

Commonly Used Sacred Plants in Tehsil Moorang, District Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Himachal Pradesh, the mountainous state of India is famous for its religious culture, traditions and its unique flora. People of this state are highly religious and variety of rituals related to deities is performed in various ways by local people. These rituals not only show humans relations with plants but also help in conserving these plants. The present study is carried out in Moorang tehsil of district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh, regarding the sacred plants used by the locals in their own socio-cultural and religious activities. The information regarding the utilization of sacred plants in socio-cultural and religious activities was collected during the period (September, 2012 to October 2013) through personal observations, oral interviews and discussions with the villagers. The present study helps to understand how locals of Moorang tehsil are dependent on sacred plants and contributing towards the conservation of plants to safeguard their inherent socio-cultural and religious activities.

Keywords: Himachal, Kinnaur, Moorang, Flowers, Tribes

1. Introduction

India is known for its diversity like religion, customs, myths, languages, culture etc. It has been also observed that large numbers of plants are being used for the worshiping of gods and goddesses by different indigenous communities, which serve as a useful tool for conservation of plants. The importance of plants for worshiping god and goddesses has been also described in different Vedas and it could be seen in the hymns. On the basis of ancient scriptures, a wide variety of plants like *Ficus religiosa* L., *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss., *Ocimum tenuiflorum* L. etc. has divine qualities, therefore used in number of religious activities, marriages and other ceremonies (Robinson & Cush 1997). India has deep-rooted traditional worshiping of plants, which provide base for the grass root conservation practices (Gadgil 1987, 2000, Gadgil & Rao 1998).

From the Indian Himalayan region, 150 sacred plants have been reported (Samant and Pant, 2003). Plants like *Ficus religiosa*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Centella asiatica*, *Curcuma longa* and *Cynodon dactylon* are used in a number of religious activities and rituals (Robinson and Cush, 1997). The rhizomes of *Nardostachys grandiflora* are generally used as incense in the temples in high Himalayas (Shah, 2006). *Azadirachta indica* is worshipped in India and its leaves are used to keep away the evil spirits (Nargas and Trivedi 2003).

Himachal Pradesh is inhabited by 14 different tribal community's viz. Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnaura, Bhot or Bhotia, Swangla, Lahaula, Pangwals etc. All these 14 tribes are rich in cultural heritage and have their own traditions and customs. They speak their own dialects and these native people are the custodians of indigenous traditional knowledge associated with their surrounding biological resources. They have been using these resources for various purposes in their daily life since ages. In district Kinnaur locals of Moorang tehsil are very fond of music, dance and singing and they celebrate many festivals throughout the

year viz., Sazo, Suskar, Beesh, Doyal, Khepa, Dakhran, Lamoch, Kurims, Losar and Ormig. In this region sacred plants are used in variety of ceremonies and festivals in various ways throughout the year by the people of study area. These plants are also used for their medicinal, aesthetic and ancient beliefs of ancestors. These ancient beliefs show the human relation with plants since ages which are also helpful in the conservation of these sacred plant species for their valuable qualities.

2. Material and Methods

Ethno-botanical information on utilization of sacred plants in religious functions, rituals and also in celebration of festivals by the locals of Moorang tehsil of district Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh was collected during the period (September, 2012 to October 2013). The usual personal observations, oral interviews, discussions with the villagers were the bases of collection of data about the use of sacred plants. At the end of each interview, the plant specimens were collected, dried by using routine botanical collection and herbarium techniques, identified and preserved (Jain & Rao, 1997). Samples of recorded herbs, shrubs and trees were identified in the laboratory with the help of (Polunin and Stainton, 1984 & Stainton, 1988) and local floras (Chowdhery and Wadhwa, 1984; Dhaliwal and Sharma, 1999; Aswal and Mehrotra, 1994; Nair, 1977). Plants species voucher specimens of recorded plants have been kept in Department of Botany Himachal Pradesh University Shimla (H.P.) India.

