



## Cross-cultural ethnophytoetymological study in Khandesh region of Maharashtra (India)

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### Abstract

Vernacular plant names are the best vehicles that carry useful information of the past. The present author studied vernacular plant names comparatively in Bhili, Kokani and Ahirani dialects, besides state language Marathi. As many as 18 bases for coining these names have been revealed from aforesaid communities residing in Khandesh region of Maharashtra (India). Total 40 vernacular plant names are analysed ethnophytoetymologically. They belong to 40 species under 40 genera and 30 families of angiosperms. There are 18 exotic taxa which have vernacularised plant names. The said bases are not singularly used in some cases. These bases are also employed in different combinations by these people. Ethnobotanical information is also revealed. There is obviously a parallel system of indigenous knowledge in the tribal and rural people with hidden treasure of information. If unearthed, it reveals useful information for the welfare of mankind.

**Keywords:** comparative ethnophytoetymology, vernacular plant names, khandesh

### Introduction

Vernacular plant names are not christened by following a set of rules of some enactments. They are rather randomised and coined after a long association of the mankind with the ambient biodiversity. Their natural observations, experience and wisdom are obviously intercalated in such names. Thus the vernacular plant names emerge from the mist of time but from the hearts of the concerned people. Attempts have been made in past to study them on ethnophytoetymological ground to reveal their origin, utility and bioculture. (cf. Jain, 1963; Patil, 1998, 2009; Patil and Patil, 2000; Pawar and Patil, 2000; Singh, 2008; Jadhav, 2017) <sup>[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]</sup>. However, these studies mostly ignored cross-cultural comparisons. The present communication is probably the first attempt to analyse vernacular names on this line. Bhil and Kokani are the main tribes and they have their own dialects. This region is also inhabited by Ahirani (a dialect) speaking people mostly in rural part. The state language Marathi is also in vogue. The vernacular plant names in these three dialects and state language Marathi are comparatively studied to analyse plant names in this region. The results of such investigation are embodied in this communication.

### Methodology

Khandesh region of Maharashtra is comprised of three districts viz., Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon bordering northern part of the state adjacent to the state of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The region inhabited by the main Tribes viz., Bhil and Kokani, besides rural folks. Their dialects are Bhili, Kokani and Ahirani. Marathi, a state language, is also spoken in these districts. Present author botanised this region in last three decades (cf. Patil, 2003; Kshirsagar and Patil, 2008; Pawar and Patil, 2008) <sup>[8, 9, 10]</sup>. He is also a native of this region and is well conversant with Ahirani dialect and partly Bhili. Vernacular plant names have been documented carefully. In earlier communications (Patil, 1998; Patil and Jaiswal, 2013) <sup>[2, 11]</sup> although some vernacular names were explained, they were not compared. In this communication, the vernacular plant names in Bhili, Kokani, Ahirani and state languages are comparatively studied. They are equated with recent botanical names and families.

Root-words are explained and reasons for coining names are revealed. Exotic status of some taxa is inferred consulting relevant literary sources. Wherever, possible, ethnobotanical data is brought forth.

**Table 1:** Systematic Enumeration

Sr. No.	Plant Name & Family	Vernacular Plant Names				Root-Word & Meaning	Native
		Bhili	Kokani	Ahirani	Marathi		
1.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R.Br. Asclepiadaceae	Ruwadi, Ruwandi	Ruy	Rui	Rui	Rui-cotton The follicular fruits yield cottony fibres.	Tropical Africa (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup>
2.	<i>Moringa concanensis</i> Nimmo ex Dalz. & Gibbs. Moringaceae	Kodwo Hegwo, Kodwo Heyi	Sheg	Kadu shewga	Kadu Shewga	Kodwo, Kadu-bitter This species bears bitter pods.	--
3.	<i>Pueraria tuberosa</i> (Roxb. ex Willd.) DC. Papilionaceae	Aadkuwo	Bharkohala	Bhuikohala	Bhuikohala	Kuwo, Kohala-Fruits of <i>Benincasa hispida</i> (Thunb.) Cong.; Bhui-earth. Kohala-like tubers found at the ends of roots beneath the earth soil.	--

