



Identification and documentation of sacred trees its uniqueness and their importance in Kabirdham district

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Abstract

Sacred trees and sacred groves both are having great ancient practices of nature conservation in the name of religious beliefs and biodiversity. Sacred trees are plant species that have deeply associated with life of tribal's from generation to generation and help in the tree conservation. Sacred trees are majorly found in and around the holy places like sacred groves, near temple and are examples of biodiversity rich areas. The present study highlighted the tree species which are associated with the sacred beliefs and have religious importance. As the many tribes of Kabirdham including the Baiga, Gonds, Halbas, they all have deep socio-religious attachment. Sacred trees are ecologically and play significance role from generation to generation by their presence in the society. Sacred trees are large in number and these plant species were maintained and conserved by the tribal's which were economical and medicinally important in the Kabirdham. Study was conducted in the tribal dominated area of Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh in the year 2012-13.

Keywords: Identification and documentation, uniqueness, biodiversity

1. Introduction

In India, many societies all over the country value a large number of plant species from the wild for a variety of reasons, for food, fiber, shelter or medicine. The practice of nature conservation is very ancient tradition. Nature worship has been a key force of shaping the human attitudes towards conservation and sustainable utilization of natural resources. Such traditional practices have been invariably operating in different parts of India.

Chhattisgarh located in central India and 44 per cent of land under forest area and contribute contributes to the 12 per cent of the India's total forests area. Out of the total population of Kabirdham about 70 per cent are tribal dominated by the Gonds, Baiga, Halbas and each tribes has its own custom, deity, dialect and life rhythm.

Sacred trees serve as valuable storehouses of biodiversity and help in conservation of trees. They are part of biological heritages and systems that has helped to preserve the representative genetic resources existing in the surrounding regions for generations. These trees are unharmed by the local inhabitants and protected them due to the belief that the deities reside in these forests trees. In addition to this, the sacred tree has ecological significance an importance in the area and they have played important socio-cultural-religious functions for the indigenous communities. Hence, Sacred trees by which biodiversity is preserved in mostly undisturbed condition because of certain taboos and religious beliefs on trees.

Now a days, they are found in village in the countryside and the heart of some temples, but popular amongst the tribal and rural landscape and they worship for their life and goodness and as a matter of gratitude and every religion accepts the importance of trees.

Hence, looking to the immense value of sacred trees and the important role of sacred tree in the tribal and rural life, it deserves special attention and care. The present study was conducted to identify and document the sacred trees and its significant found in Kabirdham, as it is an important and a part of tribal's socio-cultural and livelihood. Outcome of study helped in conservation of trees of religious and cultural importance and suggested need to conserve them.

2. Study area

Kabirdham District of the Chhattisgarh state was selected as a study site located between 21.32' to 22.28' north latitudes and 80.48' to 81.48' east longitudes. The district covers an area of 4447.5 km². This district is known for the Boramdeo temple (which is also known by the sobriquet, "The Khajuraho of Chhattisgarh") located at a distance of 18 km from the district headquarters. The northern and western parts are surrounded by the Maikal mountain ranges of Satpura and had mean annual rainfall of 1400 mm.

3. Materials & Method

Tribal community were interviewed during the survey period in Kabirdham district to get information on existence of sacred trees, plants conserved, their ethno-botanical information, religious faith, tribes etc. The information was recorded from tribal's those who were of age group from 16 to 70 years & collect information on trees those were worshiped and had intimate association in tribal's life and livelihood. An intensive survey study was carried out in Kawardha, Pandaria Sahaspur Lohara and Bodla blocks. In the area, sacred trees comprised patches of forest or natural vegetation with a few trees to forests of several trees that were usually dedicated to

local folk divinity or tree spirits. In the study, the places like forest, group of trees, temples, community lands, worship areas in the villages, agricultural lands, open areas etc where sacred tree are found, are surveyed and information on sacred trees were gathered and documented on floristic characteristics, identification and their religious and traditional uses of sacred trees and ecological influence. These trees are protected by local communities because of their religious beliefs and traditional rituals that run through several generations. They are found in all over in India and world and has valued in tribal and rural communities. Due to the rapid urbanization, cultural diffusion of tribal and rural communities has been taking place over the last hundred years which result in reduction religiously valuable repository of ancient wisdom and diversity to small pockets and in number of trees.

