

Study of Sacred Plants of Deola Taluka of Nashik District, Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

Study of sacred plants of Deola Taluka of Nashik district was carried out during January to December 2023. In all 26 plant species with 23 genera belonging to 21 families were recorded, which are used by peoples in different social and religious ceremonies and festivals.

Key words: Sacred plants, religious ceremonies, worship, rituals, Deola Taluka

INTRODUCTION

The Deola Taluka is situated in northern part of Nashik district and lies between North latitude 20° 23' 45" to 20° 25' 38" and East longitude 74° 07' 29" to 74° 21' 27" and is spread over an area of 577.46 sq.km. There are 50 villages and 0 towns in Deola Taluka. As per the Census India 2011, Deola Taluka has 28,865 households, population of 1, 44,522 of which 75,306 are males and 69,216 are females. It is situated on the confluence of the rivers Kolti and Bhawdi, etc. is rich in flora. The temperature averages 21°C. In a year, the average rainfall is 498 mm.

Sacred groves are natural areas in India that are preserved for worship and community gatherings, and are home to many rare species of plants. There are around 14,000 documented sacred groves in India. In India, many religious festivals and rituals are celebrated throughout the year. Gadgil and Vartak (1975) studied sacred groves of India; Pandey and Pandey (2016) studied sacred plants from ancient to modern era: traditional worshipping towards plant conservation; Thete and Sharma (2017) studied status of some plants in sacred groves of Akola Taluka; Nisha Verma (2018) reported medicinal as well as sacred plants of Bilaspur Town; Pawar (2020) surveyed Socio-religious plants from western parts of Nashik District.; Shastri (2021) studied some sacred plants of Nashik District. Sonawane (2022) studied some sacred plants of Baglan Taluka of Nashik District.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

An extensive survey was carried out in Deola Taluka in year 2023. The sacred plants data was collected through interviews, discussions and observations. Study work was concentrated to sacred plants which are used by peoples in religious ceremonies. The plants were identified with the help of keys to families, genera and species provided in standard floras like Flora of Bombay Presidency (Cooke, 1901-1908 Vol. I-III), Dalzell and Gibson (1861) The Flora of Bombay, Flora of Savantwadi (Almeida, 1990), Flora of Maharashtra State (Singh & Karthikeyan, 2000, Vol. I), Flora of Nashik District (Lakshminarasimhan and Sharma, 1991), relevant literature and expert opinions.

ENUMERATION

The sacred plants with their families, botanical names, local name/s, and their religious use/s are given below.

- 1) *Achyranthes aspera* L. (Amaranthaceae) - Aghada. Plants are used in Hartalika Pooja.
- 2) *Aegle marmelos* Corr. (Rutaceae) - Bael. Leaves are offered to please to Lord Shiva on Mahashivratri festival.
- 3) *Annona reticulata* Linn. (Annonaceae) - Ramphal. It is offered to Lord Ram during Ram Navami.
- 4) *Annona squamosa* Linn. (Annonaceae) - Sitaphal. Leaves are used in Chakra Pooja.
- 5) *Areca catechu* Linn. (Arecaceae) - Supari. The fruits are used for all religious rituals and ceremonies.
- 6) *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss. (Meliaceae) - Neem. The leaves are used in rituals for their purifying properties.
- 7) *Bauhinia racemosa* Lam. (Caesalpiniaceae) - Apta. On the day of Dashara, these leaves are plucked from the tree and metaphorically exchanged as gold with loved ones as a ritual in Maharashtra.
- 8) *Calotropis gigantea* (L.) R. Br. (Asclepiadaceae) - Rui. The leaves and flowers are offered to Lord Hanuman and Shanidev.
- 9) *Cocos nucifera* L. (Arecaceae) – Naral. Coconut is used in rituals: in social, family and religious ceremonies. Fruits are offered to the Gods and Goddesses in temples.
- 10) *Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers. (Poaceae) – Durva-grass. It is a sacred grass in Hinduism. Leaves are offered to Lord Ganesha.
- 11) *Datura stramonium* L. (Solanaceae) – Dhotara. Flowers and fruits are offered to God Shiva.
- 12) *Ficus benghalensis* L. (Moraceae) – Vad. It is considered sacred in India and is used in religious practices. Married women worship the banyan tree on Vat Pournima to pray for their husband's long life.
- 13) *Ficus glomerata* Roxb. (Moraceae) – Umbar. It has religious significance in Vedic texts. Tree is said to be the abode of Lord Dattatreya.
- 14) *Ficus religiosa* L. (Moraceae) – Pimpal. It is sacred to Buddhists because it is believed that Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under this tree.
- 15) *Gossypium indicum* Lam. (Malvaceae) – Kapusa – Cotton threads are used in many religious ceremonies, including Puja, hawan and Rakhi.
- 16) *Mangifera indica* Linn. (Anacardiaceae) – Amba. Mango leaves are used to decorate homes during festivals.
- 17) *Musa paradisiaca* L. (Musaceae) – Kela. Banana plant has religious significance in Hinduism. Plants are used in Satyanarayan Pooja.

18) *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* L. (Oleaceae) – Parijata. It is a sacred tree in Indian mythology and is used for religious offerings. The flowers are offered to God and Goddess.

19) *Ocimum sanctum* Linn. (Lamiaceae) – Tulsi. It is a symbol of the Hindu faith, and is worshipped in homes and temples. Leaves and seeds are added in Satyanarayan Prasad.

20) *Ricinus communis* L. (Euphorbiaceae) – Erand. The stem of this plant is used in Holi festival along with sugarcane.

21) *Saccharum officinarum* L. (Poaceae) Sugarcane – Sugar cane is used in rituals and festivals.

22) *Santalum album* L. (Santalaceae) – Chandan. Sandal wood is used in rituals and festivals. The wood of tree is made into a paste, which is used in worshipping Lord Vishnu and Shiva.

23) *Sesamum indicum* L. (Pedaliaceae) – Til. Seeds are considered sacred and are used in offerings and festivals. The seeds are used to make Laddu along with jiggery in Makar Sankranti festival.

24) *Syzygium cumini* (L.) Skeels. (Myrtaceae) – Jambhul. Leaves are used in marriage pandal decorations.

25) *Tabernaemontana divaricata* (L.) R.Br.ex Roem. & Schult. (Apocynaceae) – Chandani. Flowers are used in religious ceremonies and rituals in many cultures.

26) *Ziziphus jujube* Mill. (Rhamnaceae) – Bor. Twigs are used in pre-wedding ceremonies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of religious plant used in various Hindu traditional worshipping exhibits the important role of religious plants in human life. The information collected indicates that in all 26 plants are utilized for various religious ceremonies, festivals, worshipping of God, Goddesses, rituals etc. such as Ganapati festival, Hartalika Pooja, Mahashivratri festival, Ram Navami, Chakra Pooja, Dashara, Vat Pournima, Satyanarayan Pooja, Holi festival, Makar Sankranti, wedding etc.. The study of sacred and religious plants may give an idea about the extent of common shown by villagers about conservation of plants.

CONCLUSION

The study of sacred plants used for various worships show their importance in human life. The traditional worshipping has protected many plants which have tremendous value and made them as sacred, so that which fear of deity nobody eradicates it. The religious activities act as conserving tool for plant diversity. So we have to protect these sacred plants for next generation for better survival. So, it is necessary to conserve plant diversity, we have to follow our ancestor's belief for human and nature sustainability.

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