

ETHNO-MEDICO-BOTANY OF SOME SACRED GROVES OF ADILABAD DISTRICT OF TELANGANA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Sacred groves are the pockets of almost climax vegetation. Preserved on religious grounds. They are located in the remote tribal areas. There are many plants grown near the temples, which are regarded as the sacred plants by different ethnic groups of the country. Sacred groves are not only the sacred ecosystems functioning as a rich repository of nature's unique biodiversity but also a product of the socio-ecological philosophy that our forefathers have been cherishing since days. In India, from time immemorial, the concept of conservation of nature has been carefully woven into the various religious beliefs and customs. Tribal folklore is rich in Magico-religious beliefs and taboos. Sacred groves are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna of the past. In the district, many centers are considered under sacred grove category. For example the temple area of Jainath, situated in Jainath, a small village 21 Kms from Adilabad, the temple area of Basara-Saraswati, Ginnedhari of Tiryani Mandal, Keslapur a remote village of Indervelli Mandal, the area of Kunthala Waterfalls, the area of Pochara waterfalls, Mahagoan of Bhainsa mandal, Narnoor of Narnoor Mandal, Dankanapally of Tiryani Mandal, the temple area of Sadalpur, an ancient Temples of Lord Bhirava and Mahadeva located at just 37 kms away from Adilabad and Sirichelma of Ichoda Mandal are known as places of sacred groves.

KEYWORDS: Sacred Groves, Local Tribal Communities, Adilabad District

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Sacred groves are small groves that vary in size from a few hectares to a few kilometers protected by local communities as being the sacred residences of local deities and sites for religion - cultural rituals. There are about 14,000 sacred groves. In India various Gods and Goddesses are worshipped in Hindu religion throughout India, various plant parts like bark, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds are offered to Gods. There are many plants grown near the temples, which are regarded as the sacred plants by different ethnic groups of the country. Sacred groves are not only the sacred ecosystems functioning as a rich repository of nature's unique biodiversity but also a product of the socio-ecological philosophy that our forefathers have been cherishing since days. In India, from time immemorial, the concept of

conservation of nature has been carefully woven into the various religious beliefs and customs. Tribal folklore is rich in Magico-religious beliefs and taboos. They believe that some Gods and deities reside in forests. The famous Indian botanist, J.D Varthk has museums of living giant trees, a treasure house of rare, endemic and endangered species, a dispensary of medicinal plants, and a garden for the botanist, a gene bank for economically important organisms, a paradise for nature lovers and a lab for environmentalists. These sacred groves are commonly undisturbed from human interference due to religious beliefs. Sacred groves are assumed to be an abode of the forest God. Sacred groves may be termed as the natural islands of climax vegetation maintained and preserved for centuries in the name of God, a village deity or a forest spirit usually looked after by the local communities but seldom touched for any kind of its produce. Sacred groves are also the home of many medicinal plants which not only help in curing several diseases of the rural population but also keep alive the heritage of the traditional system of Indian medicine. Very rare and economically important medicinal plants inhabit the groves Hindu people celebrate different festivals on various religious occasions throughout the year. In these ceremonies, people use various plants and their parts to perform different rituals and rites. The plants, which are used in religious ceremonies, are considered sacred. They are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna a single or cluster of sacred trees,

