

INVENTORIZATION OF ETHNOSACRED PLANTS OF KISHTWAR DISTRICT**¹Humeera Ayub, ²Touseef Hussain Trak*, ²Ravi Upadhayay.**¹ Department of Botany, University of Jammu (India) 180001.² Department of Botany, Govt. Narmada P.G. College, Hoshangabad, Barkatullah University, Bhopal (India) 461001.

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Correspondence for*Author:****Touseef Hussain Trak,**

Department of Botany, Govt.

Narmada P.G. College,

Hoshangabad, Barkatullah

University, Bhopal (India)

touseeftrak@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Kishtwar district, popularly known as “Land of Sapphire and Saffron” the place which is diverse of all forms it harbors. People of this district are highly religious and believe in variety of rituals related to God worships which are performed in various ways, in every year by the people in which plants or their part have their vital role. The present paper aimed to document 16 sacred plant species belonging to 16 different families. During research work, the sacred plants are observed and documented from different religious places of Kishtwar district Jammu and Kashmir, India viz. Hur Astan, Bun Astan, Shiv Mandir, Ram Mandir, Sarthal Mandir, Dooga Astan, Gori Shankar Mandir (Sarkoot), Neelkanth Mandir, Bandarkoot Astan respectively. The investigations revealed that different type of these religious places

are covered with important ethnosacred plant species like *Ficus religiosa* L., *Plantago major* L., *Artemisia maritima* L., *Alnus nitida* Endl., *Quercu sincana* Roxb., *Clematis buchananiana* DC., *Betula utilis* Don., etc.

Keywords: Inventorization; Sacred plants; Kishtwar; Ethnobotany.**1. INTRODUCTION**

Humans have long understood the medicinal properties of plants and have imbued trees, plants and flowers with spiritual properties. In the world of exploration of ethnobotanical plants, some are used for sacred and ceremonial purposes, to explore the spiritual world. The use of these plants was derived from native cultures, whose members have traditionally sought access to the supranormal through the ingestion of the plants and their preparations.

These plants differ from contemporary religious practices in a key way. For religious prayer, ritual and communion are engaged to propitiate God and Gods and the use of sacred plants is intended to give the participant direct access to the divine experience. The difference is not slight but radical.

The term “Sacred”, literally means holy or deserving respect and the plants which behold such admiration are called sacred plants. These plants play a key role in human spirituality, religion, culture and are regarded as an integral part of biodiversity. The concept of sacred plants originated with the origin of human civilization. Some evidences of their importance are available even in ancient literature and religious scriptures of all faiths [1]. Sacred plants and their association with human culture is one of the abstract relationship which emphasize good and bad power of plants, plant folklores and plant worship [2]. The study of these plants and their products formations are associated with faith and tradition from the discipline of Divine botany [3]. Divine botany also epitomizes the plants which are mentioned in religious scriptures like Quran, Shrimad Bhagvat Gita, Guru Granth Sahib, The Bible, as well as plants of supernatural and spiritual level associated from birth to death of a person.

The Jammu and Kashmir state in India lies in the lap of western Himalayas. It constitutes one of the richest biodiversity and store houses of medicinal plants, herbals charms and sacred plants. District Kishtwar lies 240 km in northeast of Jammu (the winter capital of state) and 284 km southeast of Srinagar (summer capital of state). Most of its area is hilly terrain, and it lies in the lap of great Himalayan Pir Panjal range. It is popularly known as “Land of Sapphire and Saffron”. It is a rich pocket of sacred plants which is very diverse in all life forms it harbors. In the past, this region was used to be an independent hill, later being essentially merged with the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1821 A D. The Chenab valley lies in this territory at the latitudes of $33^{\circ} 10'$ - $33^{\circ} 25'$ N and longitudes, of $75^{\circ} 25'$ – $76^{\circ} 10'$ E, with an area of about 50 sq. km. The climate ranges from temperate to alpine with some sub-tropical elements. The region is divisible into four tehsils viz. Marwa-Warwan, Padder, Chhatroo and Kishtwar. Due to the marked variation in topography coupled with climatic conditions, this area is characterized by varied type of vegetation comprising of trees, herbs, shrubs, grasses, climbers, lianas, mosses, ferns etc. There are many rituals in Jammu and Kashmir, in which sacred plant are used in different occasion like marriage ceremony, Havans, in getting rid of black magic, prayers, magic, opening fast (as in Ramzan, Navratra, Karvachot) etc. However there is not a single report on sacred plants from this region till

