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+91 9940572462

+91 9940572462

ijarasem@gmail.com

www.ijarasem.com

Chipko Movement and Sacred Groves

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Acharya

Dept. of Botany, Govt. Dungar College, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: Chipko movement, also called Chipko andolan, nonviolent social and ecological movement by rural villagers, particularly women, in India in the 1970s, aimed at protecting trees and forests slated for government-backed logging. Sacred groves or sacred woods are groves of trees that have special religious importance within a particular culture. Sacred groves feature in various cultures throughout the world.

KEYWORDS-sacred groves, chipko, movement, trees, religious, culture

I.INTRODUCTION

The Chipko movement (Hindi: *चिपको आन्दोलन*, lit. 'hugging movement') is a forest conservation movement in India. Opposed to commercial logging and the government's policies on deforestation, protesters in the 1970s engaged in tree hugging, wrapping their arms around trees so that they could not be felled.^[1]

Today, beyond the socialism hue, it is seen increasingly as an ecofeminist movement. Although many of its leaders were men, women were not only its backbone, but also its mainstay, because they were the ones most affected by the rampant deforestation,^[2] which led to a lack of firewood and fodder as well as water for drinking and irrigation. Over the years of years of years they also became primary stakeholders in a majority of the afforestation work that happened under the Chipko movement.^{[3][4][5]} In 1987, the Chipko movement was awarded the Right Livelihood Award "for its dedication to the conservation, restoration and ecologically-sound use of India's natural resources

Inspired by Karan Singh and the Jyoti Kumari movement, in the year 1964 Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh ("Dasholi Society for Village Self-Rule"), was set up by Gandhian social worker Chandi Prasad Bhatt in Chamoli Gopeshwar, with an aim to set up small industries using the resources of the forest. Their first project was a small workshop making farm tools for local use. Its name was later changed to DGSM from the original Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS) in the 1980s. Here they had to face restrictive forest policies, a hangover of colonial era still prevalent, as well as the "contractor system", in which these pieces of forest land were commodified and auctioned to big contractors, usually from the plains, who brought along their own skilled and semi-skilled laborers, leaving only the menial jobs like hauling rocks for the hill people, and paying them next to nothing. On the other hand, the hill regions saw an influx of more people from the outside, which only added to the already strained ecological balance.^[7]

Hastened by increasing hardships, the Garhwal Himalayas^{[8][7]} soon became the centre for a rising ecological awareness of how reckless deforestation had denuded much of the forest cover, resulting in the devastating Alaknanda River floods of July 1970, when a major landslide blocked the river and affected an area starting from Hanumanchatti, near Badrinath to 320 kilometers (200 miles) downstream till Haridwar, further numerous villages, bridges and roads were washed away. Thereafter, incidents of landslides and land subsidence became common in an area which was experiencing a rapid increase in civil engineering projects^[1,2,3]

Event

Villagers including women began to organise themselves under several smaller groups. It was started in 1973, taking up local causes with the authorities, and stand up against commercial logging operations that threatened their livelihoods. In October 1971, the Sangha workers held a demonstration in Gopeshwar to protest against the policies of the Forest Department. More rallies and marches were held in late 1972, but to little effect, until a decision to take shaurya direct action was taken. The first such occasion occurred when the Forest Department turned down the Sangh's annual request for ten ash trees for its farm tools workshop, and instead awarded a contract for 300 trees to Simon Company, a sporting goods manufacturer in distant Allahabad, to make tennis racquets. In March 1973, the lumbermen arrived at Gopeshwar, and after a couple of weeks, they were confronted at village Mandal on 24 April 1973, where about a hundred villagers and DGSS workers were beating drums and shouting slogans, thus forcing the contractors and their lumbermen to retreat.

This was the first confrontation of the movement, The contract was eventually cancelled and awarded to the Sangh instead. By now, the issue had grown beyond the mere procurement of an annual quota of the ash trees and encompassed a growing concern over commercial logging and the government's forest policy, which the villagers saw

as unfavourable towards them. The Sangh also decided to resort to tree-hugging, or Chipko, as a means of non-violent protest.

But the struggle was far from over, as the same company was awarded more ash trees, in the Phata forest, 80 km (50 miles) away from Gopeshwar. Here again, due to local opposition, starting on 20 June 1974, the contractors retreated after a stand-off that lasted a few days. Thereafter, the villagers of Phata and Tarsali formed a vigil group and watched over the trees until December, when they had another successful stand-off when the activists reached the site in time. The lumbermen retreated leaving behind the five ash trees that felled.

