

Uttarakhand villagers dedicate forest to local deity to protect trees, ecology

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The villagers have decided that no activity such as fodder and firewood collection would be carried out in the forest for the next five years. In an attempt to conserve natural resources, they have dedicated the forests to the local deity Kotgari Devi.



In another display of their love for forests and ecology, the residents of two villages in Uttarakhand's Bageshwar district have decided to dedicate the forests of the area to their local deity for five years, in a bid to protect water resources and to check illegal felling of trees, villagers said.

They added that their economic and social life was centered around forests and as such, they needed to protect them, by invoking the power of their Goddess.

"Our forests need protection and if we don't take care of them, our natural water resources will dry up resulting in water shortage and other problems. Forest degradation has been going on. So we took a unanimous decision to save our forests by dedicating them to our Goddess Kotgari Devi," said Bhagirathi Mehta, village head of Devalchora village under Bageshwar block.

These villagers of Devalchora village in Bageshwar district held a meeting last week and expressed concern on the deterioration of water resources and illegal felling of trees in the forests near them. They

said if illegal felling was not checked it would lead to many problems like drinking water shortage and increase in landslides in their village and surrounding areas.

The villagers then decided that no activity such as fodder and firewood collection would be carried out in the forest for the next five years. They decided to dedicate the forests to the local deity Kotgari Devi. Later a delegation of villagers went to Kotgari temple and hung a letter mentioning their decision at the temple premises. Due to this people visiting the temple are reminded every day to protect their forests, Mehta said.

The villagers have also put up colourful religious flags at many points in the forest to remind others that the forest now belonging to the deity.

In another similar initiative, villagers of Dobad of Bageshwar block dedicated Vinayak forest to the local deity and decided that no villager would graze cattle in the forest till the planted saplings were fully grown.

“We have planted saplings in the forest and we will take care of them till they grow to a height that no animal can harm them. Conservation of forests is connected with our life and economy,” said Prema Arya, village head of Dobad village.

Dinesh Pandey, a social activist in Champawat said, “It is our old tradition in the hills to show love and care for nature by dedicating forests to our local deities. This practice has been in the hills for centuries. Hill peoples’ livelihood and the economy is entirely based on forests, so conservation of the forest is important for their existence.”

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/uttarakhand-villagers-dedicate-forest-to-local-deity-to-protect-trees-ecology-101628257439554.html>