date. The main aim of the present work is to explore the traditional knowledge of the sacred plants in Kishtwar district (J&K).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This survey is based on extensive reconnaissance in the area of exploration with diverse topography, undertaken from 2011-2013. Flowering plants were collected within the present limits of district Kishtwar. The places explored include roadsides, riverside, riverbanks, forests, meadows, valleys, cultivated fields, wetlands and rock crevices. Some rich plant diversity areas such as Sinthan Top Green, Mughal Maidan, Sarthal, Drabshalla, Atholi, Gulabgarh, Sigdibatha, Malipath, Gagarwari, Chingam, Barnayil, Wardi, Bandarkoot, Girinagar and other areas were visited many times in every season of the year. Many villages of district Kishtwar were also visited for screening of plants which are being applied for curing of diseases as per religious beliefs. Informations were obtained from middle aged and older peoples, most of whom were Hakims (old persons in villages who have vast knowledge about the ethnobotanical plants), Pandits, Mollana. In addition to these people, some more information was also gathered from local peoples of these areas. For each plant, the local peoples were interviewed, in order to know the medicinal as well as the sacred knowledge, regarding the common names of the plants, their usage and preparations. During field trips, the digital photographs and herbarium specimens were also collected. The duration of each collection trips were 5-10 days and each brief trip of 1-2 days were executed either alone or one or more helpers respectively. In this way, it was possible to raise collection from rich plant diversity areas of Kishtwar district in all seasons of the year.

During the field work and in collection of the data regarding the ethnosacred plants, a questionnaire highlighting abstract relationship of the ethnosacred plants with various ethnic group was formulated, circulated and verbally discussed with the local people. The common questions asked to them were as:

- a. What is the local name of the sacred plant?
- b. Which part of the plant is used for religious practice?
- c. How do people use particular plant for rituals?
- d. Which plants are preferred by locals to grow in their vicinity?
- e. Local myth if any related to the plant?
- f. Any other ethnobotanical use?

The ethno religious importance of the plant under study area was considered only when confirmed from at least 6-8 peoples. In addition to that, the sacred plants are also used for healing purposes. True healing is concerned with the body, mind and spirit with the past, present and future. Such combinations are possible by various means, including the ceremonial use of the sacred plants. From time to time, these plants have been employed to counteract the disorders of body, mind and spirit.

3. RESULTS

The present paper aimed 16 plant species belonging to 16 families, as Adiantaceae, Amaranthaceae, Umbelliferae, Apiaceae, Berberidaceae, Betulaceae, Brassicaceae, Papilionaceae, Iridaceae, Juglandaceae, Lamiaceae, Lythraceae, Moraceae, Musaceae, Platanaceae and Punicaceae is documented and in the other section which is other detailed the medicinal use of each plant species is described. Today whole new emerging body of study is currently examining and the healing properties of some plants were given (Table. 1).

Table 1. Description of sacred plants for religious purpose

s.no	Botanical name	Family	Local name	Flowering period	Sacred uses	Other details
1	<i>Adiantum capillus veneris</i> L	Adiantaceae	Gaotheer	Throughout the year	Leaves of plant are dried and ground into the powdery form is being used as one of the ingredient in Dhoopsamagries. This Dhoop is preferred for its incense in the temples of the area, so, the plant is regarded as auspicious and symbol of purity.	Leaves of the plant is mixed with cardamom and boiled in water and is given to cure cough, cold, and fever in infants
2	<i>Amaranthus caudatus</i> . L	Amaranthaceae	Saval	May	Seeds of the plant are used as food in Navratra fasts. The seeds are roasted and cooked with milk and relished as “Kheer” or taken as such.	The seeds are rich in carbohydrates and given to young children. The seeds act as a quick energizer and are preferably used in fast.
3	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> . L	Umbelliferae	Dainwal	December-April	A special dish namely “Tahar” is often garnished with coriander leaves and then offered in Shrines	The local people consider the leaves of the plants as a good

