

Sacred Forests, Sacred Sites

Cathrien de Pater¹

WSBV Sylvatica, Wageningen, 29 March 2006

¹M.Sc. Forestry Wageningen University
Student M.A. Spirituality, Radboud University Nijmegen
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (Ede)

Contents

- What & why 'Sacred'?
- Where? (India, Nepal, Netherlands)
- Management of Sacred Sites



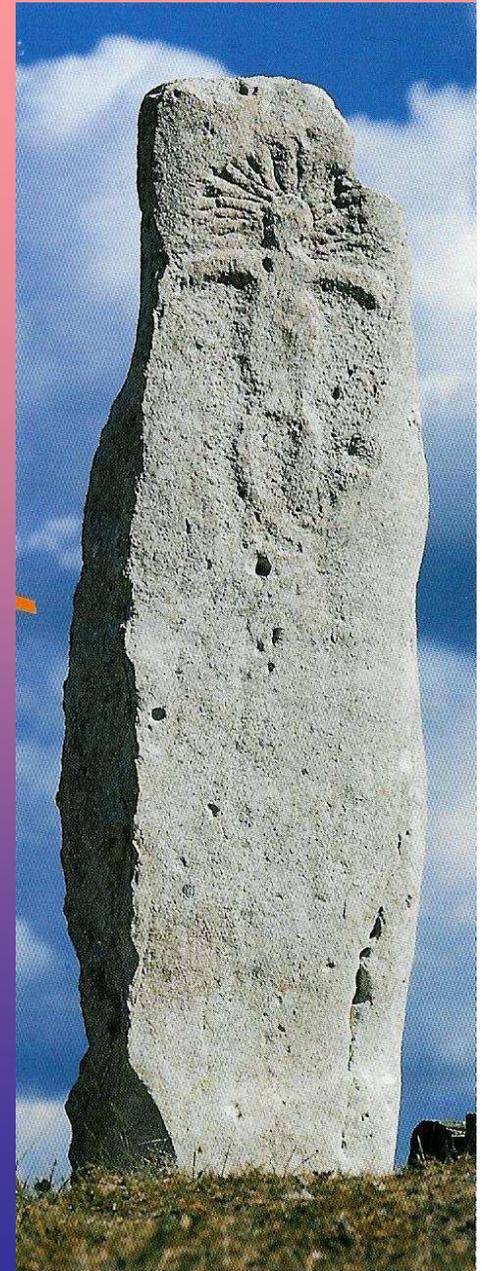
What & Why?

- What is a site/place?
- What is 'sacred'?
- Why do people visit sacred sites/forests?

What places?

- Forests, parks, trees
- Rocks, hills, mountains
- Water: rivers, lakes, sea, islands
- Lines! Songlines!
- Graveyards, tombs
- Shrines, temples, mosques, churches
- Cities!

•Remote / isolated <-----> Close by / backyard



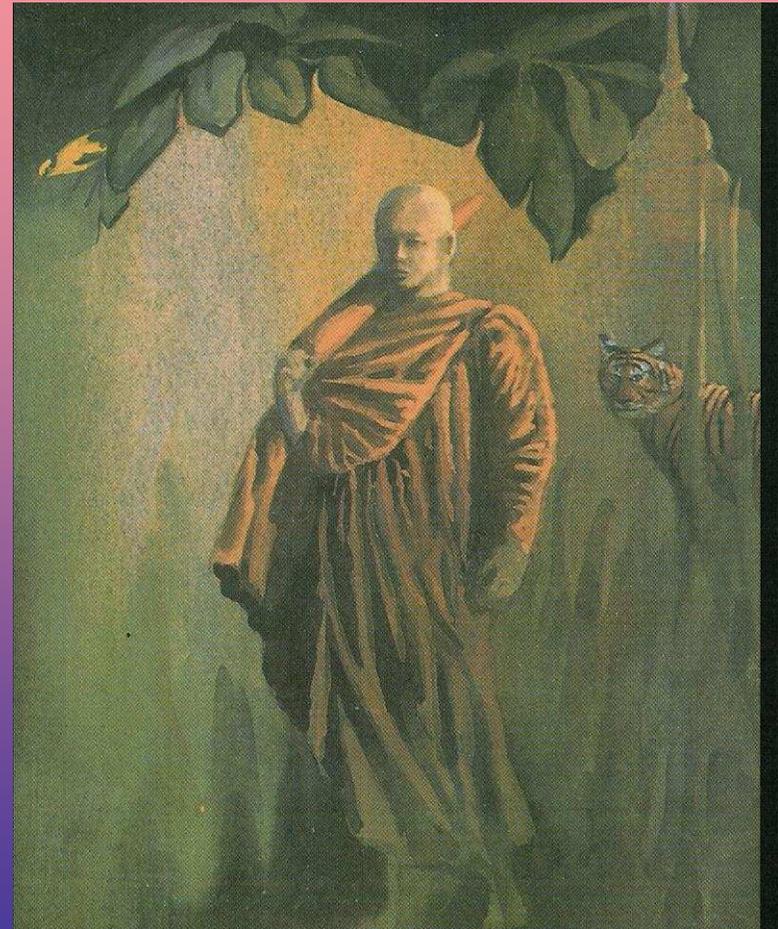
Why sacred?