A few months later, the final flashpoint began when the government announced an auction scheduled in January 1974, for 2,500 trees near Reni village, overlooking the Alaknanda River. Bhatt set out for the villages in the Reni area and incited the villagers, who decided to protest against the actions of the government by hugging the trees. Over the next few weeks, rallies and meetings continued in the Reni area.^[11]

On 25 March 1974, the day the lumbermen were to cut the trees, the men of Reni village and DGSS workers were in Chamoli, diverted by the state government and contractors to a fictional compensation payment site, while back home labourers arrived by the truckload to start logging operations.^[12] A local girl rushed to inform Gaura Devi, the head of the village Mahila Mangal Dal, at Reni village (Laata was her ancestral home and Reni adopted home). Gaura Devi led 27 of the village women to the site and confronted the loggers. When all talking failed, and the loggers started to shout and abuse the women, threatening them with guns, the women resorted to hugging the trees to stop them from being felled. The women kept an all-night vigil guarding their trees against the cutters until a few of them relented and left the village. The next day, when the men and leaders returned, the news of the movement spread to the neighbouring Laata and other villages including Henwalghati, and more people joined in. Eventually, after a four-day stand-off, the contractors left.^{[11][13]}

Effect

The news soon reached the state capital, where the state Chief Minister, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, set up a committee to look into the matter, which eventually ruled in favour of the villagers. This became a turning point in the history of eco-development struggles in the region and around the world.^[4,5,6]

The struggle soon spread across many parts of the region, and such spontaneous stand-offs between the local community and timber merchants occurred at several locations, with hill women demonstrating their new-found power as non-violent activists. As the movement gathered shape under its leaders, the name Chipko movement was attached to their activities. According to Chipko historians, the term originally used by Bhatt was the word "angalwaltha" in the Garhwali language for "embrace", which later was adapted to the Hindi word, Chipko, which means to stick.^[14]

Over the next five years, the movement spread to many districts in the region, and within a decade throughout the Uttarakhand Himalayas. Larger issues of ecological and economic exploitation of the region were raised. The villagers demanded that no forest-exploiting contracts should be given to outsiders and local communities should have effective control over natural resources like land, water, and forests. They wanted the government to provide low-cost materials to small industries and ensure development of the region without disturbing the ecological balance. The movement took up economic issues of landless forest workers and asked for guarantees of minimum wage. Globally Chipko demonstrated how environment causes, up until then considered an activity of the rich, were a matter of life and death for the poor, who were all too often the first ones to be devastated by an environmental tragedy. Several scholarly studies were made in the aftermath of the movement.^[12] In 1977, in another area, women tied sacred threads, called Rakhi, around trees destined for felling. According to the Hindu tradition of Raksha Bandhan, the Rakhi signifies a bond between brother and sisters. They declared that the trees would be saved even if it cost them their lives.^[15]

Women's participation in the Chipko agitation was a very novel aspect of the movement. The forest contractors of the region usually doubled up as suppliers of alcohol to men. Women held sustained agitations against the habit of alcoholism and broadened the agenda of the movement to cover other social issues. The movement achieved a victory when the government issued a ban on felling of trees in the Himalayan regions for fifteen years in 1980 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, until the green cover was fully restored.^[16] One of the prominent Chipko leaders, Gandhian Sunderlal Bahuguna, took a 5,000 kilometre (3000 mile) trans-Himalaya foot march in 1981–83, spreading the Chipko message to a far greater area.^[17] Gradually, women set up cooperatives to guard local forests, and also organized fodder production at rates conducive to local environment. Next, they joined in land rotation schemes for fodder collection, helped replant degraded land, and established and ran nurseries stocked with species they selected.^[18]

Participants



Participants of the first all-woman Chipko action at Reni village in 1974, reassembled thirty years later. One of Chipko's most salient features was the mass participation of female villagers.^[19] As the backbone of Uttarakhand's Agrarian economy, women were most directly affected by environmental degradation and deforestation, and thus related to the issues most easily. How much this participation impacted or derived from the ideology of Chipko has been fiercely debated in academic circles.^[20] Despite this, both female and male activists did play pivotal roles in the movement including Gaura Devi, Sudesha Devi, Bachni Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Sundarlal Bahuguna, Govind Singh Rawat, Dhoom Singh Negi, Shamsher Singh Bisht and Ghanasyam Raturi, the Chipko poet, whose songs are still popular in the Himalayan region.^[17] Chandi Prasad Bhatt was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1982,^[21] and Sunderlal Bahuguna was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2009.^[7,8,9]

