

Sacred Grove Kshireswar: A traditionally protected forest fragment in Dungarpur District of Rajasthan

Neeraj Kumar Shrimali* and Shafkat Rana**

*Department of Botany, S. G. G. Govt. College Banswara-327001 (India)

Mail id : nirajkani81@gmail.com, s.rana@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Sacred groves are a kind of nature worship in which certain plants or area (forest, hillock and certain water bodies) being protected due to some religious beliefs. It is generally prevalent in the areas, dominated by tribal community. Sacred places of tribal community are generally found on the top of isolated hillocks or near water sources. Areas having this all holly sites including hillock, vegetation, and water bodies are being protected by the local people because of religious beliefs. Kshireswar is a temple dedicated to lord Shiva. It is situated on a hillock of Jogpur village, District Dungarpur Rajasthan. The hill is densely covered by Dhonk (*Anogeissus pendula*) trees along with Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus*) Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and Sagwan (*Tectonagrandis*) which provides a suitable habitat to several peacocks. Cutting of trees and hunting in this area is naturally prohibited because of the holiness of this temple and surrounding area. In this way sacred groves are means of in situ conservation of natural resources which ensure the availability of all the resources for future generation. Present paper deals with this particular sacred grove of district Dungarpur.

Sacred groves are forest fragment which are protected due to their religious importance⁷, It ranges from a single tree like Peepal, Bargad, Gular to a big forest. They are generally located near the village on hillock and close to water bodies. Gadgil *et al.*,⁵, Chandran, MDS. *et al.*,⁴, Oramsby¹¹, Anthwal¹, and several other worker reported potential role and status of sacred groves in India. In Rajasthan there are various forms of sacred groves¹¹. In western Rajasthan there are several Orans, which provide fuel, fodder and

livelihood for humans and animals^{6,9,13}. Orans are being protected by the local community because of their religious importance. Orans of Bishnois of district Jodhpur is well known for the protection Khejri tree and Blackbug. Small hillock on Aravallis and vindhyan tract of kotabundi, there are several forms of sacred grove where people worship different deities like Bheruji, Mahadev, Bavasi, Mataji and Deoras. Sacred groves are considered as an *in situ* method of biodiversity conservation^{1,2,7,10}.

*Assistant Professor, **Associate professor

Study area: Kshireswar temple, village Jogpur, Tehsil-Sagwara, District Dungarpur (Rajasthan).

Dungarpur district lies in southern Rajasthan. The Mahi river runs along the southern edge forming boundary with district Banswara, while at the northern edge the Som River forming boundary with district Udaipur. The district is bounded on the southeast by the state Gujrat. The district occupies an area of 3770 square km. 70 percent of its population comes from "Bheel" tribe. The district has a dry tropical climate dominated by Teak forest.

Kshireswar temple is situated on small hillock (23.36° N, 73.52° E) of village Jogpur of Tehsil Sagwara, District Dungarpur, Rajasthan. The hill is densely covered by Dhonk (*Anogeissus pendula* Edgew) trees along with Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus*) Neem (*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.) and Sagwan *Tectona grandis* L.f. which provides a suitable habitat to several peacocks.

Research methodology:

Information about history and its religious importance is collected from the Mahanta, who is taking care of this holy temple. Several persons from different nearby villages were interviewed for gathering detailed information about the kshireswar temple. The flora found on this hill were minutely observed and identified with standard floras.

Kshireswar temple is dedicated to lord Shiva which is situated on a small hillock in Jogpur village. It is around 400 year old. It is a center of religious faith for several nearby

villages. People use to gather and worship the temple on several auspicious occasion and festival. They have deep faith and respect for the Mahanta Har Govindpuriji Maharaj. The temple area harvests several protected plant species; some are-

1. Dhonk (*Anogeissus pendula* Edgew)
2. Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus* species)
3. Neem (*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss)
4. Sagwan (*Tectona grandis* L.f.)
5. Mahua (*Madhuca indica* J.F. Gmel)
6. Palaash (*Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub.
7. Sagwan (*Tectona grandis* L.f.)
8. Tendoopatta (*Diospyros melanoxylon* Roxb.)
9. Churel (*Holoptelea integrifolia* (Roxb.) Planch)

Dhonk tree found most abundantly on the hill. It is a good timber yielding tree from the family combretaceae several peacock can be seen on this trees. Human activities like cutting of trees and hunting of animals is naturally prohibited because people consider the whole hill as sacred site with trees and animal.

Sacred places of tribal community are generally found on the top of isolated hillocks or near water sources. These various forms of sacred grove like **Dhooonies, Deora, Bherujibawsi, Mahadev and Mataji**. Because of religious importance, area occupied by this all holly sites including hillock, vegetation and water resources are being protected. Kshireswar temple is one of the important sacred groves which supports and conserve several Dhonk trees and national bird peacock, which is an indirect way towards sustainable development.