HISTORY OF SACRED GROVES OF ADILABAD DISTRICT

Sacred groves (SGs) are small groves that are specific places which are protected and conserved by the local communities as being the sacred residences of local deities and sites for religious and cultural rituals. They serve as valuable storehouses of biodiversity. They are part of biological heritages and systems that have helped to preserve the representative genetic resources existing for generations. Sacred groves are the important places in which biodiversity is preserved in mostly undisturbed condition because of certain taboos and religious beliefs. Sacred groves are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna of the past. In the district, many centers are considered under sacred grove category. For example the temple area of Jainath, situated in Jainath, a small village 21 Kms from Adilabad, the temple area of Basara-Saraswati, Ginnedhari of Tiryani Mandal, Keslapur a remote village of Indervelli Mandal, the area of Kunthala Waterfalls, the area of Pochara waterfalls, Mahagoan of Bhainsa Mandal, Narnoor of Narnoor Mandal, Dankanapally of Tiryani Mandal, the temple area of Sadalpur, an ancient Temples of Lord Bhirava and Mahadeva located at just 37 kms away from Adilabad and Sirichelma of Ichoda Mandal are known as places of sacred groves. In the above sacred groves species like *Achyranthes aspera*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Butea monosperma*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Cannabinus sativa*, *Clerodendrum indicum*, *Cynodon sp.*, *Eclipta prostrate*, *Ficus benghalensis*, *Ficus glomerata*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Ficus retusa*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Horduem vulgura*, *Lawsonia inermis*, *Madhuca indica*, *Mangifera indica*, *Ocimum sanctum* *Pongamia glabra*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Saraca indica*, *Streblus asper*, *Syzygium jambolanum*, *Tamarindus indica* and *Tectona grandis* are commonly found in this district.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SACRED GROVES

They are part of biological heritages and systems that have helped to preserve the representative genetic resources existing in the surrounding regions for the generation. Sacred groves were a feature of the mythological landscape and the cult practice. Altogether the taboos, self-imposed restrictions and extra care exhibited by the community have significantly contributed to preserving the groves intact and in good shape thereby conserving the whole range of biodiversity that is housed in it. The sacred groves offer manifold ecological benefits in the conservation of biodiversity. In fact, the sacred groves represent the first major effort in conserving the biodiversity. The sacred groves also provide an

ideal surviving habitat to several species of endemic flora and fauna.

ABOUT ADILABAD DISTRICT

Adilabad district is one of the 31 districts of Telangana and situated in the northwestern corner of the state. The district derives its name from Adilabad, its headquarters town which was named after Ali Adil Shah, the ruler of Bijapur. The district was for long not a homogenous unit and its component parts were ruled at different periods by different dynasties, namely the Mauryas, Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas of Kalyani, Yadavas of Davagiri, Kakatiyas, Bahmanis, Imam Shahis of Ahamednager, Mughals, Bhosle Rajas of Sirpur and Chanda. Originally this was not a full-fledged district but a sub-district named Sirpur-Tandur which was created in A.D 1872 with Edulabad (Adilabad), Rajura and Sirpur as its constituent talukas. In 1905 the status of this sub-district was raised to that of an independent district with headquarters at Adilabad.

Adilabad is one of the most backward districts of Telangana. It is known for its characteristic presence of Sahyadri hills (locally called as Satnala Range) in its northern boundary, a richness of forests as well as rich hydrocarbon resources like coal mines. The district encompassed with most ancient and innocent Adivasis. The rural folk is known for their famous carved wooden work, the most internationally known art of rural painting, small-scale industry is well established in Nirmal town, popular as "Nirmal paintings". The district is also having a 'Tiger reserve' second of its kind in A.P at Kawal known as "Kawal Tiger Reserve" and bestowed with a number of scenic waterfalls at various places of the district like "Kuntala waterfalls" and "Pochara waterfalls".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Intensive fieldwork was undertaken by the author for a period of five years from January 2007 to December 2011. Good rapport was established with the people. Locally well known herbal healers. During these visits various religious people Vidhyas/ Vejjus/ Pujaris/ Vaddegudus/ Gunyas etc. belonging to Kolams, Naikpods, Pardhans, Gonds, Thotis, Chenchus and Mathuras tribal communities of the district who are still practicing traditional medicine are identified, religious ceremonies were made to collect the information different ethnic group of people who use plants materials in different rituals, ceremonies, and any other religious purposes. The information on medicinal uses of the plants was also gathered from the local and tribal people residing in the interior areas of the district and the published literature. The data on the botanical names, family, vernacular names, religious virtues, parts used and medicinal uses along with active principle and status were also mentioned in the work. Important voucher specimens have been kept in the Herbarium, Department of Botany, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Sacred Groves Flora