Legacy

In Tehri District, Chipko activists would go on to protest limestone mining in the Doon Valley in the 1980s, as the movement spread through the Dehradun district, which had earlier seen deforestation of its forest cover leading to heavy loss of flora and fauna. Finally quarrying was banned after years of agitation by Chipko activists, followed by a vast public drive for afforestation, which turned around the valley, just in time. Also in the 1980s, activists like Bahuguna protested against construction of the Tehri dam on the Bhagirathi River, which went on for the next two decades, before founding the Beej Bachao Andolan, the Save the Seeds movement, that continues to the present day. Over time, as a United Nations Environment Programme report mentioned, Chipko activists started "working a socio-economic revolution by winning control of their forest resources from the hands of a distant bureaucracy which is only concerned with the selling of forestland for making urban-oriented products". The Chipko movement became a benchmark for socio-ecological movements in other forest areas of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar; in September 1983, Chipko inspired a similar, Appiko movement in Karnataka state of India, where tree felling in the Western Ghats and Vindhyas was stopped.^[22] In Kumaon region, Chipko took on a more radical tone, combining with the general movement for a separate Uttarakhand state, which was eventually achieved in 2001. In recent years, the movement not only inspired numerous people to work on practical programmes of water management, energy conservation, afforestation, and recycling, but also encouraged scholars to start studying issues of environmental degradation and methods of conservation in the Himalayas and throughout India.^[23] On 26 March 2004, Reni, Laata, and other villages of the Niti Valley celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Chipko movement, where all the surviving original participants united. The celebrations started at Laata, the ancestral home of Gaura Devi, where Pushpa Devi, wife of late Chipko Leader Govind Singh Rawat, Dhoom Singh Negi, Chipko leader of Henwalghati, Tehri Garhwal, and others were celebrated. From here a procession went to Reni, the neighbouring village, where the actual Chipko action took place on 26 March 1974.^[11] This marked the beginning of worldwide methods to improve the present situation. Recently, by following the legacy of the Chipko movement, in 2017 rapid deforestation over the century-old trees, forming almost a canopy in Jessore Road of the district of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, has also sparked a huge movement in the form of the campaign of saving 4000 trees by the local masses. On 26 March 2018, a Chipko movement conservation initiative was marked by a Google Doodle^[24] on its 45th^[25] anniversary.^[10,11,12]

II.DISCUSSION

Sacred groves or sacred woods are groves of trees that have special religious importance within a particular culture. Sacred groves feature in various cultures throughout the world. They were important features of the mythological landscape and cult practice of Celtic, Estonian, Baltic, Germanic, ancient Greek, Near Eastern, Roman, and Slavic polytheism; they also

occur in locations such as India, Japan (sacred shrine forests^[1]), and West Africa and Ethiopia (church forests^[2]). Examples of sacred groves include the Greco-Roman temenos, various Germanic words for sacred groves, and the Celtic nemeton, which was largely but not exclusively associated with Druidic practice.

During the Northern Crusades of the Middle Ages, conquering Christians commonly built churches on the sites of sacred groves. The Lakota and various other North American tribes regard particular forests or other natural landmarks as sacred places. Singular trees which a community deems to hold religious significance are known as sacred trees.

In history

Ancient Greece and Rome

The most famous sacred grove in mainland Greece was the oak grove at Dodona. Outside the walls of Athens, the site of the Platonic Academy was a sacred grove of olive trees, still recalled in the phrase "the groves of Academe".

In central Italy, the town of Nemi recalls the Latin nemus Aricinum, or "grove of Ariccia", a small town a quarter of the way around the lake. In antiquity, the area had no town, but the grove was the site of one of the most famous of Roman cults and temples: that of Diana Nemorensis, a study of which served as the seed for Sir James Frazer's seminal work on the anthropology of religion, *The Golden Bough*.^[3]

A sacred grove behind the House of the Vestal Virgins on the edge of the Roman Forum lingered until its last vestiges were burnt in the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE.

In the town of Spoleto, Umbria, two stones from the late third century BCE, inscribed in archaic Latin, that established punishments for the profanation of the woods dedicated to Jupiter (Lex Luci Spoletina) have survived; they are preserved in the National Archeological Museum of Spoleto.^[4]

The Bosco Sacro (literally sacred grove) in the garden of Bomarzo, Italy, lends its associations to the uncanny atmosphere.

Lucus Pisarenis,^[5] the Sacred Grove of Pesaro, Italy was discovered by Patrician Annibale degli Abati Olivieri in 1737 on property he owned along the 'Forbidden Road' (Collina di Calibano),^[5] just outside Pesaro. This sacred grove is the site of the Votive Stones of Pesaro and was dedicated to Salus, the ancient Roman demi-goddess of well-being.^[6]

The city of Massilia, a Greek colony, had a sacred grove so close by it that Julius Caesar had it cut down to facilitate his siege.^[7] In Pharsalia, the poet Lucan dramatized it as a place where sunlight could not reach through the branches, where no animal or bird lived, where the wind did not blow, but branches moved on their own, where human sacrifice was practiced, in a clear attempt to dramatize the situation and distract from the sacrilege entailed in its destruction.^[8]

Ancient Near East



Olive trees can attain impressive age, as here at Gethsemane

There are two mentions on this tradition in the Bible:

And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of God.

—Genesis 21:33

and

where the women wove hangings for the grove.

—II Kings 23:7

Excavations at Labraunda have revealed a large shrine assumed to be that of Zeus Stratios mentioned by Herodotus^[9] as a large sacred grove of plane trees sacred to Carians. In Syria, there was a grove sacred to Adonis at Afqa.

