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PANEL ON SACRED GROVES OF THE COUNTRY HELD IN MUMBAI

Amid the ongoing international Mother Earth Day celebrations this week, the New Acropolis Cultural Organisation of India, on Sunday organised a panel on the theme of 'Learning from the Sacred Groves of India', which saw the attendance of Historians and Environmentalists including the author, Dr. Nanditha Krishna and the director of New Acropolis India, Yaron Barzilay.

The New Acropolis is a completely volunteer-run organization dedicated to Philosophy as a Way of Life and for Cultural Promotion which hosted this event in collaboration with Bombay Natural History Society (B.N.H.S.).

From tracing their historical roots from the times of Indus Valley Civilisation to the threats posed by the rapid urbanisation in the modern times, a panel of philosophers and environmentalists converged in the city on Sunday to talk about the Sacred Groves of India — the country's ancient forest patches — which serve as a treasure trove of vegetation, medicinal plants and place of worship for local deities.

With accelerated industrialisation and encroaching posing a grave threat to the country's ancient forests, Krishna, along with her team, has been engaged in the restoration and preservation of the sacred groves. "It largely requires a thorough understanding of



the local community and their culture. By doing so, they can ensure that the community's beliefs are preserved while restoring the land. After getting a written agreement with the local community, our team focuses on improving the land by preventing degradation or erosion," said Dr. Krishna, adding that the task of restoring a five acre land parcel requires funding of approximately Rupees Three Lakhs.

Speaking during the course of the event, Dr. Krishna drew examples from the Hindu myth of Ramayana and from the Tripitaka, the Buddhist philosophical text, to highlight the role, the Sacred Groves play in spirituality and divinity. She added, "Sacred groves have been very prevalent in Indian culture, dating back to the Indus Valley Civilisation where one could find paintings of Man worshipping the Pipal tree. Mythologically, sacred groves have been regarded as a place of retreat and source of Inspiration where sages would be enlightened".

Meanwhile, Barzilay, director of New Acropolis India stated,

"Mother Earth could be a conscious being which might only reveal its secret and knowledge to those who learn how to respect it and accept that they are part of nature."

Yaron Barzilay, the director of New Acropolis India, also, added, "Sacred groves offer immense ecological contribution, anthropological treasure, a great social value of protecting folklores and traditions, as well as a philosophical or spiritual contribution... As philosophers our interest is to uncover what wisdom lies behind this – our connection with the land, with nature, with life".

When talking about the purpose of the event and need for such panel discussions, Head of the branch of New Acropolis Mumbai, Sivan Barzilay, stated, "As philosophers we look to explore the cause of things, to understand why things are as they are as they are so we can offer real solutions. Our interest is not only in understand things theoretically, but in constructing ourselves, our societies and our environment in the best possible way". ☺☺

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