

Tree diversity loses way in dense Dang forest: Study

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AHMEDABAD: Dang forest may make it difficult for most people to see the wood for the trees, but satellite images have shown that the tree diversity has thinned in the region which has Gujarat's largest forest cover. According to the State of Forest Report, 2017, Dang in South Gujarat had 1,368 sq km forest in its 1,766 sq km geographic area. So Dang's forest cover percentage is 77.5. To put it in perspective, Gujarat's forest cover percentage is only 7.5. However, a study carried out by two students of Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DA-IICT) has revealed that teak now comprises about 60% of Dang's forest cover. The study is titled "Biodiversity Mapping of The Dang District Using MultiTemporal Satellite Images and Dynamic Time Warping (DTW) Algorithm." It was carried out by Arnav Saha and Srikumar Sastry under the guidance of Prof Ranendu Ghosh. "The data showed that of the 26 species of trees identified by us, two of them — teak (60%) and sadad (18%) — made up 78% of the tree cover in the district," said Saha. "In all, there were seven prominent species with kalam, kudi, kher, tanach, and kakad completing the list." Sastry said that they first carried out tree identification and tagging work at three sites in Ahwa, Waghai and Mahal which were located at significant distance from each other. They then generated profiles for teak, sadad, and mixed forest from the satellite data. Ghosh said that it was an experiment to understand diversity of species. "The result successfully showed that the mix of ground data and satellite imagery analysis can be applied for diverse fields," he said. "The findings have been shared with the state forest department." M M Sharma, the chairman of the Gujarat Biodiversity Board, said that the team has been asked to submit a proposal for the measurement of diversity in forests across Gujarat. "The richness of any forest depends on the proportion of species," Sharma said. "The team had employed the Shannon Index — the higher the score on the index, the higher the diversity of species. The project was a technology demonstration."

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