

The significance of Sacred Groves and the impact of Urban Green spaces on Mental Health: A Study focusing on Kerala

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Abstract:

The study focuses on the sacred groves and urban green spaces, solely that of Kerala, using qualitative analysis to verify the positive impact urban green spaces have on mental health and well-being. Sacred Groves being the reservoir of greenness and a haven for rare species an active communal participation can be observed in the maintenance of these places showing an apt example of human being one with nature.

Keywords: Urban Green Spaces, Sacred Groves, Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora, Protected

Introduction

Clean air and a calm mind are the need for the hour. 36.6% of the population of India resides in urban areas (census2011). The area's vegetation can influence the mental well-being of a dense populace. Meanwhile, in rural areas, the flora and fauna play a crucial role in the mental wellness of the people there. Urban areas are crowded and hubs of globalization, and urban green spaces provide good relaxation spots.

Sacred groves are protected grounds where religious rituals and beliefs protect a holy place often a forest. Communities come together to care for the environment. The places usually house a deity or a temple.

Review of Literature

In the 2024 study "The role of urban green space in promoting health and well-being is related to nature connectedness and biodiversity: Evidence from a two-factor mixed-design experiment" Gong et al argue that urban planning is important for mental health and well-being. Both psychological and environmental factors have to be included. A Portuguese study understands that human interaction with technologies and the environment shapes the solutions for current social, environmental, and technological problems (Lencastre et al 2024). The study gives prime importance to culminating knowledge from diverse areas such as humanities, social, and natural sciences to understand the changing societies. Research studying the relationship between psychological well-being and urban green spaces of Lahore affirmed a positive correlation between the two after surveying more than 1000 participants (Jabbar et al 2024).

The paper titled "Sacred Groves: Guardians of Biodiversity," highlights the complex relationship between nature and culture emphasizing how external factors such as deforestation, globalization, etc. threaten this relationship (Sarmah 2024). Studying the sacred groves of Kerala, the research aims to the importance of conserving the indigenous varieties of fauna and flora that are housed in the groves. The species are rare and are of medicinal value (Nair et al 2024).

Method used

The study focuses on a qualitative analysis of having performed a survey on the mental impact of urban green spaces on individuals. 52 participants participated in the survey a positive result on the impact of green spaces on mental health.

Sacred groves

Sacred groves are green reserves of biodiversity, flora, and fauna. The groves are often sacred to a deity often encapsulated in rich beliefs and upheld by customary rituals. The community comes together for its protection. Preserving the original nature of the grove, the place is a haven for many protected species. However recent threats to these groves are deforestation and urbanization (Sarmah 2024).

As a part of the research, two sacred groves of Kerala were covered, namely, Iringole Kaavu in the Ernakulam district and Mannarasala in the Alappuzha district, filled with the richness of legends and myths these groves house varieties of protected fauna and flora. The community is actively participating in protecting and conserving future generations. Strict rules are followed and are imposed for the protection of these groves. A calm and serene atmosphere is the prime attraction of these groves. (to say tomo)

Urban Green Spaces

They are green vegetation in urban areas, often comprising of parks, gardens, Maidans/Grounds, etc. It is a place where people come unwind themselves and relax. These spaces help people relax and take a break from their hectic routines. They are open to everyone and unlike sacred groves, they are not restricted nor do strict rules have to be followed. The

study performs a survey analysis on 52 people who reside in urban areas and use urban green spaces. The results showed urban green spaces having a positive impact on the minds of people and helped give a quick relief from stress.

Survey

The survey underscores the vital role green spaces play in promoting mental well-being, particularly among working and studying individuals. A staggering 76.9% of respondents believe green spaces help reduce anxiety and stress, while 80.8% think they improve mood. Moreover, 80.8% of respondents noticed positive impacts on their mental health due to green space utilisation. These findings emphasise the significance of accessible green spaces in mitigating the prevalence of stress and anxiety, which affected 84.6% of respondents in the past six months.

Discussion

The importance of proximity to green spaces cannot be overstated. Nearly half of the respondents (48.1%) live within walking distance of a park or green space, making it more likely for them to utilise these areas. Regular visits to green spaces also yield benefits, with 34.6% of respondents reporting better mental health. Physical activity and relaxation in green spaces are popular, with 59.6% engaging in walking and 65.4% visiting for relaxation.

Despite these benefits, the survey reveals concerning trends. Stress and anxiety are pervasive, affecting 84.6% of respondents, with 38.5% experiencing stress daily. Furthermore, 11.5% of respondents rated their mental health as poor. These findings highlight the need for accessible, well- designed green spaces and targeted interventions promoting their utilisation.

The demographic breakdown of respondents offers valuable insights. Female participants (63.5%) outnumbered males, indicating potential gender disparities in green space utilisation. Working and studying individuals comprised the majority of respondents, underscoring the importance of green spaces in busy lifestyles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey demonstrates the critical role green spaces play in maintaining mental well- being. Policymakers, urban planners, and healthcare professionals must prioritise accessible, well-designed green spaces and promote their utilisation to mitigate stress, anxiety, and poor mental health. Further research should focus on longitudinal studies, green space design, and targeted interventions to fully harness the potential.

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