

# **SACRED PLANTS OF INDIA: A BRIEF REVIEW**



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**DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BURDWAN**

# CERTIFICATE

*Certified that the dissertation entitled “Sacred Plants of India: A Brief Review” has been carried out entirely by Sanjita Das, student of Sem VI, B.Sc (Gen) in the Department of Botany, M.U.C. Women’s College, Burdwan University, Purba Bardhaman under my supervision. It is further certified that the candidate has fulfilled all the conditions necessary for the partial fulfilment of her B.Sc. (Gen) degree achievement under this University and this work has not been submitted anywhere for any other degree to the best of my knowledge*

**Place: Purba Bardhaman**

**Date: 19. 07.2021**

*Irani Biswas*

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**(Dr. Irani Biswas)**

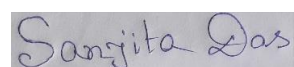
# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Place: Purba Bardhaman

Date: 19.07.2021



**(Sanjita Das)**

Sem-VI (Gen)

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## INTRODUCTION

India is well known for worship of nature, and this plays an integral role in the lives of many communities. Religion and cultural practices are closely linked with forests, and this helps in conservation. Some patches of forest are left untouched because of social fencing by local people. These types of forest are regarded as “sacred groves”. India has an abundance of sacred groves, which are known by several names. The conservation practices used in the groves vary in different states according to their nature, distribution and local beliefs.

From time immemorial, in India, as well as in parts of Asia and Africa, care and respect for nature has been influenced by religious belief and indigenous practices. Our country is well known for nature’s worship, which plays an integral role in the lives of many communities. Every aspect of religious and cultural practices is deeply rooted with the forest that helps in nature conservation. It also acts as the subject of a great deal of myth, legend and lore. Still, today there exist some tribes in the remote hilly areas, whose livelihood were fully dependent on forest resources and their traditional practices conserved a large number of wild plant species for various reasons e.g. food, fiber, shelter or medicine.

Unfortunately, various developmental activities and changes in people’s attitude in terms of beliefs in religious and indigenous practices bring heedless actions towards forest. This leads to degradation of forest at an alarming rate and shrinking of biodiversity. However, there are some patches of forest, which are left untouched because of social fencing by local people. These types of forest bring the concept of “sacred groves”. Generally, sacred groves are a tract of virgin forest, harbouring rich biodiversity and protected traditionally by the local communities as a whole. The area of sacred groves ranges from few square meters to several hectares. Till today, there exist some fascinating examples of forest patches harbouring native vegetation, which has been intertwined with the various aspects of indigenous, cultural and religious practices along with the associated taboos. The inextricable link between culture and biodiversity has been found in sacred groves.

India is having abundance of sacred groves and known by several names such as *kavu* in Kerala, *devaravana* or *devarakadu* etc. in Karnataka, *sarana* or *jaherthan* in Jharkhand, *dev van* in Himachal Pradesh, *devrai* or *devgudi* in Maharashtra, *ki law lyngdoh* or *ki law kyntang* etc. in Meghalaya, *vanis* or *kenkris* etc in Rajasthan, *kovilkadu* in Tamil Nadu, and *umanglai* in Manipur. The way of conservation varies in different states according to their nature, distribution and local beliefs.

Sacred groves also exist in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Orissa, Gujarat, Bihar, etc. It is also found that in some state, sacred groves are known by different names within the state.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is developed as a short review on literature surveys based on sacred groves present in different parts of India through enlistment of those plants marked as sacred from religious views along with their ecological and mythological importance. The common materials and methods adopted by different authors while undergoing this survey work is mentioned below in a nut shell:

Preliminary survey usually carried out to record the plant diversity of sacred groves were located along the river basin or any other regions considered as sacred. The plant specimens were collected and identified based on the plant key characters. The collected specimens were preserved as herbarium in the laboratory. The floristic diversity and the importance of the sacred groves have been recorded. Similarly the destruction factors also visually observed and recorded.

In addition, the traditional healers were interviewed using semistructure, questionnaires and open-ended conversations. An interview was conducted with five local healers in local languages and then translated in to English. Plants recorded in the results were mentioned by at least two traditional healers as treating the same disease in order to confirm its use. Finally, data were compiled for further analysis.

