



ETHNOBOTANICAL PLANTS USED IN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES OF TRIBES OF SAHEBGANJ DISTRICT, JHARKHAND

¹Sanjib Kumar and ²Shashi Kumari

¹Professor, ²Research Scholar

¹Dept. of Botany, B.S.S. College Supaul - 852131, Bihar, India

²Univ. Dept. of Botany, B.N. Mandal University, Madhepura-852113, Bihar, India

Abstract: Sahebganj district of Jharkhand state is very rich in plant diversity as well as its ethnic diversity. It has and This district is inhabited by a large number of tribes who possess a great traditional knowledge base in plant resources. Ethnobotanical surveys were conducted in the Sahebganj district of Jharkhand during August 2016 to August 2020 to investigate and document the plants used in the various religious and cultural ceremonies by the tribes of Sahebganj district, Jharkhand. Altogether 38 religious and ceremonial plant species belonging to 21 families were recorded in the present study. Tribes of Sahebganj use these plants in many ways including worshipping Gods and Goddesses for the protection and betterment of their life. They also use these plants in their religious functions and cultural ceremonies for their successful completion. These plants were found essential to commence all the religious, auspicious and cultural festivals. No any ritual of tribe was found complete without using them. These plants had also remedial effects. Almost all the tribal societies were found to consider some plants as holy in origin and essential in religious and cultural functions. In the present investigation it was also recorded that tribes used specific plant species for special purposes and functions.

Index Terms - Tribes, Sahebganj district, plants, socio-religious and cultural functions,

I. INTRODUCTION

Plants play a significant role in the life and culture of people. Religious and ceremonial plants refer to a group of sacred plant species that are used in various rituals by the people of different religions and cultures. These plants are essential to start any religious or cultural functions and one cannot imagine completing any religious or cultural rituals without them (Acharya, 2003) Jharkhand, *the land of forest* is a north-eastern state of India. In Jharkhand, Sahebganj (*the City of Hills*) is a north – eastern district surrounded by hilly tracts and is rich in evergreen and deciduous vegetation. This district is very rich in terms of its natural resources for flora and fauna and it is inhabited by various tribal communities *viz. Munda, Uraon, Ho, Santhal* and *Kharwar*, among which the “*Santhal* and *Kharwar*” tribes dominate the Sahebganj district. They depend on the forest and its products for their livelihood. Like other forest dwelling ethnic or tribal communities tribes of Sahebganj district believe that plants possess some supernatural powers (Kumar Sen and Bahera 2007) and these are reflected in their socio-religious and cultural rituals. The term religion refers to a collection of belief systems, cultural systems, social views and duties that relate humanities to spiritual and to some extents social and moral values. The

religious and cultural beliefs are the system of good or evil faith and worship of supernatural beings and conceiving everything in this universe is an act of supernatural beings (Hajra 2004, Dekota and Chhetri 2013). In every human society worship is performed with traditional rituals. There is no religious or cultural ritual which does not require plants and their products. Right from the occasion of birth to the mourning death the tribal communities preserve their traditions through folklore and worshipping their deities (Sharma and Pegu 2011). They utilize various plants and their products to maintain their beliefs. Few plants are believed by them to be sacred and ritually important. These spirits about plants have significant influence in their life. Although these traditional practices of the tribes are declining because the younger generations of the tribes are moving towards the towns and cities and are losing beliefs on their traditional systems. Therefore, it is very important and necessary to document and preserve the values of these beliefs and associated plants for the future generations as no systematic information is yet available. This paper attempts to investigate and document spiritual and cultural values of plants prevailing amongst the tribes of Sahebganj district of Jharkhand.

