

Study of religious plants of aboriginal people of the Vindhya Region

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Abstract

The people live in the remote area of forests. They are called Adivasi or aboriginal persons. They basically depend on forest for every need of life. They use food, fodder, fuel, vegetable and medicine from forest products.

This topic is very sensitive and pertinent to social management. They are very near to nature and worship god and goddess of forest.

In ancient times, some areas of earth have been protected along with the plants by the aboriginals. The Adivasi people indirectly also preserve and conserve the national environmental properties. They use only required and necessary plants for their social, cultural, religious, food, therapeutic and shelter. By these activities they do not disturb our ecosystem. Many economical and medicinal plants are saved from our lands and preserved for future use. The present paper deals with 10 species of plants, belonging to 09 genera and nine families which are used by the tribals in various activities pertaining to religion.

Nature has bestowed India with a very rich floristic heritage, which also has a sizeable tribal population with a sense of conservation of natural resources. The present paper deals with the plants of the Vindhyan region which are employed by the tribal communities in various religious ceremonies.

Study area :

Sidhi, Rewa, Satna, Shahdol, Singrouli etc.

Geography :

Sidhi district is located on the Northeastern Boundary of the state between 22.475 and 24.4210 North Latitude and 81.1840 and 82.4830 East longitudes. The district has Singrauli district in the north-east, Koriya district of Chhattisgarh on the east, and Rewa district on the west.

Land :

Sidhi district forms part of the hills and plateau of the Kaimour range of mountains. Major part of the landscape is undulating and rocky. The portion of the land used for

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agricultural purpose is 47% of the total land cover. Only 17% of the land used for agricultural purpose has assured supply of irrigation and around 33% of the land used for agricultural purpose is doubly cropped. The rest of the agricultural land is totally dependent on rain fed irrigation and produces only one crop a year. The lands are largely undulating terrain, which often has steep gradients not ideal for cultivation; the valleys along the major rivers like the Sone and the Gopad and between hills have fertile soils.

Some of the plants used in various religious ceremonies by the tribal or Adivasi communities of the study area are described hereunder:

Botanical name-*Aegle marmelos* Corr.

Common/Local name - Bel

Family - Rutaceae

A small or medium- sized deciduous tree, bark gray- white with longitudinal wrinkles. Branches ascending with sharp straight axillary spines, 2-4 cm. long, reddish brown. Leaves alternate, 3-foliolate, glabrous, petiole terete. Leaflets lanceolate, ovate-lanceolate or rhomboidal, acuminate, crenate, gland- dotted the terminal petioluled, the lateral ones sessile. Flowers greenish – white, bisexual, scented, in short lateral panicles. Calyx 4-5 –lobed, pubescent. Petals 4-5, imbricate. Stamens numerous. Ovary generally 8- or more – celled, ovules many in each cell. Fruits globose, yellow when ripe, 5-15 cm. In diameter, pulp sweet.

Religious uses :

Bel Patra (leaves of bel tree) are specially used in religious ceremonies as

Bhagwat. It is believed that pieces of bel wood are must for the burial of deads. *Belpatra* is used for worshipping Hindu god lord Shiva.

Botanical name-*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.

Common/Local name -Neem

Family -Meliaceae

Neem is a fast-growing tree that can reach a height of 15–20 m (about 50–65 feet), rarely to 35–40 m (115–131 feet). It is evergreen, but in severe drought it may shed most or nearly all of its leaves. The branches are wide spread. The fairly dense crown is roundish or oval and may reach the diameter of 15–20 m in old, free-standing specimens with straight trunk and many branches. Leaves simply pinnate crowded near the ends of the branches, leaflets 9-15 subopposite, obliquely lanceolate, acuminate, serrate, bright green and shining above, petiolules very short. Flowers scented in numerous axillary panicles, bracts minute calyx small, 5- lobed, rotund-ovate petals- ovate oblong ciliate staminal tube glabrous, slightly shorter than the petals anthers 10, inserted inside the staminal tube. Stigma 3- toothed inside the tube. Drupes ovoid-oblong smooth, 1- celled; 1- seeded, yellow when ripe.

Religious uses :

During days of fast Indian women take *parikrama* (move around) of the neem tree. It is believed that deities do reside on neem trees, hence it is worshipped. Small earthen pots are also offered.

Botanical name -*Ficus benghalensis* Linn.

Common/Local name – Bargad, Bar, Banyan

Family - Moraceae

An evergreen very large tree with many aerial roots from the branches. Bark

grey, smooth, young part pubescent. Leaves alternate, orbicular-ovate to elliptic, obtuse, entire, coriaceous, petiolate, stipules, sheathing. Receptacles in axillary pairs, sessile, globose, puberulous, red when ripe, subtended by three broad coriaceous bracts. Male flowers near the receptacle, sepals, 4 stamens 1. Female flowers with shorter perianth, style elongate. Gall flowers with perianth, as in the male, style shorter than in the female.

Religious uses :

Banyan tree is worshipped by Hindus and incense sticks are used in *pooja*. During fast ladies make parikrama around this tree. Keeping in mind that their husband have a long life like Banyan tree.

Botanical name - *Ficus religiosa* Linn.

Common/Local name - Pipal, Peepal, Pippala

Family - Moraceae

A large glabrous tree. Bark grey. Leaves orbicular-ovate, coriaceous, caudate-acuminate, entire; undulate; 5-7- nerved, long petioled; stipules minute. Receptacles sessile, in axillary pairs. globose, supported by 3 basal bracts, dark purple when ripe. Male flowers few or absent ; sepals 3; stamen 1. and female flowers with sepals 5, or 0; style short.