Table 1

S.No	Botanical name	Religious virtue	Parts used	Diseases Cured	Availability Status
1.	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i> (Amaranthaceae)	The plant is offered to the Hindu deity Ganesh during the holy month of Badrapada.masam	Whole plant	Fever, Tooth problem, Scorpion sting	Wild
2.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> L (Rutaceae)	Shiva Pooja cannot be performed without its leaf (Bilwa)	Leaves and Fruits	Diarrhoea, Dysentery and Skin Problems	Wild
3.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Twigs are hanged over the	Twigs and	Tooth Problems, Skin	Wild

	Juss. L (Meliaceae)	doors when there is smallpox in epidemic form. Twigs are also used widely in the festival of Bonalu.	leaves	problems	
4.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lamk.) Taub. Ln: Palas (Papilionaceae)	Flowers are using in 'Holy' festival	Bark	Piles, Tumors and menstrual disorder, antiseptic and cooling	Wild
5.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R.Br. (Asclepiadaceae)	Leaves and flowers are used to worship lord Shiva and Ganesha	Latex	Bone Fever	Wild
6.	<i>Clerodendrum indicum</i> (L.) Kuntze (Verbenaceae)	Used for worshipping Fire	Roots, Leaves	Asthma, Chest pain, cough, Cholera, and Fever	Wild
7.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers. Ln (Poaceae).	Gane's puja and in any other sacred rituals	Whole plant	Body cooling Diarrhoea	Wild
8.	Anacardiaceae (L.)	Used in death rituals	Whole plant	Cough and Fever	Wild
9.	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i> L. (Moraceae)	Used in Marriage ceremony	Leaves, Roots	Hair growth Piles	Wild
10.	<i>Ficus glomerata</i> Roxb. (Moraceae)	Used in Marriage ceremony	Stem Bark Fresh Fruits.	Snakebite Red discharge Diarrhoea	Wild
11.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L. (Moraceae) Ln.	Used in Marriages and 'Upanayan'	Stem bark	Wounds, Sprains	Wild
12.	<i>Ficus retusa</i> L (Moraceae)	This leaf is one of the pancha bilwas and used in Devi pooja	Leaf		
13.	<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Roxb. Ln. (Verbenaceae)	Ceremonial sacrifice	Leaf	Cough and cold	Wild
14.	<i>Horduem vulgure</i> L. (Poaceae)	Used in Marriage Ceremony	Seeds	Improve Digestion	Cultivated
15.	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L (Lythraceae)	Marriage Ceremony	Leaves	Skin disease, Typhoid	Cultivated
16.	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i> <i>var. latifolia</i> (Roxb.)A Chev (Sapotaceae)	Marriage Ceremony	Stem bark	Body pains Dog bite.	Wild
17.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L (Anacardiaceae).	Twigs are used as samidha and offered to sacred fire (Havan kunda)	Latex Unripe fruits.	Heal cracks Unripe fruits	Cultivated
18.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L (Lamiaceae)	Hindus plant this tree in their houses as a holy plant and offer a diya to it.	Leaves	Coughs, Ringworm, Skin diseases and Earache	Cultivated
19.	<i>Pongamia glabra</i> (L.) Pierre (Fabaceae)	Marriage Ceremony	Leaves	Feaver	Wild
20.	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce (Mimosaceae)	Festaval of Dasara	Leaves	Un wanted hairs	Wild
21.	<i>Streblus asper</i> Lour. (Moraceae)	A Widower whose spouse died untimely, marries a 'Saura' tree to overcome the ill effect of the planets after which he can marry again	Leaves, bark, roots	Ulcers, Sinuses, Swellings and boils, fevers, diarrhea and dysentery	Wild
22.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lamk.) Taub. (Papilionaceae)	Flowers offered to gods in 'Holy' festival.	Bark	Feaver	Wild

