

Ritual Plants Used by Indigenous and Ethnic Societies of District Banswara (South Rajasthan), India

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ABSTRACT

Rajasthan is one of the largest states located in the North-western part of India. The southern part of Rajasthan state comprises of a large population of tribal communities belonging to various ethnic groups. The tribal community believe that some Gods and deities can be welcomed by some special plants or their parts. So they conserve some plant species due to the traditional ritual ceremonies. These forest dwellers live in forests and possess a vast knowledge on various aspects of plants. An extensive survey of a few tehsils of Banswara was documented to the traditional knowledge of plants used by tribal communities. Tribals like Ninama, Nanoma, Damor, Garasia, Bhagora, Charpota, Singada and Katara are residing in the area. These people have strong traditions, cultural activities, beliefs, taboos, totems, performing religious rituals and valuable information about properties and medicinal uses of plants. Different parts of plant (roots, stem, leaves, bark, fruits, seeds, bulb, etc.) or the whole plant/herb is used for the said purpose of rituals and ceremonies. In this study deals with the documents of 36 plant species used by the rural people of South Rajasthan in ritual ceremonies are reported. Out of 36 plants studied, 31 species belonging to dicotyledons and 05 to monocotyledons, under 32 genera being used traditionally by the tribals.

Keywords- Ethnobotany, Indigenous knowledge, Ritual ceremonies, Tribals of Banswara, Natural conservation, Southern Rajasthan.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the important biodiversity centers with presence of over 45000 different plant species. Of these,

about 15000-20000 plants have good medicinal value. However, only 7000-7500 species are used for their medicinal values by traditional communities¹. India is a country with the strongest traditions of

conservation of nature and land of diverse natural resources. Since time immemorial, conservation of natural resources has been an integral aspect of many indigenous communities all over the world. India has suffered an almost unabated devastation of its natural biological heritage and much of what remains has been preserved through the ages because of a host of conservation-oriented socio-cultural and religious traditions. These tribes move around the forest for their day-to-day requirements, cultural activities, beliefs, taboos, totems and performing religious rituals. These people are largely dependent on their traditional system for their information is passed on from generation to generation through the word of mouth. India has suffered an almost unabated devastation of its natural biological heritage and remains conservation-oriented socio-cultural and religious traditions.

The significant tradition of nature conservation is to dedicating patches of forests or groves to some deities and spirits by tribal and rural peoples or sometimes conservation of the rituals. The indigenous people are illiterate but have scrupulously nurtured their traditional customs, folklores, ceremonies and a way of forest life through folk beliefs. Since the Vedic times, the human race has used various plants for ritual purposes. The tribals of South Rajasthan believe that certain plants have good omen characters and some others are ominous. As such, the good omen plants are scared, used in worship and offered to God. They also use them in their social ceremonies to keep themselves fit and prosperous. Very little work has been done on such plants in district Banswara of South Rajasthan. However, ethno-botanical and ethno-medicinal aspects have drawn the attention of several workers in South Rajasthan²⁻¹⁴. The Banswara is well known for its scenic beauty, high tribal density, fascinating culture and tradition based on intricate relationship with the

nature. These tribes move around the forest for their day-to-day requirements, cultural activities, beliefs, taboos, totems and performing religious rituals. With this realisation, the recent upsurge of interests in studying rituals or medicinal plants.

A significant contribution has been made by several workers on the ethno-biology from various part of world viz. Meghalaya¹⁵, Arunachal Pradesh¹⁶, Bahrain¹⁷, Nepal¹⁸, Biligiri Rangan Hills^{19, 20} including India²¹. In Rajasthan Ethno-botanical studies have been carried out by several scientists from different parts of the state namely Alwar²², Mt Abu²³, Udaipur^{24, 25}, Eastern Rajasthan²⁶, Aravalli hills of Rajasthan²⁷ and Hadoti Plateau SE Rajasthan²⁸.