II. STUDY AREA:

The present study was undertaken in the selected tribal villages of Sahebganj district of Jharkhand which lie approximately between 24°21' - 25°21' North latitude and between 87°25' - 87°54' East longitude. The district is surrounded on the North by the river Ganges and the Katihar district of Bihar, on the South by the districts Godda and Pakur of Jharkhand, on the East by the districts Maldah and Murshidabad of West Bengal and on the west by the districts Bhagalpur of Bihar and Godda of Jharkhand. The different villages visited during the present study were Hajipur Dira, BaluaToli and Samda (**Sahebganj block**), Karam Tola, Ajhor Santhali, Amjhor, Mirza Chauki, Mahadev Bara, Rakshi, Chokia, Khera, Lalmatia, Chatra and Motijhil (**Mandro block**), Karambi, Borio Santhali, Dhobna, Borio Bazar, Behra, Kadma, Singhari and Tetariya (**Borio block**) Karam Tola, Rakshi, Amtola, Barhait Bazar, Kitajhor, Kusma Santhali, Khutona, Godiganj and Deorary Santhali (**Barhait block**). The temperature range in this area varied usually in between 2^oc to 40^oc. Hills valleys and plateaus with altitudes of about 305-1220 meter are the characteristic features of this district. The nature of soil of this region is alluvial and loamy. The soil PH usually ranges in between 4.5 to 6.5. The vegetation of this area represents the characteristic subtropical type. From socio- cultural point of view, this district exhibits great ethnic and cultural diversities. The pre- dominant tribes in the district are Assur, Ho, Santhal, Kharwar, Munda, Oraon, Assur, Ho and some other tribes. They are dispersed in different pockets. Agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing are their major sources of income.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Several field trips were organized in tribal dominated villages of Sahebganj district of Jharkhand during the years August 2016 to August 2020. A combination of focus group of individual interviews, field walk discussions and participations in the religious and cultural ceremonies of important tribes of Sahebganj district were conducted with a tertiary educated translator present at each session. The field trips were organized in 31 tribal populated villages of four blocks of Sahebganj district namely Sahebganj, Mandro, Borio and Barhait. The data and information presented in the paper have been collected after observation and discussion with the local people during the field visits. The data were collected from different places *i.e.* mountain area, grounds, and other localities like festival areas etc.. Unidentified plant samples were collected and brought to the department for identification. The vernacular name, botanical name and family of the religious and ceremonial plants were noted. Herbarium specimens of some of the unidentified plants were also prepared following the standard methods (Jain 1987). The unknown herbarium specimens were identified with the help of standard floras (Hooker, 1872-1897; Oomachan, 1977; Maheshwari, 1986; Verma *et al.*, 1993; Duthie, 1994; Mudgal *et al.*, 1997; Sharma *et al.*, 2001) and matching with the herbarium specimens housed at Bhagalpur. Some of the important plant species like *Acacia catechu* Willd., *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub., *Calotropis gigantea* R.Br. ex Roxb., *Diospyros melanoxylon* Roxb., *Vitex negundo* L., *Withania somnifera* L. etc. were also planted in the Swami Vivekanand Medicinal Park of B.S.S. College, Supaul, Bihar. Identified plant species have been listed alphabetically in the **Table - 1**.