## ORIGIN AND LOCATION OF SACRED PLANTS

Sacred groves are scattered all over the country, and are referred to by different names in different parts of India. Sacred groves occur in a variety of places – from scrub forests in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan maintained by the Bishnois, to rain forests in the Western Ghats of Kerala. Himachal Pradesh in the north and Kerala in the south are specifically known for their large numbers of sacred groves. The Gurjar people of Rajasthan have a unique practice of neem (*Azadirachta indica*) planting and worshipping as abode of God Devnarayan. Thus, a Gurjar settlement appears like a human-inhabited sacred grove. Similarly Mangar Bani, last surviving natural forest of Delhi is protected by Gurjars of nearby area.

14,000 sacred groves have been reported from all over India, which act as reservoirs of rare fauna, and more often rare flora, amid rural and even urban settings. Experts believe that the total number of sacred groves could be as high as 100,000.

It is estimated that around 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of unexploited land is inside sacred groves. Some of the more famous groves are the *kavus* of Kerala, which are located in the Western Ghats and have enormous biodiversity; and the *law kyntangs* of Meghalaya – sacred groves associated with every village (two large groves being in Mawphlang and Mausmai) to appease the forest spirit.

Among the largest sacred groves of India are the ones in Hariyali, near Gauchar in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand, and the Deodar grove in Shipin near Simla in Himachal Pradesh

**TABLE 1. A LIST OF REPORTED NUMBER OF SACRED TREES STATEWISE FOUND IN INDIA**  
 (CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF SACRED GROVES IN INDIA BY Kailash C. Malhotra ,  
 Sudipto Chatterjee , Sanjeev Srivastava , JUNE , 2001)

STATE	NO. OF TREES
Andhra Pradesh	750
Arunachal Pradesh	58
Assam	40
Chhattisgarh	600
Gujarat	29
Haryana	248
Himachal Pradesh	5000
Jharkhand	21
Karnataka	1424
Kerala	2000
Maharashtra	1600
Manipur	365
Meghalaya	79
Orissa	322
Rajasthan	9
Sikkim	56
Tamil Nadu	448
Uttaranchal	1
West Bengal	670



## RELIGIOUS VALUES OF SACRED PLANTS

Plants are truly a gift by god to the mankind, human beings recognized their dependence on plants at the very beginning of their life on the planet. Plants are often connected with the culture since ancient times, trees do not just have religious value but also various other values associated with them. The man's physical environment is dominated by the trees and plants, as per the Indian ideologies, plants are living beings comprise of 5 primary matters known as pancha dhatu which are Water, Earth, Fire, Akasha and Air. Plants and trees are considered dear to the gods and planting plants is considered as a ritual of worship, according to the mythologies, planting trees can help people lead better life with the grace of Devtas.

Ancient civilizations were able to understand the ecologic balance better and they were good executors, in context to ancient Indian traditions plants and tree were deeply integrated with the religion as its proclaimed "By planting any kind of trees, useful for fruits and flowers, a person gets a reward of thousand cows adorned with jewels, while cutting a green tree was an unforgiving offense." Worshiping and donating cows are very significant rituals, donating a cow has to be done at least once in a life time. These rituals are still in practice, specifically in country side families. All the religions of India worship the plants in one way or the other. Let us describe how different religions promote the plantation of trees and plants:

Buddhism has very close relation with the plants, as per the Buddhist scriptures, nature creates as well as preserves life, it is the duty of people to preserve plants considering them as living being. A Buddhist monk never cuts down a tree, as the trees have life in them and they believe that it is an abode of the deity.

The Jains consider plants to be important parts of the human existence, all 24 Jain tirthankaras meditated under the trees to attain enlightenment, they have a perception of livingness for the whole universe, plants and trees possess same soul as human beings.

Vrukshayurveda, the science of plant life and also a 10th century treatise of that title on the subject ascribed to Surapala, dealt with various species of trees and their growth. Verses 9-23 from this text indicate how mystical beliefs and conservation of ecology was inter-connected.

A person is honored in Vaikuntha for as many thousand years as the days he resides in a house where tulasi is grown.