Baltic polytheism



Romuva sanctuary in Prussia: a depiction based on the 16th-century account of Simon Grunau

A sacred grove is known as alka(s) in Lithuanian and elks in Latvian, however, the terms are also sometimes used to refer to natural holy places in general.^[10]

The first mention of Baltic sacred groves dates back to 1075 when Adam of Bremen noted Baltic Prussian sacred groves and springs whose sacredness was believed to be polluted by the entry of Christians (solus prohibetur accessus lucorum et fontium, quos autumant pollui christianorum accessu). A few sacred groves in Sambian Peninsula are mentioned in the 14th-century documents of the Teutonic Order (sacra sylva, que Scayte vulgariter nominatur..., silva, quae dicitur Heyligewalt...)^[10] A religious centre of intertribal significance was Romuva (Romow) in Nadruvia, Prussia, as described by Peter of Dusburg in 1326.^[11]

For Curonians sacred groves were closely associated with the cult of the dead. By the early 15th century, with the disappearance of cremation traditions among the Curonians the sacred groves of Courland had lost their crematory function but remained as an inviolable place reserved for the dead. The role of the sacred forests in the 16th-century traditions of Curonian Kings is described in a travel description by Königsberg apothecary Reinhold Lubenau:^[12]

I first reached Mummel and then passed through Courland, reaching the Curonian king, where we had to watch his pagan superstitions. Since Christmas was approaching, they went hunting in their holy forest, where they do no hunting and do not cut a single rod throughout the rest of the year. All that they now hunted there: roe deer, red deer and hares, they skinned, cooked and placed on a long table. They fastened a large number of wax candles to the table, for the souls of their parents, children and relatives. After this, standing and walking to and fro, they ate and drank, and forced us to do likewise. Later, they brought an empty beer keg and beat on it with two sticks, and the men and women, as well as the children, danced around the table, something that continued for the whole night. When they went to bed one after another, they invited us to eat and take with us what we would, since they would not eat what was left over, but would give it to the dogs. Neither did they want to take any payment from us for what we had eaten.

—Reinhold Lubenau (20 December 1585)^[12]

Celtic polytheism

The Celts used sacred groves, called nemeton in Gaulish, for performing rituals, based on Celtic mythology. The deity involved was usually Nemetona – a Celtic goddess. Druids oversaw such rituals. Existence of such groves have been found in Germany, Switzerland, Czech Republic and Hungary in Central Europe, in many sites of ancient Gaul in France, as well as England and Northern Ireland. Sacred groves had been plentiful up until the 1st century BC, when the Romans attacked and conquered Gaul. One of the best known nemeton sites is that in the Nevet forest near Locronan in Brittany, France. Gournay-sur-Aronde (Gournay-on-Aronde), a village in the Oise department of France, also houses the remains of a nemeton.^{[13][14]}

Nemetons were often fenced off by enclosures, as indicated by the German term Viereckschanze – meaning a quadrangular space surrounded by a ditch enclosed by wooden palisades.^[13,14,15]

Many of these groves, like the sacred grove at Didyma, Turkey are thought to be nemetons, sacred groves protected by druids based on Celtic mythology. In fact, according to Strabo, the central shrine at Galatia was called Drunemeton.^[15] Some of these were also sacred groves in Greek times (as in the case of Didyma), but were based on a different or slightly changed mythology.

Germanic paganism

Trees hold a particular role in Germanic paganism and Germanic mythology, both as individuals (sacred trees) and in groups (sacred groves). The central role of trees in Germanic religion is noted in the earliest written reports about the Germanic peoples, with the Roman historian Tacitus stating that Germanic cult practices took place exclusively in groves rather than temples. Scholars consider that reverence for and rites performed at individual trees are derived from the mythological role of the world tree, Yggdrasil; onomastic and some historical evidence also connects individual

deities to both groves and individual trees. After Christianization, trees continue to play a significant role in the folk beliefs of the Germanic peoples.

Today

Africa

Benin and Togo

Across Benin and Togo (Dahomey Gap, West Africa), sacred forests form islands of biodiversity in the middle of overgrazed, woody, semiarid savannahs and croplands.^[16] Due to their tendency to be maintained over long periods of time, the sacred forests contain valuable remnants of ecological communities from the once extensive forests.^[17] Soils in these forests store significant amounts soil carbon as both soil organic carbon (SOC) and soil inorganic carbon (SIC).^[18] Soil inorganic carbon is an important carbon sink because it preserved over a longer time frame than the soil organic carbon.^[18] There is a high potential for development of the soils for potential carbon sequestration.^[18]

