

## **KA LAW LYNGDOH MAWPHLANG MAWPHLANG SACRED GROVE**



**Location:** Mawphlang Sacred Grove, located at Mawphlang Village, covers an area of about 76.8 hectares. It is a primordial forest aged more than 700 years, standing aloft through the test of time and conserved by the local Khasi community through social fencing. It is just 24 km from Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya.

**Tradition:** Tradition tells us that the conservation and sanctification of a Sacred Grove is to recreate a close link of peaceful harmony between Humans and Nature. The unique way of conserving Sacred Groves has been attached with traditional religion and culture. This belief and practice identifies and showcases that Khasi people were (and still are) great lovers of nature. There is a local phrase that says, "There can be no sacred grove without Hima or Raid and there is no identity or sovereignty of any Raid or Hima without a Sacred Grove". Mawphlang Sacred Grove is one of the most famous Sacred Groves because the sanctity is still intact through the active preservation of the local community. The forest is still part of pristine nature.

**Formation of a Grove:** When "Khmah Nongsai" (Ancestress) of the Lyngdoh Mawphlang Clan was invited to send her son to be the Chief and rule over Hima Mawphlang, she preferred to reject it right away, but would accept it if and only with the consent of the almighty God (*U Blei*). In order to know whether this was the will of God or not, she made a vow with the existing clans to give her time to testify this by planting three saplings and waited for three years. These saplings were: Dieng Sohma (*Rhus semialata*), Dieng sning (*Castanopsis indica*), and Diengdoh (*Exbucklandia populnea*) all planted at Phiephandi. Since this was the will of God, after three years, the saplings sprouted well. Then Ka Khmah Nongsai and the other clans arranged for the crowning ceremony of the First Chief, solemnized at Phiephandi, where the stone staging with five seats was made. The Chief sits in the middle and on both sides sit the Myntri. She also performed rituals inside Phiephandi itself.



It has been said that a few years after the Anglo-Khasi War ended in 1839, attempts were made by some people to cut down the trees that grow in the Sacred Grove. The Lyngdoh, his Myntri and the Elders of the Hima tried hard to prevent this and even sent volunteers at night to prevent people from doing so. It was also told that, the people of Mawphlang wanted to cut down all the trees from the same grove, but one brave man, named '**Kun Lyngdoh Mawphlang**' stood alone to protect the Grove by saying defiantly, "***Who dares to take away the clothes of my mother? One tree felled, one head will be chopped off***".

Due to sporadic attempts to destroy the Sacred Grove, the Chief and his Elders perform certain rituals to invoke the deities "U Ryngekew U Basa" to punish those who dare to violate the taboos relating the Sacred Grove by cutting trees, plucking flowers or creating nuisance in and around the grove. Actually, all the fruits, nuts, herbs, edibles, honey, and water can be consume freely, but are not to be taken outside the grove or to be taken home for profit-making business purposes.

Therefore, anyone who violates these rules are punished; many have died, and more may die if they mistakenly or intentionally act against the will of the Deities (Leopard and Snake) and a pardon from the Chief is not given or a prayer is not given. Until today no one dares to disturb the grove, therefore its biodiversity has remained intact to become a pride of the Nation and a home of flora and fauna rarely found in the contemporary world. We all are proud of it.

The Sacred Grove is home to more than 450 plant species including numerous climate indicator tree species, like *Quercus glauca* and *Q. griffithii* and medicinal plants like *Taxus bacatta* and *Panax pseudoginseng*.



Frogs such as *Rana mawphlangensis*, migratory birds like the black breasted thrush, and flying squirrels are just a few of the animals within the Sacred Grove habitat that are rarely found in contemporary temperate rain forests.



The Grove has attracted many visitors, tourists, and researchers from around the globe. Many of them admire the wisdom of our forefathers who possessed this unique concept of conserving nature through the Tradition, Religion and Culture.

As the children of the present generation we have to take an all-out effort to preserve this kind of forest which is a treasure-house of biodiversity. We have to spread awareness among ourselves that preservation and conservation of forests are the need of the hour, for without trees and forests the world and our ecosystem will diminish due to changes in climate, excess heat, intensity of storms, and lack of water and food.

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