Table 1: Contd.,

23.	<i>Calotropis gigantean</i> (L.) R.Br. (Asclepidaceae)	Ganesh puja, shiva Hanuman puja	Whole plant and flower	Cough, asthma, fever	wild
24.	<i>Citrus medica</i> L. (Rutaceae)	Ceremonial sacrifice	Roots, Fruits		Cultivated
25.	<i>Clerodendrum indicum</i> (L.)Kuntze (Verbenaceae)	For worshiping fire	Roots, leaves	The bark of root is used for Asthma, Chest pain, cough; leaves are useful for Cholera and fever.	
26.	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. Ln. Narikol (Arecaceae)	All religious, rituals, ceremonial sacrifices etc from cradle to grave, coconut plays very important role. Its leaves are also used in decorating Marriage gate	leaves	Coconut water cooling, diuretic, nutritive, aphrodisiac used in dysentery and diarrhoea.	Cultivated
27.	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L. (Zingiberaceae).	Marriage ceremony and few other rituals	Rhizomes	Turmeric powder is antiseptic, used for skin disease, cough, cold and asthma.	Cultivated
28.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers. Ln (Poaceae).	Ganes puja, Shiv puja and in any other sacred rituals	Whole plant	Hemostatic and in uterine hemorrhage.	: Wild
29.	<i>Datura metel</i> L. (Solanaceae)	Shiv Puja specially in Shivaratri	Leaves, seeds	Leaves used in Asthama, epilepsy, seeds are used in leprosy and dog bite.	Wild
30.	<i>Demostachya bipinnata</i> . Stapf.	Rishi and Pitri puja, Kushasan, in every ritual.	Root	Roots used as diuretic, galactagogue, in Ashma and jaundice	Wild
31.	<i>Ficus baghalensis</i> L. (Moraceae)	Marriage ceremony	Bark and latex	Powder of bark and latex are applied in rheumatic pains, infusion of bark is effective in diabetes, dysentery, gonorrhoea and seminal weakness.	Wild
32.	<i>Ficus racemosus</i> L. (Moraceae)	Ceremonial sacrifice, Mising people eat the tender leave in various rituals.and Tribes people make dish from the leaves for any religious festivals	Bark and latexan fruit	Used for piles, and diarrhea, fruits are carminative bark anti-diabetic.	Wild
33.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L. (Moraceae)	Vishnu and Pitri puja, in Yayna Karma, marriage, 'Upanayan'	Bark, fruits	Bark used for gonorrhoea, young shoots and fruits laxative, fruits used in asthma.	Wild
34.	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> L. (Dioscoreaceae)	Tubers regarded sacred boiled and eaten in Magh Bihu	Tuber	Tebers used for abscess and ganglionar inflammation, tubers used in piles, dysentery	Wild
35.	<i>Eclipta prostrate</i> (L.) L. (Asteraceae)	Used in death rituals, Nepali people used the plants at the time of offering panda.	Whole plant	Leaves used for cough and fever, used in hepatic and spleen	Wild

				enlargements and in skin problems, root emetic and purgative, applied in wounds	
36.	<i>Gossypium arboretum</i> L. (Malvaceae)	Cotton used in Diya and all religious ceremonies, sacrificial thread 'lagun' used by Brahmins	Roots, seeds	Roots diuretic, used in diarrhea, dysentery, leprosy and skin disease, seeds used in gonorrhoea	: Cultivated
37.	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L. (Lythraceae)	Marriage ceremony and sacrifice.	Leaves	Leaves used as cooling agents, hair dye, used in skin disease, tuberculosis and typhoid.	: Cultivated
38.	<i>Musa sapientum</i> L. Ln. Kol (Musaceae)	Satya Narayan Puja, Prosad, Mandap and all other religious ceremonies, leaves used as plates for prosad, in Assamese society it is a sacred plant.	Whole plant	Fruits used in loose motion and flower juice mixed with curd given in dysentery and menorrhagia.	Cultivated and wild
39.	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn. (Nymphaeaceae)	Ceremonial, puja and sacrifice.	Whole plant	Roots used for ringworm, dysentery and dyspepsia, seeds used to stop vomiting, diuretic, anti-fungal, flowers astringent and cooling	Wild
40.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L. (Lamiaceae).	: Puja and Prosad in Kati Bihu, Assamese people plant the sapling and kindle a diya under it, the disciples of Lord Krishna, Chaitanya wear 'Tulsi Mala' around their necks	Whole plant	Leaves used for coughs, inflammations, ringworm and other skin diseases, earache, root is given in Malaria, root soil used for skin disease.	Cultivated
41.	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L. (Poaceae) Ln.	In all Puja and sacrifice rice is used, mixed with ghee, sesame used in fire sacrifice (Hom). The use of 'Rice tika' in the forehead is seen in some Hindu communities.	Grains	Leaves are used for asthma, fever,	Cultivated
42.	<i>Piper betle</i> L. (Peperaceae)	In all puja and sacrifice betel leaves are important.	Leaves	Free digestion	Cultivated
43.	<i>Santalum album</i> L. (Santalaceae)	Wood paste (Chandan) and wood stick are used in all pujas. The widows take white chandan spot on their foreheads.	Wood	Paste of wood stick applied on normal burns and prickly heat	Wild and cultivated.
44.	<i>Manifera indica</i> L. (Anacardiaceae)	Leaves are used in all religious ceremonies; twigs are used as samidha and as offering to sacred fire (Havan kunda).	: Leaves, fruits, bark, seeds	Leaves are used for cough, asthma, bronchitis, diarrhea, fever, diabetes and high blood pressure; fruits are digestive given in hemorrhoids of uterus, lungs and intestine; laxative and diuretic, seeds anthelmintic, bark is useful in amoebic	Cultivated

