

## Deteriorating Condition of Sacred Groves in Jammu City and its Surroundings, J&K



### Environment

**KEYWORDS :** Exploitation, Conservation, Awareness.

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### ABSTRACT

*Traditional conservation practices of indigenous people such as small forest patches dedicated to local deity, contributed to the conservation and protection of biodiversity. The present study was aimed to examine the threats to the biodiversity of sacred groves of Jammu city. The survey was conducted and information was collected from 60 different sacred sites. The study reveals that these conservation sites face different levels of threats from urbanization, over-exploitation of natural resources, fragmentation, expansion of agriculture, religious tourism, lack of awareness, sanskritization, etc. It is recommended that there is need for awareness generation among youth, ecological education among the common people.*

### INTRODUCTION

India is known worldwide for its diverse culture and traditions. Traditional conservation methods are part of society, as they relate man and nature. The best mode of traditional conservation is sacred groves which are patches of forests protected by local communities in relation to religious and cultural beliefs. These places act as repositories of biodiversity and providers of valuable ecosystem services (Malhotra et al. 2001). In recent past, it has been observed that proximity to human habitation has become a great threat to these traditional conservation sites, as increasing population, encroachment, urbanization, economic exploitation of natural resources has increased (Gadgil and Chandran, 1998). The present study is an attempt to unveil the major threats to biodiversity of traditional conservation sites of Jammu city and its surrounding areas.

### METHODOLOGY

For initial examination of the study area, map and satellite data of Jammu city was used. Most of the information about the sacred groves was collected from the elderly people, village heads, headman of the groves and also people well versed with the diverse use of plants. A field survey was conducted and information was collected in 60 sacred groves (locally called as *Bani*) of Jammu area. The information regarding impact of construction, tree cover degradation, anthropogenic disturbances, management, etc. was collected and observed along with their photographs.

### RESULTS

A total of 60 sacred groves of Jammu city and its surroundings were studied for the present study (Table 1). Out of the total of 60 sacred groves studied 30 are located in rural and semi urban areas whereas 29 sacred groves are located in urban areas of Jammu and one in Ram nagar wild life sanctuary. The total area under the sacred groves studied comes to 296.29 ha out of which 287.47 ha (97.03 %) of the area fall in rural and only 8.82 ha (2.97%) of the total area is contributed by sacred groves in urban locations. The sacred sites studied are devoted to deities of various clans and religions and there is no restriction of entry or worship to any person belonging to other clans or communities. During the study it was found that sacred groves of the area are facing various threats.

Construction activities are being carried out at the cost of the vegetation of the grove as observed at Jhiri sacred grove, Mathwar sacred grove, Kailakh Nath sacred grove (Fig. 1), Sehaj Nath sacred grove, Peer Zahir Shah Wali sacred grove, etc. In the past, the small temples once existed under trees or in a grove, but now big temples are taking their place along with some residential and commercial complexes (Amirthalingam, 2010). In some sacred grove, trees were cleared for making parks (Fig. 2), resting places for devotees and pathways. It was also found that the green area of sacred groves is shrinking due to conversion of the grove area by people for the purpose of development of

market viz. Panchbaktar temple grove, Raghunath temple grove, Peer Baba Budhan Ali Shah sacred grove and due to surrounding agricultural area like Kailakh Nath, Prachin Shiv temple, etc.

Removal of trees emerges as a major threat to some sacred groves in the study area as they are being exploited for timber, firewood, food and fodder by the local people (Gadgil and Chandran, 1998). At Kailakh Nath sacred grove, nomads were seen freely collecting firewood, grazing their cattle (Fig. 3). With increased accessibility to these sacred places more number of people are visiting the areas like Mathwar sacred grove, Raghunath temple grove, Badigal sacred grove, etc. imposing anthropogenic pressure on the area in the form of solid waste generation (Fig. 4), water requirement, demand for fuel wood used for cooking food (langar) for the pilgrims and devotees. Indigenous varieties are being neglected (Fig. 5) and replaced with exotic ornamental and avenue trees like *Araucaria cookii*, *Alistonia scholaris*, etc. and invasion of weeds like *Lantana camara*, *Parthenium*, etc. During the study two stone crushers were also found near Pata Sarovar sacred groves releasing dust and imposing threat to vegetation and local population. Water sources in the form of springs, tanks, ponds and wells found at almost all the sacred groves in the study area. Due to the negligence of the stakeholders the water bodies are in deteriorated condition (Fig. 6).



**Fig 1. Construction**



**Fig 2. Sacred grove area converted into park**



Fig 3. Nomads grazing cattle



Fig 4. Solid waste dumping



Fig 5. Plant degradation



Fig 6. Polluted water body

Table- 1. List of Sacred Groves found in the Study Area.

S. No	Name of Sacred Grove	Name of the Deity	Place	Area (hect.) - Location
1	Kaliveer	Kaliveer Ji	Sunjwan	0.1 - Rural
2	Jhiri	Baba Jitto	Jhiri	0.75 - Rural
3	Bahufort	Kali Mata	Bahufort	1.0 - Urban
4	Raghunath Temple	Ram Ji	Old city	0.25 - Urban
5	Peer Kho Caves	Jamwat	Old city	0.1 - Urban
6	Ranbireshwar Temple	Lord Shiv	Old city	0.5 - Urban
7	Baba Bhutto	Baba Bhutto	Rathoa	0.15 - Rural
8	Mahamaya	Mahamaya	Mahamaya	268 - Rural
9	Sehaj Nath	Baba Sehaj Nath Ji	Talab tilo	1.2 - Urban

