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## ECOLOGISM: A CASE STUDY OF UDAIPUR DISTRICT CONFLICT BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OF RAJASTHAN

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### Abstract

Ecologism is considered to be an ideology that defines human environment relationship, anthropocentric values, respect for nature and its limits, and socio- economic change. Ecologism can be studied in an interdisciplinary way as it is related to society, culture, religion, economy, polity, and others. Many of the Rajasthan tradition is linked to environment. Orans of Rajasthan symbolize the faith, lore, and history of the people of Rajasthan. Due to the ongoing developmental projects Orans are under a threat. This study is based on Udaipur district which mainly aims to identify why economic development hampers biodiversity and what can be done to preserve the Orans of Udaipur district. Secondary data sources are used to highlight the distribution of orans in Udaipur district and to identify the importance of village community in reconciling sustainability with development. This study also explores the possibility of legal protection for orans in Rajasthan.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity, Ecologism, Economic Development, Legal Protection, Orans, Sustainability.

### Introduction

Ecology is one of the most significant ancient terms. It is derived from the Greek work “Oikos” which means home and “Logos” which means study. The credit of coining this term goes to Ernest Haeckel in 1869. In the early 1970’s a political orientation was developed which emphasised on the environmental and social problems as a result of destruction of ecological resources. This was termed as Ecologism which goes in sync with Brundtland’s notion of Sustainability.

Rajasthan being a Desert state long for water and trees. Due to this reason Rajasthan is related deeply with its environment. Orans are one of the most significant parts of environment. The word Oran is derived from the Sanskrit word “Aranya” which means forest. Orans are basically sacred groves and pasture lands found around temples. Here, no cultivation is allowed, only the flora and fauna is allowed to grow. Orans are epic example of lore, faith, and history of the people of Rajasthan. It also serves as the habitat of wide range of flora and fauna.

Orans are under a threat and that is why environmentalists are concerned about the ecology of certain areas in Rajasthan. Orans are cut for trees, pastures, and institutionalizing the developmental projects. The ecological cost of destroying orans comes into play with such economic activities.

Ecologism related problems will persist in the coming decades as well. It depends on the degree of environmental problems and the willingness of political structures to cope up with the ongoing economic development. This study tries to analyse the cost of economic development on the orans of Rajasthan. At the same time, it seeks to provide few suggestions to preserve orans as a symbol of heritage and culture.

### Review of Literature

Ecologism is the study of relations between human and environment including flora, fauna, mountains, factories, land, water, etc. Ecologists put emphasis on the reconciliation of principle of sustainability and economic development. There are two divisions with respect to Ecologists debate over sustainability. On one hand, Modern Ecologists seek to reconcile sustainability and economic progress. They favour scaling back the impact of economic progress by imposing tax and heavy duties for pollution. On the other hand, Radical ecologists want strong sustainability and ‘zero growth attitude’.

**B.R. Gadi** in 2016 published a study ‘Oran: A Traditional System for Conservation of Biodiversity in Indian Thar Desert’. It highlighted the destruction of Orans due to mismanagement in the region. These orans preserve the endemic, endangered, and vulnerable species of plants and animals. Thus, it is essential to conserve such biodiversity resources.



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**Mamta Rawat and Sumit Dookia** in 2017 in Sacred groves of Thar Desert: A case study of Kolu Pabuji Oran of western Rajasthan and its biodiversity profiling highlighted the importance of Sacred Groves in western part of Rajasthan. Western Rajasthan is a drought-stricken area also the economy of this region is based on livestock. There is an urgent need to analyse the role of village commons in biodiversity conservation.

**Dheeraj Singh, M. K. Choudhary, M. L. Meena & M. M. Roy** in Oran Dynamics: A Community-Based Biodiversity Management System in India's Arid Zone highlighted that comprehensive and well-tested approach to Oran management and conservation has not been developed or widely applied, and the rehabilitation of Orans needs proper planning and execution of a technically feasible package, tailored to suit their unique edaphic, climatic, vegetation, social and legal status.

### Research Gap

The present studies in the field of Biodiversity Conservation and Ecologism seeks to assess the overall impact of mismanagement and overexploitation of resources on the environment. However, there is a need to study the impact of economic activities on biodiversity and also to develop a sustainable approach to preserve Orans in Rajasthan.

