

# RESTORATION OF SACRED GROVES



**C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre  
Chennai**

## RESTORATION OF SACRED GROVES OF INDIA



C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC) is a Centre of Excellence of the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of India, established jointly by the Ministry and the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai.

CPREEC has been set up to increase consciousness and knowledge about the environment and the major environmental problems facing the country today. It has been conducting a variety of programmes to spread awareness and interest among the public, including, teachers, students, voluntary workers, educators, farmers, women and youth, on all aspects of the environment and ecology, with the purpose of promoting conservation of nature and natural resources.

In 1993, CPREEC decided to take education to action, and took up the restoration of sacred groves as a pilot project. Through the years, CPREEC has restored 52 sacred groves in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

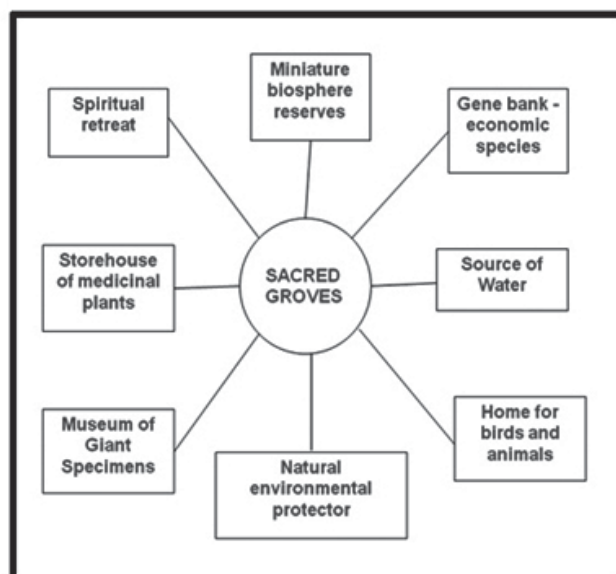
India has a long tradition of conserving nature by giving it a spiritual dimension. There is a strong symbiotic relationship between the biophysical ecosystem and socio-economic institutions, with strong cultural relations binding them. Culture and environment have been regarded as complimentary, yet dynamic. The various cultural connections are expressed through myths and religious practices that celebrate plants and animals, forests, rivers, mountains and precincts that are so essential for existence.

The sacred groves are an undisturbed patch of vegetation left on the outskirts of the villages in the plain or a part of a forested area. They are dedicated to local folk deities or ancestral spirits that are protected by the local people through traditions and taboos incorporating spiritual and ecological values, and are called sacred groves. These groves are found all over the country with local names and associated deities.

## Documented Sacred Groves



## Importance of the Sacred Groves



## **TABOOS, RITUALS AND BELIEFS**

The taboos, rituals and beliefs associated with the groves, supported by mystic folklore, have been the prime motivating factors for preserving the sacred groves in a pristine condition. Ritual activities are carried out in the sacred grove as part of annual festivals. In certain sacred groves, food is cooked using the dead wood collected from the grove. In most, terracotta figurines of horses and other animals are given as ritual offerings.

## **PRESENT THREATS TO SACRED GROVES**

Recent observations show that traditional rituals are still performed with the customary beliefs in the larger groves, but in smaller groves the traditional rituals no longer exist. Developmental activities such as the erection of temples within the groves, construction of highways, extension of power lines, or reclaiming of land for agriculture have also taken their toll of the sacred groves, many of which have been destroyed under commercial forestry operations. Conflicts among the grove managers have also resulted in the loss of biodiversity in certain places.

## **Activities of CPREEC**

- ❖ **Documentation of nearly 10,000 from all over India.**
- ❖ **Field outreach through**
  - Rallies, Traditional folk arts, Film shows, Field visits and interactions with local people,
  - Flim “*Vanadevathai*” (Gods of the Forest) produced by CPREEC
- ❖ **Information dissemination through**
  - Website
  - Books
  - Newsletters
  - Pamphlets
  - Exhibitions

**CPREEC has restored 53 sacred groves in  
Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka**



**Before** → **Nenmeli** → **After**

**RESTORATION OF SACRED GROVES (1993 to 2018)**

Sl.No.	State & District	Place
	<b>TAMILNADU</b>	
1.	<b>Thiruvallur</b>	Velliyur
2.		Veeraanathur
3.		Aiyaneri
4.		Poondi
5.	<b>Kanchipuram</b>	Daamal
6.		Nenmeli
7.		Thaiyur
8.	<b>Thiruvannamalai</b>	Kunnam
9.		Pavithram
10.		Paavupattu
11.		Hasanamaapettai
12.	<b>Pudukkottai</b>	Maynallur
13.		Perambur
14.		Sittannavaasal
15.		Annavaasal
16.		Vadavaalam
17.		Ilayaavayal
18.		Karambakkudi