And if one properly grows bilva, which pleases Lord Siva, in his family, the goddess of riches resides permanently passes on to the sons and grandsons

He who plants even a single asvattha, wherever it may be, as per the prescribed mode, goes to the abode of Hari.

He who has planted dhatri has performed several sacrifices. He has donated the earth. He would be considered a celebrate forever.

He who plant a couple of banyan trees as per the prescribed mode would go to the abode of Siva and many heavenly nymphs will attend upon him.

After planting neem trees a person well-versed in dharma attains the abode of Sun. Indeed! He resides there for a long period.

By planting four plaksa trees a person doubtlessly obtains the fruits of Rajasuya sacrifice.

He who plants five or six mango trees attains the abode of Garuda and lives happily forever like gods.

One should plant seven palasa trees or even one. One attains the abode of Brahma and enjoys the company of gods by doing so.

He who himself plants eight udumbara trees or even prompts someone to plant them, rejoices in the lunar world

He who has planted madhuka has propitiated Parvati, has become free from diseases, and has worshipped all deities.

If one plants ksirini, dadimi, rambha, priyala, and panasa, one experiences no affliction for seven births.

He who has knowingly or unknowingly planted ambu is respected as a recluse even while staying in the house.

By planting all kinds of other trees, useful for fruits and flowers, a person gets a reward of thousand cows adorned with jewels.

By planting one asvattha, one picumanda, one nyagrodha, ten tamarind trees, the group of three, viz., kapittha, bilva, and amalaka, and five mango trees, one never visits hell.

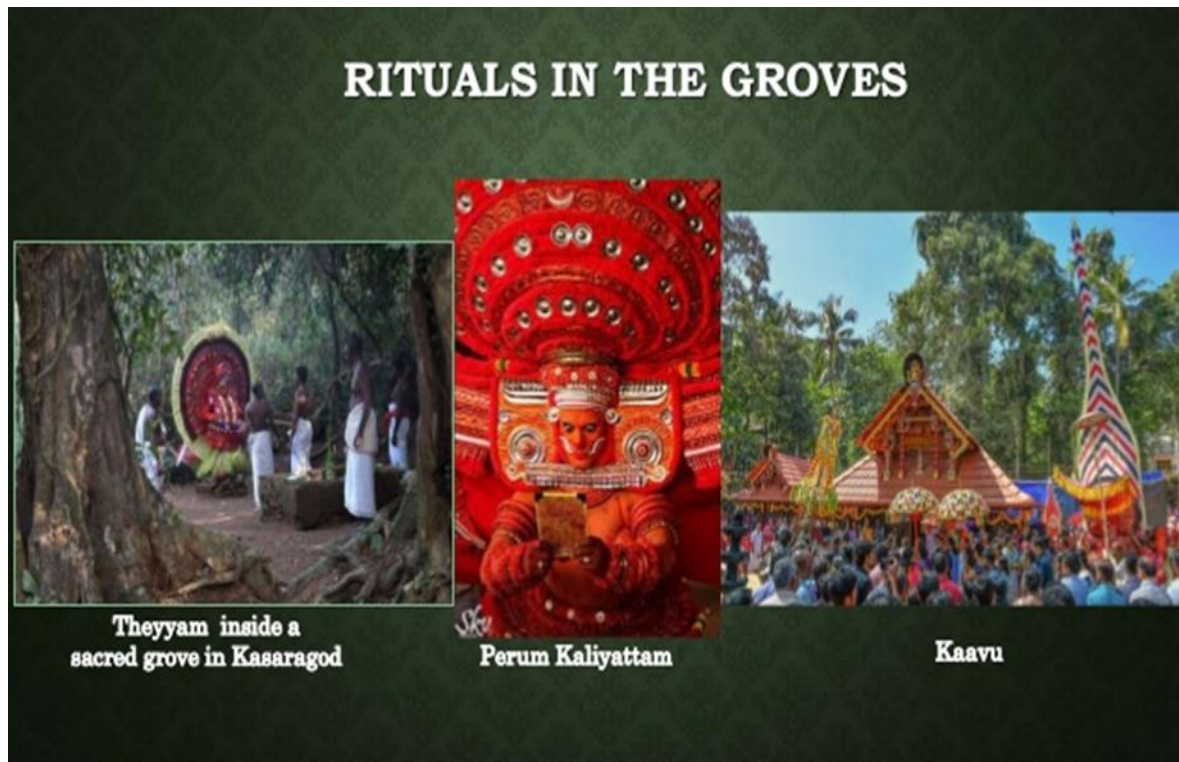
The importance that Indians give to the plants and trees can be implied as there are various forest fragments which are protected by the people. There are various NGOs in India which work to protect the forests and groves. In fact, people of the community take turns to protect the trees. All this clearly explains the place of trees in the religions of India.