III. OBSERVATIONS

TABLE - 1: PLANTS USED IN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES BY THE TRIBES OF SAHEBGANJ DISTRICT

S.N.	Botanical Name	English Name	Vernacular/ Local Name	Family	Plant form	Parts in Use	Ritual Uses
1.	<i>Acacia catechu</i> Willd.	Black catechu	Khair, Kharia	Mimosaceae	T	Whole plant (WP)	Worshipped for family welfare
2.	<i>Adina cordifolia</i> Hk.f.	Haldu	Karam	Rubiaceae	T	Leaves	Worship
3.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Wood apple	Bel, Sinjo	Rutaceae	T	Leaves	Worship
4.	<i>Annona reticulata</i> L.	Wild sweetsop	Ramphal	Annonaceae	T	Leaves, Fruits	Religious ceremonies
5.	<i>A. squamosa</i> L.	Custard apple	Sharifa	Annonaceae	T	Leaves, Fruits	Religious ceremonies
6.	<i>Artocarpus lakoocha</i> Wall. ex Roxb.	Lakoocha	Barhar, Dahua	Moraceae	T	Leaves	Worship
7.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A.Juss.	Margosa tree	Neem	Meliaceae	T	Twigs	Reception
8.	<i>Bambusa arundinacea</i> (Retz.) Willd.	Bamboo	Bans	Poaceae	H	Culm	Making worship place (Charani)
9.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Flame of the forest	Palash, Dhak	Fabaceae	T	Twigs, Leaves	Sarhul festival
10.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> R.Br. ex Roxb.	Madar	Ak, Dahua	Asclepiad-Aceae	S	Flowers	Worship
11.	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Ait.)R.Br.	Rubber bush	French cotton	Asclepiadaceae	S	Flowers	Worship
12.	<i>Carissa spinarum</i> L.	Bush plum	Khirkoli	Apocynaceae	S	WP	Worshipped for family welfare
13.	<i>Crossandra infundibuliformis</i> (L.) Nees	Firecracker flower	Anlei	Acanthaceae	S	Flowers	Worshipping of Goddess of Forest
14.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.)Pers.	Bermuda grass	Doobi	Poaceae	H	Leaves	Worship
15.	<i>Dalbergia lanceolaria</i> L.	Indian rosewood	Sajanapati malanga	Fabaceae	T	Leaves, Stem	Worshipped for propitiation of planet
16.	<i>Datura metel</i> L.	Devil's Trumpet	Dhatura	Solanaceae	S	Fruit, seeds	Worshipped of Goddess
17.	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> (Roxb.)Nees	Bamboo	Baans	Poaceae	H	Leaves, Culms	Making worship place
18.	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i> Roxb.	Malabar ebony	Kendu	Ebenaceae	T	Wood	To avoid evil soul

19.	<i>Emblica officinalis</i> Gaertn.	Indian gooseberry	Amla	Euphorbiaceae	T	WP	Worshipped for family welfare
20.	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Banyan tree	Bargad	Moraceae	T	WP	Worshipped for propitiation of planet Saturn
21.	<i>Ficus hispida</i> L.f.	Hairy fig	Dimiri	Moraceae	T	Whole plant	Worshipped for propitiation of planet
22.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Acred fig	Pipal	Moraceae	T	Whole plant	Whole plant is worshipped
23.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Acred fig	Pipal	Moraceae	T	Whole plant	Whole plant is worshipped
24.	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i> (J.Koenig) Macbr. Var.	Honey tree	Mahua	Sapotaceae	T	Flower	Religious ceremonies
25.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Mango	Am	Anacardiaceae	T	Leaves & Twigs	Religious ceremonies
26.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Holy basil	Tulsi	Lamiaceae	H	WP	Worship as sacred plant
27.	<i>Oryza coarchata</i> Griff.	Wild rice	Dhan	Poaceae	S	Grains	In religious ceremonies
28.	<i>Polyalthia longifolia</i> Sonn..	Mast tree	Devdaru, False Ashoka	Annonaceae	T	Wood	For sacrificial fire
29.	<i>Ricinus communis</i> L.	Castor	Arand	Euphorbiaceae	S	Leaves, Fruits	In worship for family welfare
30.	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i> L.f.	Varnish tree	Bhelwa	Anacardiaceae	T	WP Seeds	Worshipped Kept for success in every work
31.	<i>Shorea robusta</i> Gaertn.f.	Sal tree	Sakhua	Dipterocarpaceae	T	Twigs, leaves WP	In religious ceremonies, Worshipped
32.	<i>Solanun surattense</i> Burn.f.	Wild egg plant	Bhatkataiya	Solanaceae	H	Fruits	In religious ceremonies
33.	<i>Sreblus asper</i> Lour.	Tooth-brush tree	Sahora	Moraceae	T	WP	Worshipped as abode of Goddess