This is a most religious plant of Adivasi area. It is perennial plant that has many branches with dense leaves. The people never cut it at any cost or time.

Religious uses :

All over Vindhya region it is worshipped by all type of Hindu people. In every religious period, it is worshipped both by males & females. Some tribal people worship on every Saturday. Many people go near the plant and

worship with earthen lamp.

Botanical name - *Madhuca longifolia* (Linn.) Macbride

Common/Local name – Mahua, Mohuva, Madhuka

Family - Sapotaceae

A large, deciduous tree with dense crown. Bark dull black with vertical cracks. Leaves clustered at the ends of branches, elliptic, obovate, nerves conspicuous beneath. Flowers cream-coloured, fragrant, drooping, rusty-tomentose, in dense fascicles at the ends of branches without leaves. Fruit a berry, fleshy, ovoid, greenish, 1 to 4-seeded, in clusters.

Religious uses:

Leaves and flowers of Mahua trees are used in *pooja* by Adivasis and Hindus. On *Chhat* festival *Mahua* leaves are used as utensil which is called *dona* in Hindi and flowers are bowed and distributed as *Prasad* among people.

Botanical name - *Mangifera indica* Linn.

Common/Local name - Mango

Family - Anacardiaceae

A large spreading evergreen tree. All parts glabrous except the panicles. Leaves alternate, crowded at the tips of the branches, acute or acuminate, dark green, shining; margin entire or wavy; base acute; petiole 1-6 cm long. Flowers small, in large pubescent panicles; bracts elliptic; bracteoles ovate, small. Sepals ovate, concave, pubescent outside, shorter than the petals. Petals 4-5, imbricate, oblong, subacute, reflexed, glabrous, leaves leathery. Stamens with subulate filaments. Ovary glabrous, sessile; fruit a drupe. Also planted as an avenue tree because

of its dense foliage.

Religious uses :

Wood of mango tree is used in *Hawan*. The leaves of mango tree are used as *toran* and in other forms of religious occasions such as *Grahpravesh*, *pooja*, marriage ceremony etc.

Botanical name - *Musa paradisiaca* Linn.

Common / Local name-Kadali Kela, Banana

Family-Musaceae

A tall stoloniferous, erect plant. Stem composed of convolute leaf sheaths. Leaves large, oblong, erect or ascending, spirally arranged. Flowers monoecious, on stout, elongate, bracteate, drooping spikes. Male above, female below. Bracts spirally arranged, large, ovate or orbicular, tube split down one side, remaining petal opposite the split, free as long as the calyx, embracing the base of the stamens and style. Stamens 5 perfect, 6th rudimentary or absent; filaments erect, filiform; anthers erect. Ovary many-ovuled; style filiform; stigma subglobose, 3-6 lobed. Fruit baccate, oblong, yellowish-green when ripe. Seeds, if present, embedded in pulp.

Religious uses:

Whole banana tree is useful. Its whole plant is placed in forest gate where much religious ceremony is performed. The leaves are used for worship by the women. Banana fruit is mixed in "*Prasad*" and distributed.

Botanical name - *Ocimum sanctum* Linn.

Common / Local name - Tulsi, Tulasia, Tulasi.

Holy Basil

Family-Labiatae/Lamiaceae

Ocimum sanctum, also known as Holy Basil, tulsi, or tulasi, is an aromatic plant

in the family Lamiaceae which is native throughout the Eastern World tropics and widespread as a cultivated plant and an escaped weed. It is an erect, much branched subshrub, 30–60 cm tall with hairy stems and simple, opposite, green leaves that are strongly scented. Leaves have petioles, and are ovate, up to 5 cm long, usually slightly toothed. The flowers are purplish in elongate racemes in close whorls.

Religious uses :

Women worship the *tulsi* plants. They mix the leaves of tulsi plants in *Prasad* to make it sacred and distribute it.

It has also got medicinal values. It is useful in throat infections, cough cold etc.

Botanical name - *Santalum album* Linn.

Common/Local name – Chandan, Sandal

Family - Santalaceae

A small glabrous evergreen tree. Semiparasitic on root of grasses. Leaves opposite, subcoriaceous, ovate-lanceolate or elliptic, acute, entire; base acute; petioled. Flowers small, at first pale then deep crimson, inodorous, acute; petioled. In trichotomous panicles. Disc-lobes very thick. Stamens 4, exerted. Drupe globose, purple black and ribbed when ripe.

Religious uses :

Wooden pieces of *Chandan* tree are used in all religious functions. Its wood treated as sacred and it is also used to burn the deads. It is also used by tribals on their forehead.

Botanical name - *Shorea robusta* Gaertn. f.

Common / Local name – Sal, Sala

Family - Dipterocarpaceae

Sal is moderate to slow growing tree,

and can attain heights of 30 to 35 m and a trunk diameter of to 2-2.5 m. The leaves are 10–25 cm long and 5–15 cm broad. In wetter areas, it is evergreen; in drier areas, it is deciduous, shedding most of the leaves in between February to April, leafing out again in April and May.

Religious uses :

Groove of sal tree is called *Saran* by tribals. They treat *Sal* trees as their god and they worship these trees. They use these in their religious functions.

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