

## **Change in Socio-Cultural Dimensions and its Impact on Existing Sacred Grove**

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### **Abstract**

*Since inception of our civilization, every aspects of its are changing. Civilized populace and their every demandable foot-print is the prima causes of these changing. In Vedic-Ramayana- Bible –Mahabharata- Koran period, society was formed on ‘religious based environment’ and on the pillar of this ‘religious-deterministic mental frame’, people shaped their ‘nature based culture’, and one of them is Sacred Grove culture. But unfortunately people’s perception about their environment has been changing and now-a-days nature is being considered as an economic-bank. Therefore, change in socio-cultural dimensions is controlled by economic activities. Environmental based rituals and festive are now are being eroded in many ways. Present day planning and developmental policies are too much misty for environmental conservation as well as renewal. There are more than dozen of international conventions related to conservation of our environment, but little emphasize has given on the renewal of environment through the revival of age-old cultures, for example nourishment of Sacred Groves.*

*Sacred Grove is an age-old culture of our society which conserves the sacred trees on the basis of people’s religious believes in relation to nature. In ancient India, people’s strong religious acuity gave a believed-shadow, under which nature associated Sacred Grove culture was protected with a large territory which was a great impact on prolific environment. But, today we lost our age-old nature-based social culture and are moving towards technology-based civilization to fulfill the economic easiest demand life. As a result, we have lost almost the real identity of these Sacred Groves for our healthy environment.*

*Present authors are trying to establish the age-old traditional conservational thinking with the clubbing of scattered Sacred Groves and encouraging the Sacred Grove culture to revive the environment for present as well as future.*

**Key words:** *Religious based environment, age-old cultures, Sacred Grove.*

### **Preamble**

From the birth-day of our planet; related all aspects are trying to changing in respect of time-space geography. Society and their specimen culture is the catchment area; on that sporadic alteration are being cultivating. In Vedic-Ramayana-Bible-Mahabharata-Koran period, populace was formed on ‘religious based environment’. On the prop of this ‘religious-deterministic mental frame’, people shaped their ‘nature based culture’, and one of them is Sacred Grove culture. Sacred Grove is an age-old culture of our society which conserves the sacred trees on the basis of people’s religious believes in relation to nature. People’s burly religious perception gave a believed-landscape, under which nature associated Sacred Grove culture was protected with a large territory which was a great impact on plentiful environment. Recently, people’s perception about their environment has been changing and now-a-days nature is being considered as an economic-hut. Therefore, change in socio-cultural dimensions is controlled by economic activities. Environmental based rituals and festive are now are being eroded in many ways. Modern philosophy gave little emphasize on the renewal of environment through the revival of age-old cultures, for example nourishment of Sacred Groves.

## Objectives

To establish the age-old traditional conservational thinking with the clubbing of scattered Sacred Groves and encouraging the Sacred Grove culture to revive the environment for present as well as future.

## Data Base and Methodology

The present work is divided into three phases. First, in pre- field stage, we studied different secondary literature based survey from different journals, books, epics, magazines, Indian cinemas, documentary photos of different Ceremonies ( like marriage etc.) of society etc. and also prepared some questionnaires like; what is the name & location of sacred grove, age of sacred groves, festivals related sacred groves, what are the infrastructures that have planted and improved with the part of these sacred groves, how local peoples use their sacred groves, their perception about their sacred groves, do local people uses their sacred trees as ayurvedic medicine etc. during field survey, I followed the questionnaires that I was prepared on pre-field survey and also collect different photos of sacred groves randomly ( total 60). To select the respondents, here used mainly the answers or comments of age-old local peoples of that area ranging from 45-80+ ages. Then in post-field, to analyze the whole work author used the Random Sampling Method. To formulate the name of the trees into use in world respect here scientific names of them has been collected from the interview of biological students.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION VIS-A-VIS SACRED GROVES PERCEPTION IN ANCIENT THOUGHT

Ancient people were intimate with their surroundings. They so often weaved themselves into the tapestry of life surround them so exquisitely that we can only admire their sensitivity and their wisdom. They had a very special understanding of the places, the locus genius of their territory.