### Scope and Objectives of the study

Orans are about 800 years old and they are important in preserving the biodiversity and livestock economy. These sacred groves find a mention in the anecdotes and folk lore of Rajasthan. The Case study of Udaipur district of Rajasthan is taken to study the ecological dynamics of economic development.

The main Objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyse the impact the economic activities on the Orans of Rajasthan.
- To describe a midway between Modern Ecologism and Radical Ecologism.
- To suggest some ways to preserve the biodiversity (Orans).
- To highlight the role of village commons in Udaipur district in protecting the Orans.
- To explore the possibility of Legal protection in case of Orans of the above districts.

### Methodology

To conduct the study qualitative and quantitative data was used. The area of study is Udaipur district of Rajasthan which is considered as one of the potential areas of Orans. This study is policy oriented as it aims to find solutions to the exiting problem. Secondary data will be used for data collection. Interview method was used to gather information from the local population staying around orans of Udaipur district. Government websites, published articles in various journals, newspapers and editorials, etc. were also studied to work on this project. Conclusions will be drawn on the basis of data analysis.

### Discussion

The number of sacred groves in various locations and regions depends upon the magnitude of the varying threats which are area specific. Over the past few decades many people have lost their rights of forest management to the government. Many researchers have worked on conservation aspects of sacred groves through socio-cultural practices in India. Some of the **major impact of developmental projects on biodiversity of Rajasthan** are - Disappearance of Traditional belief system, Rapid urbanization and development interventions, Culture of Sanskritization, Pressure of Fuelwood and Firewood collection, Unending Human greed, Threat to Species in afforestation programme, Policy implication, Diversion of land of sacred groves.

### Importance and Profile of Orans of Udaipur District

After the finalization of the design and the number of sacred groves was to be surveyed, field study was conducted. Based on the various information collected through field observations and people interaction, a format has been designed for compilation of data for easy access and knowledge about the particular sacred grove.

- ✚ Basic Information about the sacred groves
  - Name of village, Panchayat Samiti, Nearest Forest block, District, Name of sacred grove
- ✚ Vegetation status
  - Tree species, Herbs and grass species
- ✚ Wild-life
  - Animals, Birds
- ✚ History and Current Status



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**DATA ON THE SACRED GROVE OF UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN**

**Table 1: Bhairon Ji ka Oran**

Name of the oran	Bhairon Ji ka oran, Pava Baba Ji
Name of the village	Pava
Panchayat	Girva
Forest Block	Alsigarh
District	Udaipur
Area	50 bigha
Tree Species	Cinerea, Cordifoltia, Gibbosa, Tora, Rippens, etc.
Wildlife	Blue bull, Wild dog, Pea fowl, Wild pig, Peahen.
History and Status	This area is protected naturally as people believe that this area is protected by Lord Bhairon ji

**Table 2: Hanuman Ji ka Oran**

Name of the oran	Hanuman Ji ka Oran
Name of the village	Madri
Panchayat	-
Forest Block	-
District	Udaipur
Area	8 bigha
Tree Species	Cinerea, Cordifoltia, Gibbosa, Tora, Rhomboidera,
Wildlife	Fox, Hare, Peafowl, Piegion.
History and Status	This area is protected naturally as people believe that this area is protected by Lord Hanuman Ji

**Table 3: ShringJi Rishi ka Oran**

Name of the oran	ShringJi Rishi Ji ka Oran
Name of the village	Bhikarni
Panchayat	Udaipur
Forest Block	ShringJi Rishi
District	Udaipur
Area	200 bigha
Tree Species	Cinerea, Cordifoltia, Gibbosa, Tora, Rhomboidera,
Wildlife	Blue bull, Jarakh, Wild Dog, Fox, Hare, Peafowl, Piegion.
History and Status	In ancient times, ShringJi Rishi used to praise Lord shiva as an ascetic saint.

**Table 4: Bhanwar Mata Ji ka Oran**

Name of the oran	Bhanwar Mata Ji ka Oran
Name of the village	Sakroda
Panchayat	Girva
Forest Block	-
District	Udaipur
Area	625 bigha
Tree Species	Senegal, Pendula, Indica, Tora, Rhomboidera,
Wildlife	Blue bull, Jarakh, Wild Dog, Fox, Hare, Peafowl, Piegion.
History and Status	Because of the presence of Bhanwar Mata Ji, all the people worship Goddess Bhanwar Ji



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## Role of Village Commons in protecting Orans

The sacred groves in Rajasthan are illustrated by the Banis of Mewar, the Kenkris of Ajmer, the Orans of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, the Shamlat Dehs and Devbanis of Alwar and Baag in south eastern Rajasthan regions. However, there is an overlap between ‘gauchar’ or ‘roondhs’, the common pastures, and ‘Oran’ the sacred woodland around a temple (Dookia and Rawat, 2017).