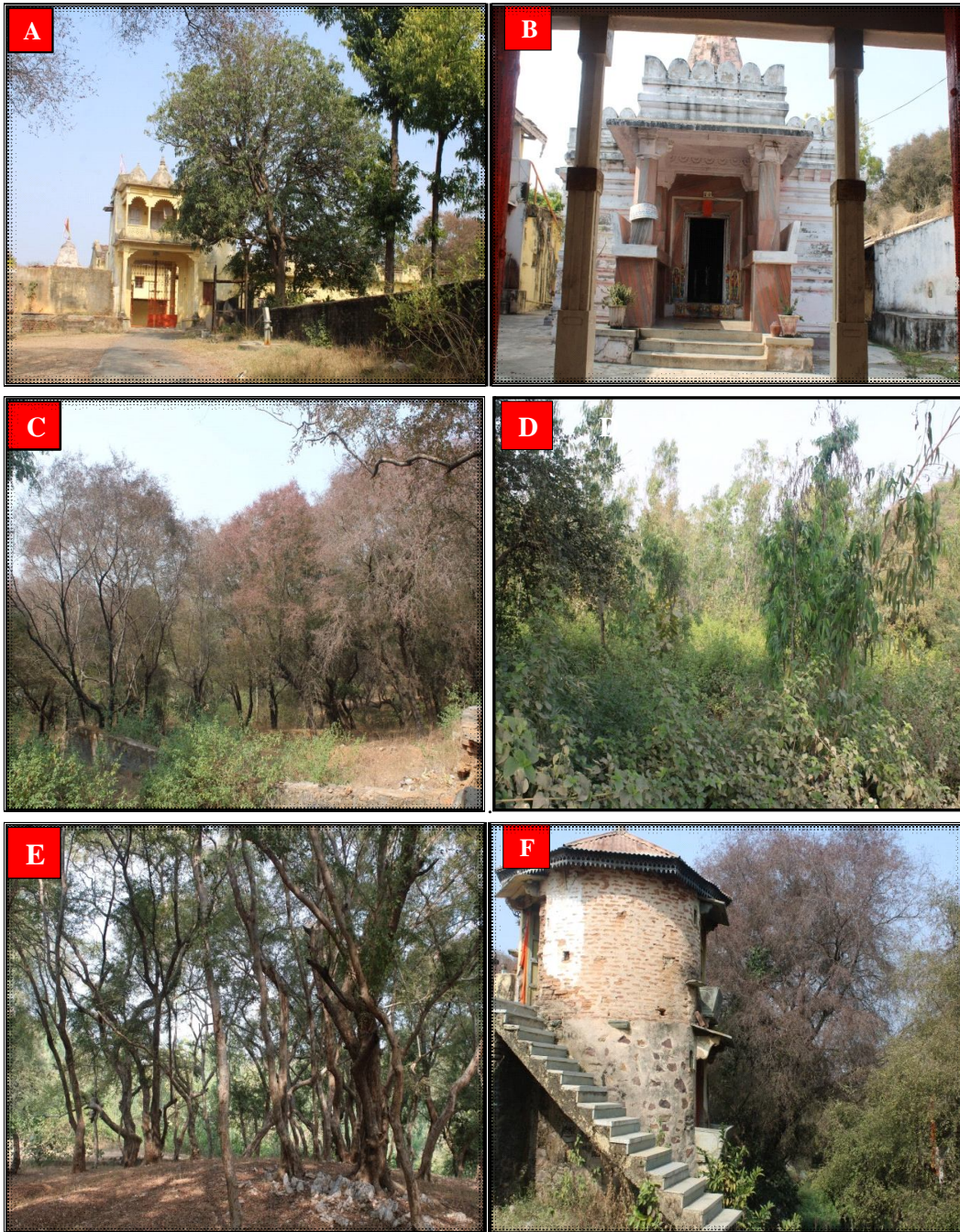


Figure: A, B and F Showing Kshireswar Temple Area and C, D and E Showing Protected Dhonk forest Area.

I am highly thankful to Dr. G. S. Deora, associate professor (Mohanlalsukhadiya university Udaipur) for his valuable guidance. I would like to give special thanks to Mahanta Har Govindpuriji who provided me the information regarding the history of the temple. Special thanks Motiramji for their blessing and support.

References :

1. Anthwal, A., N. Gupta, A. Sharma, S. Anthwal and K.H. Kim (2010). *Resource conservation and recycling*. 54(11): 962-971.
2. Bhattra, K. R. and S. R. Baral (2008). *Bankojankari*, 18(1): 25-31.
3. Chandrakanth, M.G, M.G Bhatt and M.S. Accavva, (2004). *Int. natural resource forum*. 28(2): 102-111.
4. Chandranm M.S. and J.D. Hughes (1997). *Ecology, traditional communities and religious change. Social compass*, 44(3): 413-427.
5. Gadgil, M. and V.D. Vartak (1976). *Economic botany*, 30(2): 152-160.
6. Jha, M., H. Vardhan, S. Chatterjee, K. Kumar and A.R.K. Sastry (1998). Status of Orans (Sacred groves) in Peepasar and Khejarli villages in Rajasthan. *Conserving the Sacred for Biodiversity Management UNESCO & Oxford IBH publishing*. New Delhi pp. 263-275.
7. Khan, M. L., A. D. Khumbongmayum and R.S. Tripathi (2008). *International journal of ecology and environment science*, 34(3): 277-291.
8. King, E. I. O., C. Viji and D. Narsimhan (1997). *Int. j. of ecology and environment science*, 23(4): 463-470.
9. Meena, D. and A. Singh (2012). *Current science*, 103(12): 1389.
10. Mgumia, F. H. and G. Oba (2003). *Environmental conservation*, 30(3): 259-265.
11. Ormsby, A. (2013). *Conservation and society*, 11(2): 187-197.
12. Pandey, A., B. Agrawal and S.K. Srivastava (2017). *Sacred Groves- A method of Biodiversity Conservation* p. 9.
13. Singh, A. and R. Bahl (2006). *Oran Land Issues. A livelihood Concern for Pastoralists in Rajasthan Available at SSRN 981506*.
14. Singh, G. (2016). *Sacred groves. Scientific Publisher*.