

# 'areas pradesh (sinha, 1995), oran in rajasthan,

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' Areas of land having special religious significance to local inhabitants and communities' (Oviedo and Jeanrenaud, 2007, Upreti et al., 2017). ' Sacred' has different meanings to different communities, at the basic level it denotes respect and 'set aside' for purposes of the religious belief. These are religiously managed community forests and they often represent the relic climax vegetation of the region. Named differently in different parts of India viz.

, Law lyngdhoh in Meghalaya (Upadhyay et al., , 2003), Kovil kadu in Kanyakumari (Ramanujam and Praveen 2003), Dev bhumi in Uttarakhand (Bisht and Ghildiyal, 2007, Singh 2011), Kavu in Kerala, Sarna and Deorai in Madhya Pradesh (Sinha, 1995), Oran in Rajasthan, Jaherthan and Garamthan in West Bengal, Deovan in Himachal, Ummanglai in Manipur, etc., these groves are mainly found in areas dominated by tribal's and managed by local people for various reasons. The existence of such undisturbed pockets is mostly due to certain taboos, strong beliefs, supplemented by mystic folklores (Gadgil and Vartak, 1975 Singh 2011). Sacred forests are part of a broader set of cultural values that different social groups, beliefs or value systems, traditions attach to places and which ' fulfil humankind's need to understand, and connect in meaningful ways, to the environment of its origin and to nature' (Putney, 2005). The term ' sacred natural sites' implies that these forests are in some way holy, consecrated, and so connected with belief systems.

Sacred natural sites are just one of many domains where religions or belief systems interact with nature. The first scholar to document sacred groves of the State was D. Brandis, the first Inspector General of Forests, who wrote <https://assignbuster.com/areas-pradesh-sinha-1995-oran-in-rajasthan/>

about occurrence of sacred groves in 1897 (Rao, 1996). There are important elements to take into account regarding indigenous or traditional spirituality. In 2007 the recognition of the political status of indigenous peoples provided by UNDRIP (the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) has significantly increased awareness of the deeper dimensions of oppression and of resilience (UNDRIP, 2007). The first report on the sacred sites is the Census report of Travancore of 1891 in which Ward and Conner (1927) reported about 15,000 sacred groves in Travancore. Historical records, legends and the folk songs, particularly certain devotional songs like "Thottampattu" sung in praise of Lord Ayyappan throw light on sacred groves of ancient Kerala. "Thottampattu" believed to have been composed during 500-600 AD, names 108 major "Ayyappan Kavus" and mentions about numerous "Ayyappan Kavus" distributed all over Kerala.

Most people believe that we have an obligation to avoid the extinction of species and races and the destruction of ecosystems caused by our own actions (WWF, 2005). A symbiotic relationship exists between cultural and biological diversity. This relationship is an important factor for ensuring sustainable human development. Nature provides light, food, water, and air through living process of creative renewal. This awareness of life in nature as a precondition for human survival led to the worship of air, light, food, and water. Different situations and histories gave rise to a large diversity of spiritualities among indigenous peoples, which is largely made up of a body of beliefs, values, and practices intimately connected to nature.

At a landscape level, anthropologists have long recognized the sacred status that cultures have given to nature not only in specific sacred sites (e. g. Frazer, 1890) but also in larger areas of cultural significance and entire landscapes. Many sacred natural sites have been well protected over long duration and have seen low levels of disturbance. Sacred sites also represent ancient and profound cultural values. After the 2003 Congress, IUCN's Specialist Group on the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA) that had formed in 1998 continued the work on guidelines for the management of sacred sites (Wild and McLeod, 2008). CSVPA has since advanced a significant amount of work on sacred sites and species including this volume, Mallarach and Papayannis, 2007.

The urge for the protection of sacred natural sites have also been recognized by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The CBD in 2004 developed the Akwe Kon voluntary guidelines for the conduct of environmental, cultural, and social impact assessments regarding proposed developments that may affect sacred forests and on lands and waters traditionally used by indigenous and local inhabitants (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2004). At the political level, as described before, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an important benchmark.

Article 12 (twelve) in particular provides significant political advantage for developing policies for the protection and recognition of sacred natural sites at the national level. It states: Indigenous peoples have the right to practice,

manifest, develop and teach their religious and spiritual traditions, ceremonies and customs; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. (UNDRIP, 2008) Traditional African religions often viewed land and its resources as communal property that belonged not only to the living but also to their ancestors and to future generations (Omari, 1990). In other cases, the relationship between people and the land was a matter of spiritual concern, and such religions have been called "profoundly ecological" (Schoffeleers, 1978).

Studies of sacred forests and other sacred sites throughout Africa shows that spiritual beliefs and religious can sometimes be the motivation for conservation of natural resources (Schoffeleers, 1978; Omari, 1990; Dorm Adzobue et al., 1991; Ntiamoa-Baidu, 1995). In north eastern India about 133 species of native plants are presently found only in sacred groves, presumably having been extirpated from unprotected areas (Khan et al., 1997). Traditional conservation practices in the form of nature worship have played an important role in protection and conservation of Indian biodiversity (Bhagwat and Rutte 2006). In the Kodagu district of Karnataka, local communities have traditionally protected forests patches, which are dedicated to the local deity. Such forest patches reserved in the name of local deity, are called sacred groves 'Devakad or Devarakadus'.

Forest fragments in Kodagu that exist in the form of sacred groves contain trees, epiphytes and lianas, understory plants. The proximal surrounding

matrix is dominated by relatively recent coffee plantations, many of which have maintained native tree cover within them. This tree covered coffee matrix surrounding the forest fragments in Kodagu have helped in maintaining tree diversity within fragments by providing connectivity to other fragments as well as the reserve forest, thus making the effect of fragmentation less severe (Bhagwat et al., 2005a). They act as a reservoir for native, endemic, and endangered floral species and as an important source of propagules and genetic diversity (Elouard 2000; Boraiah et al., 2003; Bhagwat et al., 2005 b).

There is a wide variation in the size of sacred forests. Some of them are small fragments of forest less than one hectare, and others are more extensive, spanning several hectares (Ntiamoa-Baidu 1995; Malhotra et al., 2007). Sacred forests have been protected around the world for a variety of reasons,