EVALUATION OF PLANTS IN HINDU MYTHOLOGY, FESTIVALS AND RITUALS AND THEIR CONSERVATIONAL ASPECT

DOLON NATH, SOBHAN KR. MUKHERJEE
Taxonomy of Angiosperms and Biosystematics Laboratory, Department of Botany, University of Kalyani, Kalyani -741235, West Bengal, India

Accepted Date: 14/06/2015; Published Date: 27/06/2015

Abstract: Mythology is a part of every religion. It is the science which investigates myths or fables or legends founded from remote events to present day. Plants have played a vital role in development of human civilization since past time. In India, amongst Hindu many plant species are associated with religious functions, rituals and also in calibration of festivals. The sacred plants of India are actually worshipped throughout the nation owing only to its mythological significance. In this study about 70 plant species have been recorded in different mythological, ritual and festival purposes. The mostly used for these purposes are Oryza sativa L., Santalum album L., Aegle marmelos (L.) Correa, Ocimum tenuiflorum L., Cocosnucifera L., Musa paradisiac L., Cynodon dactylon Pers., Areca catechu L. All these plants are belonging to 15 families. The most used families are Graminae, Moraceae, Leguminosae and rarely used families are Sapotaceae, Pedaliaceae, Menispermaceae, Costaceae. 17 plant families have been conservational aspects and 22 plant species have medicinal value. Such type of studies has potential value in our daily life for in-situ conservation of plants in their domain and also employed for recreational and promotional of mental health from our everyday stress condition in competitive modern life in metropolitan, urban and village areas. Plants recorded from this study can also be used for the treatment of some common diseases in particularly in remote areas people.

Keywords: Mythology, Festivals, Rituals, in-situ conservation

Corresponding Author: MS. DOLOM NATH

Access Online On:
www.ijprbs.com

How to Cite This Article:
Dolon Nath, IJPRBS, 2015; Volume 4(3): 310-326
INTRODUCTION

Mythology derived from the Latin word ‘Mythologie’. Mythology is a part of every religion. It is the science which investigates myths or fables or legends founded from remote events to present day. Plants have played a vital role in development of human civilization since past time. Man has been fascinated by nature since he evolved from his primitive ancestors, the apes. No doubt, to start with he hunted for food mainly by killing the wild animals, but if there was anything on which he could depend with any confidence towards its availability, it was the plant. Not only the fact that a large number of plants provided him with food but also the fact that they provided him with curative medicine and shelter, were perhaps the reasons why he worshipped them rather than the animals which also gave him food.

Traditional use of plants and their parts during some festival occasions by people is an aspect of human life. In India, amongst Hindu many plant species are associated with religious functions, rituals and also in calibration of festivals. After being contact with plant kingdom, people come to know the great significance and benefits start to use them for medicines, food, textiles and other uses. Due to easy availability of plants, this has given an important place in our great Hindu Cultures by Worshiping them and one of to conserve from being extinct. Such useful plants have been recorded in the various religious books and knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation (Shah and Patel). The sacred plants of India are actually worshipped throughout the nation, owing only to their mythological significance (Sahu et al).

Trees being nature’s major processors of solar energy which is vital for our existence, and yielding flowers, fruit, wood or medicine, have been worshipped by the Hindus as a matter of gratitude. Different plant parts are used for this purpose such as twigs, roots, flowers, fruit, seed, exudation as well as the whole plant. From this study, we know about pollution control, awareness of inter-dependability and inter-relatedness. It has also been practiced through customs, daily routines, myths and rituals. Plants worshipping is also a way of plant conservation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The names of plants have been taken from different literature such as Prain, Guha Bakshi, Hooker and valid citation of author of these plants have been checked from IPNI Website. Information of plant species used in a particular festival occasion, importance of the plants or its parts in traditional use, beliefs and benefits were collected through personal interview with some Brahmans or Pujiar or Thakurmosai. Information about use of plants were also collected from traditional books, such as Sheel’s, BenimadhabSheel’s publication; Bidya Binod, Akshay, Library Publications. The information about common name, medicinal value, and
conservational aspect has also been collected from Ambasta. Information was also collected from different Websites (indicated in reference part).