4.	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> Linn. Caesalpiniaceae	Khati Amlī	Chinch	Chinch	Chinch	Khat-sour; Chinch-fruit of this tree. Chinch or Amali are sour fruits of this species. Vernacular names in all these dialects or languages are similar.	Tropical America (Patil, 1990) <sup>[13]</sup> , Africa (Pullaiah & Ramamurthy, 2001) <sup>[14]</sup> .
5.	<i>Drimia indica</i> (Roxb.) Jessop. Liliaceae	Jangli Kando	Jangli Kanda	Jangli Kanda	Jangli Kanda	Jangli-wild; Kanda-bulb. This wild species bears onion-like bulb underground.	--
6.	<i>Acacia catechu</i> (Roxb.) Willd. Mimosaceae	Kati	Khair	Khair, Katha	Khair	Kati-thorn; Khair, Katha- refers to catechu yielding tree. This tree is spiny and yields catechu from its heartwood.	--
7.	<i>Argemone mexicana</i> L. Papaveraceae	Unhalyo, Kathilyo	Piwla Dhutara	Piwala Dhotra	Piwala Dhotra	Unha-Sunny; Kathi-spines; Piwala-yellow. The plants grow in sunny places and bear spines.	South America (Chandra Sekar, 2012) <sup>[15]</sup> .
8.	<i>Cissus quadrangula</i> L. Vitaceae	Lagwel	Peral	Kandwel	Hadsakhal	Lawane-to grow; wel-climber; peranode; kand-nod, Had-bone, Sakhal-chain. A piece of stem grows well after planting in soil. The climber is noded conspicuously like a chain. It is said useful for bone-fracture.	--
9.	<i>Holarrhena pubescens</i> (Buch.-Ham.) Wall. ex G. Don Apocynaceae	Dudhkuwdo	Dudhkuda	Dahi-kudi	Kuda	Dudh-milk; Dahi-curd; Kudi-body. It yields milky latex. Latex if added in milk, it help to coagulates and turns it into curd.	--
10.	<i>Solanum virginianum</i> L. Solanaceae	Ringno	Bhui-ringani	Ranwanga	Bhuiringani, Ranwange	Ringno-circular; Bhui-earth; Ran-wild; Wanga-fruit of Brinjal. The plants are prostrate and form circular patches on the ground. It is wild and bears fruits similar to Brinjal.	--
11.	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L. (Lythraceae)	Mehedi	Medi	Mehandi	Mehandi	Mehandi-red dye made from leaf paste. Leaf paste is applied on hand-palms on auspicious or religious occasions.	Middle East (Gaikwad & Garad, 2015) <sup>[16]</sup> ; Arabia and Persia (Shetty & Singh, 1987) <sup>[17]</sup> .
12.	<i>Coleus amboinicus</i> Lour. (Benth.) Lamiaceae	Pan Ojma	Pan Owa	Pan-owa	Panacha Owa	Pan-leaf; Owa-seeds of <i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> (Linn.) Sprague. The leaves emit spicy smell like the seeds of 'Owa' when bruised, hence the name.	--
13.	<i>Triumfetta rotundifolia</i> Lamk. Tiliaceae	Chiktyo, Chikato	Chikana	Zinzarda	Chikani	Chitakane-to stick, cling. The fruits are spiny and stick to the clothes of passersby and animals.	--
14.	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i> (L.) Pierre Papilionaceae	Konji, Korunj	Karan	Karanji	Karanj	Karanji-a sweetmeat in Maharashtra with a typical flat and curved shape. This tree bears fruits which are shaped like 'Karanji'.	--
15.	<i>Tridax procumbens</i> L. Asteraceae	Kodkya khod	Unhalya	Ek Dandi	Ek Dandi	Ek-one; Dandi-stalk. Each branch of this plant ends with an elongated peduncle and head inflorescence.	Tropical Central America (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> ; South America (Patil, 1990) <sup>[13]</sup> .
16.	<i>Phyllanthus amarus</i> Schumach & Thonn. Euphorbiaceae	Bhui Awali	Bhui Aasan	Bhi-awala	Bhui Awali	Bhui-earth; Awala-fruit of Emblic myrobalan ( <i>Emblia officinalis</i> Gaertn.); Aasan: <i>Bridelia airy-shawii</i> P.T.Li. Fruits of this species are similar to Emblic myrobalan but they are beneath the branch facing the earth. The tree species 'Aasan' is also compared for the similar fruits.	--
17.	<i>Mucuna prurens</i> (L.) DC. Papilionaceae	Khojlo, Khaunjo	Kuyali, Khajal	Khaj Kuiri	Khajkuhili	(Khaj-itching; Kuiri or Kuili-a casket) This liane have fruits with stinging hairs on the fruits which on touch cause itching. The fruit are hollow, curved, flat and like a casket.	America (Singh & Nigam, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup> .
18.	<i>Biophytum</i>	Lajwalyo,	Lajalu	Lajalu,	Lajari, Lajalu	Laj-shyness. The plant, on touch,	--