### Paleolithic Era (2,50,000 B.C.):

In the seminal book of sir James Frazer *The Golden Bough* (1935), we have an impressive and eloquent evidence of how people, from the Paleolithic Era onwards went on about preserving and worshipping their forests; how they set out certain forests as sacred.

### In Veda :

The poetic vision of the Hindu Vedas extolled the power of nature in its various forms Vedic Gods were embodiments of nature and its forces such as Dyaus ( Sky), Prithivi ( Earth), Varuna (waters). In the *Samkhya* school of Hindu philosophy, the five powers of earth ( Prithivi), water ( Jal), fire ( Tejas), air ( Vayu) and space ( Akasha) are evoked in the rituals and meditational techniques of Hinduism and in daily worship or *Puja* they are employed as symbols. Actually these nature based worshipping perceptions are the sources of the human love and respect to the nature. And from this loves and respect on natural items, natural trees or the symbols had been originated as a Sacred unit.

### In Rik-Veda (4000 B.C.):

According to Researcher Prof. Herman Jokabi

In *Rik-Veda*, medicinal trees other trees are worshipped as God for instance *Vadic-Rishi* (fellow) called to medicinal trees as for the giver of peace (Al Aman, 2010). *Somlata* is a wild epiphyte in forest that was used in Vedic-society to collect *Somrash* (liquor) and that *Somlata* was decided as Sacred item and Vedic-fellows worshipped this (Al Aman,2010 ). Even in *Rik-Ved* we can searched the location of this *Somlata* that was at *Muzban* mountain( Al Aman,2010).

### In Jaju-Veda Sanhita:

In Jaju Veda Sanhita, we can find out that, *Ashttha* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree and *Palash* ( *Butea Monosperma* ) was dedicated as Sacred tree in respect of its medicinal and use of Ashamed *Jagya*'s burring logs item .in Vedic Society, people thought that , these two trees are the home of Medicinal Gods. Again in this Veda Forest – worshipping concept can be searched as for worshipping to God and here Forest was identified as the term like *Banashpati*.

### In Kritibashi-Ramayana ( First half of 14<sup>th</sup> Century)

According to Sri Benimadhav Sil

In *Ramayana Panchabati Bon* (the forest based residence of *Surpanakha*, plate-D), *Tapa Bon* (forest residence of *Sita* and her Sons after detaching from Ram), *Ashok Bon* (residence of *Sita* in *Lankha*) are the examples of Sacred Forest.



Plate -D



Plate -E

### ***In Kashidashi- Mahabharata (3200 B.C.)***

*According to Abdul Aziz Al Aman*

In Mahavarata, we can searched that, *Dronacharya* dying ( plate-E), pierced with many arrows, under a large *Ficus Tree*, he was watched over by *Krishna* and the five *Pandava* brothers ( *Judhistir, Arjun, Bhim, Nakul, and Sahadev*).

### ***In Sri Magbhat Gita( 5000 years Before Present):***

*According to Swami Pravupada*

In *Gita*, *Sri Krishna* (Hindu God) identified the *Asattha* tree (*Ficus Religiosa*) as a Material world and to release own self from this greedy material abiotic world we have to worship this tree. Here *Sri Krishna* told that, the leaves of this tree is *Veda-Mantra* and those peoples who will known about this tree, they can relief ownself from the sin of material world ( *Provupada, 2007* ).The stems ahead portion of this tree was decided as human's demandable nature. So, in recent time when we will see that, peoples are worshipped to *Asattha* tree like, it is the reflection of the *Sri Krishna's* thought about sacred tree.

### ***Srikrishnakirtan of Baruchandidas :***

On the other side, in *Srikrinalila*, we can search that a scenic scene that is, the onset of summer inflames an ardent longing for romantic dalliances in the *sakhis* and their sacred couple, *Shri Radha-Krishna*. And even during the days of searing heat, the enchantment of these amorous frolics makes one unaware of the strong blasts endorsing the scorching summer. At times coolness, on the banks of the lake...inner realm of bowers or *nikunjas*, in thickets of sensuous creepers on the shores of the *Yamuna*, make *Krishna*, the handsome supreme lover, consort *Radha* and the herd of young maidens...ecstatic...by joyously responding to the magical autumnal like love of the most glorious season ( plate-B).