3. Results

Present study shows that total 21 plants, belonging 18 genera and 16 families were associated with the sacred belief and utilized by locals in religious functions, rituals and also in celebration of festivals. *Aconitum violaceum*, *Bergenia ciliata*, *Carex nivalis*, *Delphinium brunonianum*, *Delphinium glaciale*, *Jurinea macrocephala*, *Poa alpina*, *Polygonum affine*, *Saussurea gossypiphora* and *Saussurea*

obvallata are used in celebration of festival of flowers known as Phulaich or Ukhyang. During the festival locals present garlands of these flowers to their deities and also wear in their caps. Bark of *Betula utilis* used for writing Buddhist scriptures, building of stupes and also in death ceremonies especially during cremation of dead bodies. *Daphne oleoides*, *Fraxinus xanthoxyloides*, *Rosa webbiana* and *Jurinea macrocephala* are used in various religious rituals by Buddhist monks to keep away evil spirits and for good health of locals. Because of the aesthetic properties, flowers of *Narcissus tazetta*, *Rosa brunonii* and *Rhododendron campanulatum* are offered to local deity during their flowering season. Leaves of *Cannabis sativa* and *Hedera nepalensis* are also offered to the Lord Shiva during the Shivratri festival. Roots of *Jurinea macrocephala* and leaves of *Juniperus indica* is used as Dhooop during the prayer time to please the deity. Beside these locals also keep dried flowers and leaves of *Saussurea obvallata*, *Saussurea gossypiphora*, *Ocimum basilicom* in their house to keep away the evil spirits and to bring good health and wealth.

Table 1: Commonly Used Sacred Plants of Moorang tehsil of District Kinnaur, H.P.

S. No	Scientific Name	Family	Local name
1	<i>Aconitum violaceum</i>	Ranunculaceae	Bangat Kaiser
2	<i>Bergenia ciliata</i>	Saxifragaceae	Rachu Kanang
3	<i>Betula utilis</i>	Betulaceae	Padh
4	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Cannabaceae	Sulfa
5	<i>Carex nivalis</i>	Cyperaceae	Rog seelang
6	<i>Daphne oleoides</i>	Thymelaeaceae	Agru, Jikog
7	<i>Delphinium brunonianum</i>	Ranunculaceae	Loskarch
8	<i>Delphinium glaciale</i>	Ranunculaceae	Loskarch
9	<i>Fraxinus xanthoxyloides</i>	Oleaceae	Thum
10	<i>Hedera nepalensis</i>	Araliaceae	Lacha
11	<i>Juniperus indica</i>	Cupressaceae	Shur
12	<i>Jurinea macrocephala</i>	Asteraceae	Guglang, Gugal
13	<i>Narcissus tazetta</i>	Amaryllidaceae	Narkasang
14	<i>Ocimum basilicom</i>	Lamiaceae	Tulsi
15	<i>Poa alpina</i>	Poaceae	Gyalchee
16	<i>Polygonum affine</i>	Polygonaceae	Shueg seelang
17	<i>Rosa brunonii</i>	Rosaceae	Yal
18	<i>Rosa webbiana</i>	Rosaceae	Lamauh
19	<i>Rhododendron campanulatum</i>	Ericaceae	Sarmanang
20	<i>Saussurea gossypiphora</i>	Asteraceae	Khasbal
21	<i>Saussurea obvallata</i>	Asteraceae	Rongol

4. Conclusion

India has deep-rooted traditional worshipping of plants, which provide base for the grass root conservation practices. For the maintaining the ecological balance the religious practices of these sociologically recognized plants is very necessary. Due to the esteem faith in the magical powers of sacred plants these are worshiped and offered by the local people to their deities to get blessings and good health and wealth. Such deep-seated faith on ancestor's beliefs provides mental, physical and emotional stability to locals. These traditional worshipping has protected many plants because of the fear of deity and great reverence which played important role in conservation and sustainable utilization of these plants. Hence it is very important to uphold traditions and beliefs in order to protect and conserve these plant resources.

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