

# of ancient texts and sacred structures

## Express News Service

**Chennai:** There is nothing like stories to take environmental issues to people, said environmental historian Nanditha Krishna, in her special lecture at the launch of the book *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism*, at the IIT Madras recently.

“The utilisation of stories to narrate and discuss environmental events is important in transferring academic discussion to popular reception,” she said.

Pointing out the collections of real stories from various parts of the world in the book, Krishna said that these stories helped one understand the problems that environmental movements faced. Citing an incident from the book of a local tourism association in Japan, which cut down trees that enabled people to have a bet-

ter view of nature, she said, this an example of environmental ambiguity.

Giving her lecture on the ‘The Ecological Traditions of India’, Krishna said that in Indian culture, sacredness was always assigned to different aspects of nature to protect and preserve natural resources.

“The ancient texts point out that sacredness was assigned to nature, taking into account their significance and ban of any kind of pollution,” she said.

There are nine different traditions in this — including sacred groves, rivers, seeds, gardens, animals, mountains, temple tanks, seeds and other sites.

Krishna pointed out that each of these sacred structures helped preserve nature in their own ways.

For instance, sacred groves and preserved local plants, medicinal herbs, give animals the tag of sacredness, which helped in pre-

venting extinction, while that of the mountains ensured that ecological balance was preserved.

Also, apart from their environmental importance, these sacred structures of nature performed social functions. “For example, Buddhist gardens were places for meditation and healing, playing a central role in the life of the monasteries. Similarly, temple tanks were repositories of water for droughts and sacred trees served as a meeting point at villages, while the holiness associated with animals like cow ensured protein through milk,” she said and quickly added but today, this link between sacredness and preservation is lost.

“While we still call them sacred, we don’t know why they are sacred and why they are preserved. So, while a river like Ganga is worshipped, it is also polluted,” she said.