### ***In Koran Swarif :***

'*Masjedolharam*' ( Islamic word ) term used in *Koran Swarif*, the actual meaning of this term is; '*Masjedol*' means the four side of Mosque and the term '*Horam*' means prohibited ( *Sen, 2002*). That means in the boundary of holy Mosque various anti social activities specially killing of mans, trees plucking, wealth collection, torturing on any biotic part. So from this it can be watched here that prohibition on trees plucking is the backdrop of sacred identity of the trees in holy specific place. In context of *Hodoibear war, Hajarath* was speech under the tree that, 'those peoples will devote themselves against *Koreshians* in this war; they are all , will not go to the hell of world'. So here a tree was dedicated as holy site. In *Koran Swarif*, a heaven- tree; the name of it is '*Sedra*' can be researched and this tree's every leaf was the seating place of different Gods ( *Sen, 2002*).Again, another Sacred tree is availed in *Koran Swarif* that is '*Ghorba*' which was worshipped by '*Gatfhan*'-community of Arab ( *Sen, 2002*).

**Indus valley culture of 3000 B.C.:**

Numerous references to sacred trees occur in literature and scriptures. In depiction on the seals of the Indus valley culture of 3000BC, the tree is a recurring motif in the sub-continent, appearing in architecture and painting. Early seals from the Indus valley civilization depict the tree as a symbol of abundance and veneration. The Rivers of the sub-continent are often sacred and worshipped as embodiments of goddesses. Besides trees and river, rocks and mountains, indeed all forms of nature were believed to spirits to be respected.

**Time of Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.):**

To Buddha the definition of forest is a particular organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life activity; it affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it'. the narrative of his life has certain constants, he has born to Queen Maya (mother of Budha) under a grove of Sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) at Lumbini (in Nepal). At the age of 29 he renounced the material world and followed various spiritual teachers and wandered seeking the truth, practicing austerities and meditating. At the age of 35, seated meditating under a *Pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) in Bodhgaya, he achieved enlighten (Plate-A).

**Sikh culture and Guru Nanak:**

During the time of Guru Nanak, he was followed the shadow of trees to cultivate the song culture which was a part of their spirituality of worshiping of peace-love and social reforms to fulfill those they arranged a natural place with his follower-populace under the trees calmness situation. He was a saint man and after his setting that place was decided as sacred place and through that sacred thought the shadow tree was also decided as sacred tree (plate-C).

**Classical Greece and then Rome:**

In the world of classical Greece and then Rome, these special groves and forests were usually enclosed by stone walls. This enclosure was called in Greek *Temenos*, a cut-off place, or a demarcated place. A better translation would be a sacred enclosure. Indeed a periodical entitled *Temenos* started to be published in England in the late 1970s explicitly evoking the spirit of *Temenos* as a sacred enclosure. In Latin the term these demarcated places was *templum*. *Templum* was of course the original root of the word 'temple'. To begin with, those sacred enclosures were the sanctuaries in which religious ceremonies took place. They were in fact open air temple. When later on temples were erected as monumental buildings with columns and all, sacred groves and forest did not cease to exist. In the sacred groves and forests of ancient Greece, particular species of trees were dedicated to particular gods. Oaks were in the domain of Zeus, willow of Hera, olives of Athena, the laural of Apolli, pines of Pan, vine of generous and flexible people.

**SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION VIS-À-VIS EXISTING SACRED GROVES IN RECENT TICKING:**

Due to adaptation with modernity, most of the societies are doing lost their real sacred Groves culture. Sometimes the actual theme of sacred groves cultures are totally changed or in some cases it is partially changed from its originality. But in most cases the proportion of these changing in context of the quantity or frequency of the Sacred Groves are higher. To discuss this changing scenario, different nature of changing are discussed here with suitable examples. In this supersonic era most of the folk-peoples have lost their nature based traditional belief and for this sacred grove and related traditional belief has also been disappeared from their mind. For example, a sacred grove has now a day disappeared from Dallaha village of Illambazar of Birbhum district (plate 18).