34.	<i>Terminalia alata</i> Roxb.	Indian laurel	Asan	Combretaceae	T	Fruits	In religious ceremonies
35.	<i>Thevetia peruviana</i> (Pers) merr.	Yellow oleander	Pili Kaner	Apocynaceae	S	Flower	Worshipped of Goddess
36.	<i>Viscum album</i> L.	Mistletoe	Banda, Banjhi	Santalaceae	S	Leaves	In initiation of rituals, Kept for success in every work
37.	<i>Vitex negundo</i> L.	Chaste tree	Nirgundi	Verbenaceae	S	Leaves, Twigs	In marriage, worship
38.	<i>Withania somnifera</i> L.	Winter cherry	Ashwa-gandha	Solanaceae	H	Roots	To prevent evil eye of others

H = Herb; S = Shrub; T = Tree

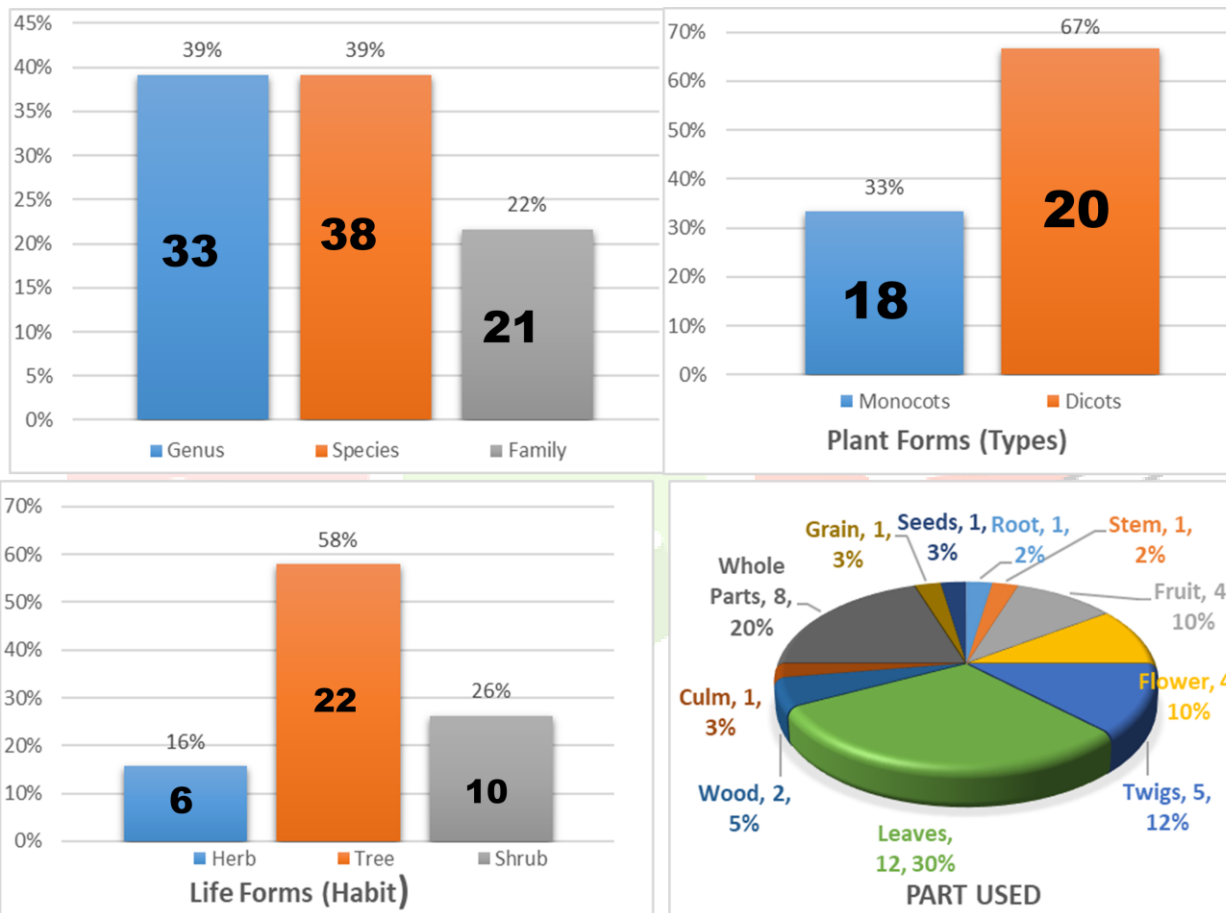


FIG- 1: PLANTS USED FOR RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL CEREMONIES BY THE PEOPLE OF SAHEBGANJ DIST.

PLATE - 1

ETHNOBOTANICAL PLANTS USED IN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES IN SAHEBGANJ DISTRICT



Madhuca longifolia (Konig) Macbr. : Flowers



Acacia catechu Willd. (Khair)



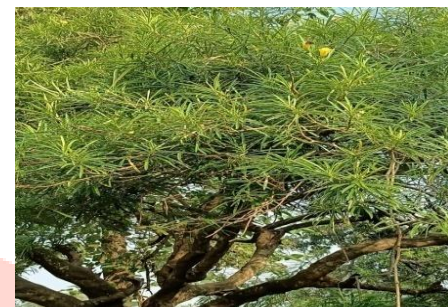
Bambusa balcooa (Roxb.) Haraut



Annona reticulata L. (Ramphal)



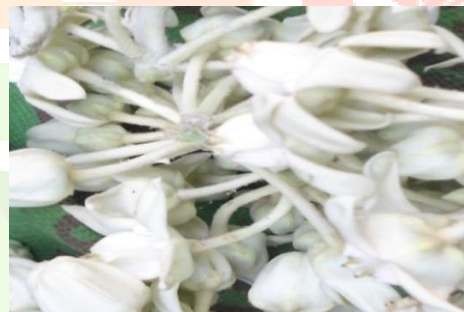
Emblica officinalis Gaertn. (Amla)



Thevetia peruviana (Pers.) K. Schum



Ficus religiosa L. (Pipal)



Calotropis procera (Ait.) R.Br. Flowers



Vitex negundo L. (Nirgundi)



Diospyros melanoxylon Roxb. (Kendu)



Butea monosperma (Lam.) Taub. (Palash)



