

Foreword

Certain varieties of Trees have always been worshipped traditionally, and parts of trees are used during practice of various cultural traditions and rituals. This is particularly true of the popularly worshipped Peepal and Neem trees, planted together in temple premises and known locally as 'Ashwathakatte'. Several cultural practices are emphasised in Hindu religious scripts, mythology, while the rituals have attempted to drive home the importance of preserving nature over the centuries. Given the context of rapid urbanization and its threat to urban ecology, it is important that the green cover is protected in cities. It is interesting to see close linkages between cultural practices and tree conservation. Due to their ecological value and mythological beliefs, trees are worshipped and still continue to be used in religious ceremonies.

This study has made an attempt to capture the mythological beliefs, rituals surrounding these holy trees besides its scientific aspects and medicinal values. Capturing the perceptions of people visiting temples is an interesting perspective which provides insights into the belief systems still in practice. Findings from the survey revealed that these trees remained in the landscape because of the religious or social values associated with them. Thus, religious and ritualistic activities followed by lay persons can be an effective tool in aiding biodiversity conservation and reducing tree cover loss to a certain extent. Religious teachings and cultural traditions could be used in a positive sense for conservation of the environment and ecology. In the light of this, the researchers have also suggested some of the measures to be taken to protect the trees since some traditional practices lead to injure the trees.

The researchers have made some relevant suggestions to the concerned departments to ensure sustenance of these holy trees and I am sure the study will be quite useful to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike who is responsible for the maintenance of trees in the city premises and the Mujurai Department who are directly responsible for temple management and the Forest Department to address this as a component of urban tree conservation measures. The results and recommendations of this study will be also be beneficial to researchers pursuing this theme and students working on tree conservation besides some of the non-government organizations working on tree protection in urban areas.

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