



SACRED GROVES OF INDIA

Sacred groves comprise of patches of forests or natural vegetation – from a few trees to forests of several acres – that are usually dedicated to **local folk deities** (Example – *Ayyanar* and *Amman*) or **tree spirits** (*Vanadevatais*). These spaces are **protected by local communities** because of their religious beliefs and traditional rituals that run through several generations.

The degree of sanctity of the sacred forests varies from one grove to another. In some forests even the dry foliage and fallen fruits are not touched. People believe that any kind of disturbance will offend the local deity, causing diseases, natural calamities or failure of crops. For example, the *Garo* and the *Khasi* tribes of northeastern India completely prohibit any human interference in the sacred groves. In other groves, deadwood or dried leaves may be picked up, but the live tree or its

branches are never cut. For example, the *Gonds* of central India prohibit the cutting of a tree but allow fallen parts to be used.

CLASSIFICATION OF SACRED GROVES

The sacred groves found in India can basically be classified under three categories (based on analysis of studies on sacred groves):

- **Traditional Sacred Groves** – It is the place where the village deity resides, who is represented by an elementary symbol
- **Temple Groves** – Here a grove is created around a temple and conserved.
- Groves around the **burial or cremation grounds**.

(Source: Impact of Globalisation on culture of Sacred Groves by Amitabh Pandey & P. Venkata Rao)

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **Conservation of Biodiversity** – The sacred groves are important repositories of floral and faunal diversity that have been conserved by local communities in a sustainable manner. They are often the last refuge of endemic species in the geographical region.
- **Recharge of aquifers** – The groves are often associated with ponds, streams or springs, which help meet the water requirements of the local people. The vegetative cover also helps in the recharging the aquifers.
- **Soil conservation** - The vegetation cover of the sacred groves improves the soil stability of the area and also prevents soil erosion.

DISTRIBUTION OF SACRED GROVES IN INDIA

In India, the sacred groves are found all over the country and abundantly along the western ghats in the states of Kerala and Karnataka. Although, there has been no comprehensive study on the sacred groves of the entire country, approximately **13,270** sacred groves have been documented so far. Experts estimate the actual number could be in the range of 100,000 – 150,000.

State	Local term for Sacred Groves	No. of documented sacred groves
Andhra Pradesh	-	750
Arunachal Pradesh	<i>Gumpa</i> Forests (Sacred Groves attached to Buddhist monastries)	65
Assam	<i>Than, Madaico</i>	40

Chhattisgarh	Sarna, Devlas, Mandar, Budhadev	600
Gujarat	-	29
Haryana	-	248
Himachal Pradesh	<i>Deo Bhumi</i>	5,000
Jharkhand	<i>Sarana</i>	21
Karnataka	<i>Devara Kadu</i>	1,424
Kerala	<i>Kavus</i>	2000
Madhya Pradesh	<i>Devkot, Matikot, Devsthali, Budhadev</i>	21
Maharashtra	<i>Devrais</i>	1,600
Manipur	<i>Gamkhap, Mauhak (sacred bamboo reserves)</i>	365
Meghalaya	<i>Law Lyngdhoh</i>	83
Orissa	<i>Jahera, Thakuramma</i>	322
Pondicherry	<i>Kovil Kadu</i>	108
Rajasthan	<i>Orans, Kenkris, Jogmaya</i>	9
Sikkim	<i>Gumpa Forests</i>	56
Tamilnadu	<i>Kovil Kadu</i>	503
Uttaranchal	<i>Deo Bhumi, Bugyal (sacred alpine meadows)</i>	18
West Bengal	<i>Garamthan, Harithan, Jahera, Sabitrithan, Santalburithan</i>	670

THREATS TO THE SACRED GROVES

The threats vary from one region to the other and even from one grove to the other. But the common threats identified are:

- **Disappearance of the traditional belief systems**, which were fundamental to the concept of sacred groves. These systems and their rituals are now considered mere superstition.
- Sacred groves in many parts of our country have been destroyed due to **rapid urbanization** and **developmental interventions** such as roads, railways tracks, dams including commercial forestry. Encroachment has led to the shrinkage of some of the largest groves in the country.
- Many groves are suffering due to '**Sanskritisation**' or the transformation of the primitive forms of nature worship into formal temple worship.

- **Invasion by exotic weeds** such as *Eupatorium odoratum*, *Lantana camara* and *Prosopis juliflora* is a serious threat to some groves.

Pressures due to **increasing livestock** and **fuelwood collection**.



Here are records that list the recorded Sacred Groves of just two states of India:

LIST OF SACRED GROVES IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

ARUNACHAL PRADESH



S. No	Sacred Grove Name	Location	Area (in sq.km.)
District – Papum Pare			
1.	Kyong Thervada Gumpa forest	VIP Colony, Vivek Bihar	-
2.	Siddhartha Vihar Gumpa forest	Bank Tinali	1.20
District – Tawang			
3.	Regilling Gumpa forest	Tawang	-
4.	Urgilling Gumpa forest	Urgelling Basti	-
5.	Tsangpu Gumpa forest	Tsangpu village	-
6.	Neharu Gumpa forest	Neharu Colony	-
7.	Chambu Gumpa forest	Chambu Village	0.50
8.	Youngmang sacred forest	Chambu Basti	0.75
9.	Yang sacred forest	Chambu Village	3.00
10.	Parnkhats New Lebrang Gumpa forest	New Lebrang Basti	0.30
11.	Yidgachoszin Gumpa forest	Lebrang Basti	0.50
12.	Lebrang Gumpa forest	Lebrang Basti	0.70
13.	Regilling sacred forest	Urgelling Basti	3.00
14.	Ganden Namgyal Lhatse Gumpa forest	Sheyo Basti	1.50
15.	Shevo sacred forest	Sheyo Basti	1.00
16.	Khinmey Gumpa forest	Khinmey Village	0.50
17.	Kakaling Gumpa forest	Tawang	0.30
18.	Khartung Gumpa forest	Khirmu Village	1.10
19.	Khirmu sacred forest	Khirmu Village	1.50
20.	Namet sacred forest	Namet Basti	0.50
21.	Singsur Ani Gumpa forest	Namet Basti	0.50
22.	Sharmang Gumpa forest	Namet Basti	0.30