**OBSERVATION**

A list of some common terms of plants which are used in some common festivals or ‘puja’s in West Bengal like:

- **Panchasasho** ----1) Endosperm of *Oryza sativa* L.; Graminaceae (Dhan, chal). 2) Cotyledons of *Vigna mungo* L.; Papilionaceae (Maskolai). 3) Seed of *Sesamum indicum* L.; Pedaliaceae (Til). 4) Endosperm of *Hordeum vulgare* L.; Graminaceae (Jav).

- **Panchapallav** ----Leaves of 1) *Mangifera indica* L.; Anacardiaceae (Aam), 2) *Ficus lusens* Blume; Moraceae (Pakur), 3) *Ficus benghalensis* L.; Moraceae (Vat), 4) *Ficus religiosa* L.; Moraceae (Ashtawa), 5) *Ficus glomerata* Roxb.; Moraceae (Jagya dumur).

- **Panchakosai** ----1) *Syzygium cumini* L.; Myrtaceae (Jaam). 2) *Bomba xceiba* L.; Bombacaceae (Simul). 3) *Sida cordifolia* L.; Malvaceae (Berala). 4) *Ziziphus mauritiana* Lam.; Rhamnaceae (Kool), 5) *Mimusops elengi* L.; Sapotaceae (Bokul).

- **Panchaguri** ---- Wood of 1) *Terminalia chebula* Retz.; Combretaceae (Horitoki), 2) *Hibiscus rosasinensis* L.; Malvaceae (Joba), 3) *Oryza sativa* L.; Graminaceae (Dhan), 4) *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Correa; Rutaceae (Bel Pata).

In addition to **Panchaguri, Panchasasho, Panchapallav**, other plants are also used in common festivals such as 1) *Terminalia chebula* Retz.; Combretaceae (Horitoki), 2) *Cynodon dactylon* Pers.; Graminaceae (Dhurba), 3) *Ocimum tenuiflorum* L.; Labiatae (Tulsi), 4) *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Correa; Rutaceae (Bel), 5) *Piper betle* L.; Piperaceae (Pan), 6) *Cinnamum camphora* L.; Lauraceae (Korpur), 7) *Oryza sativa* L.; Graminaceae (Dhan,chal), 8) *Sesamum indicum* L.; Pedaliaceae (Til), 9) *Cocos nucifera* L.; Arecaceae (Narkel). These are common plants which are used in some common festivals like 1) Annapurna puja, 2) Durga puja, 3) Gandheswari puja, 4) Doljatra, 5) Jagardhatri puja, 6) Kartik puja, 7) Kojagori Laxmi puja, 8) Kali puja, 9) Viswakarma puja, 10) Rasjatra, 11) Itupuja, 12) Soni puja, 13) Sasthi puja, 14) Janmastami, 15) Sutika sasthi puja, 16) Aksay Tritia puja, 17) Subochoni brata, 18) Satya narayan puja, 19) Soni puja.

Other plants are also used to devote many other gods and goddess, such as Bel (*Aegle marmelos* (L.) Correa), Rudraksa (seeds of *Elaeocarpous ganitrus* Roxb. ex.G.Don) and Ber (*Ziziphus mauritiana* Lam.) are considered dear to Lord Siva, Sal (*Shorea robusta* Gaertn.f.) and Pipal (*Ficus religiosa* L.) to Lord Visnu; Kadamba (*Anthecephalus chinensis* Walp.) to Lord Krishna; Mango (*Mangifera indica* L.) to Lord Hanuman, Asok (*Saraca asoca* Roxb.) De Wilde to Kamadeva; Silk cotton (*Bombax ceiba* L.) to the goddess Laksmi; and Coconut or Sriphala (*Cocos nucifera* L.) to Varuna or the lord of waters.
The five trees (panca-vrksa), which are believed to be present in Lord Indra’s garden (Nandana) and his paradise (Svarga) are: (1) Mandara (Erythrina indica Roxb.); its shade relieves one of physical ailments and mental stress; (2) Parijata (Nyctanthes arbor-tristis L.) ; (3) Samtanaka, a tree of wonder having leaves which promote fertility in men; its identification remains obscure; (4) Harichandana or Sandalwood (Santalum album L.) well known for its fragrance and cooling effect, it keeps evil spirits at bay; and (5) Kalpa Vrksa or Kalpa Taru, the tree of eternity which emerged as a result of the churning of the ocean of milk; it was lifted to Svarga by Indra, and is frequently mentioned in Sanskrit literature for its wish-fulfilling quality.

