

THE SACRED LIFE SAVER: A STUDY ON SACRED GROVES IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism has significant ramifications today as nature and ecosystem is on the verge of corrosion. Mankind is not an autonomus structure rather functions by depending on environment. This is forgotten and he is engaged in an activity of plunder with machines and technology based on selfish profit motives. The result is the loss of earth and natural wealth causing disaster for the planet itself. The Sacred Groves are a group of vegetation which endured the greed largely due to their religious relevance. It is a primeval form of biodiversity and decisive in Kerala's cultural identity. Sacred groves of 60 acres still survive in North Kerala. There are sacred groves for Mother Goddesses in Madayi, Neeleshwaram, Velloor, Peringom, Bheemanadi etc. The sacred groves for Father Gods are called as Palottukavukal, Daivathar kavukal, Vishnumoorthi kavukal, Gulikan kavukal, Muthappan kavukal etc. Nature was worshiped in the form of trees, stones, animals etc. Some sacred groves like Pulidaiva kavukal, Sarpakavukal are centred on animal deities. It is the seat of number of flora and fauna encompassing medicinal plants and endangered species. Vaghbata believed all the plants in sacred groves are medicinal and can be used in Ayurveda. Ashoka, sandal wood, teak, rudraksha, kurunthotti, peepal, devil's tree etc. are few. The many species of 'orchids' mentioned in the book Hortus Malabaricus are found in the sacred groves. It is an abode of reptiles like common skink, amphibians like tortoise and snake, birds like Indian pitta, cuckoo, and several migratory birds. Mammals and butterflies are also part of the sacred groves.

They balance weather, generates oxygen, stores underground water, supply pure water, prevents desert formation, plays an abode of biodiversity, myths, medicine, culture, rituals, worship and so on. Therefore it is our responsibility to preserve and protect them. This paper focuses on the importance of sacred groves in sustaining environment and the need to protect them.

KEY WORDS: , Ayurveda, Biodiversity, Ecocriticism, Nature, Sacred groves, Worship

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism has significant ramifications today as nature and ecosystem is on the verge of corrosion. Mankind is not an autonomus structure rather functions by depending on environment. Man forgets this and he is engaged in an activity of plunder with machines and technology based on selfish profit motives. The result is the loss of earth and natural wealth causing disaster for the planet itself. A group of vegetation which survived the greed is the Sacred Groves. It is a store house of biodiversity which dates back to over thousands of years and a miniature form of evergreen forests. It produces the purest oxygen and stores rain water. It is intricately linked to worshipping of deities. The progeny of civilization are rooted from them. Today it is under threat and the death knell to conserve them must be addressed since it is a treasury of life.

The origin of sacred groves dates before the Dravidian civilization and is mentioned in the Tamil Sangha literature. All the ethnic tribes of India have worshiped sacred groves. They are nature goddesses in the folk songs of Santhal, Munda, Orion, Parja, Gond etc. A cluster of trees and some stones were worshipped in ancient Kerala in sacred groves. Trees were considered as seat of totems and human life was interweaved to other living beings. Universe was understood in ritualistic terms. Numerous myths originated from this approach. The folk culture which revolved around the sacred groves was encroached by Aryans and Brahmins. A lot of them stand as symbols that resisted colonization but their indigenous identity is torn apart when they were converted into modern temples. The word 'kaavu' means garden or cluster of trees. Until the Temple Proclamation Act the Dalits and Sudras were denied permission to enter there. So they had to go back to the worshipping practices of their forefathers in