

Bundelkhand's Sacred Groves (Devsthalis)

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

In the dry region of Bundelkhand (spanning parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), community-guarded sacred groves are thriving and maintaining rich biodiversity.

- A 2026 study by researchers at Maharaja Chhatarsal Bundelkhand University evaluated sacred groves (*Jatashankar* and *Bhimkund* in Chhatarpur district, MP) against nearby degraded government forest patches.
- These sacred sites exist completely outside formal legal frameworks, receiving no state forest report listing, title deeds, or budget allocation.

Scientific & Ecological Findings

Indicator	Sacred Groves (Devsthalis)	Adjacent Degraded Forest
Plant Species Count	70 – 72 species per site	40 – 51 species per site
Flora Composition	High density of native flora & medicinal herbs (<i>Curcuma caesia</i> , <i>Chlorophytum borivillianum</i>)	Dominating invasive weeds (e.g., <i>Lantana camara</i>)
Ecological Indices	Higher scores on Shannon-Wiener diversity index and lower dominance scores	Lower diversity, dominated by hardy invasive species

- **Role of Dalit and Tribal Women** - Research documents that Dalit and tribal women act as the primary stewards of these groves.
- **Community Rule Enforcement** - They regulate firewood collection, prevent the felling of live trees, and preserve traditional botanical and medicinal knowledge.

Key Threats Facing Sacred Groves

- **Lack of Legal & Revenue Protection**

- Most *devsthalis* sit on unclassified or revenue land rather than notified forest land.
- Without legal tenure, they remain vulnerable to encroachment from agriculture, road construction, and quarrying.

- **Sanskritisation & Cultural Erosion**

- Transition from nature-spirit worship to concrete temple structures reduces the sanctity of surrounding vegetation.
- Youth migration for employment weakens traditional rituals and taboos that previously protected the timber.

- **Legal & Institutional Friction**

- **Wildlife Protection Act (WPA)** - Allows creation of community reserves but transfers administrative control to the state forest department.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** - Entrusts management and authority directly to the local *Gram Sabha*.
- Neither UP nor MP has formalised protection under either framework for these groves.

Reference

[Down to Earth | Bundelkhand's sacred groves](#)