

Sacred groves, sometimes known as sacred woodlands, are tree groves that hold unique religious significance in a particular culture. Sacred groves can be found in many cultures around the world. They were prominent in Celtic, Estonian, Baltic, Germanic, ancient Greek, Near Eastern, Roman, and Slavic polytheism's mythical landscapes and cult practises, as well as in India, Japan, and West Africa.

Due to ever-increasing human populations, pollution, and biomass removal, India's sacred groves are gradually being transformed; comprehensive conservation is required to sustain their functional values.

### What are Sacred Grooves?

Sacred groves in India are forest remnants of various sizes that are communally conserved and have a profound religious significance for the community that protects them. In most cases, hunting and logging are tightly restricted within these areas. Other types of forest use, such as honey harvest and deadwood collecting, are occasionally permitted on a long-term basis. To safeguard these groves, NGOs collaborate with local residents. Members of the community take turns protecting the grove in the past, and in some cases still so now. The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act of 2002 established the protected area category community reserves, which provides government protection to community-owned areas, which could include holy groves.

### References to the past

Temples, monasteries, shrines, pilgrimage destinations, and burial grounds are all common locations for holy woods in India. Sacred groves have been mentioned in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist scriptures throughout history, ranging from sacred tree groves in Hinduism to sacred deer parks in Buddhism. Sacred groves is a term that can be used to refer to any natural area that is conserved for religious reasons. Other historical references to sacred groves may be found in ancient treatises like Vrukshayurveda and classics like Kalidasa's Vikramuurvashiiya. Green spots, such as the Nakshatravana grove, are becoming increasingly popular.

### Activities in Sacred Grooves are regulated

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### Sacred Grooves in India

Around 14,000 sacred groves have been documented across India, serving as reservoirs for uncommon fauna and, more commonly, unusual flora, in both rural and urban environments. The overall number of sacred groves could be as high as 100,000, according to experts. Urbanization and resource overexploitation are two threats to the groves. While many of the groves are revered as the homes of Hindu gods, a few of them have recently been partially destroyed to make way for shrines and temples. In Indian-origin religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, sacred groves are destinations of yatra (pilgrimage).

In different states, they are known by different names:

Sarna in Bihar

Dev Van in Himachal Pradesh.

Karnataka's Devarakadu

Kerala's Kavu

Madhya Pradesh's Dev

Maharashtra's Devarahati or Devarai

In Maharashtra, Lai Umang

In Meghalaya, Law Kyntang or Asong Khosi

In Rajasthan, Oran.

In Tamil Nadu, this is known as Kovil Kadu or Sarpa Kavu.

### The various types of holy woodlands

Tapovan, Mahavan, and Sreevan are three types of forests according to Hindu legend. Tapovan woodlands are inhabited by saints and rishis and are associated with penance (Tapas). Mahavan is a word that refers to large natural woods. Because ordinary humans are not permitted to enter these forests, Tapovan and



Mahavan are considered Rakshas ("sanctuaries") for flora and fauna. Sreevan is made up of lush forests and groves, and its name means "forests of the goddess of wealth." People would take dry wood, leaves, forest produce, and a limited amount of timber from the former, though the natural ecology would not be disturbed needlessly. Groves were seen as woodland places from which harvesting could be carried out.

## **Sacred groves are used in a variety of ways**

### **Uses in the past**

Sacred groves served as a reservoir for numerous Ayurvedic remedies, which was one of the most important ancient functions of sacred groves. Other applications included providing a source of replenishable resources such as fruits and honey. Hunting or chopping wood was, however, forbidden in most sacred groves. As in Rajasthan, the plant cover helps to prevent desertification by reducing soil erosion. The groves are frequently paired with ponds and streams, and they help local people meet their water needs. They can also assist in replenishing aquifers.

### **Uses in the modern world**

Sacred groves have become biodiversity hotspots in contemporary times, as many species seek sanctuary there owing to habitat degradation and hunting. Many plant and animal species that have become extinct in nearby places can be found in sacred groves. As a result, they have a lot of genetic diversity. Sacred groves in urban environments also serve as the city's "lungs," giving much-needed vegetative cover.

### **The dangers that such grooves face**

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### **What awaits us?**

The groves provide a lot of research value for rare, endangered, and threatened plant species in situ conservation.



It is past time to raise public awareness about the importance of these sacred groves, to prohibit development operations, and to prohibit the felling of trees or the removal of any other vegetation.

Only by creating a separate law for the conservation and management of sacred groves would this be achievable.

Because management methods and other rituals differ by state, the concerned state governments may enact legislation that is appropriate for the state.

In the face of global warming and climate change, the goal should be to safeguard unique, endangered, and threatened plant species.