Young girls are symbolically wedded to the Pipal tree—Ficus religiosa L. or Bel fruit -Aegle marmelos (L.) Correa to avoid future widowhood. Tree trunks are tied with thread and circumambulated 108 times and adorned with vermilion and sandal-paste.

In ‘Kali puja’ in West Bengal, there is a ritual that eating of 14 different leafy vegetables are used, which are as follows: 1) Raphanus sativus L.; Brassicaceae (Mula), 2) Lagenaria siceraria (Mol.) Standley; Cucurbitaceae (Lau), 3) Brassica juncea (L.) Czern & Coss; Brassicaceae (Sarisha), 4) Basella alba L.; Basellaceae (Pui), 5) Hygrophila auriculata (Schum.) Heyne. ; Acanthaceae (Kulekhara), 6) Ampelopteris prolifera (Retz)Copel.; Thelypteridaceae (Dheki shak); it is a fern, 7) Alcosia macrorrhiza (L.) Schott; Araceae (Mankchu), 8) Amaranthus tricolor L.; Amaranthaceae (Lalshak), 9) Enhydra fluctuans; Asteraceae(Hingcha), 10) Spinecea oleracea L.; Chenopodiaceae (Palong), 11) Trigonella foenum-gracum L.; Fabaceae (Methi), 12) Ipomoea aquatica Forsk.; Convolvulaceae (Kalmi),13) Amaranthus blitum L.; Amaranthaceae (Sadanayta), 14) Cucurbita maxima Duchesne ex Lam.; Cucurbitaceae (Kumra).


There are also some common plant materials which are used during Hindu Sraddha ceremony to the manes (Funeral rites):1) Ocimumtenuiflorum L. (Tulsi) 2) Musa paradisiaca L. (Kola). 3) Cynodon dactylon Pers. (Durva). 4) Hordeum vulgare L. (Jav). 5) Oryza sativa L. (Dhan). 6) Terminalia chebula Retz. (Horitoki) etc. Plants are used in different mythological purposes are given in table 1.
Table 1. Showing some common plants with their scientific name, common name, and their purpose of use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>NAME OF THE PLANTS</th>
<th>LOCAL NAMES</th>
<th>FAMILIES</th>
<th>MYTHOLOGICAL PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1       | Acacia catechu (L.f.) Willd | Khoyer(B); Katha(H); Cutch tree(E). | Mimosaceae | • Khadira wood is considered sacred both by the Hindus and the Buddhists.  
• There is a mention of the plant in the Bhagavata Purana and other ancient Indian texts. It also finds a mention in the Buddhists Jataka stories.  
• The inflorescence is essential in marriage ceremonies. |
| 2       | Acacia suma (Roxb.) Buch. Ham.ex Voigt | Saikanta (B); Sami(H); Acacia(E). | Mimosaceae | • Agni Devatta concealed himself in the Sami wood, the tree became sacred.  
• Sami is a very inflammable wood and is therefore, used in all sacred rites where the holy fire Homa is kindled.  
• Sami is also considered as the goddess-incarnate. |
| 3       | Aegle Marmelos (L.) Correa | Bel, Bael(H & B); Wood Apple (E). | Rutaceae | • The three leaves together, look like Trishul, or the Trident, the emblem of Siva.  
• These tri-foliate leaves signify the three functions of Siva i.e. Creation, Preservation and Destruction.  
• In Sivaratri the Sivlinga is decorated and wrapped with bilva leaves  
• According to Banihi Purana and Tantrik folklore, Lakshmi was born as a sacred cow and from her dung arose the Bel tree and therefore, it is considered sacred. The tree being associated with Lakshmi, it is also called Sribiksha, the tree of prosperity and good fortune.  
• The people of Kerala never eat the fruit, as it signifies the head of Siva.  
• Bilva leaves are offered to Siva on Mondays in the month of Shrawan (July).  
• Its wood is included in Homa and the fruit is believed to promote fertility.  
• ‘BhadraSuklaChaturthi’ offering of trifoliate leaves of bel to Lord Ganesha.  
• BilvaNimantrana Asvina Sukla Sasti; summoning the tree-goddess and worshipping the Devi.  
• ‘Bilva Saptami’ and ‘AsvinaSukla Saptami’; a twig of bel, bearing two fruits, is offered to Devi.  
• ‘Bilva Navami Asvina Sukla Navami’; bel leaves are offered to Siva.  
• In a Newar family, there is a culture called bel bibaha, where a daughter must be marriage with Aegle marmelos before mensuration. |
4 | Anthocephaluschinensis Walp. | Kadam (H & B); Kadamb (E). | Rubiaceae | *Krishna loved to sport in Kadamba forests.*  
*The Mother Goddess Durga resides in a Kadamba forest (Kadamba Vanavasini).*