					(Ziyarat).	appetizer and digestive tonic.
4	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> . Mill	Apiaceae	Badyaan	January-April	The seed of the plant is used in “Janavceremony (Yagnopavit)” its fruits are used in Havans, and the fruit is offered to Agni Devta.	The powdery form of seed is mixed with sugar and then added in warm water and is given in constipation.
5	<i>Barberis lyceum</i> . Royle.	Berberidaceae	Khumbalaya	May-June.	Plant is used as guard to check over evil spiritto prevents them from entering houses. The common ethic related to the plant is that it keeps ghost away and acts as protection shield.	The decoction of roots is used to cure scalp disease.
6	<i>Betula utilis</i> D.Don	Betulaceae	Bhurzaj/Burzpatter	May-June	The bark of this tree is well known, as the material on which ancient manuscript of India is written. All religious hymens had been written on this bark. Beside this, the whole plant is regarded as auspicious and highly valued for its ethnic use.	Sap of stem is used to lengthen the hair, infusion of roots and bark is used for curing cuts and bruises.
7	<i>Brassica campestris</i> L	Brassicaceae	Sarsoo/Saryaan	April-may	The plant has a long history of spiritual use, several references had been mentioned in two verses of different Suras (Quran).the seeds of the plant are used in slightly different ways, they are blazed and smoke is allowed to be inhaled by the hunted person.	Oil is extracted from seeds and employed to treat dryness.
8	<i>Pisum sativum</i> L	Papilionaceae	Matter	May	Seeds are used in marriage ceremonies, these are soaked in water for two days and then given to the horses on which bride groom rides upto Bride’s house.	Dish prepared from the seeds of this plant is eaten to reduce nervousness and trembling.
9.	<i>Iris kashmeriana</i> L	Iridaceae	Kaberposh	July	The plant grows commonly in graves yards or in other words the gives representation of a graveyard. People do not prefer to grow such plants in front of their houses. A common myth related this plant is that this plant had	Flowers are preferred by the locals for their antiseptic value. Flower paste is applied to infectious eye.

					originated from the eyes of “Hazrat Zuleikha ^{RA} ”	
10	<i>Juglans regia</i> L	Juglandaceae	Dun/ Akhroot	June-July	The walnuts are offered to Lord Shiva as Prasad on occasion of ShivRatri. Walnuts are kept in earthen pots, dipped in water and these pots are then buried into the earth for 4-5 days before Shiv Ratri. On the festival occasion, walnuts are taken out of the pots and offered as “Prasad” to people.	Nuts are consumed by people and bark of the tree is used for cleaning teeth's, and in the process lips get coloured.
11	<i>Ajuga bracteosa</i> Wall	Lamiaceae	Batien	April-May	Dried leaved are aromatic and is an important constituent of commercial Dhoop. The plant is valued for its excellent purity and pleasant incense. This dhoop is regarded as purest form and burned as incense in temples.	Leaves paste is used to treat scalp related infection. It is also utilized to prevent baldness.
12	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L	Lythraceae	Maanz/ Mehndi	October	Crushed leaves in the form of the powder are used by both communities when both bride and groom are applied mehndi on hands and feet's by their friends and relatives. Mehndi is also applied to pregnant women on the occasion of “Godbharaie”. Muslims prefers it because they believe that it originates in Heaven.	The leaves are dried and ground into powder, to this is added some water, lemon juice and black pepper, a past thus formed is kept for 3-4 hours. After which is used by locals for dying hands, head and feet's.
13	<i>Ficus palmate</i> Forssk.	Moraceae	Fogkul	April-may	There is a reference of Fig in Quran under the name of “Teen” meaning significance. The reason for the mention of “fig” is that the fruit is highly useful. Muslim people of the area consider it as a gift of God.	People suffering from long illness are advised to take its fruits. It is easily digestible and good for health.
14	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L	Musaceae	Kela	Febuary- November	The plant finds a mention in Vedas and Puranas where women are emphasize to worship the tree on 4 th of Kartik for the long life of	Its fruits are used to maintain chastity.

					husband; beside, the bunch of the fruit are used in festivals and religious ceremony	
15	<i>Plantanum orientalis</i> L	Platanaceae	Chinar kul	March - July	The tree is held auspicious by every section of society, owing to bring its religious importance the tree is planted in the vicinity of the religious place. A fate big stone below the tree in this region is quite popular and reserved because the holy body of Saint Shah Asrar-ud-Din Wali ^{RA} was placed on that stone. When taken to funeral yard. This place is known as "Salam Kain". Also a big chinar tree is growing infront of Darbar-e-shah-Fareed-Ud-Din Sahib.	The wood and leaves of the plant are dried, are used in winter as fuel.
16	<i>Punica granatum</i> L	Punicaceae	Anaar/ Daan	May-June	Three reference of pomegranate in Quran under the name "Rumman", an important advice has been given with regard to this fruit crop because it is good food and a medicine of great value. This plant is sacred and its fruits are offered to many Devtas in the region.	It is a tonic for heart patients to increase hemoglobin content.