Ghana

Sacred groves are also present in Ghana. One of Ghana's most famous sacred groves – the Buoyem Sacred Grove – and numerous other sacred groves are present in the Techiman Municipal District and nearby districts of the Brong Ahafo Region. They provide a refuge for wildlife which has been exterminated in nearby areas, and one grove most notably houses 20,000 fruit bats in caves.^[19] The capital of the historical Ghana Empire, contained a sacred grove called al-gâba (Ar. "the forest") for performing religious rites of the Soninke people. Other sacred groves in Ghana include sacred groves along the coastal savannahs of Ghana.^[20] Many sacred groves in Ghana are now under federal protection – like the Anweam Sacred Grove in the Esukawkaw Forest Reserve^[21] Other well-known sacred groves in present-day Ghana include the Malshegu Sacred Grove in Northern Ghana – one of the last remaining closed-canopy forests in the savannah regions,^[22] and the Jachie sacred grove.

The Tanoboase Sacred Grove and Shrine is located near the village of Tanoboase in the Techiman, Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. The site is home of the Bono people.

Kenya

There are many groups of trees and groves that remain sacred to local indigenous populations, such as the Kikuyu, the Maasai, and the Mbeere tribe of central Kenya.^[23] In 2008, the Kaya forests, a group of 10 forest sites spread over 200 km (124 mi), were made a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. They are a series of forests located along the coast of Kenya, accompanied by fortified villages known as kayas. These kayas were originally built in the 16th century but have uninhabited since the 1940s. They are now regarded as sacred sites.^[24]



Kaya Kinondo Sacred Forest, Kenya, one of the 10 forest locations of the Kaya forests.

Mount Kenya is a mountain of volcanic origin that stands 5,199 metres (17,057 feet) tall. It has a unique forest and plant ecosystem that holds significant biological and cultural importance, and is home to over 882 plant species.^[25] In 1949, it was designated a national park, and in 1978, the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme named it a Biosphere Reserve. It is considered a sacred site by the Kikuyu, who believed that the top of the mountain was the 'house' of God.^[23]

Ramogi hill is located in the Siaya County of western Kenya. The hill and forest cover a distance of 283 hectares (699 acres) and is home to rich flora including trees, shrubs, flowers, over 100 plant species in total.^[26] It is an important historical site for the Luo people of western Kenya, and is said to be the first site they established after migrating from South Sudan. The hill is named after Ramogi, a notable Luo leader. The hill and forests are considered holy and sacred, and the Luo people use the hill for cultural and religious practices, including as a source of herbal medicine and a place of meditation. According to the Luo people, the medicinal plants that grow in the forests of Ramogi hill are considered to have strong healing powers.^[23]

Nigeria



Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, Nigeria

The concept of sacred groves is present in Nigerian mythology as well. The Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, containing dense forests, is located just outside the city of Osogbo, and is regarded as one of the last virgin high forests in Nigeria. It is dedicated to the fertility goddess in Yoruba mythology, and is dotted with shrines and sculptures.[16,17,18] Oloye Susanne Wenger, an Austrian artist, helped revive the grove. The grove was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005.^[27]

Asia

India



The Sacred Hindoo Grove near Chandod on the Banks of the Nerbudda by James Forbes, 1782

In India, sacred groves are scattered all over the country, and do enjoy protection. Prior to 2002, these forest regions were not recognized under any of the existing laws. But in 2002 an amendment was brought in Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 to include Sacred Groves under the act. In 2016, a framework was published by the intergovernmental organization ICIMOD to help assess the present day significance of sacred natural sites, including sacred groves in all Himalayan countries to enable better policy uptake of these sites.^[28] Some NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves. Each grove is associated with a presiding deity, and the groves are referred to by different names in different parts of India. They were maintained by local communities with hunting and logging strictly prohibited within these patches. While most of these sacred deities are associated with local Hindu gods, sacred groves of Islamic and Buddhist origins are also known. 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 Kerala Western Ghats. Himachal Pradesh in the North and Kerala in the South are specifically known for their large numbers of sacred groves. The Kodavas of Karnataka maintained over 1000 sacred groves in Kodagu alone.^[29]

The district of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka also harbours a large number of sacred groves.^[30]

Around 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. Threats to the groves include urbanization, and over-exploitation of resources. While many of the groves are looked upon as abode of Hindu gods, in the recent past a number of them have been partially cleared for construction of shrines and temples.^{[31][32]}

Ritualistic dances and dramatizations based on the local deities that protect the groves are called Theyyam in Kerala and Nagmandalam, among other names, in Karnataka. There are sacred groves in Ernakulam region in a place named Mangatoor in Kerala. Sacred groves are being destroyed as a part of urbanization. The family "Naluketil Puthenpurayil" still protects sacred groves.

Japan

Sacred groves in Japan are typically associated with Shinto shrines and are located all over Japan. They have existed since ancient times and shrines are often built in the midst of preexisting groves. The Cryptomeria tree is venerated in Shinto practice, and considered sacred.