## BELIEF, TABOOS, RITUALS AND FOLKLORE ASSOCIATED WITH SACRED PLANTS

The taboos, rituals and beliefs supplemented with mystic folk tales associated with the groves have been the prime reason in preserving the sacred groves in pristine condition. Trees such as banyan, peepal, neem and tamarind are considered to be the abode of sprits which are to be propitiated by tying toy cradles when desiring a child, generally a male child or at the birth of an infant. Similarly, people tie a black cloth with salt in it to ward off the evil eye. The yellow or white or some times red cloth and bangles are tied in fulfilment of vow. In certain sacred groves, people fulfill their vow by tonsuring as a mark of respect to the deity in the sacred grove temples. In certain sacred groves, people place granite statues of snake gods in order to fulfill their vows. Offering of Terrakotta horses of various sizes are kept lying in a row at one corner of the sacred grove is common in many places to have a good harvest. The people have the belief that any damage to the sacred grove or felling a tree from the sacred grove may bring the wrath of local deity by causing diseases and failure of agricultural crops. Therefore, wilfully many a times they do not even take a dead wood out of the sacred groves and also do not harm the fauna residing in it. Ayyanar, is worshipped daily and also offered special prayer on full moon and new moon days. An annual ritual, a weeklong celebration is usually held during the post harvest season i.e. March-April. In some sacred groves the local community celebrates the annual festival in July- August. In short, the festival is for the benefit and prosperity of the whole village and is dedicated to local residing deities. Every family of the locality comes to the temple for ritual community cooking of rice. They cook food in certain sacred groves by the dead wood collected from the sacred grove itself. The preparations are offered to the goddess and other deities and the food is distributed to all those who take part in the festival. During the festival, the villagers organize bull taming, a favourite rural sport and a form of folk art performed at night, in which folk tales and the epics are enacted. On the last day of the festival, animals such as fowl and goat are sacrificed to the goddess. Nagara kavus are highly respected by the believers even taking a dry twig is forbidden, any violation of the taboo, people say, will incur the wrath of snake gods.. In most of the Nagara kavus, daily pujas are performed and special prayers are offered during full moon days.

**TABLE 2. SACRED TREES ASSOCIATED FESTIVALS (SACRED PLANTS FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN ERA : TRADITIONAL WORSHIPPING TOWARDS PLANTS CONSERVATION BY Deepti Pandey , Vimal Chandra Pandey , 27 February , 2016)**

NAME	FESTIVALS	MONTH
Neem	Sheetala Ashtami	March
Neem	Nimb Saptami	April
Banyan	Vat Savitri	May - June
Peepal	Somvari Amavasya	In All Amavasya
Tulsi	Tulsi Vivah	Oct. - Nov.
Amla	Amla / Akshay Navmi	Oct. – Nov.
Asoka	Asoka Pratipada	1 <sup>st</sup> day of chaitra shukla