5 | Aganosmadichotomosa (Roth) K. Schum. | Malati (S, H & B). | Apocynaceae | *Ancient Hindu mythological stories are full of references to Malati flowers, as in the braids of women, or in overhanging bowers under which lovers meet.*

6 | Abrus precatorius L. | Gunjā (S); Gunchi (H); Kunch (B); Indian Liquorice (E). | Papilionaceae | *The bright red-and-black bead-like seeds are attractive to children right from the days of mythology. These beads have special significance to the Gaudiyas sect: followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Krishna worship. The child Krishna is inseparable from his favourite gunja amala, and it was said to represent Radha. Followers of Chaitanya worship Krishna in a small stone representing Mount Govardhan, with a gunja mala around it representing Radhanarani.*

7 | Aeschynomene aspera L. | Sola (H); Shola (B); Sola Pith Plant (E). | Papilionaceae | *The dried soft stem is the sola, used in Hindu marriage ceremony as decoration purpose, viz., for making 'topor' and also used for idol decoration.*

8 | Andropogon serratus Thunb. | Bena (B). | Gramineae | *Bena is used in ‘Patai Sasthi Puja’ in West Bengal.*

9 | Alocasia indica (Roxb.) Schott | Manaka (S); Mankanda (H); Mankochu (B); Giant Taro (E). | Araceae | *In West Bengal it used in ‘Itu Puja’.*

10 | Areca catechu L. | Poogiphalum (S); Supari (H&B); Betel nut (E). | Arecaceae | *Fruits are essentials for all ritual functions*  
*Supari or areca nut which symbolizes Lord Ganesa is commonly used in various rites.*

11 | Azadirachta indica A. Juss. | Nimba (S); Nim (H & B); Neem (E). | Meliaceae | *Used in ‘Sitola Puja’. Goddess Sitola who is said to reside in the neem tree.*  
*‘Pat Gosain’ festival in West Bengal means neem tree worship. Neem leaves are eaten on ‘Vaisakha Sukha Saptami.’  
*Eaten on New Year’s Day.*

12 | Butea monosperma (Lam.) Taub. | Palasha (S); Palas (H&B); Flame of the forest (E). | Papilionaceae | *The flowers are used for making a dye used during ‘Holi’ and ‘Rang panchmi’.*  
*This beautiful tree is sacred to Soma (Moon).*  
*The dry twigs are used in the ceremonies which goes under the name of Nova Grahas (i.e. celebrated to secure the pacification of the nine planets), also on the occasion of Vastu Shanti (i.e. entrance into a newly built house).*

13 | Borassus flabellifer L. | Tal (S & B); Tar (H); Palmrya Palm (E). | Palmae | *Used in famous ‘Tal Nabami Brata’,*  
*It is also used in ‘Janmasthami’.*