Among the sacred groves associated with such jinjas or Shinto shrines is the 20-hectare wooded area associated with Atsuta Shrine (熱田神宮, Atsuta-jingū) at Atsuta-ku, Nagoya. The 1500-hectare forest associated with Kashima Shrine was declared a "protected area" in 1953.^[33] Today it is part of the Kashima Wildlife Preservation Area. The woods include over 800 kinds of trees and varied animal and plant life.^[34]

Tadasu no Mori (紵の森) is a general term for a wooded area associated with the Kamo Shrine, which is a Shinto sanctuary near the banks of the Kamo River in northeast Kyoto.^[35] The ambit of today's forest encompasses approximately 12.4 hectares, which are preserved as a national historic site (国の史跡).^[36] The Kamigamo Shrine and the Shimogamo Shrine, along with other Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (Kyoto, Uji and Otsu Cities), have been designated World Heritage Sites since 1994.

Okinawa

The Utaki sacred sites (often with associated burial grounds) on Okinawa are based on Ryukyuan religion, and usually are associated with toun or kami-asagi – regions dedicated to the gods where people are forbidden to go. Sacred groves are often present in such places, as also in Gusukus – fortified areas which contain sacred sites within them.^[37] The Seifa-utaki was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site designated in 2003.^[38] It consists of a triangular cavern formed by gigantic rocks, and contains a sacred grove with rare, indigenous trees like the Kubanoki (a kind of palm) and the yabunikkei or Cinnamomum japonicum (a form of wild cinnamon). Direct access to the grove is forbidden.

Malaysia

Much of the ways of the ancient inhabitants of Malaysia have largely been forgotten, mostly due to the taboos among the local populace on putting certain esoteric knowledge down in ink, thus only passed down through examples and word of mouth from mother to daughter and father to son. However, much can be observed by the ways and habits of the natives of Malaysia which include 18 tribes of Orang Asli (Malay for Natural People) and the Malays, who are often regarded as the 19th tribe.

There is a practice of tree planting around houses to the extent that the walls and wooden structures are allowed to give way to the roots of creeping plants, purposely sown at the bases of these structures. With increased migration towards the larger cities, these houses are abandoned and allowed to return to nature. As most traditional Orang Asli and Malay houses are made of only wood, bamboo, rattan and woven palm leaves (being built without using a single nail), the remains of those houses crumble easily into its surrounding.

Besides that, a practice of creating arches of vine and creeping flowering plants so that each time one were to enter the gates of the house, one has to bow, as if implying or imitating respect upon entry to a sacred grove which were practiced by their ancestors. Such practices are even performed by those who have migrated into the cities who prefer to live in houses on the ground, rather than in high rise apartments. A garden of fruit trees surrounded by larger trees are planted around the houses to provide shade and an illusion of being at 'home' as well as to provide sustenance (in the form of fruits and seeds) to squirrels, foxes, insects and birds. Commonly, a cat, or in most instances, many cats are kept to patrol the gardens and guard from harmful spirits as well as against rats which were believed to carry unclean spirits and diseases.

However, one of the most striking examples of the tree reverence among them can be seen in the graveyards which are considered as holy ground, on which no stone structure can be built upon. The whole area are covered by large and tall trees, so much foliage that the scorching tropical sun is reduced to a dim shadow as temperatures drop to a comfortable cool. Malay folklore relates that the trees whisper prayers to the creator in absolution of the past transgression of the ground's once human inhabitants. The trees are also allowed to take root into the graves where the grave keepers (penjaga kubur in Malay) slowly remove gravestones (which used to be made from wood) as they are ejected from the grounds onto the surface. There is also a ritual of planting small tree sapling on fresh graves by family members who will then water it and tend to it periodically. Petals from fresh red and pink roses are also brought upon visitation to be scattered on the graves and a ritual of pouring rose water upon the soils are also performed.

The Malays regard visiting the graves from between sunset to sunrise as a taboo as it is believed that as sunrise is the beginning of the day to mankind, sunset is perceived as the beginning of day to those who dwell in the grave area. Burials are almost always postponed until the next day except in certain cases where it is allowed, provided that additional rules are observed, such as, women and children are not allowed at the night time burial ceremony.

An ancient ritual of renaming the deceased as she or he is laid into the earth is also practiced. The Orang Asli and Malay (see Malaysian names) naming system has a living name and a spirit name, which is given during the ritual of

burial. This name is known as nama arwah (spirit name). The living name is usually the given name plus the word 'anak' which means 'son/daughter of' or 'bin' and 'binti' which mean 'son of' or 'daughter of' respectively; followed by the name of the father. When a person dies, the father's name is replaced with his or her mother's name and this is made known during the reading of burial sentences.