- Social functions, justice
- Dwellings of gods, demons, ancestors
- Locus of myths



With what purpose?

- Place of quiet, retirement, study, ascetism
(Aranyaka)
- Place of inspiration, aesthetic enjoyment
- Place of spiritual experience & practice



Spiritual Experiences

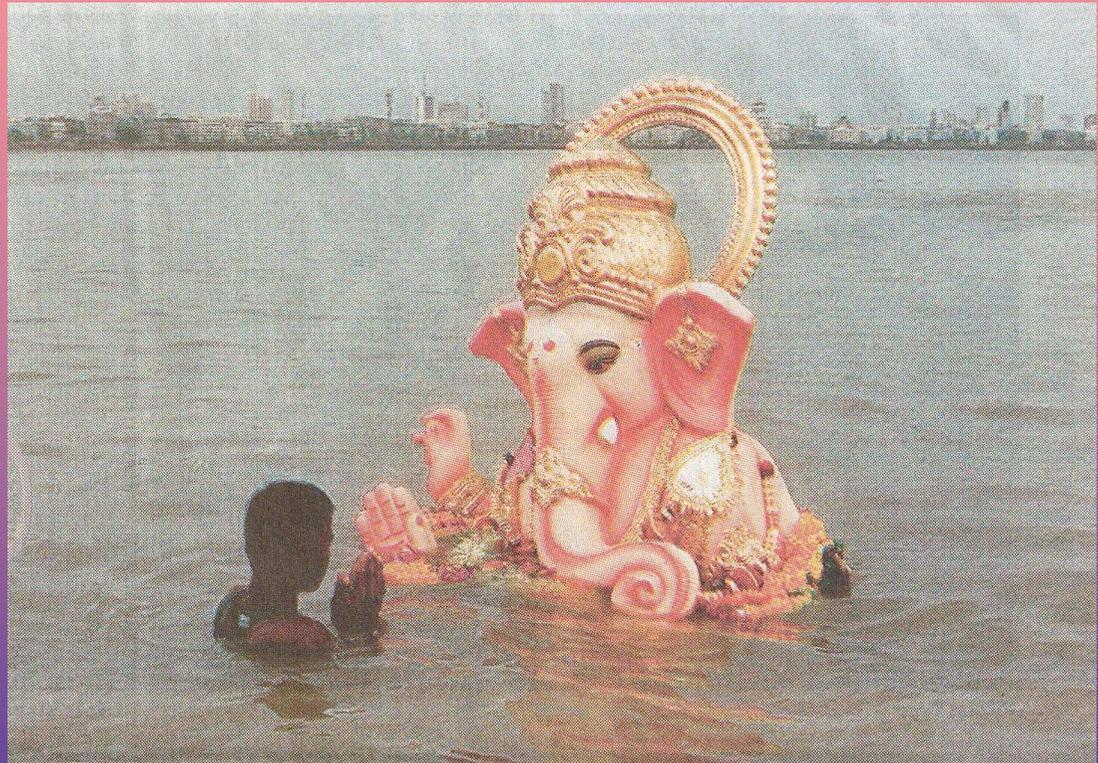
- Purification
- Healing
- Contact with the 'other world'
- Balance, comfort, atonement



- Individual experiences
- In a group (social)