14 | Bambusa sp. | Vansh (S); | Gramineae | *The death body must be transported*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Common Names</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 15   | Calotropis procera (Ait.) R. Br. | Alarka (S); Aak (H); Akando (B). | Asclepiadaceae | - Its leaves are used in sacrificed rites.  
- The flowers are used in the worship of Mahadev and Hanuman. On every Saturday leaves are made into garland and offered to Maruti (Hanuman).  
- The twigs are also employed in sacred fires as Samidhas (Hawan). |
| 16   | Cocculus hirsutus (L.) Diels | Gaduchi (S); Indian cockle (E). | Menispermaceae | - According to Ramayana, plant is considered as immortalized plant because Laxmana is rebirth by eating it. |
| 17   | Costus speciosus (Koenig) Sm. | Kemuka (S); Keu (H & B). | Costaceae | - The inflorescence is used of making 'bou'in Laxmi puja in Nadia district. The inflorescence is covered with new cloth and decorated to make bou. In 24 Parganas this plant is used in 'Manasa Puja'. |
| 18   | Cocos nucifera L. | Narikela (S); Naroyel (H); Narkel (B); Coconut (E). | Palmae | - It is called "Kalpavriksha" meaning "the tree which provides all the necessities of life" or "wish-fulfilling tree". The marks on the coconut are even thought to represent the three-eyed Lord Shiva and therefore, it is considered to be a means to fulfill our desires.  
- In India one of the most common offerings in a temple is a coconut. It is also offered on occasions like weddings, festivals, the use of a new vehicle, bridge, house etc. It is offered in the sacrificial fire whilst performing homa. The coconut is broken and placed before the Lord. It is later distributed as prasaada.  
- Tender coconut water is used in Abhishek rituals since it is believed to bestow spiritual growth on the seeker. |
| 19   | Curcuma longa L. | Haridra (S); Haldi (H & B); Turmeric (E). | Zingiberaceae | - It is used in pre-marriage ceremonies ‘Gaye Holud’; Haldi: a ritual holy bath during which turmeric (Haldi), oil and water is applied to both the bride and groom by married women.  
- Pure vermilion or kumkum or sindur is made from pure turmeric, water of soda lime powder and a small quantity of pure camphor. Married women wear a tilak or sindur on the forehead. |
| 20   | Cynodon dactylon Pers. | Durva (S); Dhub (H); Durba (B); Bermuda or Bahama grass (E). | Graminae | - Durva is supposed to be very auspicious and is offered to Ganesha. |
| 21   | Diospyros malabarica Kostel. | Tendu (H). | Ebenaceae | - The branches of tinduka wood are kept in the lying in chamber as it is believed to keep the evil spirit away and brings good luck. |
| 22   | Elaeocarpus ganitrus Roxb. ex G. Don | Rudraksha (S); Rudrakhi (H); Utrasum Bead tree (E). | Elaeocarpaceae | - The weeds made up of fruit of Elaeocarpus ganitrus seeds are used to pray the god. |
According to Skanda Purana, rudraksha is originated from tears of Mahadev. There is a general belief that the beads dispel the evil eye and if kept in house, they avoid misfortune.

- If the beads are wearing in hand or throat it cures the cardiac ailments and the people who suffers from high blood pressure.

### 23 Emblica officinalis Gaertn.
- **Adiphala (S); Amla (H); Amlaki (B); Indian Gooseberry (E)**
- Euphorbiaceae
- Used in ‘Amala Ekadasi’; 11th day of Phalguni Sukla; bath with water, soaked in amala fruit; eating it; worshipping it; and worship of Radha-Krishna.

### 24 Eulaliopsis binata (Retz.) C.E.Hubbard
- **Sabai (B & H); Sabai Grass (E)**
- Graminae
- The weaving of different kinds of leaves and flowers in a rope made of Eulaliopsisbinata is called toran, which must hanged, around the ritual performing place called Mandapalonano.

### 25 Ficus benghalensis L.
- **Vata (S); Bar (H&B); Banyan tree (E).**
- Moraceae
- The Pancha Bhallap is made of leaves of five tree species (Ficusreligiosa, F. bengalensis, F. glomerata, Magniferaindica) must be offered to start any ritual functions.
- Used in ‘Vata Savitri puja’; Jyestha Purnima or Amavasya Day; leaving fasted for three previous days; married women worship the tree by circumambulating, tying with the sacred protective thread (Raksa Sutra), and listening Barga Vratato the sacred Savitri-Satyavan story; some women stay awake during the night and complete the vow feeding a Brahmin; in western parts of India, devout women observe this vow for five consecutive years after marriage.

### 26 Ficus religiosa L.
- **Pipala (S); Pipal (H); Aswattha (B); Peepal (E).**
- Moraceae
- It is one of the leading trees in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is also known as the Bodhi tree because Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under it.
- It is sacred to Vishnu.
- The Peepal is believed to be inhabited by the sacred triad – Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva).

### 27 Gomphrena globosa L.
- **Botam ful (B); Bachelor’s Button (E).**
- Amaranthaceae
- The beds of flowers must be offered to brothers by sisters in tihar as a symbol of long life. The flowers are remaining as usual for many years so it indicates the long life of brother.

### 28 Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L.
- **Java (S); Jasum (H); Joba (B); Shoe flower (E).**
- Malvaceae
- Used in ‘Kalipuja’, the favourite flowers for offering to Goddess ‘Kali’.