				dysentery.	
45.	<i>Vitex nigundo</i> L. (Verbenaceae)	Twigs used in Nepali marriage, in worshipping jungle god	Leaves	Leaves are used in blister, boil, body ache, cold, cough, fever, gum trouble, piles and rheumatic pain.	wild
46.	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> Lam. (Rhamnaceae)	The plant twigs used to expel the spirits from the house or from their compound by some tribal people of this region.	Leaves, fruits, root	Roots are useful for fever, wounds and ulcer, leaves used in typhoid fever, fruits are aphrodisiac, seeds used in pox.	Cultivated, wild
47.	<i>Tagetes erecta</i> L. (Asteraceae)	Wreath (Mala) made of flowers used in Bhatriditiya, a brother-sister's festival.	Flower, bark, root, and whole plant	Infusion of herbs used against rheumatism, cold and bronchitis. Leaves and flowers used as carminative, diuretic and vermifuge.	Cultivated

RESULTS

Altogether 47 different plant species have been identified as sacred plants by different ethnic groups of Adilabaddistrict. Though there is many more information about sacred plants but only some of the most commonly used plants having medicinal value are taken into consideration. During this project work, some important information has been unearthed. Fewsuch information are given here below. There is a long experienced traditional belief among the people that they have selected some plants which are edible or not edible during or after the religious works. According to Gautamiya Tantra during the religious works, a person should eat boiled sunned rice and ghee. The Agasthya Samhita opines that the following materials may be eaten during the religious works. These materials are *Cocos nucifera*, *Musa sapientum*, *Mangifera indica*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *Terminalia chebula*, *Oryza sativa*, *Vigna radiata*, *Sesamum indicum*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Chenopodium album*, *Chorcorus capsularis*, *Raphanus sativa*, *Citrus aurantifolia*, *Citrus aurantium* etc. Plants not edible before or during religious works: According to Yoginitantra, the following plants should not be taken before or during the religious works. The plants are *Tamarindus indica* (*Teteli*), *Cajanus cajan* (*Urohi*), *Benincasa hispida*, *Cocos nucifera* (*Narikol*) etc. The widows should not eat onion, all kinds of spices and chilly.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of sacred and religious plants may give an idea about the extent of concern shown by people of different eco-floristic regions about the conservation of plants. IT may be mentioned here that most of the sacred plants usually have great utility value. If every Mandir or Masjid committee, a committee will protect their sacred plant grown around these religious places automatically a gauge number of plant species will be conserved. Many sacred groves of India are the best examples of conservation of Biodiversity. Besides, the plants of the sacred groves or religious places have many plants of medicinal use. People have a belief that using the plants of the religious places can cure any kind of disease. This infusion of superstitious myths or beliefs and medicinal properties of plants plays a very significant role in their conservation and conservation of Biodiversity, The forest is now being maintained by forest management committee comprising of the local people. Maharishi Charak has said that there are no plant on the earth which does not have medicinal value, the same is the belief that if we use any plant for performing *Puja* the same will definitely have the

potential for improving the health. So it can be said every plant used in worship, ceremonies have also medicinal value.

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