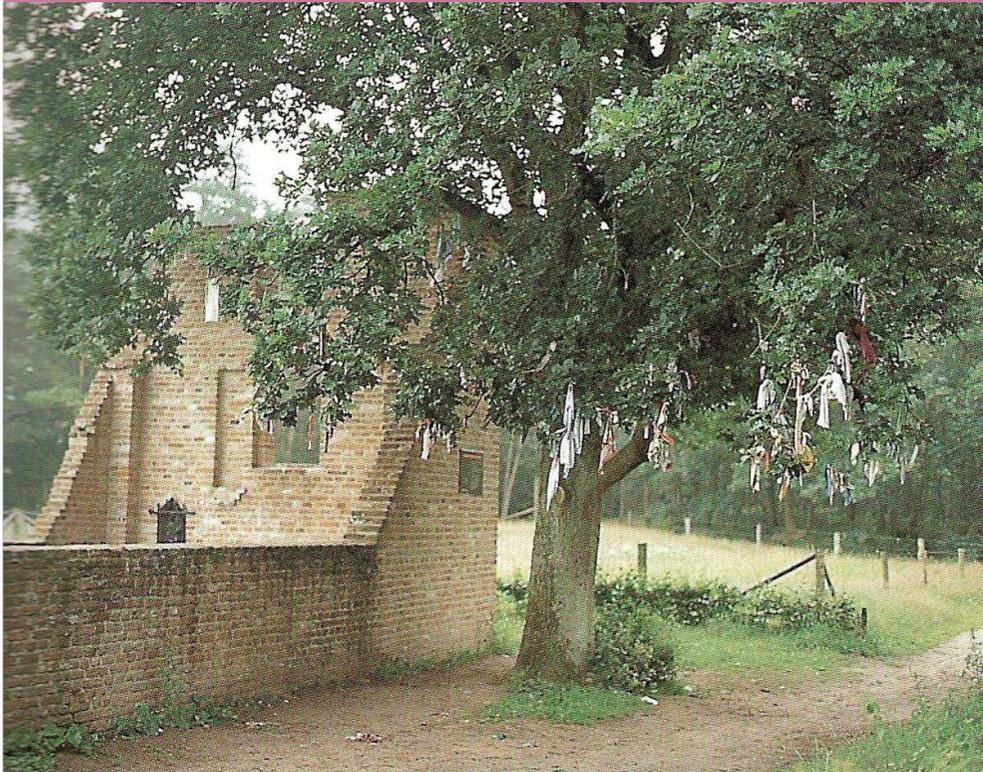
Spiritual experiences

- Purification



Spiritual practice

- Healing



How do people experience?

- Rituals
 - daily,
 - seasonally,
 - yearly
- Rites of passage:
 - birth,
 - wedding,
 - funeral
- Pilgrimage



India: Maharashtra



Insights: Brhad-Aranyaka-Upanishad III-9:28

*As a mighty tree in the forest,
so in truth is man,
his hairs are the leaves,
his outer skin is the bark.*

*'From his skin flows forth blood,
sap from the bark;
and thus from the wounded man comes forth
blood,
as from a tree that is struck.*

*'The lumps of his flesh are the splinters of
wood,
the fibre is strong like the tendons
The bones are the hardwood within,
the marrow is made like the marrow of the
tree.*

*'But, while the tree, when felled,
grows up again more young from the root,
from what root does a mortal grow up,
after he has been felled by death?*

*'Do not say, "from seed,"
for seed is produced from the living;
but a tree, springing from a grain,
clearly rises again after death.*