STUDY AREA

Rajasthan is one of the largest states located in the Northwestern part of India (Figure 1). Geographically, it lies between 23°3' to 30°12' longitudes and 69°30' to 78°17' latitudes. Southern part of Rajasthan comprising Banswara, Chittorgarh, Dungarpur and Udaipur districts is the tribal belt. The study area, Banswara district is located in southern Rajasthan with an area of 5,037 square kilometres (1,945 sq mile) in between 23.11° N to 23.56° N latitudes and 73.58° E to 74.49° E longitudes (Figure 2).

The region represents a rugged terrain undulated by short ridges at west. The eastern part of the district is occupied by flat-topped hills of the Deccan trap. The district has the southern end of the Aravali Mountains, the drainage system belongs to the Mahi river and its main tributaries are Anas, Chap, Erav, Hiran and Kagdi. Banswara has plenty of rainfall and on the whole has a salubrious climate. Banswara has high varied physiographic from plateau lands to hilly tracts. Due to heavy rainfall (averaging around 1000 mm per annum)

with plenty of humidity, it becomes one of the richest spot for the growth of varied vegetation includes variety of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers and grasses. The subtropical evergreen forest of Banswara consists of mixed tree growth with *Tectona grandis* L. f. nom cons. as a predominant species followed by *Anogeissus latifolia* (Rxb. ex DC.) Wall. Ex Guill & Perr., *Diospyros melanoxylon* L. Roxb., *Madhuca indica* J.F. Gmelin, *Dendrocalamus strictus* (Roxb.) Nees. and *Ficus religiosa* L. in this region.

On account of the district's unique location character, an overwhelming majority of tribals, the forest-fringe villages not only depend on the surrounding medicinal plants for home remedies but also protect these plants through village sacred groves and uses in rituals.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study was based on personal interviews of various groups like village headman, spiritual leader, priest; teachers etc. of tehsil Ghatol, Bagidora, Kushalgarh, Garhi, Anandpuri and Aspur (District Banswara and Dungarpur) who could give correct information and mode of uses. The field tours for study were made at regular intervals in years 2011–2013 in order to cover the tribal areas in different seasons to collect the maximum information at the time of marriage ceremonies, local fairs at **Ghotia Amba**, **VEneneshwar** and **Local HAATS**. The data obtained in local language (**Baagri**) collected through questionnaire from different localities and villages was compared and cross linked so as to ascertain their validity and integrity. During the study, daily activities were closely observed and interpersonal contacts on different rituals ceremonies were established by participating in several social and religious ceremonies. The collected specimens were identified taxonomically with the help of Flora of India²⁰, Flora of

Indian Desert²³, Flora of North East Rajasthan³⁰, Flora of Upper Gangetic Plain and the Adjacent Siwalic and Sub Himalaya Tract³¹. The verification and authentication of collected data were made in the light of standard literature^{32, 33}. In the course investigation two years, the three sacred groves were surveyed. Identification of plants was done on the basis of for local uses, a cross discussion of tribals were interviewed and cross interviewed for final conclusion of study.

DISCUSSION

In the present study of district Banswara (Rajasthan) documented of 36 plant species used by the rural people in ritual ceremonies are reported. Out of 36 plants studied, 31 species belonging to dicotyledons and 05 to monocotyledons, under 32 genera being used traditionally by the tribals (Table 1). To prevent the damaging habitat fast regenerative capacity is needed. So there a great need to indulge in the doctrine of development through conservation which will lead to development without causing any harm to the resources thus leading to conservation³⁵. Many plants species are utilised by Tribals in different Traditional Magico-religious. Plants ways but this does not affect their conservational aspects^{12,13,35-37}. Like all other indigenous tribal communities, tribes of Banswara Ninama, Damor, Garasia, Bhagora, Katarahavea close association with nature and have developed an indigenous knowledge of environmental protection as well as biodiversity conservation. Various cultural and religious rites and rituals are also performed except for medicinal purpose; none of the plant species is harmed in any way^{38,39}. It was observed in this study that different parts of plant (roots, stem, leaves, bark, fruits, seeds, bulb, or their extracts or by-products etc.) or the whole

plant is used as various cultural, religious rites and rituals purpose.

