

Title: Need for a national action plan to restore sacred groves in the country.

DR. K. DHANARAJU (TINDIVANAM): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, biodiversity is the cornerstone of life. The tangible and intangible benefits derived from the living organism and their varieties and their associations are immensely vast and varied. Wild species and their varieties have made substantial contribution to agriculture, medicine and industry.

The concept of conservation of biodiversity is to conserve biological resources. The sacred groves are one of the finest examples of natural resource management wherein the innate native wisdom guided their protection from biotic exploitation. Sacred groves are patches of forests dedicated to a local spirit or deity and protected by cultural traditions and religious precepts. Such sacred groves are available in all parts of the country. For example, 82 groves with floristic values are available in Pudukottai and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu over the years. C.P. Ramaswamy Foundation of Chennai and M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai have also resurrected several denuded groves and successfully restored them to their original status in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The coastal sector covering Pondicherry, Cuddalore and Villupuram districts, which belong to my constituency, stretching over 350 square kms. has about 163 groves, of which 33 have rich biodiversity values. There are hundreds of groves with biodiversity potential in Tamil Nadu, but these are facing intense pressure from human exploitation and faulty management policies.

Originally, the groves were aimed at protecting the local biodiversity through taboos and restrictions and it was hailed as "vernacular conservation", but slowly the cultural manifestations in the form of rites, rituals, worships and festivals have become colourful, commensurate with elaborations of temple complexes.

13.00 hrs.

Understandably, when cultural traditions soared high, conservation ethos suffered heavily on account of economic improvement and slackness, neither the groves are protected nor maintained.

Values of groves are islets of local biodiversity, tiny tots of endemic asylums and refugia for relict species. It is time for us to carry initiative into the villages. Sacred groves can be integrated into schemes under national biodiversity strategy action plan. The Ministry of Environment and Forest should send a directive to all the State Governments to take up the restoration of sacred groves on a priority basis so that the villages are restored of their natural heritage.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Chandra Bhushan Singh -- Not present.