### 29 Hordeum vulgare L.
- **Java (S); Jav (H); Jab (B); Barley (E).**
- Graminae
- Used in ‘Saraswati Puja’.

### 30 Lawsonia inermis L.
- **Mehndi (H); Mehedi (B).**
- Lythraceae
- In Mehendiceremony, the bride’s hands and feet are decorated with
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Other Names</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td><em>Mimusops elengi</em> L.</td>
<td>Bakula (S); Maulsari (H); Bakul (B); Bullet wood (E).</td>
<td>Sapotaceae</td>
<td>Bakul flowers are offered to the manes, seeking their blessings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td><em>Mangifera indica</em> L.</td>
<td>Amra (S); Am (H&amp;B); Mango (E).</td>
<td>Anacardiaceae</td>
<td>Uses in 'Amra Puspa Bhaksana Vrata'; 1st day of Caitra Sukla; eating of mango blossom and worship of 'Kamadeva'. Leaves are used as festoons during pujas and auspicious events. All flowers and leaves of plants are used during worship for Pushpa Puja and Patra Puja. The tree is said to be a transformation of Prajapat (Lord of Creatures). The flowers are used in Shiva Worship, on 'Shivaratri' day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td><em>Michelia champaca</em> L.</td>
<td>Champaka (S); Champa (H &amp; B); Champak (E).</td>
<td>Magnoliaceae</td>
<td>Used in 'Sarbooshadhi' preparation. Also used for making of garland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td><em>Musa paradisiaca</em> L.</td>
<td>Kadali (S); Kela (H); Banana (E).</td>
<td>Musaceae</td>
<td>Used in 'Kadali Vrata'; 'Vaisakha, Magha or Kartika Suklacaturdasi'; banana tree is planted and nurtured till it bears fruit; wishing the welfare of one's family, a person should worship the tree with flowers, fruit, etc. and circumambulate it. Used in 'Yaksa-Samantaka Kadali Vrata'; A golden banana tree is worshipped and offered to a Brahmin on any auspicious day. It is commonly used in Marriages; the 'Chatnata' is decorated by the plant. During festivals, a decorative doorway is made out of it, leading to the temple or the room where the prayers are to be held. The leaf base is used as pot of many puja. In North Bengal, the whole plant is worshiped in 'katipuja' by infertile women. The leaf is used to make 'Kola bou' in 'Bijaya Dashami Puja'. The candle strand is make by the plant in 'Kali Puja'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td><em>Nerium indicum</em> Mill.</td>
<td>Karavira (S); Kaner (H); Karabi (B); Oleander (E).</td>
<td>Nyctanthaceae</td>
<td>Used in 'Karavira Vrata' and 'Jyestha Sukla Prathamagati'; Karabi roots and Karabi branches are bathed and adorned with red cloth; offerings of seven cereals (Saptadhanya) and fruits of Nerium indicum are used followed by fasting; Savitri, Satyabhama, and others performed this method when they were in trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td><em>Nelumbo nucifera</em> Gaertn.</td>
<td>Padma (S &amp; B); Kamal (H); Lotus (E).</td>
<td>Nelambaraceae</td>
<td>The famous festivals in West Bengal 'Durga Puja', 108 flowers are needed. The symbol associated with many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the country’s Hindu gods and goddesses who are traditionally portrayed holding or sitting within a lotus flower.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis L.</td>
<td>Parijata (S); Seoli (H); Seuli (B); Coral jasmine (E).</td>
<td>Nyctantheaceae</td>
<td>It is considered as flowers of Swarga (Indra’s garden).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Ocimum tenuiflorum L.</td>
<td>Tulsi (B); Basil (E).</td>
<td>Labiatae</td>
<td>Tulsi is worshipped as Goddess, also considered as a wife of Lord Vishnu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In every hindu house, there is a ‘tulsi mandir’ on where in everyday, the ground near it is covered with a layer of cowdung and at night a lamp is lit near it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is a common custom to place a sprig of tulsi near the head of a dying person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tulsi leaves are used while offering Naivedya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Poa cyansuroides Retz.</td>
<td>Kushaghas(S &amp; B); Grass of lucky augury(E).</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>Kusha has the quality of warding evil. It is considered as most important Vedic grass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Santalum album L.</td>
<td>Chandana (S); Chandan (B); Sandal (E &amp; H).</td>
<td>Santalaceae</td>
<td>The wood is rubbed on stone and the paste is widely used for anointing the forehead as well as for incense and in ayurvedic preparations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temple deities are also bathed with the paste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Saraca asoca (Roxb.) DC Wilde</td>
<td>Ashok(S, H &amp; B).</td>
<td>Caesalpiniaeae</td>
<td>Used in ‘Ashok Sasthi’ a famous vrata, where the bud of Ashok tree is eaten by hindu women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The tree is sacred to siva and is planted on the south east corner of the temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ashoka tree is popular for the myth of LordBuddha taking birth under it in Lumbini.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LordMahavira, too, renounced the world under the Ashoka tree in Vaishali.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In Ramayana, mentioned this tree as the Ashoka-Vatika, whereHanuman first meets Goddess Sita.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Shorea robusta Gaertn.f.</td>
<td>Sal (B &amp; H).</td>
<td>Dipterocarpaceae.</td>
<td>The Sal leaves plates are essential for all ritual functions and is regarded as chokho (uncontaminated).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Dhups’ are made from the exudation of the plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Synadenium grantii Hook.f.</td>
<td>Manasa (B); African milk bush (E).</td>
<td>Euphorbiaceae</td>
<td>The plant is the goddess of snakes and is offered at the temple of Manasa by the tribal and hill people where snake worship is prevalent, particularly in Bengal and South India.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A) Conservational aspects:

Conservation is the result of nature worship of the people all over the world. An important tradition of nature worships is to protect plants dedicated to deities or ancestral spirits. It is a unique traditional Indian way of in-situ conservation of biodiversity. Lists of the wood of sacred trees which are never used as fuel but these are protected through wrath of gods:

1) *Acacia suma* (Roxb.)Buch.Ham.ex Voigt; Mimosaceae (Saikanta).
2) *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Correa; Rutaceae (Bel).
3) *An thocephalus chinesis* Walp.; Rubiaceae (Kadam).
4) *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss; Meliaceae (Neem).
5) *Butea monosperma* (Lam.)Taub.; Papilionaceae (Palas).
6) *Costus speciosus* (J.Koenig)Sm.; Costaceae (Kew).
7) *Cocos nucifera* L.; Palmae (Narikel).
8) *Elaeocarpous ganitrus* Roxb. ex.G.Don; Elaeocarpaceae (Rudraksha).
9) *Emblica officinalis* Gaertn.; Euphorbiaceae(Amlaki).
10) *Ficus benghalensis* L.; Moraceae (Vat).
11) *Ficus luscens* Blume; Moraceae (Pakur).
12) *Ficus religiosa* L.; Moraceae (Ashathwa).
13) *Ficus glomerata* Roxb.; Moraceae (Jagya dumur).
14) *Mimusops elengi* Roxb.; Sapotaceae (Bakul).
15) *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* L.; Nyctanthaceae (Seuli, Parijata).
16) *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.)De Wilde. ; Caesalpiniaceae (Ashok).
17) *Synadenium grantii* Hook f.;Euphorbiaceae(Manasa).

Some well-known places of West Bengal where plants are preserved through plant worships. Some of them are:

1) Chatimtala [*Alstoniascholaris* (L.) R.Br.] of Santiniketan of Birbhum district.

2) Dead Neem [*Azadirachtaindica* A.Juss.] tree in Gopiballavpur of West Medinipur district.

3) Salpujo [*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. f.] in Keshiriya block of West Medinipur.

A small patch of forests protected by local communities in religious grounds is called sacred grooves. In West Bengal, there are 562 sacred grooves present. Sacred grooves are also a way of in-situ conservational purpose.

**Ecological significance of conservation study:**

- **Conservation of Biodiversity:** Plant worship is important repository of floral and faunal diversity.
- **Recharge of Aquifers:** The plants are often associated with ponds, streams which support the water requirement of the local people.
- **Soil conservation:** Protection of plants through sacred grooves and other methods is an indirect method of soil conservation in said areas.

There are some plants which are used mainly as food or use in festivals or ‘vrata’ purpose, have some scientific values in table 2.