4. Review of past work

The work done the past by various workers, researchers, and scientists etc on various aspects on sacred groves and trees in India like studies and documentation of forest sacred groves (Brandis, 1897) ^[1], distribution, historical importance, floristic, ethnographical (Gadgil and Vartak, 1975; Roy, 1928) ^[5], Biodiversities in sacred groves (Visalakshi, 1995) ^[12], belief system associated with sacred trees and groves (Elwin's, 1947; Griegson, 1938), historical link of the sacred groves to the pre agricultural, hunting and gathering societies (Gadgil and Vartak, 1973) ^[11] and had great economic and climate importance (Wingate, 1888) were done. Many other earliest

work done studies on sacred trees and sacred groves according to its distribution and identification and documented the work on sacred groves & sacred trees in India.

5. Findings of the study

5.1 The many tribes of Kabirdham include the Gonds, Baiga and Halbas had its own custom, dialect, and deity and life rhythm. They had its religious faith and they worship the tree during various occasions and ceremonial functions especially at the times of cultural, social, family functions in particular days in Kabirdham.

5.2 During the period i.e 2012-13 of study, 17 plant species were identified and documented that were found associated with the sacred beliefs and have religious importance amongst the tribal's and rural communities of Kabirdham, Chhattisagr.

5.3 Study revealed that tribal and rural life of Kabirdham was completely aligned with trees from birth to death. They dependent on trees and they consider it as lifeline of livelihood by way of forest produce and considered sacred tree as God and belief that they protect them from any eventuality happenings on their life.

5.4 Tribal people's love for nature and environment just not end with greenery but they see even their Gods living in trees and that's why they nurse and protect trees one generation after another.

5.5 List of Most important sacred trees of Kabirdham is depicted in Table no 1

Table 1: List of Sacred Plants Species of Kabirdham

S.No.	Scientific name	Vernacular name	Family
1-	<i>Ficus glomerata</i>	Gular	Moraceae
2-	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Bel	Rutaceae
3-	<i>Butea monosperma</i>	Palas	Fabaceae
4-	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Bargad	Moraceae
5-	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Pipal	Moraceae
6-	<i>Emblica officinalis</i>	Aonla	Phyllanthaceae
7-	<i>Madhuca indica</i>	Mahua	Sapotaceae
8-	<i>Shorea robusta</i>	Sal	Uritaceae
9-	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Aam	Anacardiaceae
10-	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i>	Bhilwa	Anacardiaceae
11-	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Imli	Fabaceae
12-	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Neem	Meliaceae
13-	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Aak	Apocynaceae
14-	<i>Calotropis procera</i>	Madar	Apocynaceae
15-	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Tulsi	Lamiaceae
16-	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i>	Kush	Poaceae
17-	<i>Pandanus odoratissimus</i>	Kewara	Pandanaceae

6. Conclusion

In present investigation traditional knowledge of tribal of Kabirdham on sacred trees was documented during the period of study and the information of 17 sacred trees of religious and cultural important were documented. These plants were found to belong 11 families of dicotyledons and 01 of monocotyledons. The habit of the used plants was herbs/shrubs/ trees, climbers.

The trees of religious and social- culturally important in the region were identified as sacred trees and documented. On the basis of survey information and discussion it can be concluded

that the 17 plant species have been enumerated which are being used in different rites and ritual like marriage ceremony, worshipping, child birth, festivals and in cremation by the tribal people of Kabirdham. They treat sacred plants as socio-religious entity and worship them. Their devotion to these plants is so high that they never think to cut these plants, if it happens so they try to conserve it. The present study may be useful to mankind and it inspire and aware to conserve these sacred plant species wherever possible. Trees have occupied an important place of sanctity in every man's heart in many ways. All the trees are important to us in many ways.

Therefore, need is to protect them for the betterment of future generations because trees are part and parcel of tribal life by making their presence felt in all their traditions, whether it is

social, cultural or family rituals. Hence, it is needed to make conservation plans for these sacred tree found in the entire forest.



1 *Ficus glomerata*

2 *Aegle marmelos L*



3 *Butea monosperma*

4 *Ficus benghalensis*



5 *Ficus Religiosa*

6 *Emblica officinalis*



7 *Madhuca indica*

8 *Shorea robusta*

9 *Mangifera indica*



10 *Semecarpus anacardium*



11 *Tamarindus indica*



12 *Azadirachta indica*



13 *Calotropis gigantea* (L.)



14 *Calotropis procera*



15 *Ocimum sanctum*



16 *Desmostachya bipinnata*



17 *Pandanus odoratissimus*



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