Most of the sacred groves units in West Bengal were moved to temple form; for example Dangkalitala sacred grove in Bolpur town of Birbhum district (plate 12). In youth society, most of them are not followed or believed on this sacredness and some time they gave their unfaithful sign on sacred trees. For example 'Hatichakkhu' (local name) a sacred tree in Illambazar block has been adversely affected by their odd unusual handwriting. The integrity of many groves with regional or pan Indian character has suffered due to the influx of large number of pilgrim and tourist. Pilgrim's non eco-friendly polluted behavior changes the natural identity of these sacred zones. Different priests are developed on the basis of sacred Groves based temples and they are the media for god worshipping and through this belief initial belief on sacred groves has diverted to pre-initial to sacred groves. From this economy beneficiary concept had generated for priests for instance it can be seen in Fullaratala sacred grove in Labhpur or in Kankalitala sacred groves in Bolpur of Birbhum district. In different parts of this West Bengal, local folk deities have been, continuous replaced with Hindu gods and goddesses and have resulted in erection of a temple in the sacred grove. Sacred groves have been encroachment by local communities, governmental activities, migrated persons and tourist persons. Daily clearing of sacred ground by local people by brome to collect dead leaf, fruits, stems are not deposited and accumulated on land and due to lack of accumulation plants organs, re-germination, pollenization of trees or plants are being stopped. Moreover due to cycling of beating by brome huge number of micro organisms, tiny grassroots animals insects, animals etc. are become follow the '*door of Yama*' and ground level bio-diversity become disaster; for instance Sacred Grove in Dhallah or in Sacred grove of Fullaratala or Dangkalitala Sacred grove or in Kalisha Sacred grove in Bolpur.

Sacred Grove concept now has moved to especially sacred tree or sacred trees in very small area bases for example plate 4, 2 and 6 are the examples of sacred tree rather sacred grove. Actually we should keep in mind that Grove is a plural form; wherein many sacred trees are accumulated in an area. But, due to modernity, urbanization, demand of land-space, changing eco-faith, changing rural specimen eco-culture, multi-species sacred grove has moves to single species sacred tree concept. Now a day it is mostly found that with the increasing distance from remote rural area to urban landscape, the sacred groves concept is becoming to sacred tree framed; wherein multi species or multi numbers sacred trees are absent due to changing land use pattern with traditional belief. For kind of information, we can see the examples of plates 1, 3 and 5. If we see the plate 3, then With the invasion of globalization, human encroachment has increased and ultimately some time open sky templum has moved to concrete framed temple (see plate 10 and 12). Even the sacred tree is adversely affected by modern westernized preceptors and young people give imprint their lack of sacred believe about sacred trees. For kind of information a specific example can be opened here that is plate 8. where we can easily identify that local un-believed people sketched different *Love sign* ( ) on the body of sacred tree (see plate 12). But if we go to the remote comparative rural area then we can promptly find out different sacred groves in natural form which are free from human's encroaching effects (see plate 7, 9 and 11). we can easily realized that, this sacred grove is lived with total 260-280 bamboos in a particular area.

**NATURE & EXTENT OF HUMAN ENCROACHMENT**

Totally free from human interference

Partly affected by human interference



← Plate-7: Darbarsaheb of Labhpur



Plate-8: Hatichakkhu tree of Ilambazar →



← Plate-9: Brahamacharitala Indas



Plate-10: Kankalitala of Bolpur →



← Plate-11: Sibchanditala of Ilambazar



Plate-12: Dungalitala of Bolpur →

**Inference:** Away from the urban centre human interference is becoming less

**SINGLE & MULTISPECIES SACRED GROVES**



← Plate-1: Gutulikalitala of Monoharpur(Bolpur)



Plate-2: Kalitala of Monoharpur(Bolpur) →



← Plate-3: Manasatala of Chelliah( Ilambazar)



Plate-4: Shivtala of Jambuni(Bolpur) →



← Plate-5: Kalitala of Bora(Nanoor)



Plate-6: Shivtala of Bandhgara(Bolpur) →

**Inference :** Away from the urban centres number of species within sacred grove units is increasing



Plate11: Sacred tree of Alipurduar (near rail station) indicates that the concept that now a day sacred tree (relict of sacred groves) is decided as a source money or income for local dwellers. The right sided plate informs us that we have lost the original sacred culture and now we are running the sacred tree culture for money genesis.