**Table 2. Plants used mainly as food or use in festivals or ‘vrata’ purpose, having scientific values.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants names and family</th>
<th>Parts used</th>
<th>Scientific value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Acacia catechu</em> (L.) Willd.</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>The dried pulp extracted from the wood of <em>Acacia catechu</em> is used as a paste for the betel leaves. It has digestive and other medicinal properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aegle marmelos</em> (L.) Correa</td>
<td>Fruit, leaves</td>
<td>Astringent, digestive and stomachic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Abrus precatorius</em> L.</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Goldsmiths of India are used seeds for weight and each seed is about 1.75gm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alocasia macrorrhiza</em> (L.) Schott</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Useful against impetigo, vomiting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amaranthus blitum</em> L.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Source of Potassium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amaranthus tricolor</em> L.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>It is astringent, diuretic, appetizing and digestive. Effective against dysentery and haemoptysis. Also said to act as antidote against poison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Azadirachta indica</em> A. Juss.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Leaves are antiseptic; flowers are used tonic and stomachic; berries are purgative and emollient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brassica juncea</em> (L.) Czern &amp; Coss</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Useful in dengue, dyspepsia, abdominal colic, and worms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cucurbita maxima</em> Duchesne ex Lam.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Source of Lipids (major fatty acid linoleic acid), proteins, ash, glycolipids, phospholipids, Ca, Mg, Fe, Zn and Cu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Curcuma longa</em> L.</td>
<td>Rhizome</td>
<td>Natural coloring agent, having antiseptic property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Enhydra fluctuans</em> Lour.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Used against cutaneous and nervous affections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elaeocarpous ganitrus</em> Roxb. ex G. Don.</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>It raises the electron flow of the body. This way it cures many problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hygrophila auriculata</em> (schum.) Heyne.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Useful against bladder stones, eye diseases, dysentery, jaundice, dropsy and rheumatism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ipomoea aquatica</em> Forsk.</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Beneficial for nervous and general debility in females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lagenaria siceraria</em> (Mol.) Standley</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Used against vitiated condition of pitta, cough, bronchitis, inflammations, skin disease,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lawsonia inermis L.  
Leaves  
It is used as a prophylactic against skin troubles.

Raphanus sativus L.  
Leaves  
Diuretic, carminative and a digestive.

Santalum album L.  
Wood  
Paste made from the wood has a cooling effect. It has also antiseptic effect.

Saraca asoca (Roxb.) De Wilde  
Bud  
It is related with fertility. It has a stimulating effect on endometrium and ovarian tissue and useful in menorrhagia due to uterine fibroids.

Spinecea oleracea L.  
Leaves  
Source of Mucilage, fat, sugar, oxalic acid, iodine, lecithin, carotene, saponins.

Trigonella foenum-gracum L.  
Leaves  
Shows anti-tumor, anti-fungal and anti-viral activity.

In this study about 70 plant species have been recorded in different mythological, ritual and festival purposes. The mostly used for these purposes are Oryza sativa L., Santalum album L., Aegle marmelos (L.) Correa, Ocimum tenuiflorum L., Cocos nucifera L., Musa paradisiaca L., Cynodon dactylon Pers., Areca catechu L. All these plants are belonging to 15 families. The most used families are Graminae, Moraceae, Leguminosae and rarely used families are Sapotaceae, Pedaliaceae, Menispermaceae, Costaceae. 17 plant families have been conservational aspects and 22 plant species have medicinal value.

Such type of studies has potential value in our daily life for in-situ conservation of plants in their domain and also employed for recreational and promotional of mental health from our everyday stress condition in competitive modern life in metropolitan, urban and village areas. Plants recorded from this study can also be used for the treatment of some common diseases in particularly in remote areas people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors are thank full to all the research scholars of Taxonomy of Angiosperms and Biosystematics Laboratory, for their cooperation to carry out our work. The first author would like to acknowledge all her batch mates of taxonomy section of this department to fulfill this work.
Plate-1: Photographs related to Hindu Mythology
Plate-2: Photographs related to Hindu Mythology

Mehendi in Marriage ceremony use of leaves of *Lawsonia inermis*

*Belpata (Aegle marmelos)* used in shiv puja

*Tulsi (Ocimum tenuiflorum)* mandir present in every hindu house
Plate-3: Photographs related to Hindu Mythology

Rudraksha (*Elaeocarpous ganitrus*) used in shiv puja

Vat (*Ficus benghalensis*) used in ‘Vata Savitri puja’

REFERENCES


16. www.hindujagruti.org/hinduism/knowledge/article/why-are...