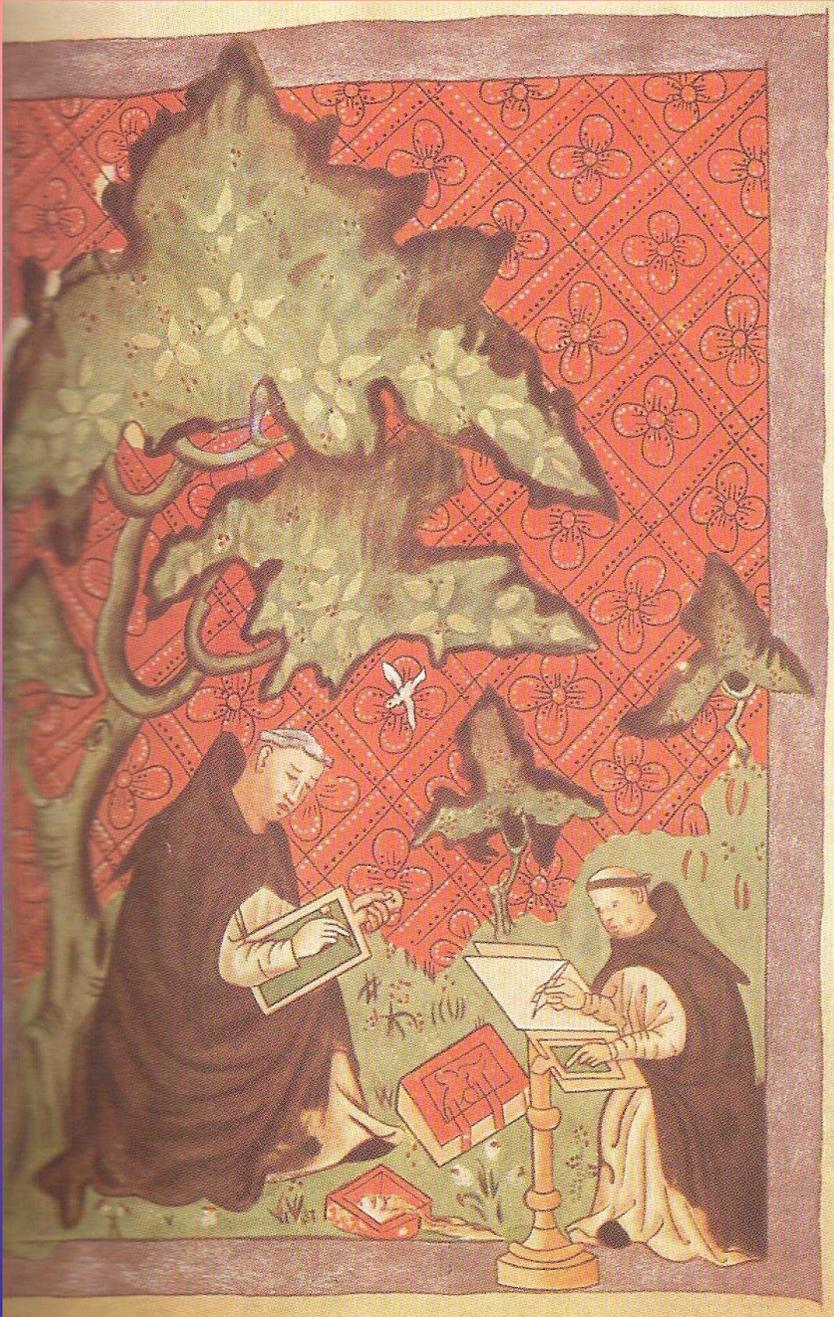
*'If a tree is pulled up with the root,
it will not grow again;
from what root then, does a mortal grow up,
after he has been felled by death?*