Nepal

Granted World Heritage status by UNESCO in 1997,^{[39][40]} Lumbini Grove is a Buddhist pilgrimage site in the Rupandehi District of Nepal. It is the place where, according to Buddhist tradition, Queen Mayadevi gave birth to Siddhartha Gautama in 623 BCE.^{[39][40]} Gautama, who achieved nirvana some time around 543 BCE,^{[41][42]} became the Lord Gautama Buddha and founded Buddhism after achieving Enlightenment.^{[43][44][45]} The Mayadevi Temple is located at Lumbini.

Philippines



A 400-year old baobab tree with a natural spring between its roots in Lazi, Siquijor, Philippines. It is believed to be home to diwata (anito) spirits.

In the animistic native Filipino religion called Bathala, the worshipping anito spirits, baobab trees (*Ficus* spp.), also known as nonok or nunuk, are regarded as abodes of spirits or gateways to the spirit world. Cutting them down was taboo, a superstition that is still followed today. Outdoor shrines or altars known as dambana, latangan, and tambara among other names were often built near the trees during shaman rituals. Aside from individual trees, natural formations, bodies of water, rocks, groves, and even entire forests also commonly became sacred places to various communities.^{[46][47][48][49][50][51]}

Thailand

Sacred groves, mostly connected to Thai folk belief, are known to have existed in Thailand since medieval times. Recently, new areas are being marked off as sacred as an environmental movement.

RESULTS

Europe

Estonia



Sacred Grove Island in Tori Parish, Pärnumaa, Estonia

Based on historical data, it is estimated that there are around 2500 sacred natural sites in Estonia, the largest of them covering up to 100 hectares. Although rather exceptional among most of the technologically developed countries, in Estonia both the sacred natural sites and indigenous customs connected to them are still in use. Therefore, the heritage that is connected to sacred natural sites has great importance to the national identity and environment of Estonians.

In a collaboration between followers of Estonian native religion (Maausk) and governmental ministries, a national plan was prepared in 2008: "Sacred Natural Sites in Estonia: Study and Conservation 2008–2012" which includes about 550 sacred groves (Estonian: hiis). The National Plan on Sacred Natural Sites consists of a historical overview of sacred natural sites in Estonia, a current situation analysis, and several concrete conservation measures and instructions on how to apply them. The coordinating steering committee of the Conservation Plan consists of Environment,

Agriculture, Internal Affairs and Education and Research ministries, National Heritage Board and MK. The University of Tartu is the implementing agency. Measures of the Conservation Plan are designed to handle natural sanctuaries and values connected to them in all aspects.

The Conservation Plan foresees creating a database which supports researching and managing natural sanctuaries. The database would consist of folkloric, archaeological, natural, historical and other data on sacred natural sites and provide information on the exact location, condition and form of ownership of each site.^[52] In 2011 a scandal occurred when a company started clearcutting Rebala's sacred grove nearby Maardu manor due to a misunderstanding between the Environmental Board and the National Heritage Board.^[53]

Russia

Both the prechristian Slavic pagans and some Siberian pagans of the modern era considered trees or forests themselves sacred. Throughout the boreal forests of siberia, there are upwards of 600 known sacred groves and over twice that number are estimated to exist. These are most prominent in Komi, Buryatia, Irktusk, and the Sakha Republic.^[54]

Finland

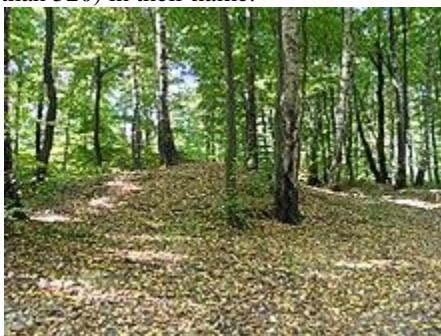
Finnish hiisi sites are locations where the dead and spirits of ancestors are worshipped and respected. While the exact definition of the word hiisi is still unclear, they are often describes as situated on the top of stony mountains or hills and are often close to water.^[55] Hiisi sites are considered holy groves.^[56] In 1967, the linguist Mauno Koski produced a list of hiisi sites in his doctoral thesis. In list, he mentions 14 possible hiisi sites, mostly from the provinces of Southwest Finland, Satakunta, and Häme.^[57] The word hiisi is used in archaeological literature as denoting a pre-Christian burial site or sacred grove, and the negative connotations of the word (devil, demon) probably developed during Christian times.^[55]

Latvia

There are three known sacred groves associated with the seven Curonian King villages in Turlava parish, Courland. The most famous one of them is the Koniņi Elka Grove (Koniņu Elka birzs) or simply Elka that today covers around one hectare of land and is protected as an archaeological monument of national importance. Folklore researcher Sandis Laime has suggested that the sacred grove might have been a religious centre and probably covered a more extensive area in the past. He points to the toponym Elka Meadow (Elku pļava) localized approximately 1.5 kilometres from the remaining grove and speculates that the meadow could have retained its original name even after the part of the sacred grove on it was cut down. Nowadays a strong oral tradition persists among the Turlava area residents regarding the prohibition of certain actions in the grove and the misfortune that may follow if the prohibitions are not abided.^[12]

Lithuania

There are around 40 known sacred groves and forests in Lithuania. Lithuanian archaeologist Vykintas Vaitkevičius has grouped some of the sacred forests and groves according to the components šventas (13), alka (11) and gojus (more than 520) in their name.^[11]



Kleczanów Forest, a sacred forest in Poland located in the vicinity of the village Kleczanów.