People first organised into ‘van samiti’ in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan. A number of meetings were conducted to educate the village members about the benefits of preserving the Oran and the “Devbani”. People participated enthusiastically in the oran conservation programme. They first attempted to rehabilitate water storage structures.

To address the issue of soil erosion, structures like ‘Tak’ gully plugging, Medbandhi/ field bunding were taken up on the farming lands. Trenching, field levelling were the other activities taken up. Afforestation is also carried out in the land near the johads. Tree plantation has been undertaken to increase the number and variety of trees and also arrest soil erosion.

Orans depict a complementary relationship amongst biodiversity, livestock and agriculture is important to the livelihoods of the resource users, meeting economic, social, cultural and spiritual needs of the community.

## Debate over Legal status of Orans

Sacred groves are also categorized based on their legal status and management, which differs among regions and individual villages. Some groves are associated with and managed by separate caste groups within a community, some by a village as a whole, and some by neighbouring districts within a larger geographical area. There are also large “pan-Indian” groves that involve people from many parts of the country.

The legal status and total area of several groves have not been clearly defined. Despite of significant role played by sacred groves in conserving biodiversity there is no policy for management, conservation and utilization of these resources. Further there are no special laws for eviction of unauthorized occupants.

Absence of a single coordinating agency results in fragmentations as well as duplication of the efforts undertaken by various governmental and nongovernmental agencies for conservation and rehabilitation of the sacred groves. Further, almost all sacred groves do not have any kind of physical boundary demarcation. In absence of such demarcation the extension of the agriculture lands and encroachments for various uses are continued.

In 2018, the Supreme Court (SC) of India issued an Order declaring all Orans to be "deemed forests". If implemented, this Supreme Court Order would go a long way toward providing much-needed protections for these community forests as they face pressure from encroachment and mining. This judgement should provide the Orans with greater legal protection against mining, urbanization, and other grave threats facing them. However, owing to the insufficient registry of location, ownership and size of the Orans, it often becomes difficult to extend the legal protections available to them.

## Modern Ecologism vs. Radical Ecologism

As per the approach of Modern Ecologism, there is an urgent need to honour the ecological architecture in the form of Orans. It reaffirms on balancing both economic development and biodiversity conservation. Ecological modernization shares a number of features with other approaches such as sustainable development and the industrial ecology.

Radical ecologists conceptualized that natural environment is made of some elements. Most importantly, human life itself is dependent on natural environment. When human beings destroy this environment, they destroy themselves by doing so. As per Radical ecologists, they should try to change its exploitative activities such as developmental projects and mould our relationship with environment. It focuses on the values of ecological activism, eco-spirituality, and social justice.

## Conclusion

The conclusions from this study are twofold: **Firstly**: Orans are not a single entity, but a network of many mutually supporting areas important for the integrity of landscapes. **Secondly**: Orans are valuable for both biodiversity (ecosystems and species) and human livelihoods and wellbeing. In Rajasthan, they provide territories of life, contribute to the livelihoods and cultural and spiritual wealth of 7.5 million pastoralists and exemplify peaceful human-wildlife coexistence. More importantly, Orans function as hotspots for biodiversity by providing safe spaces for rare, threatened and endangered and keystone species.



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Restrictions on access and use of such areas generally reduce or even eliminate human environmental impact and thereby help protect species in the sacred groves (Guha et al. 1994). This indicates that strategies for biodiversity conservation that link culture and nature are more likely to be effective than those imposed from the top down by government and/or international agencies and that ignore the traditional beliefs, values, institutions, and practices of local societies.

However, management of sacred groves is under the village panchayats, which unfortunately are highly political institutions with artificially constituted units of communities or villages with divergent agendas and social and economic identities. This leads to conflict development many of the times. For ecologists, traditional ecological knowledge offers a means to improve research and also to improve resource management and environment impact assessment (Gadgil, 1994). For effective management of the sacred groves there is need to strengthen the existing conservation activities.

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