*'Once born, he is not born (again);
for who should create him again?'*

Insights

Jan van Ruusbroeck

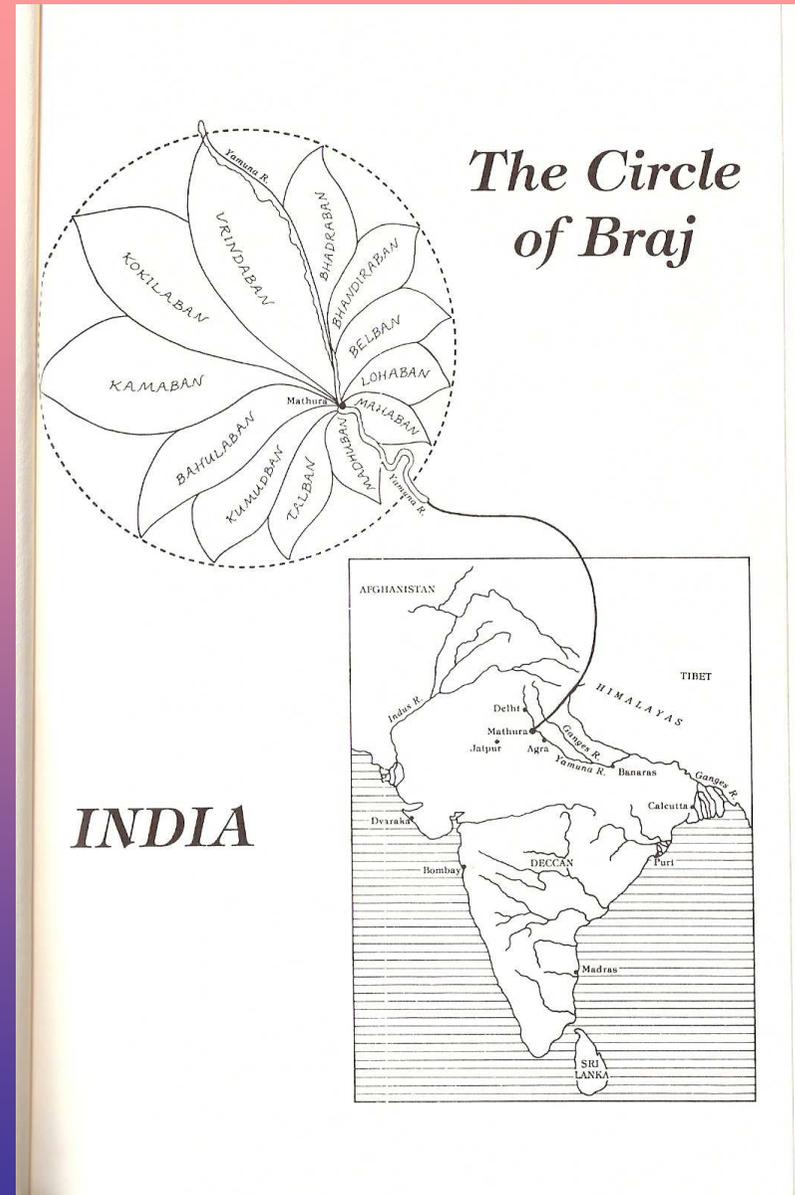
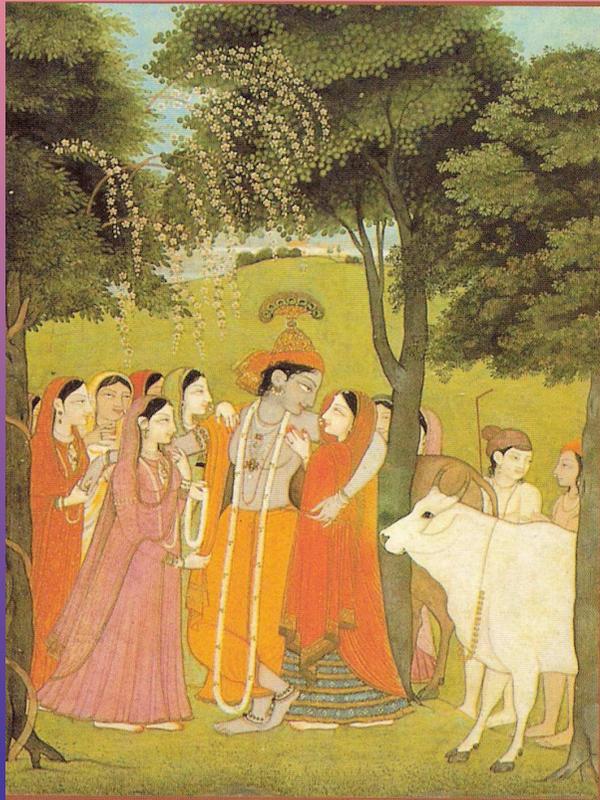
in the Zonien Forest near
Brussels



India

- Banyatra: journey to the 12 forests in Brindaban

based on
Krshna and
the Gopis
(cowgirls)
mythology



Are Sacred places good for biodiversity?