Ocimum sanctum L. (Tulsi)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an ethnobotanical study of Sahebganj district of Jharkhand, several plant species with religious, auspicious and cultural significances among various tribal communities were documented. Nature based festivals like **Karma, Sarhul, Sakrat, Jatra** etc. and cultural programs like art, drama, song, dance etc. are interwoven with the day to day life of the people of this district especially tribes. Altogether **30** plant species were recorded associated with the religious and cultural activities. Their botanical name, vernacular name, family, life form,

parts in use and ritual uses are depicted in **Table - 1**. The religio-cultural plants were represented by **33 genera** under **21 families**. The survey work indicated that trees occupied the dominant position (**58%, 22 plant species**), followed by **10 shrubs (26%)** and **6 herbs (16%)**. The different plant parts used for religious and cultural ceremonies were roots, stems, culms, leaves, twigs, bark, flowers, fruits, seeds and sometimes whole plant. These plant parts were being used for various purposes like worshipping Gods / Goddesses for family welfare, propitiation of planet, making worship place, religious ceremonies, reception to avoid evil soul, as sacred plant and for sacrificial fire to prevent evil eye of others. These religious plants are also used for the treatment of different ailments by the tribes. Most of the religious and cultural plants were also found to be domesticated by the tribes of Sahebganj district for different rituals and purposes as also reported by Sharma and Pegu (2011)

