



Tree worship is the result of our reverence for a creation of nature that provides us food and fodder, write

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By conferring sanctity on trees, ancient people indicated their appreciation of their socio-economic-medical role. To please the gods and spirits residing in the trees, the trees themselves were worshipped. Tree worship is the most prevalent form of worship all over the world. The Roman 'forest king' was the personification of the sacred tree, the oak, his living dual. The oak worship of the Druids is familiar. The Celts worshipped Jupiter in the form of a tall oak tree.

An ancient sanctuary still exists in the name of Nemi in Italy, which comes from the Greek and Latin *nemos/nemus*, 'a forest enclosing pastures, groves and a group of trees considered to be sacred'. Sacred groves were common among Germans and the oldest sanctuaries were natural woods. Ancient Greeks represented the spirit of conservation by Goddess Artemis, protector of wildlife and the wilderness.

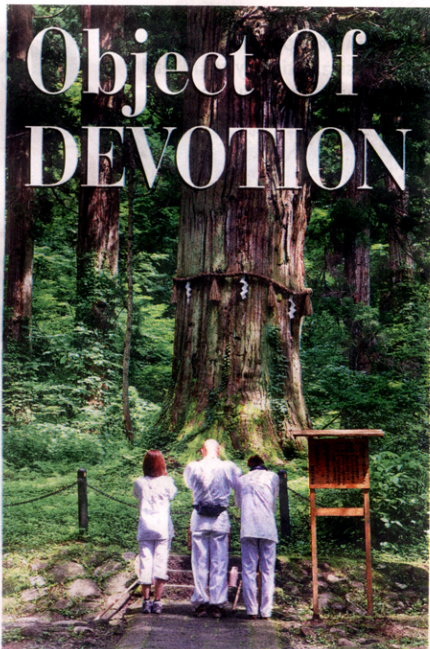
Sacred Groves

Sacred trees and groves have been reported from Africa since pre-agricultural, hunting and gathering societies, when human societies were in primitive states. The migumu tree in the groves is sacred to the Kikuyu tribe. Cutting of trees, breaking branches, collection of firewood, burning of grass, and grazing and hunting of wild animals within the groves are strictly prohibited. There are about 200 sacred groves in the Kirinyaga district of Kenya, and these are protected by the Kikuyus. The colonial administration has listed over 100 sacred groves, where cutting of trees is taboo among the Mbeere tribe of eastern Africa.

Sacred groves and forests still survive throughout Ethiopia; Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and local ethnic groups, with their traditional belief systems, protect these groves. The Oromo begin the harvesting season with a thanksgiving festival called Irreessa, which takes place under big trees in a sacred grove. The Gurage and Amhara also have their ceremony called Adbar, which takes place each year under big trees on community lands.

Sacred groves occur throughout Ghana. In northern Ghana, patches of woody vegetation are conserved by communities for ritual purposes. In north-eastern Ghana, about 179 groves have been reported. The sacred groves and their communal features are responsible for the cultural estrangements

Object Of DEVOTION



JAPANESE PILGRIMS OFFER PRAYERS TO THE 1,000-YEAR-OLD CEDAR TREE IN YAMAGATA PREFECTURE

THE ROMAN 'FOREST KING' WAS THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE SACRED TREE, THE OAK, HIS LIVING DUAL. THE OAK WORSHIP OF THE DRUIDS IS FAMILIAR. THE CELTS WORSHIPPED JUPITER IN THE FORM OF A TALL OAK TREE

of the Tiriki people. In Kenya, the sacred groves are known as Kaya forests.

In Timor, rock and tree forms are symbolic cultural structures. In West Timor, among the Meto-speaking communities, their description for their indigenous religion is the 'sacred tree and the sacred rock'. The Egyptians were also known to worship trees. The tamarisk played an important role in the legend of Isis and Osiris. The Norway maple that shaded the tomb of Osiris on the banks of the Nile was also considered divine.

In Persian mythology, the gogard or gaokerena tree bears the haoma, which gives health and generative power and imparts life at the time of resurrection. The white haoma, the tree of life that grows in paradise, was the

holiest offering of ancient Iranian worship.

The gods and goddesses of ancient Greece are each associated with a tree. The earliest mentioned and most celebrated tree is the oak in the grove at Dodona, assigned to Jupiter, and the laurel that represents Apollo. The vine tree is associated with Bacchus, the olive with Minerva, the myrtle with Aphrodite, the apple or orange of the Hesperides with Juno, the populus with Hercules, and the plane tree was

the 'Numen' of the Aridae. The laurel at Delphi was as celebrated as Dodona's oak.

Romulus killed Acron, king of Cecina, and hung the rich spoils or trophies on an ancient oak, which had been considered sacred by the shepherds, on Capitoline Hill. Another important god in Roman history is Mars, originally the god of vegetation and fertility. Among the plants and trees dedicated to Mars were fig, oak, laurel, and oriental hornbeam plant. The



EXTRACT

people of Judea venerated natural groves too. They worshipped oves or ashenah, often represented as an emblem on Assyrian sculptures, an artificial tree. Worship of the ashenah was a form of tree worship, frowned upon by the priests of the Jewish religion.

Tree Of Immortality

In the Genesis story of creation, found in both the Jewish *Torah* and the Biblical *Old Testament*, the Tree of Knowledge (of good and evil) and the Tree of Immortality were situated in the Garden of Eden.

Ancient Germans believed that they were the offspring of their sacred trees and forests. They had no images and declined to enclose their gods within walls, but consecrated groves and woods in the names of their gods. The Christmas tree, so common to the whole Christian world, is a remnant of the tree worship of their ancestors.

Uppsala in Scandinavia existed in front of a great temple where grew a huge tree of unknown origin, that spread with large boughs, and was green both during summer and winter; near the same temple was a sacred grove. There are several recorded instances of tree worship in America. A huge cypress was hung all over with votive offerings, besides hundreds of locks of hair, teeth, and bits of ribbon. Abridged from Sacred Plants of India, Penguin Books India ■

March 24 was observed as International Day of Forests and the Tree

SACRED FAUNA

Squirrel

The squirrel belongs to the rodent family. There are over 265 species of squirrels worldwide. The smallest is the 10-cm long African pygmy squirrel and the largest is the massive three feet long Indian giant squirrel.

According to Norse mythology, Ratatoskr is a squirrel that carries the wise words of Yggdrasil, the tree of life, to its three roots where the gods hold their meeting. The roots represent the past, present and future. The squirrel is the native American symbol for preparation, trust and thriftiness. Squirrels are also used as clan animals. The



animal is praised for its industrious food-gathering habit and courage. Some tribals honour squirrels as caretakers of the forest, because they bring warnings of danger to the people. The animal is associated with practicality. As the squirrel is known to hide and save its food and return to it in the winter months, anthropologists who specialise in symbolism, take this as a sign that we too must take stock of our own provisions from time to time.

Squirrels are quite sociable, and are often seen in pairs or groups. They are vocal creatures as well. A squirrel communicates extensively when in play or when it feels threatened. These traits address our ability to express ourselves in social settings.

The squirrel reminds us to communicate effectively with others, and also to honour those around us.