

Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest

The indigenous forest of the Auroville bioregion is called Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF). In India it extends as a coastal belt from Ramanathapuram in the south of Tamil Nadu to Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. It provides a rare biological richness due to its high species abundance. However, it is now close to extinction as only 0.1% survives in the form of sacred groves. It contains over 160 woody species of which around 70 are found within the climax vegetation. The TDEF is composed predominantly of trees and shrubs which have thick, dark green foliage throughout the year. Today there is hardly any of this forest that remains free from human interference, and most of it is little more than degraded thorny thickets, lacking in the inherent nobility of the climax vegetation.

The forest comprises six vegetative elements: trees, shrubs, lianas, epiphytes, herbs and tuberous species. In the pristine state, these components weave together to form a complex, diverse habitat that is home to myriad animal species, as well as a host of microbes. Not more than 500 acres of undisturbed forest remains and many of the listed species of trees, shrubs and lianas are on the verge of extinction.

An intricate relationship has developed between people and the forest over the millennia and today 300 species are still used medicinally, whilst many have important roles to play culturally and in handicrafts. The relevance of the forest today lies within both its vast botanical wealth and its role in helping to balance local environmental conditions that are steadily deteriorating due to the expanding population and increasing consumerist lifestyles.