	<i>sensitivum</i> (L.) DC. Oxalidaceae	Lajaro		Saram		close the leaves and leaflets. This is thought exhibition of shyness by this species.	
19.	<i>Boerhavia diffusa</i> L. Nyctaginaceae	Dogodphodyo	Dagadphodya	Khout-khobra	Dhentuli, Punarva	Dagod, Dagad-stone, rock; phodane-to break; Khout-unpleasant; Khobra-coconut kernel; punarnava-born repeatedly. The plants usually grow on rocky soil, breaking rocks. It sprouts out repeatedly from the same individual plant. It tastes like a rotten coconut kernel.	Tropical Africa (Panda <i>et al.</i> , 2018) <sup>[19]</sup> .
20.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers. Poaceae	Dorudo	Devada	Daudi	Durwa, Harali	Daudi-runs growing from place of place; Devad-god; Durwa-referring leaves. The plants grow spreading on ground and difficult to root out. Leaves called 'Durwa' are offered to Hindu god Lord Ganesh.	Tropical Africa (Panda <i>et al.</i> , 2018) <sup>[19]</sup> .
21.	<i>Cyperus rotundus</i> L. Cyperaceae	Gundyo	Gunjla	Kunda	Nagar-motha	Gundi-button, round structure; Kunda-unwanted weed; Nagar-motha- referring to tubers. The plants produce rounded or elongated tubers at the ends of roots. It grows in cultivated fields and difficult to remove. It is known as 'Kunda'.	Tropical Africa Debnath & Debnath, 2017) <sup>[20]</sup> , Europe (Panda <i>et al.</i> , 2018) <sup>[19]</sup> .
22.	<i>Kalanchoe pinnata</i> (Lamk.) Pers. Crasulaceae	Lagpan	--	Panphuti	Ghaymari, Paniphuti	Lawane-to grow; pan-leaf; phutane-to produce. The leaves produce small plantlets (vegetative reproduction) on margin. They fall on ground and can grow into entire plants.	Tropical Africa (Yadav & Sardesai, 2002) <sup>[21]</sup> .
23.	<i>Martynia annua</i> L. Martyniaceae	Wagnakhyo	Wagnakya	Winchu, Wagnakhi	Winchu	Wagh-tiger; nakh-nail; winchu-scorpion. The fruits produce hard hooked spines resembling nails of a tiger. These spines are also conceived as a sting of scorpion.	Tropical America (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> ; Mexico & Brazil (Singh <i>et al.</i> , 1991) <sup>[22]</sup> .
24.	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> (DC.) Stapf Poaceae	Govati Chaha	Gavati Chaha	Gavati Chaha	Ola Chaha	Govat, Gavat-grass; ola-green, wet. Fresh green leaves are added in tea. It renders tea aromatic.	Malaysia or Ceylon (Purseglove, 1968) <sup>[23]</sup> .
25.	<i>Ocimum americanum</i> L. Lamiaceae	Ran Tulsi	Ran Tulsi	Ran Tulashi	Ran Tulas	Ran-jungle, wild, forest; Tulsi- <i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i> L. (Holy Tulsi) This species is close relative of Holy tulsi, but it grows in wild.	Tropical America (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> ; Tropical Africa (Debnath & Debnath, 2017) <sup>[20]</sup> .
26.	<i>Amaranthus spinosus</i> L. Amaranthaceae	Katulo Matalo	Matala, Kateri-matla	Kate-math	Kante-math	Kato, Kate-spine; mat, matla- <i>Amaranthus viridis</i> L. which is used as vegetable. Leaves of this plant are also used as vegetable like the leaves of 'Matla' by tribal or rural folks but the plants are spiny.	Tropical America (Chandra Sekar, 2012) <sup>[15]</sup> .
27.	<i>Dolichodrone falcata</i> (Wall. ex DC.) Seem. Bignoniaceae	Menhingi	Moding	Medshingi	Medshingi	Medha-ram; shing-horn. The fruits are curved and resemble to the horns of a ram.	--
28.	<i>Cassia auriculata</i> L. Caesalpiniaceae	Chamar Awali	Kala Turta	Awhali, Awhai	Tarwad	Chamar-a caste in the region; Turta or Tarhota- <i>Cassia tora</i> L.; Kala-black. Bark is removed from this plant. Its tannin is used by the people of Chambar caste for tanning animal skin. It is a close relative species of 'Tarhota' ( <i>Cassia tora</i> L.) but its stem-axes are dark in colour.	--
29.	<i>Diplocyclos palmata</i> (L.) Jeffrey Cucurbitaceae	Kabro-dowo	Hudgan-dola	Shivlingi	Shivlingi, Nendalichadola	Kabro, Hudgo-variegated; dola-eye ball; Shiv-Hindu god; Ling-idol. Its ball-like fruits are variegated. The seeds resemble to the idol of Lord Shiva.	--
30.	<i>Holoptelea integrifolia</i> (Roxb.) Planch	Papdyo	Papda	Papda, Sanjari	Papda	Papad-flat and circular food item; Sanjari-a sweetmeat which is also flat and circular. The fruits resemble	--

