

Role of Sacred Plants in Religion and Primary Health Care System- A case study of rural people of Ajmer district of Rajasthan State (India)

Ashwani Kumar*

Department of Environmental Science and Engineering, Bhagwant University,
Ajmer, Rajasthan (India)

ABSTRACT

Rajasthan is the largest state of India occupying an area of 342, 274 square kilometers with deep indigenous and cultural knowledge. The traditional knowledge system in Rajasthan is fast eroding. A large number of rural people living in remote areas of Ajmer district of Rajasthan depend on nature for their basic necessities of life. People of this state are highly religious and various plants and their parts are used in these occasion in various ways round the year by these rural people which play great role and importance in their life. By this survey it is found, the role of sacred plants in the routine life style and health care system of rural people of Ajmer district of Rajasthan state. These people belonging to different culture and customs posses a good deal of information about medicinal utility of local biodiversity. Different parts of plant (roots, stem, leaves, bark, seeds, flowers, fruits) or the whole plant is used at various occasions which have the great property of medicine to cure various ailments. It is observed that 16 plants have high utility and importance in various religion activities as well as health care system. This system in rural people plays a role in conserving these biotic species as they are very useful in their life.

Keywords: Indigenous, cultural, traditional knowledge, religious, health-care, conservation.

***Corresponding Author:**

Ashwani Kumar

Department of Environmental Science and Engineering,

Bhagwant University, Ajmer, Rajasthan (India)

+91-75977-30269 avi1986ms@rediffmail.com

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of great natural heritage. It has good traditions for conservation of nature and natural resources by various means. The plants used in magico-religious beliefs rites and rituals including those in diseases, divination and worship by different tribal societies of Rajasthan have been discussed by Sebastian and Bhandari ¹, Singh and Pandey². A major project entitled 'Ethnomedicinal Plants of Rajasthan State' completed by Trivedi ³ given by CSIR, New Delhi⁴. The utilization of plants for medicine is an ancient, global, tradition that represents the cornerstone of healthcare for many rural communities in developing countries⁵. The human culture, customs, religious rites, myths, Folk tales and folksongs, food as well as medicinal practices are deeply associated and influenced by plants⁶. *Cynodon dactylon* has divine qualities, hence used in number of religious activities and ritual from marriage, baptism to healthcare system⁷.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Ajmer district is well known at international level as holy city. The present study is carried out in Ajmer district in 2010 to find out the importance of plants in religion, culture, custom and primary healthcare system of rural people⁸. The information regarding the use of plants gathered at various religious occasion like Pushkar fair, Ramdevra fair and other activities by knowledgeable villagers⁹, folk healer, traditional herbal healers and other traditional medicines practitioners¹⁰. During the periodic visits, a number of plants were located and attempt was made to find out their local names, scientific names, family and ethnobotanical distribution and their uses for various ailments. The collected specimens were identified taxonomically with the help of Flora of India, Flora of Indian desert, Flora of North-East Rajasthan¹¹ and Flowers of Himalayas¹². The verification and authentication of collected data were made by standard literature ¹³.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Present study shows that 20 plants species were enumerated which are associated with the sacred beliefs and have religious importance. These are used by rural people at various religious occasions and traditional healing system. The detail regarding names, scientific name, uses, religious importance were given in Table 1.

Table. No: 1. List of Plant Species of religious values with their medicinal utility.

| S.No. | Botanical Name | Local Name/English Name | Religious Value & Medicinal Utility |
|-------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Azadirachta indica Juss.</i> | Neem | About 7-10 leaves are boiled incup of water till half cup |

| | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------|--|
| | | | remains. Decoction is drunk twice a day. |
| 2 | <i>Calotropis procera Br.</i> | Aak/Aakra | Smoke of leaves after burning is inhaled. |
| 3 | <i>Prosopis cineraria (L.) Druce.</i> | Khejri/Janti | Regular use of fruits is helpful for treatment. |
| 4 | <i>Terminalia arjuna (Roxb. ex DC.) Wt. & Arn.</i> | Arjuna/Ashoka | Decoction of stem bark is taken thrice a day. |
| 5 | <i>Withania somnifera (L.) Dunal</i> | Ashwagandha | Root powder is taken with milk in daily morning. |
| 6 | <i>Capsicum annum Linn</i> | Mirch/ Chilly | The smoke of the red chillies is inhaled in ward off the evil spirits. Local people use its power with mustard oil on dog bite. |
| 7 | <i>Curcuma Longa Linn</i> | Haldi/Turmeric | Powder of rhizomes considered as a good antiseptic. Associated with planet Jupiter, its paste is applied on the face and body of the bride and groom to get blessing, as an auspicious ritual on the day of marriage. |
| 8 | <i>Cynodon dactylon (L.) Pers.</i> | Dabra/Bermuda grass | It is used in almost all religious rituals supposed to please Lord Ganesh (The Elephant Head God). The paste of the plant is applied on the cuts and wounds. |
| 9 | <i>Ficus religiosa Linn.</i> | Peepal/ sacred fig tree | This is one of the most sacred tree, associated with planet Saturn and Jupiter, and worshiped to need of blessing on almost all rituals. The oil medicated with its leaves is used as ear drops. |
| 10 | <i>Mangifera indica Linn.</i> | Aam/Mango | Wood is used in worship and to perform fire sacrifice (Hawans). Associated with planet Venus, its leaves are also used in making string for doors on every auspicious occasion to attract positive power of seeds is prescribed in case of diarrhea and dysentery. |
| 11 | <i>Musa paradisiacal</i> | Kela/Banana | This sacred plant is worshiped mainly on Thursday, as associated with planet Jupiter. The stems are used to make pavilion during various sacred rituals. Fruits are offered to please deities. The fruit is given with milk to cure body weakness. |
| 12 | <i>Ocimum sanctum Linn.</i> | Tulsi/Holy Basil | Associated with Lord Vishnu, the creator of this universe. This sacred plant is worshiped daily due to a belief that it wards off the evil spirits from home. The leaves are used with common salt to cure toothache and decoction in common cold. |
| 13 | <i>Oryza sativa Linn.</i> | Dhan/Rice | Its husked seeds are used in various sacred rituals and worship. It is also used for auspicious mark (Tilak) on forehead with turmeric or sandal wood |

| | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| | | | paste as blessing of fertility. Rice paste is also used to decorate place of worship. The rice water is used as nourishing drink. |
| 14 | <i>Piper betle</i> Linn. | Pan/ Betel pepper | Its leaves are used in all religious ceremonies and regarded as a pleasure to Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth). The leaves are chewed to sweeten the breath and improve the voice. |
| 15 | <i>Pyrus malus</i> Linn. | Seb/ Apple | The fruit is offered to the deities and its juice is used to improve the digestive system. |
| 16 | <i>Tegetes erecta</i> Linn. | Gainda/ Marigold | The flowers are used to make garlands for deities. The paste of flower is used externally in eye diseases. |

Some Plant Species of religious values with their medicinal utility:



Figure 1: *Withania somnifera*



Figure 2: *Ficus religiosa*Linn



Figure 3: *Azadirachta indica* Juss



Figure4: *Calotropis procera*



Figure 5: *Tegetes erecta* Linn.



Figure 6: *Terminalia arjuna*.



Figure 7: *Ocimum sanctum* Linn



Figure 8: *Cynodon dactylon*

There is great importance of plants in human life as they provide all basic amenities of life as food, cloth and shelter. Other uses of plants as fiber, cosmetics, ornaments etc were discussed time to time by many researchers. But the religious aspects of plants are not given more attention and not much explored. Although some specific plants in human culture are explained by Nargas and Trivedi¹⁴, pointed out that *Azardirachta indica* is worshiped in India. The association of plants with folk songs was discussed by Manraland Pande¹⁵. The symbolic and superstitious activities of Naga

tribes in Manipur were explained by Mao¹⁶. Sacred plants and their medicinal importance with special reference to Indian context have been discussed by Dhiman¹⁷. The religious activities and use of these plants as medicines promote the conservation of these plant species. So, it is necessary to conserve and promote these religious and aesthetic values to conserve bio-diversity and nature, which will surely play an important role in the betterment of human beings.

REFERENCES:

1. Sebastian M K, Bhandari M M. Magico-religious beliefs about plants among the Bhils of Udaipur district of Rajasthan. *Folklore* 1984;77-88.
2. Singh,V. and Pandey, R.P. ‘ Plants used in religion and magico-religious beliefs in Rajasthan’. *J.Econ.Tax.Bot.*1982;3:273-278,.
3. Trivedi P C. Ethnomedicinal plants of Rajasthan State. (CSIR Project Report), University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 1998.
4. Robbins C. Comparative analysis of management regimes and medicinal plant trade monitoring mechanism for American Ginseng and Goldenseal. *Conservation Biology* 2000. 14(5): 1422-1434.
5. Badoni A, Badoni K. Ethnobotanical Heritage. In: Kandari OP, Gusain OP, eds. Garhwal Himalaya: Nature,Culture & Society. Trans Media Srinagar (Garhwal).2001;125-47.
6. Robinson C, Cush D. The Sacred Cow: Hinduism and ecology. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 1997;18(1):25-37.
7. Sharma N P, Balakrishanan. *Flora of India*. Botanical Survey of India, Culcutta. 1996: Vol 1-4:29-45.
8. Bhandari M M. *Flora of Indian desert*. MPS Reports, Jodhpur. 1990.
9. Sharma S, Tiagi B. *Flora of north east Rajasthan*. Kalyani Publication, New Delhi. 1979.
10. Polunin O. Stainton A. *Flowers of Himalaya*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India. 1984.
11. Jain S K. Studies in Indian ethnobotanical plants used in medicine by tribal of Madhya Pradesh. *Bull. Regional Research Lab*. 1963.Vol 1: 126-129.
12. Jain S K. *Dictionary of Indian folk medicines and ethnobotany*. Deep Publications, New Delhi. 1991.
13. Nadkarni A K. *Indian materia medica*. Popular Prakashan, Bombay.1992. Vol. I & II.
14. Nargas J, Trivedi PC. Traditional and medicinal importance of *Azadirachta indica* Juss. In India.In:Maheshwari JK, ed. *Ethnobotany and Medicinal plants of Indian Subcontinent*. Scientific Publishers (India), Jodhpur. 2003:33-7.

15. Manral B, Pande PC. Plants associated with the folk songs of Kumaon Himalaya. In: Pande PC, Joshi NK, eds. Traditions and Traditional knowledge of the Central Himalaya. Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, Dehradun (India). 2004:195-207.
16. Mao A A. Some symbolic and superstitious botanical, folklore about Mao Naga tribe of Manipur (India). In: Maheshwari JK, ed. Ethnobotany and Medicinal plants of Indian Subcontinent. Scientific Publishers (India), Jodhpur. 2003:625-28.
17. Dhiman A K. Sacred Plants and their Medicinal uses. Daya Publishing House, Delhi, 2003.