4. DISCUSSION

The use of herbs in a sacred way for religious rituals has history that goes back almost as long as human being was originated on the planet Earth. From the time immemorial, plants have been focus of religious life for many people. In the world there is considerable evidence of plants worship in the archaeological record of the ancient Egyptians, Greek, Romans and Assyrians [4]. Even Indian civilization sanctifies various trees and plants. Sacred herbs like those used in religious rituals are traceable to almost every single continent on the planet, including ancient civilizations like Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece. The resources obtained from nature like; land, water, air and plants can no longer be considered free and inexhaustible resource. The basic elements of nature in the form of *Prithvi* (earth), *Agni* (fire), *Jal* (water), *Vayu* (air) and *Akash* (space) were always worshipped or revered in one or the other forms from the ancient times as per the Hindu mythology. The tree of *Cedrus*

deodara is believed to be the tree of God and is planted around temples. Many times, the entire landscape represented by a variety of species and ecosystems has been considered sacred and conserved in their pristine condition by forbidding the use of any resource from it. Any sort of damage to vegetational sanctities was considered a sin by the people of that locality. As far as Kishtwar place is concerned, some of the plants like *Capsicum annum*, *Vigna mungo*, *Citrus limon*, are being used to counteract harmful omens like evil eye and witchcraft. A few plant species are regarded auspicious like *Platanus orientalis* and unauspicious as (*Opentia vulgaris*) [4]. Plants are praised and honored by people because of their close association with a deity e.g. *Ocimum sanctum* with Lord Krishna, *Ficus religiosa* with Gautam Buddha, *Butia monosperma* with Lord Brahma and *Saraca asoca* with Devi Sita etc. Different people used sacred herbs in different ways, illustrating the fact that the sacred plants are beneficial for the mankind from the ancient time. From the taxonomical point of view, each plant is assigned a correct botanical name with correct authority and family name. The nomenclature has been updated in accordance with the latest version of ICBN [5]. Almost all the plants worked out at present also possess ethnomedicinal values e.g. a seed of *Pisum sativum* reduces nervousness and trembling, the leaf paste of *Ajuga bracteosa* wall is used to treat scalp related infection, the oil extracted from *Brassica campestris* is employed to treat dryness.

The importance of plants in human life as food, fibre, cosmetics etc. was discussed time to time by many researchers. But the religious aspects of plants are not given any attention and not much explored. Some researchers explained the recognition of some specific plants in human culture such as *Nargas and Trivadi* [6] pointed out that that *Azadirachta indica* is worshiped in India and its leaves are used to keep away the evil spirits. While in case of Rajasthan, it is associated with the farmers tradition method of weather forecasting. In addition, *Kumar et al.* [7] described the diversity of vascular plants of Kishtwar High Altitude National Park, Jammu and Kashmir (Northwest Himalaya) and their ethnomedicinal uses were also elucidated by [8]. There is a need of preservation, restoration and proper management of existing valuable plant species. The local traditional folklore medicinal knowledge was the basic source for preliminary selection of medicinal valued plants, so the conservation of plant diversity is very important, therefore most important is the management and sustainable development in these fragile ecological and life support systems. From ancient time, plants and animals are the part of our life. Plants are oldest creation of God on earth and plant worshipping is one of the earliest religious trends since the time ancient.

Numerous references are available in literature where plants are treated as to the abode of the Gods. Some plant species are grown in sacred places because people thought that ancestors and deities reside in these plant species and protect their life [9]. So the religious activity their observation as well as documentation act to conserve the tools for biodiversity and is very important to preserve and promote these aesthetic values to conserve bio-diversity and the nature in which we live. This in present and future will surely play a vital role in betterment of life existence on the planet earth.

5. CONCLUSION

Many ethnic, religious and cultural traditions are associated with plant species (folk music, dance, literature and poetry). To keep the benefit of these plants alive for future generation, there is an urgent need of conserving these sacred plants that are over-harvested. It is possible only due to the mutual cooperation of the people in local communities and various scientists and specialists present there. One of the modern crises is that the priceless ethnic and traditional knowledge of the plants is disappearing very rapidly because of Westernization, breakdown of traditional cultures and even the extinction of whole tribal groups. One of the main purposes of such study is to ensure that local natural history becomes a living tradition in communities, where it has been transmitted orally for many years.

6. CAUTIONARY NOTE

Warnings: Use of the sacred plants is not for everybody those who think should not try them should listen to their own best advice. But for those who do feel drawn to these plants, they can open up entirely new world of experience, the sacred plants holds esteemed positions in the culture from which they originate, and are now drawing to them explorers from all parts of the globe. The present research is carried purely for scientific aims. Some plants are toxic, in the aforementioned ones, thus the author does not recommend ingesting or otherwise using any plant, plant extract, or plant product and cannot be responsible for the effects on anyone. In some plants, the part used was first given specific treatment and then used.

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