Sl.No.	State & District	Place
19.	<b>Madurai</b>	Paappaapatti
20.		Thimmanatham
21.	<b>Sivagangai</b>	Koodal Senkulam
22.		Kollangudi
23.	<b>Thirunelveli</b>	Perunkottur
24.	<b>Vellore</b>	Sirunamalli
25.		Putteri
26.		Nambirajapuram
27.		Arunkundram
28.	<b>Trichy</b>	Nelvaay
29.		Poigaipatti
30.	<b>Nagapattinam</b>	Kannudayanpatti
31.		Thiruppugalur
32.	<b>Thanjavur</b>	Punnainallur
33.		Vennaatrangarai
34.	<b>Thiruvarur</b>	Paapanaasam
35.		Mannaargudi
36.	<b>Erode</b>	Bannaari
37.	<b>The Nilgiris</b>	Masinagudi
38.	<b>Villupuram</b>	Thiruvaamaathur
39.		Siruvangur
40.	<b>Virudhunagar</b>	Inam
		Meenaakshipuram
41	<b>Ramanathapuram</b>	Rameshwaram
<b>ANDHRA PRADESH</b>		
42.	<b>Nellore</b>	Prabugiripattinam
43.		Mallam
44.	<b>Chittoor</b>	Yerpedu
45.		Ramagiri
46.		Gurramkonda
47.		Eguapalyam
48.	<b>Cuddappah</b>	Odhiveedu
<b>KARNATAKA</b>		
49.	Mandya	Chikkade
50.		Haravu
51.	Mysore	Doddahejjur
52.		Karahalli
53.	Tumkur	Kallukote

Animal sacrifice has been discontinued in the restored groves.

# Publications

## CPREEC Publications

- ❖ Sacred Groves of India, 2014
- ❖ Plant & Animal Diversity in Valmiki's Ramayana, 2013
- ❖ Sacred Groves of Tamil Nadu and their Management Plan, 2012
- ❖ Temple Tanks of Chennai, 2004
- ❖ Sacred Tanks of South India, 2002

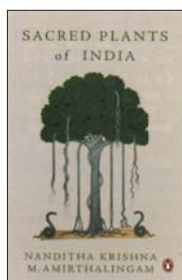
## Ecological Traditions of

- ❖ Tamil Nadu
- ❖ Andhra Pradesh
- ❖ Karnataka
- ❖ Kerala
- ❖ Maharashtra
- ❖ Goa
- ❖ Odisha
- ❖ Punjab
- ❖ Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh
- ❖ Rajasthan
- ❖ Gujarat
- ❖ Jharkhand
- ❖ West Bengal
- ❖ Assam

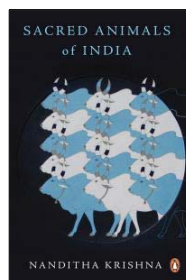


## Survey and Documentation of

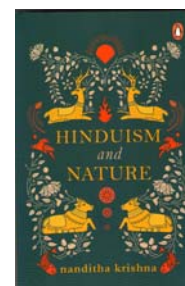
- ❖ Sacred Plants of India
- ❖ Sacred Animals of India
- ❖ Hinduism and Nature



Penguin 2014



Penguin 2010, 2014



Penguin 2018

## Seminars & Conferences

- 2011 - National Conference on “Conservation of Sacred Groves to protect local Biodiversity”
- 1998 - National Conference on the “Conservation of Sacred Groves and Ecological Heritage Sites of India”, in Chennai
- 1997 - Seminar on “ Ecological Traditions of Tamilnadu” in Chennai

## Exhibitions

- Sacred Groves of India, 2014
- Plant and Animal Diversity in Valmiki’s Ramayana, 2013
- Ecological Heritage of India, 1998

## ENVIS website

The website on Conservation of Ecological Heritage and Sacred Sites of India provides a decentralized system using a network of databases to ensure integration of information relating to the subject. Databases have been created on the different subtopics.



[www.cpreecenvnis.nic.in](http://www.cpreecenvnis.nic.in)

## Research

- **Inventory and Preparation of a Management Plan of Sacred Groves for the entire state of Tamil Nadu** sponsored by Forestry Extension Division, Tamil Nadu Forest Department, Government of Tamil Nadu.
- CPREEC was sanctioned a five year research project on **Sacred Grove Ecosystem Service Assessment in the Inland Plains of Tamil Nadu (SGESA)** by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of India.

The ecosystem services project assigned to CPREEC include the study of the non-timber forest products (NTFP), medicinal plants and healthcare under provisioning services; biodiversity under supporting services; and spiritual and recreational activities under cultural services.



## Award

*CPREEC received the Best ENVIS Centre Award on Conservation of Ecological Heritage and Sacred Sites of India for 2006 from the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, at the National Workshop of Envis Centres, at Shimla on October 14, 2006.*



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