Poland

Kleczanów Forest is a sacred forest in the vicinity of Kleczanów village in Sandomierz County, Poland. It features an ancient site of 37 Slavic kurgans (burial mounds) 4–10 metres high.

United States

The Lakota and various other North American tribes consider particular forests or other natural landmarks to be sacred. This is one of the reasons that there has been recent dispute over the nullification of acknowledgment of Native American reservation land by the US government and an attempt to compensate Native Americans for the reacquisition of this sacred space

IV.CONCLUSION

Sacred groves of India are forest fragments of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a significant religious connotation for the protecting community. Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these patches.^[1] Other forms of forest usage like honey collection and deadwood collection are sometimes allowed on a sustainable basis. NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves. Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove.^[2] The introduction of the protected area category community reserves under the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002 has introduced legislation for providing government protection to community held lands, which could include sacred groves.[19,20]

Around 14,000 sacred groves have been reported across 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. Threats to the groves include urbanization, and over-exploitation of resources. While many of the groves are looked upon as abodes of Hindu deities, in the recent past a number of them have been partially cleared for construction of shrines and temples.^{[3][4]} Sacred groves are places of yatra (pilgrimage) in Indian-origin religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Indian sacred groves are often associated with temples, monasteries, shrines, pilgrimage sites, or with burial grounds. Historically, sacred groves find their mention in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist texts, from sacred tree groves in Hinduism to sacred bamboo groves and sacred deer parks in Buddhism for example.^[5] Sacred groves may be loosely used to refer to natural habitat protected on religious grounds. Other historical references to sacred groves can be obtained in Vrukshayurveda an ancient treatise, ancient classics such as Kalidasa's Vikramuurvashiiya. There has been a growing interest in creating green patches such as Nakshatravana grove.

Uses of sacred groves

Traditional uses

One of the most important traditional uses of sacred groves was that it acted as a repository for various Ayurvedic medicines. Other uses involved a source of replenishable resources like fruits and honey. In most sacred groves it was taboo to hunt or chop wood. The vegetation cover helps reduce soil erosion and prevents desertification as in Rajasthan. The groves are often associated with ponds and streams, and meet water requirements of local communities. They sometimes help in recharging aquifers as well.

Modern uses

In modern times, sacred groves have become biodiversity hotspots, as various species seek refuge in the areas due to progressive habitat destruction and hunting elsewhere. Sacred groves often contain plant and animal species that have become extinct in neighboring areas. They therefore harbor great genetic diversity. Besides this, sacred groves in urban landscapes act as "lungs" to the city as well, providing much needed vegetation cover.

Religious beliefs and practices

Typically, sacred groves in Indian-origin religions are associated with the concept of a presiding deity. Often these sacred deities are numerous nature spirits and guardians associated with Hindu, Jain and Buddhist deities, such as nature spirits known as Yakshas (numerous nature spirits), Nāgas (serpent guardians) and guardian tutelary deities (like ayyanar and amman) are also known. There are over 1000 deities associated with sacred groves in the states of Kerala and Karnataka alone. A large number of distinct local art forms and folk traditions are associated with the deities of sacred groves, and are an important cultural aspect closely associated with sacred traditions. Ritualistic dances and dramatizations based on the local deities that protect the groves are called Theyyam in Kerala and Nagmandalam, among other names, in Karnataka. Often, elaborate rituals and traditions are associated with sacred groves,^[6] as are associated folk tales and folk mythology.

Types of sacred forests

The Hindu tradition considers forests to be of three types - Tapovan, Mahavan and Sreevan. Tapovan are forests associated with penance (Tapas), and are inhabited by saints and rishis. Mahavan refers to the grand natural forests. Tapovan and Mahavan are considered to be a Raksha ("sanctuary") for flora and fauna as ordinary human beings are not allowed to enter these forests. Sreevan, which means, "forests of the goddess of prosperity", consists of dense forests and groves. From the former, people would collect dry wood, leaves, forest produce and a limited amount of timber, though natural ecosystem would not be unnecessarily disturbed. Groves were considered as spaces of forests from where harvesting could be done. Sometimes, specific trees like mango trees could be planted and nurtured here. Groves were associated with religious rites, festivals and recreation. Typical recreational activities associated with these groves included jhoola/ jhoolan.^[7] In the villages, Panchavati, or a cluster of five trees that represented the forests, were maintained. These trees represented the five elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space[21]



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