23.	Thespa Gumpa forest	Namet Basti	0.50
24.	Thongmen Gumpa forest	Khirmu Village	0.40
25.	Brakar Gumpa forest	Lhou Village	0.30
26.	Arkidung Gumpa forest	Lhou Village	0.25
27.	Sangdok Palri Gumpa forest	Sangdok Palri Basti	1.00
28.	Dungarmani Gumpa forest	Namazing BAsti	0.50
29.	Dungirmoon Gumpa forest	New Kharsa Basti	0.30
30.	Jung Zero Point Gumpa forest	Jung Zero Point	1.20
31.	Khartung Basti Dudstang forest	Khartung Basti	0.01
32.	Kulangaus Basti Dudstang forest	Kulangaus Basti	0.01
33.	Namazing Basti Dudstang forest	Namazing Basti	0.01
34.	Kharsa Basti Dudstang forest	Kharsa Basti	0.01
35.	New Kharsa Basti Dudstang forest	New Kharsa	0.01
36.	Khraling Basti Dudstang forest	Khraling Basti	0.01
37.	Jung Bara Basti Dudstang forest	Jung Bara Basti	0.01
38.	Nuranang Dudstang forest	Jung Bara Basti	0.01
39.	Jung Bara Basti Pharmang forest	Jung Bara Basti	1.50
40.	Kharsa Basti Pharmang forest	kharsa Basti	0.50
41.	Khartang Pharmang forest	Khartang Basti	0.60
District - West Kameng			
42.	Bomdila Bazarline Gumpa forest	Bomdila Old Bazar	-
43.	Gontse Gaden Rabgyeling -1 Gumpa forest	Bomdila Bazar	0.50
44.	Gontse Gaden Radgyeling-2 Gumpa forest	Bomdila Bazar	1.10
45.	Upper Shera Basti Gumpa forest	Shera Basti	0.80
46.	Lower Shera Basti Gumpa forest	Lower Shera Basti	1.60
47.	New Bomdila Gumpa forest	New Bomdila Basti	0.03
48.	Jyoti Nagar Gumpa forest	Jyoti Nagar	0.50
49.	Kalchakar Gumpa forest	Jyoti Nagar	1.20
50.	Maishing Sacred forest	Maishing Basti	0.50
51.	Kepsingmu sacred forest	Saksem Basti	3.00
52.	Yangfaundi sacred forest	Richong Basti	2.00
53.	Sunlingnang sacred forest	Burchi Basti	0.55
54.	Khadun Gumpa forest	Dirang Basti	0.75
55.	Manidungur Gumpa forest	Yang Village	0.30
56.	Grang sacred forest	Yang Village	2.60
57.	Sangeechulen Gumpa forest	Youang Basti	3.00
58.	Palvul Jangechub Dhargvelling Gumpa forest	Lieung Basti	3.00
59.	Youngnang sacred forest	Young Basti	0.50
60.	Lieung sacred forest	Lieung Basti	1.20
61.	Rimpopha Gumpa forest	Dirang Basti	0.50
62.	Gazangphrang Gumpa forest	Dirang Basti	0.40
63.	Gomluk Gumpa forest	Dirang Basti	0.70
64.	Dupphang Gumpa forest	Dirang Basti	0.25

65.	Mani sacred forest	Dum Dirang Basti	1.50
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LIST OF SACRED GROVES IN UTTRANCHAL

S.No.	Name of the Sacred Grove	Location	Area (in acres)
CHAMOLI DISTRICT			
1.	Ghanteyal ki cheevi, Devika mandi	Badheth	500.00
2.	Ghandiyal Devataka van	Majyanitalli	0.50
3.	Laxmivan, Nandaaur Ghantakaran Ki Phulwari	Mana	500.00
4.	Nanda Aur Ghantakaran Ki Phulwari, Laxmivan	Mana	2.50
5.	Amdar Ki Kyor, Surai Ka Ped, Panyaltha Jalsort	Anusuya	1250.00
6.	Fulana (Chinap Sink Bugyal), Jaladhara, Mandir Ke Ped	Thaing	250.00
7.	Nanda Ki Phulwari, Bugyal, Mandir Ke Ped	Bhundar	3.00
8.	Bugyal, Nanda Kir Phulwari, Mandir Ke Ped	Bhundar	-
9.	Thai	Irani	250.00
10.	Sivalaika Jungle	Irani	2.00
11.	Bhagwatika Jungle	Irani	3.00
12.	Saimyar	Irani	0.50
13.	Anand Van	Irani	2500.00
14.	Kotgadi Ki Kokila Mata Ka Sthan	Madigaon	1.00
15.	Kotgadi Devi Ke Samrakshit Van	Madigaon	50.00
16.	Pravasi Pavasu Devata	Deuti	500.00
17.	Devrada	Koti	250.00
PITHORAGARH DISTRICT			
18.	Thal Ke Dhar	8 kms from Pithoragarh	1315.60

(Source : RANWA, Pune and Gadgil, M., 1998)

