



SACRED GROVES OF INDIA

**LEGENDARY IAS MENTOR CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY,
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"Nitin Chakravarthy Sir's mentorship pushed me to excel. His constructive feedback, practical solutions, and unwavering commitment helped me improve daily. A true mentor who

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State / UT	NAMES OF SACRED GROVES
Himachal Pradesh	Dev Van
Uttarakhand	Bugyal & Dev Van
Rajasthan	Vanis, Kenkris, Orans, Shamlat Dehs & Devbanis
Maharashtra	Devrai, Devrathi & Devgudi
Karnataka	Devarabana, Devarakadu, Hulidevarakadu, Nagabana, Bhutappanbana, Jataka-ppanbana & Chowdibana
Kerala	Kavu & Sarpa Kavu
Tamil Nadu	Kovilkadu & Sthalavriksha
Andhra Pradesh	Pavitrashetralu
Chhattisgarh	Sarana, Jahera, Matagudi, Devgudi & Gaondevi
Odisha	Jahera & Thakuramma
Jharkhand	Sarana or Jaherthan
West Bengal	Garamthan, Shitalathan, Harithan, Sabitrithan, Santalburithan & Jahera
Manipur	Gamkhap, Mauhak & Umanglai
Mizoram	Mawmund
Assam	Than & Madaico
Meghalaya	Law Kyntang & Law Lyngdoh
Arunachal Pradesh	Gumpa Forest
Sikkim	Gumpa Forest

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SACRED GROVES IN INDIA

Sacred groves are patches of forest or natural vegetation preserved by local communities due to religious and cultural beliefs. These are some of the oldest forms of conservation practices in India. The following thematic analysis highlights their multi-dimensional significance.

1. Ecological Significance

- **Biodiversity Hotspots:** Sacred groves host endemic, rare, and medicinal species of flora and fauna, serving as micro-reserves.
 - ♦ *Example:* The Kavus in Kerala are home to endemic species like the Travancore flying squirrel and rare orchids.
- **Watershed Management:** They protect water bodies, aid in groundwater recharge, and prevent soil erosion.
 - ♦ *Example:* Devrais in Maharashtra are often associated with perennial springs that supply water to nearby villages.
- **Climate Regulation:** Function as carbon sinks, contributing to climate mitigation at the micro-level.
 - ♦ *Example:* The sacred groves of Meghalaya's Law Kyntang help stabilize local climate and reduce temperature fluctuations.
- **Ecological Corridors:** In fragmented landscapes, they serve as green corridors, supporting species migration.
 - ♦ *Example:* Sacred groves in the Western Ghats help maintain connectivity between fragmented forest patches.

2. Cultural and Religious Significance

- **Ritual Spaces:** Sites for local festivals, ancestor worship, and rituals.
 - ♦ *Example:* In Tamil Nadu, Sthalavriksha (temple trees) are integral to temple rituals and processions.
- **Taboo and Protection:** Cultural taboos often restrict logging and hunting, indirectly ensuring conservation.
 - ♦ *Example:* In Karnataka, the Hulidevarakadu groves are protected due to the belief that disturbing them invites divine wrath.
- **Mythology and Oral Traditions:** Embody local myths, legends, and folklore that reinforce conservation ethics.
 - ♦ *Example:* The Sarna groves in Jharkhand are tied to tribal cosmology and creation myths.

3. Socio-Economic Significance

- **Livelihood Support:** Source of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) like honey, fruits, and herbs.

- ◆ *Example:* Tribal communities in Odisha collect medicinal herbs and tubers from sacred groves for both income and traditional healing.
- **Community Ownership:** Often managed by village councils or clans, fostering collective responsibility.
 - ◆ *Example:* The Mawphlang Sacred Grove in Meghalaya is maintained by the Lyngdoh clan under customary law.
- **Eco-Tourism Potential:** Can be promoted for sustainable tourism, generating local employment.
 - ◆ *Example:* The sacred groves of Wayanad in Kerala attract eco-tourists interested in indigenous culture and biodiversity.

4. Administrative and Policy Dimensions

- **Lack of Legal Protection:** Many groves lack formal legal status, making them vulnerable to encroachment.
 - ◆ *Example:* Urban expansion in Goa has led to the destruction of several undocumented sacred groves.
- **Role in Biodiversity Acts:** Recognized under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.
 - ◆ *Example:* Nallur Tamarind Grove in Tamil Nadu was declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site.
- **Integration with Forest Governance:** Can be integrated into Joint Forest Management (JFM) and eco-development programmes.
 - ◆ *Example:* In Madhya Pradesh, sacred groves are included in village micro-plans under JFM schemes.
- **Challenges:** Urbanization, changing religious beliefs, and weak institutional support are threats.
 - ◆ *Example:* In urban areas of Maharashtra, loss of traditional faith has led to degradation of Devrais.

5. Regional Diversity and Local Names

- Different states have localized names and customs (e.g., *Devrai* in Maharashtra, *Sarna* in Jharkhand, *Kavu* in Kerala), reflecting India's cultural pluralism.
 - ◆ *Example:* The term "Umanglai" is unique to Manipur's sacred groves, emphasizing their cultural identity.
- Regional ecological adaptations are seen in the vegetation protected (e.g., sacred groves in Western Ghats differ from those in NE India).
 - ◆ *Example:* Arunachal Pradesh's Gumpa forests include temperate and alpine flora suited to Himalayan conditions.

6. Legal, Policy and Government Initiatives

- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Sacred groves can be declared as Biodiversity Heritage Sites under this act, promoting conservation through state biodiversity boards.
 - ♦ *Example:* The Oorani sacred grove in Tamil Nadu was documented under this act.
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Though not directly referencing sacred groves, certain protected areas include sacred sites within their jurisdiction.
 - ♦ *Example:* Sacred groves within Periyar Tiger Reserve are afforded indirect protection.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** Empowers forest-dwelling communities with rights over traditionally conserved lands, including sacred groves.
 - ♦ *Example:* The Dongria Kondh in Odisha have gained community rights over sacred sites.
- **National Mission for a Green India** (under the National Action Plan on Climate Change): Supports community-based forest conservation, including sacred groves.
 - ♦ *Example:* Community afforestation projects in Andhra Pradesh under this mission have revitalized degraded sacred groves.
- **State Government Programs:** Several states like Kerala, Maharashtra, and Meghalaya have specific schemes or documentation projects to record and conserve sacred groves.
 - ♦ *Example:* Kerala Biodiversity Board has inventoried over 2000 sacred groves.
- **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs):** Mandated under the Biological Diversity Act, these registers include local knowledge and practices related to sacred groves.
 - ♦ *Example:* PBRs in Karnataka's Uttara Kannada district document sacred groves and their traditional management systems.
- **Eco-sensitive Zone Notifications:** In some cases, sacred groves near protected areas are included in ESZs, offering indirect protection.
 - ♦ *Example:* Sacred groves around Silent Valley National Park in Kerala fall within its eco-sensitive zone.

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