## SOME PHOTOGRAPHS OF SACRED PLANTS OF SACRED PLANTS



Local name – PEEPAL

Scientific name – *Ficus religiosa*

Family – Moraceae



Local name –BANYAN

Scientific name – *Ficus benghalensis*

Family -- Moraceae



Local name – ASHOKA

Scientific name – *Saraca asoca*

Family -- Fabaceae



Local name – KADAMB

Scientific name – *Neolamarckia cadamba*

Family – Rubiaceae



Local name – NEEM

Scientific name – *Azadirachta indica*

Family – Meliaceae



Local name – TULSI

Scientific name – *Ocimum sanctum* Linn

Family – Lamiaceae



Local name – COCONUT

Scientific name – *Cocos nucifera*

Family – Arecaceae



Local name – BANANA

Scientific name – *Musa*

Family -- Musaceae



Local name – AAM

Scientific name – *Mangifera indica*

Family -- Anacardiaceae



Local name – AMLA

Scientific name – *Phyllanthus emblica*

Family -- Phyllanthaceae



Local name – SANDELWOOD

Scientific name – *Santalum album*

Family -- Santalaceae





Local name – SUPARI

Scientific name – *Areca catechu*

Family -- Arecaceae



Local name – BAEL

Scientific name – *Aegle marmelos*

Family -- Rutaceae



Local name – RICE

Scientific name – *Oryza sativa*

Family – Poacea



ANCIENT MONOLITHS IN MAWPHLANG SACRED GROVE , INDIA



A SACRED HINDU GROVE NEAR CHANDOD ON THE BANKS OF THE NARMADA RIVER. (DRAWN BY JAMES FORBES , 1782)

## SOME SACRED PLANTS WITH THEIR SCIENTIFIC NAME, COMMON NAME AND MYTHOLOGICAL USE

**TABLE 3.**

Sl. No.	NAME OF THE PLANTS	LOCAL NAMES	MYTHOLOGICAL USE
1.	<i>Acacia catechu</i>	Khoyer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Khadira wood is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists.</li> <li>• There is a mention of the plant in the Bhagavata Purana and other ancient Indian texts. It also finds a mention in the Buddhists Jataka stories.</li> <li>• The inflorescence is essential in marriage ceremonies.</li> </ul>
2.	<i>Acacia suma</i>	Sami	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agni Devatta concealed himself in the Sami wood, the tree became sacred.</li> <li>• Sami is a very inflammable wood and is therefore, used in all sacred rites where the holy fire Homa is kindled.</li> <li>• Sami is also considered as the goddess-incarnate.</li> </ul>
3.	<i>Abrus precatorius</i> L.	Kunch (Indian Liquorice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bright red-and-black bead-like seeds are attractive to children right from the days of mythology. These beads have special significance to the Gaudiyassect: followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Krishna worship. The child Krishna is inseperable from his favouritegunjaamaala, and it was said to represent Radha. Followers of Chaitanya worship Krishna in a small stone representing Mount Govardhan, with a gunja mala around it representing Radharani.</li> </ul>
4.	<i>Borassus flabellifer</i>	Tal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in famous 'Tal Nabami Brata',</li> <li>• It is also used in 'Janmasthami'.</li> </ul>
5.	<i>Bambusa sp.</i>	Vansh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The death body must be transported in green bamboo up to the cremate places or burning ghat where it has to be burned with fuel wood</li> </ul>
6.	<i>Calotropis procera</i>	Akando	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its leaves are used in sacrificed rites.</li> <li>• The flowers are used in the worship of Mahadev and Hanuman. On every Saturday leaves are made into garland and offered to Maruti (Hanuman).</li> <li>• The twigs are also employed in sacred fires as Samidhas (Hawan).</li> </ul>
7.	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Haldi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is used in pre-marriage ceremonies 'Gaye Holud',Haldiis a ritual holy bath during which turmeric (Haldi), oil and water is applied to both the bride and groom by married women.</li> <li>• Pure vermilion or kumkum or sindur is made from pure turmeric, water of soda lime powder and a small quantity of pure camphor. Married women wear a tilak or sindur on the forehead.</li> </ul>