Mohanty et al. (2011) have recorded **15** sacred plants used in religious ceremonies by tribals of Dhenkalal district of Odisha. Sharma and Pegu (2011) revealed 30 religious and supernatural plants used by the Mising tribes of Assam (**Kumar (2014)** has recorded **15** such religious and cultural plants from Jharkhand. However, **30** such plants were recorded in the present study. **Ahmad et al. (2016)** have also recorded **16** plant species of Magico-religious beliefs among tribals of Jabalpur (M.P.). Several findings of the present study corroborate with the findings of religious and cultural utilization of different plants by the above mentioned authors. However, **tying of neem leaves in the hands of bride and bridegroom during marriage** was a new tradition and not recorded earlier.

V. CONCLUSION

After going through the analyses of socio-religious, auspicious and cultural ceremonial plants used by the tribes of Sahebganj district, it becomes evident that tribes use these plants mainly for their well beings by offering them to their God and Goddesses, to avoid evil's eyes to protect their children and houses and during their auspicious functions.. Altogether 38 plants were found to be used by the tribes of Sahebganj district .Most of these plants are considered sacred by the ethnic groups and also found to be domesticated and preserved by them. They also believe that some Gods and deities reside on trees in the forests (Sharma and Pegu 2011). Hence, tribes try to domesticate, and conserve these plants mainly for their rituals, to mark respect to their deities, to avoid curse by their deities and to some extent for medicinal purposes also The .domestication of religious and cultural plants by the tribes are good practices for conservation point of view. Therefore, the traditional knowledge of tribes on plants may be useful in finding new drugs for the welfare of human beings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to "Santhal, Munda, Kharwar and Oraon" tribes of Sahebganj district of Jharkhand for their active support in allowing participation in their festivals and also providing valuable information regarding socio-religious, auspicious and cultural plants. The authors are also thankful to Fransis Tuddu, Santoshani Marandi, Jangli Munda, Manjhi Kisku, Vivekanand Singh, Gurudev Pahariya of Sahebganj district for providing necessary facilities and encouragement and Dr. SK Varma, Retd. Prof. and Dr. Naresh Kumar, In-Charge Herbarium, University Department of Botany, TMBU Bhagalpur, Bihar for identification of some of the socio-religious and cultural plants.

REFERENCES

Acharya KP (2003). Religious and spiritual values of forest plants in Nepal. Paper submitted to the XII World Forestry Congress, Quebec City, Canada, Article No. 0087 - A1.

Ahmad Faizi, Shashi Tiwari and Aparna Awasthi (2016). Chthonic knowledge of traditional magicoreligious plant beliefs among tribals of Jabalpur region, (MP). *Ethnobotany*, **28**: 60-67.

Choudhary BL, SS Katewa and PK Galav (2008). Plants in material culture of tribals and rural communities of Rajsamand district of Rajasthan. *Indian journal of Traditional Knowledge*, **7** (1): 11- 22.

Dekota Rajeev and RB Chhetri(2013). Plants in magico-religious belief among Rai, Magar and Tamang communities of Sansari district, Eastern Nepal, *ethnobotany*, **25** (1&2); 148- 152.

Hajra PK (2004).Plants in magico- religious beliefs and in Sanskrit literature. In: *A Manual of qethnobotany*. Sci.Pub., Jodhpur, pp. 98-103. household and rituals by tribal people of Dhenkalal district, Odisha, India. *Journal of Applied Pharmagcentical Science*, **01** (04): 79-82.

Mohanty Nibedita, Prasant Kumar Das and Tranisen Panda (2011). Use of plant diversity in household and rituals by tribal people of Dhenkalal district, Odisha, India. *Journal of Applied Pharmagcentical Science*, **01** (04): 79-82.

Sharma UK and S Pegu (2011). Ethnobotany of religious and supernatural beliefs of the missing tribes of Assam with special reference to the DoburUie. *J. Ethnobiol. Ethnomed*, **7**; 16