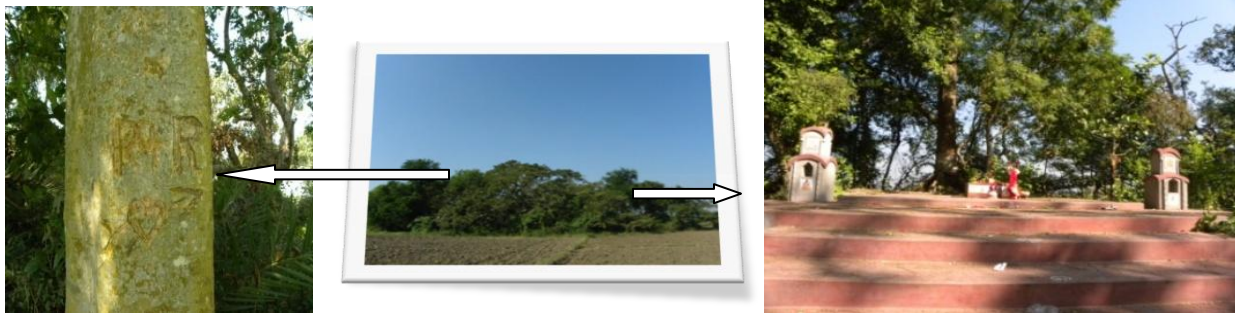


Plate 12: In most recent, even in rural area is not free from modernity about sacred groves. They are decided as sacred groves but in interior of that the advanced concrete's foot prints bear for example plate 12 is the rural Mathkalitala sacred grove in Bachra village of Murshidasbad. where if we see the outer portion of the sacred zone the it will good for sacred grove identification but if we see interior of that sacred groves then a red colour open sky concrete structure (*Than*) can be identified.

**TEMPLE BASED SECRED GROVES**



← Plate-13: Dangalikalitala of Bolpur



Plate-14: Kalishayar of Sriniketan

**NON-TEMPLE BASED TRADITIONAL SECRED GROVES**



Plate-15: Shivtala of Nanoor



Plate-16: Bagratata of Dahllah



Plate-17: Hanumantala of Bolpur



**Inference:** Changes of faith scenario from replica or taboo based sacred believe to temple norm.

With the changing perception of modern Time-Space geography, peoples are trying to structures every aspects relevant their surrounded society. And for result, our cultures are being moved to man modified modern culture which is far away from nature-allied culture. The reflection of this changing can be identified through the sacred Groves culture.

Most of the sacred groves in nowadays are being moved to concrete frame structure instead of open-sky temple structure. For example; Dungalikalitala sacred grove (see plate-13), Kalisha sacred grove (plate-14), Kankalitala Sacred grove of Bolpur (plate 10) or some sacred groves are partially moved as modern net like Hanumantala sacred grove (plate-17).

In recent, sacred groves or specimen of sacred tree is used as an additional part for cinematography. This cinema is the reflector of the changing cultural taste of any society. In Kollywood (Tamil Film Industry) or Tollywood ( Bengla or East Indian Film Industry) or even Hollywood, sacred grove concept is being applied as a commercial thought. So, our altering frame of socio-cultural dimension give birth the changing application of sacred groves. In some Tamil cinema, Tulsi sacred tree with *Than* is used to prepare a scene of cinema (see plate 18 A, 18 B). Today sacred groves are also used as a advertising notice of different companies; which is also the result of changing economic taste and demand of society (see plate19 ).In Tollywood (*Sedin dekha Hoyechilo, Dui Prithibi*), this sacred grove concept has been also used as commercial purpose.