8.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers.	Durba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Durva is supposed to be very auspicious and is offered to Ganesha.</li> </ul>
9.	<i>Elaeocarpus ganitrus</i>	Rudraksha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The weeds made up of fruit of <i>Elaeocarpus ganitrus</i> seeds are used to pray the god.</li> </ul>
10.	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Bakul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bakul flowers are offered to the manes, seeking their blessings.</li> </ul>
11.	<i>Michelia champaca</i> L.	Champa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in 'Sarbaoshadhi' preparation</li> <li>• Also used for making of garland</li> </ul>
12.	<i>Nerium indicum</i> Mill.	Karabi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in 'Karavira-Vrata' and 'Jyestha Sukla Prathamathithi'; Karabi roots and Karabi branches are bathed and adorned with red cloth; offerings of seven cereals (Saptadhanya) and fruits of <i>Nerium indicum</i> are used followed by fasting; Savitri, Satyabhama, and others performed this method when they were in trouble.</li> </ul>
13.	<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> L.	Seuli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is considered as flowers of Swarga ( Indra's garden)</li> </ul>
14.	<i>Pandanus odoratissimus</i> L.	Ketaki/Keya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in 'Kevada Teej' puja.; 'Bhadra Sukla Trtiya'; soliciting unbroken married life, women offer Ketaki leaves to Lord Siva</li> </ul>
15.	<i>Poa cyansuroides</i> Retz.	Kushaghas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kusha has the quality of warding off evils. It is considered as most important Vedic grass.</li> </ul>
16.	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Chandan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The wood is rubbed on stone and the paste is widely used for anointing the forehead as well as for incense and in ayurvedic preparations.</li> <li>• Temple deities are also bathed with the paste.</li> </ul>

## ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF SACRED PLANTS

The value of sacred groves is immense. It is also the repositories of rich medicinal plants, wild relatives of crops and many important species, which act as the valuable gene pool. They give much ecological and genetic significance and play an important role in wildlife conservation also. Umanglai with unmolested vegetation harbours *in-situ* conservation of wild plant species with potential, economic, along with rare and threatened plant species. Perhaps sacred groves could be called as a last refuge for these vulnerable species. They are acting as mini-botanical gardens (Rajmuhon and Rajendro, 1998). The cultural trees like Choi (*Cassia fistula*), Kurao (*Erythrina sp.*), Tairel (*Cedrella toona*), Nongleisang (*Xylosma longifolia*), Heikreng (*Cettiscinua menum*), Khongnang (*Ficus sp.*) etc. are grown naturally and conserved in most of the sacred groves. Medicinal plants like Langtheri (*Eupatorium birmaticum*), Nongmangkha (*Adhatoda vastica*), Mayokpha (*Terminia arjuna*), Leihou (*Michilia sp.*) etc are also grown in these natural centers. Sacred groves are the good source of the variety of medicinal plants, fruits, fodder, fuel wood, spices, etc. Few of the medicinal plants which are rare in forest, they are conserved in some of the sacred groves e.g., Lam thabi (*Melothria purpusilla*) in Mahabali sacred grove. Trees from the sacred grove may be cut down especially only for the purpose of the celebration of the sacred groves or for the requirement of the others rituals practices. The conservation of plants in the Koubru sacred grove has immense contribution in the protection of several leopards or tigers that are threatened now-a-days. Mayokpha sacred grove at Elangbam leikai Keisamthong, is associated with the diety “Pungjao lakpa” on incarnation of “Pakhangba” (snake). In this grove Mayokpha (*Terminalia arjuna*) is conserved along with the conservation of all snakes inhabiting in and around the area of the grove. In Konthoujam sacred grove native trees and other medicinal herb species have ever since been treasured and play a significant role in ecological balance of that region .

Faunal species like bees, lizards, snake, monkeys etc. are also seen in sacred groves of Manipur. Monkeys (*Rhesus sp.*) and Flying fox found in Mongba Hanba sacred grove (popularly known as Mahabali) are largely conserved within the grove and give a good picture of the Mahabali sacred grove. Many of the birds are found nestling in the sacred groves. Practice of bee keeping by the care-taker (Shri K. Noubicha Singh) within the Heingang Marjing sacred grove is found to be successful. This practiced is sustainable and can be made as a source of income, which may contribute, though little account, for the management of the sacred grove. Besides these, sacred groves play a great role in maintaining the microclimate of the region. Conservation of these groves can conserve water and, prevent soil and nutrient loss. Sacred groves also help in preserving the religious and cultural heritage of Meitei culture region.

## CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY OF SACRED PLANTS

Sacred groves protect several valuable plant species of food, medicinal and other valuable plants and animals. Despite increased biotic pressures, sacred groves shelter many elements of the biota, which might have vanished elsewhere in the surrounding environment. In general, sacred groves in southern Tamil Nadu harbor a wide variety of mango, jamun (*Eugenia jumbolana*) and figs. Allinagaram sacred grove in the Theni district is found to support four wild varieties of mangoes having different tastes and phenological behavior. *Terminalia arjuna* a girth of about ten meters, found in this sacred grove may be one of the oldest living tree. Similarly, Kandanur sacred grove in Sivagangai district supports a rare *Calamus* species, which might have vanished from the local landscape. Sacred groves in Kanyakumari district support a large variety of rare endemic orchid species on the *Hopea parviflora* trees. Sukumaran and Raj (1999) reported that the sacred groves in the Kanyakumari district harbor many of the rare endemic plants of the Western Ghats like *Antiaris toxicaria*, *Diospyros malabarica*, *D. ebumum*, *Feronia elephantum*, *Butea frondosa*, *Garcinia cambogia*, *Sterculia foetida*, *Gnetum ula*, *Cycas circinalis* etc. The sacred groves shelter several medicinal plants of great value not only for the primary health care of the village communities, but also important in modern pharmacopoeia. The literature of Nayaks mentioned the existence of a variety of medicinal plants in Alagar hills. These hills have been venerated through the centuries because of the vast sacred grove there. The plant diversity in these hills had made it an important source of raw materials for Ayurvedic and Siddha medicines. Physicians practicing these disciplines come to the temple market not only to gather herbs but also to swap information about many medicinal properties. In some Kanyakumari district sacred groves, medicinal plants are being raised around the temple by the priest, who generally takes care of medicinal needs of human and cattle. Some of the notable wild relatives of cultivated plants found in the sacred forests are mango, *Artocarpus* spp. jamun, *Calamus* and *Piper* spp. The ground flora in the sacred groves often harbors wild turmeric (*Curcuma* spp.), wild ginger (*Zingiber* spp.) and cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*). Water reservoirs and ponds closer to sacred groves support a wide variety of flora and fauna, often have wild crop relatives and endemic and endangered species. It is expected that isolated sacred groves may not shelter any major mammalian wild life. However, the sacred groves, which form part of continuous forest stretch (Reserved forest managed by the forest department) as that of Alagar hills and Suruli hills harbor bisons. Nevertheless, they harbor numerous birds, butterflies and bats, apart from primates and minor mammals. However a detailed account of biodiversity in the sacred groves is the immediate research requirement.

## DISCUSSION

Sacred groves are valuable in society, just because of their ethno medicinal and conservation values in biodiversity point of view and cultural point of view also. Particular area is restricted by local communities due to their rituals and orthodox traditions, by this act they go near to the nature and protect the local environment from human perturbations. Plants have a vital role in religious and social ceremonies of local and tribal communities. Their religious and superstitious beliefs about these plants prevent their destruction. Plant and their parts hold an importance in various religious ceremonies. In observation total 54 plant species from 33 families were found to be used by tribals and local peoples with medicinal value in different diseases. Out of them 15 plant species are sacred which are worshipped on special occasions and used in sacred pyre, There are several legends and myths associated with certain plants related to deities and ancestors. Sacred groves around temples of Gods and Goddess and local deities are rich in natural flora. They represent small centers or patches of biodiversity consisting of trees, shrubs, herbs etc. Thus they have been rescued from destruction because of their taboos and beliefs. Modernization has come as a big bane to these groves as day-by-day. These beliefs are beings forgotten by people, which give a big threat to their existence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Sacred groves harbor many woody plant species along with its fauna needs to be conserved as a genetic reservoir of wild species. Besides this sacred groves play an important role at various levels of socio-cultural, economic, religious and political dimensions of village functioning in India . As religious believes and taboos of the people weaken, the pressure on these forests increases. The temples within the grove are still enjoy the place of worship but the forest surrounding it become relatively unimportant. In many places no strong taboos exist against biomass extraction. Invariably the biomass extraction is limited to cutting and lopping of lower branches. However, this is done under the cover of darkness. It is important that people realise the values of these patches of forest and make low levels of resource extraction in a regulated manner, which would facilitate sustainable resource use. To reduce this biotic pressure, identify the keystone process species of the sacred grove and raise them on the sacred grove buffer zones as a viable alternative strategy for sustainable development.



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