It was also reported that these plants or plant parts used in various cultural and religious rites and rituals are of medicinal uses also and tribals try to live in contacts of these plants for their better health as well the spiritual promotions. The use of such plants in ethnomedicine was reported previously^{40, 41}. The conservation and protection of medicinal plants against over exploitation by domestic and foreign commercial interest without benefits accruing to the nation are clearly our priorities⁴². The uses of such plants in various cultural and religious rites and rituals are a mode of conservation of natural wealth of earth. As we are trying to conserve by different ways as in situ, botanical gardens, germplasm banks etc⁴³⁻⁴⁶. The present note is prescribed here to focus on good omen plants.

CONCLUSION

Various religious beliefs and myths are attributed to conserve the biodiversity of the region. Tribal communities of Banswara have a cultural ecological heritage in the form of this in-situ conservation practice, the knowledge of which needs to be preserved and appreciated. Their presence in agricultural lands; grazing, fragmentation of the grove-owning families and erosion of cultural and religious beliefs and taboos are the major reasons. Therefore, there is an urgent need not only to protect rare, endangered and medicinal plants, but also to revive and reinvent such traditional practice of nature conservation and environmental management.

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Table 1: List of plant species used in rituals in district Banswara of south Rajasthan

S. No.	Botanical Name	Family	Local Name	Use of Part	Purpose on celebrations
1	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> (L.) Willd.	Mimosaceae	Babuliyo	Whole plant	Used in Havan, aahuti etc.
2	<i>Adansonia digitata</i> L.	Bombacaceae	Gorakh	Whole plant	Holly plant used in worship
3	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> L. Corr.	Rutaceae	Bel	Leaves	Offered to Lord Shiva
4	<i>Annona squamosa</i> L.	Annonaceae	Seetaphal	Leaves and Fruit	Used in Religious ceremonies
5	<i>Annona reticulata</i> L.	Annonaceae	Ramphal	Fruit	Used in Religious and marriage ceremonies
6	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss	Meliaceae	Limmro/ Limra	Leaves	Used in Reception
7	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub	Fabaceae	Khakhro	Flowers	Used in worship of lord shiva, Holi/Dhulandi festival
8	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Ait.)Ait. F.	Asclepiadaceae	Aakro	Flowers	Offered to the Lord Shiva and Hanuman
9	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.)R. Br.	Asclepiadaceae	SafedAakro	Flowers	Offered to the Lord Shiva and Hanuman
10	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L.	Cannabaceae	Bhang	Leaves	Offered to Lord Shiva in festivals
11	<i>Catharanthus roseus</i> (L.) G. Don	Apocyanaceae	Sadabaha r/Barama si	Flowers	Offered to God and goddess Laxmi
12	<i>Citrus aurentifolia</i> (Christm.) Swingle	Rutaceae	Limbu/ Neebu	Fruit	Offered in various festivals
13	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Arecaceae	Nariel	Fruit	Used in many religious and social ceremonies
14	<i>Cucurbita maxima</i> Duch. Ex Lam.	Cucurbitaceae	Kolu	fruit	Sacrifice after worship
15	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Zingiberaceae	Pitti	Rhizome	Marriage ceremony
16	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	Poaceae	Dub	Leaves	Ritual, offered to lord Ganesh or different deties (Pooja)
17	<i>Datura innoxia</i> Mill.	Solanaceae	Dhaturo	Flowers	Offered to the lord Shiva
18	<i>Emblia officinalis</i> Gaertn.	Euphorbiaceae	Amrai	Whole plant	Holly tree is worshiped
19	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Moraceae	Vadla	Whole plant	Holly tree, worship of hanuman
20	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Moraceae	Peeplo	Whole plant	Holly tree and ladies worship on the occasion of Sheetla Saptami
21	<i>Hibiscus rosasinensis</i> L.	Malvaceae	Jassus	Flower	Offered to goddess Kali