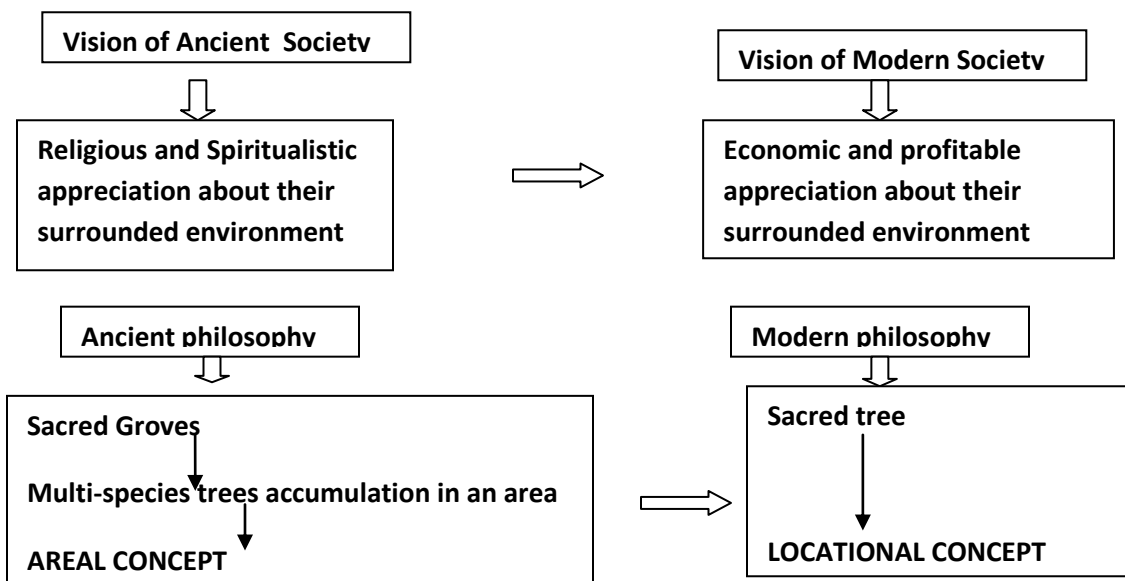


Plate-18 A and B: scene of Tamil Cinema where Basal plant is being used.



Plate 19: Hanging of Advertisement in the entrance of Puthuput sacred grove, near Chennai.

**Inference (watched remarks):** Time and Space always follow the dynamism and being that’s result; society and its cultural institution like sacred groves have been changed partially or in some cases totally from their mother-identity. Human’s unbounded demand-desire, modern aspiration, unmethodical land-use, altering perception about eco-environmentalism, aggressive philosophy about environment destroying the Eco-thought of Sacred Groves. And the final outcome came to in front of our life-basin that we are going to be unable to find our traditional wisdom, culture, traditional rituals-rules-belief-perception from our social geography and the final actual realistic watched geography about sacred groves are sketched by authors are as follows-





The worshipping of sacred groves was mainly concerned on the sacred tree and on the basis of sacred belief; folk-peoples were preserved and maintained a distinct sacred boundary. But this real perception had been totally changed in some cases. For explanation, in recent, the sacred place becomes more importance rather sacred tree. For example, Bagratata sacred grove of Dāhllah village of Illambazar bears those types of result (see plate 18).



Plate 18: It indicates that the sacred periphery is being maintained by peoples but the sacred tree is absent. So, folk's believe has moved to mainly sacred land and sacred spirituality or god rather sacred grove or tree (attached with spirituality or god).

### Recommendation

World is moving to two 'D'; one- to Discovering, two- to Destruction in side by side. So, these two directions gave a changing cultivation in Sacred Groves traditional environment. But being as environmental geographers we have to conserve our nature based culture for maintaining our traditional tourism, traditional specimen culture of society, societies own eco-behavioralism and related distinct identity. After dying the sacred tree it should keep it our mine that we have to plant again re-plantation of sacred tree in the place of previous location. Also we have to maintain our aggressive demandable hand and try to leave the sacred groves arena from its natural status.

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