

Nanditha says religion to blame

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Jan. 7: Religious conversions are one of the main reasons for the degradation of the country's fragile biodiversity, according to noted environmental scientist, Dr Nanditha Krishna. "The team of scientists from C.P. Ramaswami Iyer Environmental Research Centre (CPR ERC) has found from a five-year-old research that religious conversions are harmful to the ecology than any other factor. The proselytisers, in their anxiety to wipe out the last remains of the traditions and rituals of the new converts, make them destroy the sacred groves, the main landmark of the countryside," she said here on Friday.

Dr Krishna, the honorary director of CPR ERC, was addressing the delegates of the 98th edition of the Indian Science Congress. She said the samathuvapurams of Tamil Nadu have also led

to the deterioration of the sacred groves because most of the sites selected as government vacant lands were nothing but groves.

Though there were more than 150,000 sacred groves at the time of Independence, their numbers have come down to 13,670.

"They are mini-biosphere reserves" and they are destroyed as "mere superstition", she said. These patches of forests play a major role in sustaining the local climate and livelihood.

The team found that almost all traditions and rituals practised by tribals and villagers were indirectly helpful in preserving the groves.

The study conducted by Amrithalingam of CPR ERC found that vast stretches of sacred groves have been destroyed in the North-East, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They are now documenting the last remains of sacred groves in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.