	Ulmaceae					Papad or Sanjari.	
31.	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i> (Roxb.) Wt. & Arn. Combretaceae	Bhuro-hojudo, Bhuro-hoju	Sadada	Arjun-Sadada, Kahu, Kauli, Arjun	Arjun-Sadada	Bhuro-whitish; Arjun-one of five Pandav brothers in epic Mahabharata; Hojudo, Sadada- <i>Terminalia crenulata</i> Roth. The name of Arjuna is associated with this tree. This tree species is distinguished from others by whitish bark.	--
32.	<i>Operculina turpethum</i> (L.) S. Manso Convolvulaceae	Tindharya	Tindhari	Tindhari	Nishotar	Tin-three, dhare-angle, corner. The stem is 3-angled in this species.	--
33.	<i>Uraria picta</i> (Jacq.). Desv. Ex DC. Papilionaceae	Vandar-sheptya	Vandar-sheptya	--	Pithwan	Vandar-monkey; Sheptya-tail; Pith-white as floor. The inflorescence resembles a tail of monkey. The leaves are blotched white.	--
34.	<i>Vigna trilobata</i> (L.) Verdc. Papilionaceae	Ran-mugya	Ran-mug	Ran-mug	Ran-mug	Ran-wild, forest; mug- <i>Vigna radiata</i> (L.) Wilczek. Var. <i>sublobata</i> (Roxb.) Verdc. Leaves, pods and seeds resemble to those of Mug. [ <i>Vigna radiata</i> (L.) Wilczek. var. <i>sublobata</i> (Roxb.) Verdc.	--
35.	<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i> (Molina). Standl. Cucurbitaceae	Dudiyo	Dhudhala	Dudhi-bhopala, Dhudhi	Dudhi, Dudhi-bhopala	Dudh-milk; bhopala-fruits of <i>Cucurbita</i> species. Fruits of this species are white inside. In case of other <i>Cucurbita</i> (Bhopala) species, they are red or yellowish-red.	Tropical Central America (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> .
36.	<i>Cuscuta chinensis</i> Lamk. Cuscutaceae	Deo-aate	Amarwel	Amarwel	Akash-walli	Amar-eternal; wel-climber; Akash-sky; Walli-climber, Deo-god. This parasitic species thrives profusely and indefinitely from one plant to another. It is hence thought eternal and as if it touches the sky.	Mediterranean Region (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> .
37.	<i>Coccinia grandis</i> (L.) Voight Cucurbitaceae	Khat-gole, Goli	Todla	Tondli, Tongala	Tondli	Khat-sour; Gol-roundish. It bears elongated-roundish fruits which when ripe taste sour.	Africa: Medakkar & Sharma (2016 a, b) <sup>[24, 25]</sup> .
38.	<i>Tribulus terrestris</i> L. Zygophyllaceae	Gokro	Gokru	Gokhru	Gokharu	Go-cow; Khur-hoof. The fruits are clefted like the hoof of a cow.	Tropical America (Reddy, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup> ; Africa & Asia (Excl. India) (Kaul, 1986) <sup>[26]</sup> .
39.	<i>Baliospermum razianum</i> Keshav et Yog. Euphorbiaceae	Datya	Dati	Dati	Danti	Dat-tooth. The stem pieces are used locally to clean tooth, hence the name.	--
40.	<i>Salmalia malabarica</i> Sch. & Endl. Bombacaceae	Hawari	Savar	Savar, Sayar	Savar	Hawar, Savar, Sayar-porcupine. The tree is studded with sharp and stout tubercles. The porcupine also has such spines all over its body, hence denoted in this name	--