- yes and no!

yes:

access limited or denied

remote places

no:

parts are (over) used

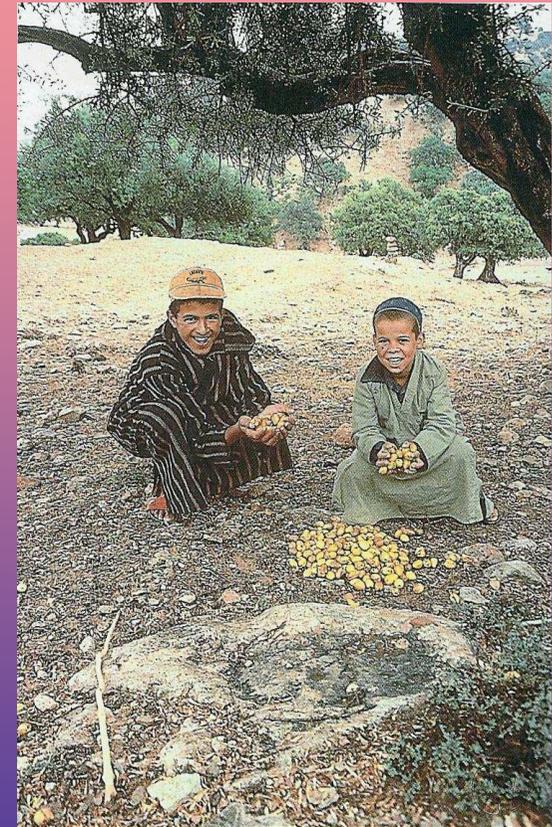
pilgrimage -> high pressure

deprivation & social erosion



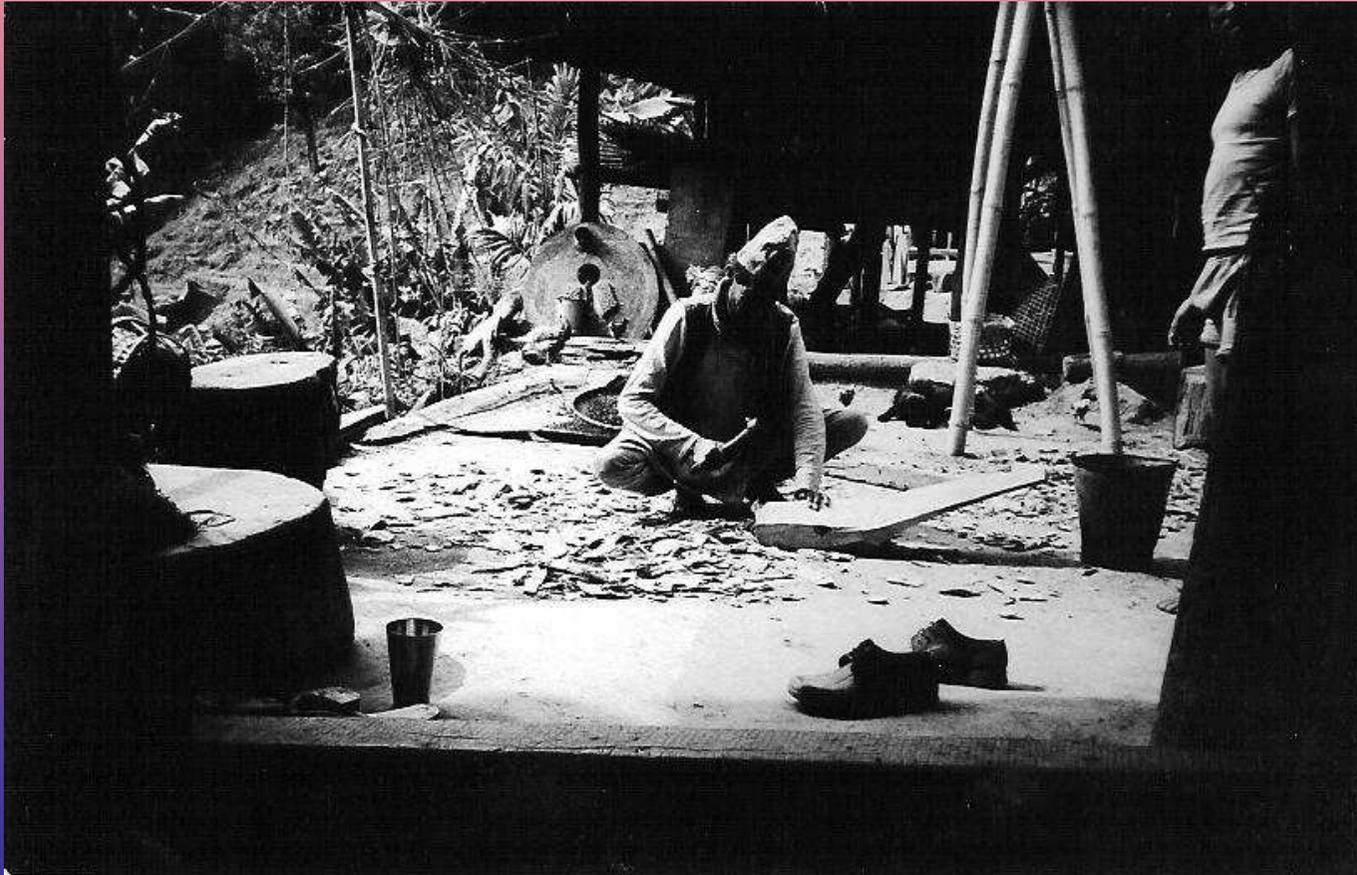
Management of Sacred Sites 1

- Sacred Groves in Morocco
 - (Culmsee, 2006):
“This outstanding floristic diversity is related to a relatively constant and moderate level of human impact”



Management of Sacred Sites 2

- Nepal, Andrew W. Ingles (1997):
- “Religious forests are not sacrosanct”



Management of Sacred Sites 3

- Canada: National Aboriginal Forest Association (NAFA): Aboriginal Criterion with Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management (March 2005)

Canada 2: Lewis (2005)

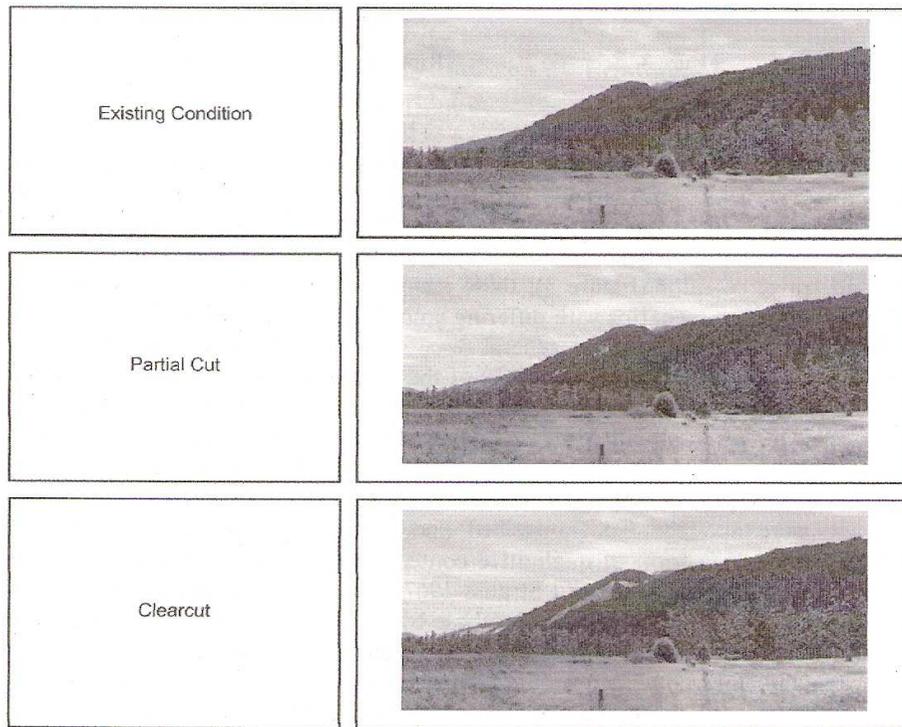


Figure 2. Scenario Panels – Forest Management.

Cheam First Nation, B.C.:
respectful land USE (not
static total preservation)!

Canada: RPF discussion 1

- Spiritual Forest Values:
 - are intangible & difficult to measure
 - are subjective & associated with a moment's ('peak') experience
 - evolve over time
 - influenced by setting & location and by different religions & perceptions!
 - change with structure of stands
 - change as we observe them
 - can be created by ceremony / ritual
 - are created by history

Canada: RPF discussion 2

- Management issues concerning SV:
 - How can SV be managed without piecemeal approach?
 - resistance from forest workers?
 - role of foresters as advocates of SV?
 - who identifies SV?
 - How to measure & quantify SV?
 - How to manage today's SV without compromising future generation's SV?
 - How to reconcile individual 'mystique' of SV with standardised measurement?
 - How to reconcile individual SV with job requirements?
 - Who to make decisions? Community, global citizen?