



Preserving India's Sacred Groves

Why in News?

[Sacred groves](#) actively support biodiversity and function as [carbon sinks](#), but growing threats jeopardize their existence.

- **Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh** are among the states that are **rich in sacred groves**.



Key Points

- **About Sacred Groves:**
 - Sacred Groves are **patches of natural or near-natural vegetation**, dedicated by local communities to their ancestral spirits or deities.
 - They are known as **sarnas in Jharkhand, devgudis in Chhattisgarh, and orans in Rajasthan**.
 - These groves vary in size, **ranging from small clusters of trees to large areas spanning several acres**. Some consist of a single sacred tree, like the sal tree in Jharkhand.
 - Sacred groves have been legally protected under '[community reserves](#)' in the [Wildlife \(Protection\) Amendment Act, 2002](#).
 - Community Reserves are **areas designated for conservation that involve**

direct participation from local communities in preserving natural resources and wildlife.

▪ **Extent and Distribution:**

- Sacred groves occupy an estimated 33,000 hectares, accounting for just **0.01% of India's total land area**.
- India has well over 13,000 documented sacred groves. The states particularly rich in abundance of groves are **Kerala, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu**.
 - **Maharashtra** leads with nearly **3,000 documented sacred groves**.

▪ **Biodiversity and Cultural Significance:**

- Sacred groves are biodiverse areas that hold immense ecological value.
- [Tribal communities](#) have worshipped and maintained a deep connection with these groves.
- They historically symbolized **environmental conservation, guided by spiritual codes** codified in customary rules and governance systems.

▪ **Role in Climate Goals:**

- Sacred groves contribute to **climate change mitigation** by acting as [natural carbon sinks](#).
- Their preservation is vital for achieving **India's net-zero target by 2070**, alongside government-owned forests.
- Effective management of groves can **maintain the human-nature bond and prevent community alienation** caused by relocation.

▪ **Role of Sacred Groves in Biodiversity Conservation:**

- A sacred grove in **Raigad district, Maharashtra**, conserved by the **Waghoba Habitat Foundation**, recently saw the return of a [leopard](#), indicating ecological recovery.

▪ **Conservation Approach:**

◦ **OECM:**

- Sacred groves align with the "[Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures \(OECM\) approach](#) under the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#)."
- Groves are managed by communities, integrating cultural values into biodiversity conservation.
- OECM ensures **long-term conservation outcomes**, preserving biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

◦ **Government Initiatives:**

- **Gherabandi in Jharkhand** was introduced in 2019 to protect sacred groves by building boundary walls.
- **Renovation Projects in Chhattisgarh** were introduced to restore groves were undertaken during the previous government.
 - Due to **lack of community involvement** in conservation schemes and prioritization of reserved forests **often neglect sacred groves**.

Carbon Sinks

- These are the **long-term storage of carbon in plants, soils, geologic formations, and the ocean**.
- It **occurs both naturally and as a result of anthropogenic activities** and typically refers to the storage of carbon.
- **Natural Carbon Sink:**
 - Under this, nature has achieved a **balance of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere suitable for sustaining life**. Animals expel carbon dioxide, as do plants during the night.
 - All organic life on this planet is carbon based and when plants and animals die, much of the carbon goes back into the ground where it has little impact on contributing to [global warming](#).