10	Peer Baba Rah	Baba Rah	Gandhi nagar	0.12 - Urban
11	Peer Baba	Zahir Shah Wali	Science College	0.15 - Urban
12	Peer Baba Ilai Baksh	Baba Ilai Baksh	Bakshi Nagar	0.01 - Urban
13	Panch-Peer	Panch Peer	Ram Nagar	0.15 - Wildlife sanctuary
14	Peer Baba	Budhan Ali Shah	Satwari	0.05 - Rural
15	Mathwar	Baba Bulla	Mathwar	6.5 - Rural
16	Raja Mandlik Ji	Raja Mandlik Ji	Baran	0.3 - Rural
17	Jewel Peer Baba	Saraf-ud-din Rehmat Ulla	Jewel	0.12 - Urban
18	Karwanda	Lord Shiv	Karwanda	0.05 - Rural
19	Kailakh	Kailakh Nath Ji	Thathar	2 - Rural
20	Rajpura	Sid Ji Maharaja	Rajpura	0.05 - Urban
21	Drora	Bua Dati Ji	Rajpura	0.01 - Urban
22	Prachin Shiv Temple	Lord Shiv	Sunjwan	1 - Rural
23	Badigal	Badigal Dev Ji	Kargar Morh	0.75 - Rural
24	Pandav Temple	-	Nagrota	0.02 - Rural
25	Chawadi	Bua Dati Ji	Chawadi	0.35 - Rural
26	Temple Katal Batal	Lord Shiv	Katal Batal	0.1 - Rural
27	Maharani Charki	Radha Krishan	Birpur	0.05 - Rural
28	Nagbani	Nagdevta	Nagbani	0.4 - Rural
29	Rani Ki Samadia	Ranbireshwar Ji	Gumat	0.07 - Urban
30	Panchbakhtar	Lord Shiv	Old city	0.4 - Urban
31	Mahalakshmi Temple	Mahalakshmi	Pacca danga	0.02 - Urban
32	Chirki	Baba Rochi Ram	Ranjan	1.75 - Rural
33	Hanuman Temple	Hanuman	Amb	0.25 - Rural
34	Bua Sajawati Temple	Bua Sajawati	Amb	0.087 - Rural
35	Baba Kaliakh Nath	Baba Kaliakh	Amb	0.093 - Rural
36	Baba Geonath	Geonath	Aghore	0.25 - Rural
37	Bua Sjawati	Bua Sjawati	Ranjan	0.12 - Rural
38	Baba Kaan Dev	Baba Kaan Dev	Aghore	0.12 - Rural
39	Sarorver Swa-Patta	Bua Sajawati, Baba Sar	Swa Patta	0.25 - Rural
40	Baba Sua	Baba Sua	Nargarda	2.215 - Rural
41	Pairawali Mata	Mata Vaishno Devi	Amb	0.25 - Rural
42	Kaliveer	Kaliveer	Aghore	0.37 - Rural
43	Bua Sajawati	Bua Sajawati	Ranjan	0.12 - Rural
44	Peer Baba	Peer Baba	Jandial	0.12 - Rural
45	Birpur Sati Temple	Dati Sheilavanti	Birpur	0.4 - Rural
46	Aap Shambu Temple	Lord Shiv	Roop Nagar	0.3 - Urban
47	Baba Pairh	Pairh Devta	Katal Batal	0.5 - Rural
48	Bua Dati Temple	Dati Ji	Paloura	0.15 - Urban
49	Peer Mitha	Mitha Peer	Old city	0.1 - Urban
50	Ram Temple	Lord Rama	Purani Mandi	0.05 - Urban
51	Hanuman Temple	Hanuman	Purani Mandi	0.05 - Urban
52	Baldeo Temple	Baldeo Ji	Old city	0.12 - Urban
53	Kol Kondoli Temple	Mata	Nagrota	0.17 - Urban

54	Satya Narayan Temple	Narayan	Nagrota	0.15 - Urban
55	Kali Mata Temple	Kali Mata	Nagrota	0.03 - Urban
56	Manhas	Dilip Singh Manhas	Paloura	1.75 - Urban
57	Peer Baba Gumat	All	Gumat	0.05-Urban
58	St. Mary's Church	Jesus Christ	Satwari	0.8- Urban
59	St Paul Church	Jesus Christ	Old city	0.6 - Urban
60	Lakshmi Narayan temple	Lakshmi Narayan	Gandhi nagar	0.5 - Urban

## CONCLUSION

Traditional conservation sites like sacred groves have spiritual, cultural, social, economic and scientific value. The views of ancient people to conserve important species which may get extinct in wild, has played an important role to save the biodiversity in the form of sacred sites. Due to increased urbanization, population, lack of traditional knowledge among young generation and non involvement of local people in the conservation strategies these sacred groves are at threat. The various threats to the sacred groves of the study area were also identified as ongoing construction activities (temples, shrines, residential and commercial buildings, *etc*) in and around the groves, encroachment of the grove land for agriculture purposes, exploitation of resources by locals, removal of vegetation, grazing of cattle, tourism activities, replacement of indigenous tree species by exotic ornamental tree species, *etc*. Hence, there is need to protect this rich traditional conservation institution for the betterment of future generations.

**Recommendations** Generate awareness among the local people by providing them ecological education and initiate people's participation. Proper documentation of the resources of sacred groves should be done. All these areas should be made no poly-thene zone. Alternative sources of fuel and fodder should be created. Agro-forestry, plantation on community lands, wastelands should be promoted. Exploitation of sacred groves can be prevented by making stringent laws and proper fencing. To prevent encroachment of the sacred groves, limited construction should be allowed around them. Water sources and vegetation should be maintained.

## REFERENCE

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