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## Planting of Exotic Trees in Nilgiris is Harmful

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### Why in News

A local non-governmental organization (NGO) has proposed mass plantation of exotic trees in the **Nilgiris**.

- An exotic plant is a plant that has been introduced to an area from outside its native range, either purposefully or accidentally.
- Conservationists argue that plantation of exotic trees will have a huge impact on soil chemistry, wildlife and is harmful to the environment in the long term.

When exotics take root in a particular area, they **increase the water demand** in that region, impacting not just the Nilgiris but other districts further downstream that rely on rivers emanating from the hills. The same also has a **knock-on effect on wildlife**, resulting in their vacating the areas.
- One of the justifications offered for the introduction of exotic trees is that they lead to better soil stability of the slopes on which they are planted.

Conservationists however argue that the **roots of exotic trees are very shallow, and the trees get uprooted by high-velocity winds and heavy rain, which characterise the monsoons in the Nilgiris**.
- The government should come up with a policy that stipulates that only native flora should be planted in public spaces in the Nilgiris because of its ecological significance and its unique biodiversity.

### Nilgiri Hills

- Western Ghats are locally known by different names such as Sahyadri in Maharashtra, Nilgiri hills in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and Anaimalai hills and Cardamom hills in Kerala.
- The temperate forests are called Sholas in the Nilgiris, Anaimalai and Palani hills.
- The Sholas are found **only in high altitude** (>1500 meters) regions within the tropics and are limited to the southern part of the western ghats.

- They are characterized by **undulating grassland patches**, interspersed with thickets of stunted evergreen tree species, and are home to a **host of endemic and endangered plants and animals**. They are also vitally important in keeping water cycles alive.
- Shola tree species require a **lot of maintenance** post-planting to ensure their survival. Maintaining a Shola nursery is indeed very difficult as the trees are very slow in growing.

**Source: TH**