22	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.	Lythraceae	Mehndi	Whole plant	Marriage and religious ceremony
23	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i> (Koen.) Mac Bride	Sapotaceae	Mahudo	Whole plant	Religious belief
24	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Anacardiaceae	Ambo/Kerry	Leaves	In marriage ceremony and Festival auspicious, garland hung around gate
25	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L.	Musaceae	Kelo	Leaves	Ritual
26	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Nelumbonaceae	Kamaliyo	Flower	Offered to the lord Shiva
27	<i>Nerium indicum</i> Mill.	Apocynaceae	Kaner	Flowers	Used in Festival and Fairs, they wear its flowers at ears.
28	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Marva	Whole plant	Holly plant to pray lord Saligram (lord Vishnu)
29	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Tulsi	Whole plant	Holly plant, used in fast worship of the lord Vishnu
30	<i>Pandanus fascicularis</i> Lam	Pandanaceae	Kevdo	Leaves	Ladies worship, holly plant
31	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce	Fabaceae	Khejdo	Stem	Used in Havan, aahuti etc.
32	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	Poaceae	Ganna	Whole Plant/Stem	Holly plant, used in worship of goddess Lakshmi
33	<i>Saraca indica / Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) Wilde	Caesalpiniaceae	Asha-Pala	Leaves	Used in making Toran in marriage ceremony
34	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Santalaceae	Sandan	Wood	Worshiped in various ceremonies
35	<i>Sesamum orientale</i> L.	Pedaliaceae	Meetu Tel	Seeds	Used in Puja and havan
36	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> Lam.	Rhamnaceae	Ber	Leaves	Used in Festival and ceremonies



Fig. 1. Location map of rajasthan and district banswara

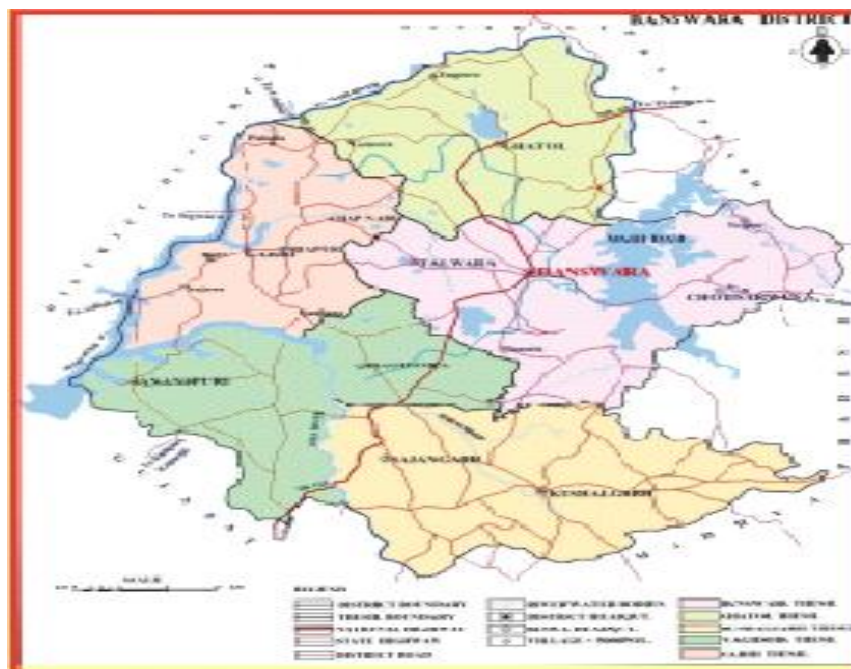


Fig. 2. Location map of study site in district banswara