## Results and Discussion

It is a common experience and observation that vernacular or common plant names are used by the native people of a region. The scientific or botanical names of plants are used for uniform and international communication by the botanists or educationists. What is more important in field and human societies is not prioritized by the botanists. During biodiversity studies, the vernacular names are hardly paid attention. This trend obviously causes gaps in between the scenario of natural field and laboratories, research or educational institutions. Of late, ethnobotanical investigations have been started and being geared up well to reveal indigenous or traditional knowledge. Importance of vernacular names are now being recognized. Dr.S.K.Jain's paper (1963) <sup>[1]</sup> is the first research contribution which opened up this area of research in India. Others have picked

up the trail as stated earlier. However, these researches simply attempted to reveal bases of vernacular names. Ethnophytoetymological investigations are still ignored. The present author particularly in Khandesh region experienced that some vernacular plant names are peculiar to some tribal or rural societies. In some cases, they are similar in all tribes and rural folks. They employ their own language and choices while vernacularising the plant names. If these names are studied comparatively, comparing between the tribes or rural folks, they yield more interesting results. Following are some cases for reader's perusal.

Vernacular names in Bhili, Kokani, Ahirani dialects and state language Marathi belong to 40 species, 40 genera and 30 families. Of these, the dicotyledons are 36 species belonging to 36 genera and families, whereas the monocotyledons belong 04 species, 04 genera and 03

families. Majority of these are wild taxa (31 species, 31 genera and 27 families). Cultivated species are few (06 species, 05 genera and 06 families). Only three species belonging to 03 genera and 03 families are found either cultivated or run wild in nature. Exotic taxa have also invaded in this region. Of the present account, 18 species belonging to 18 genera and 16 families are exotic. They are native of either New or Old worlds as stated earlier. Majority of them are wild (12 species) and integral part of local biodiversity, whereas few ones are cultigens (04 species). Two exotic species are either wild or cultivated.

As many as 18 bases of coining vernacular names are employed by the people of this region. They are: (1) plant features, (2) taste, (3) chemical content, (4) colour, (5) medicinal use, (6) smell, odour or fragrance, (7) resemblance with other plant species, (8) plant parts causing injury or annoyance, (9) biological phenomena, (10) habitat, (11) religious use, (12) method of reproduction, (13) comparison with animals, (14) miscellaneous uses, (15) plant exhibiting relationship with other plants, (16) shape, (17) mythology and (18) growth. The vernacular names have been coined by different tribes and rural folks in this region. The same species is sometimes have different combination of bases depending upon the choice of the tribes e.g. (a) plant feature and colour, (b) plant feature and medicinal use, (c) plant feature and mythology, (d) taste and habitat, (e) taste and shape, (f) chemical content and colour, (g) plant structure causing injury or annoyance and comparison with animals, etc. In some other, a single base for coining vernacular names is used in different tribes and rural folks. Ethnobotanical uses are pointed out in some cases.

Indigenous people have considerably longer period of association with the indigenous floral elements. But there are some species which invaded this region comparatively in a later period of time being exotic. These have been brought in intentionally (especially cultivated ones) or negligently because of biotic interference by mankind or naturally because of some plant adaptive features. All these have also vernacularised plant names. More or less similar bases stated above are also employed for them by the native people of this region.

It appears that man has not remained aloof from the plant species in his surroundings whether indigenous or alien ones. He has a constant interaction with this live world for his advantage or as a natural instinct. His observations, experience (bad and good), wisdom, feelings, notions, etc. are integrated with the local plant names. If these are analysed critically on etymological ground, they reveal some useful information about the local biodiversity. Cross-cultural comparisons based on ethnophytoetymological studies yield more interesting results. However, care should be taken to note them tribe-wise or community-wise during field work. They are vehicles loaded with much information of the past. A whole parallel system of knowledge in the library and laboratory of 'Nature' is hidden. It must be unearthed for the welfare of mankind.

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