

Study on traditional worshiping plants in Hindu religion from Nalbari and Sonitpur districts of Assam

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Abstract- Biodiversity is an important gift of nature that provides all basic requirements for human existence. But due to modern development of human races nature is under great threat. Since time immemorial plants have played an important role in human civilization. It has been 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. Hinduism has been called the oldest religion in the world and dominant in Indian subcontinent. The present paper analyzed different plant species that are used in worshiping of gods and goddesses in Hindu tradition in two districts of Assam viz. Nalbari and Sonitpur. A total of 54 species under 51 genera and 30 families were recorded during the study. Among these, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Piper betle*, etc. are exclusively used in all worship. Prasad is one of the most important elements of all worship which is prepared with different varieties of fruits and cereals. *Vigna radiate*, *Cicer arietinum*, *Mangifera indica*, *Musa* sp., *Saccharum officinarum*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Zingiber officinale*, etc. are some important species used for the preparation of Prasad. In fact, the Prasad are rich in nutrients and considered very healthy.

Index Terms- Plants, Worship, Hindu, Sonitpur and Nalbari, Assam.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Hindu is one of the largest and oldest religions in the globe. Traditionally Hindu peoples use a large numbers of plant species for worshiping different gods and goddesses. The importance of plants for worshiping god and goddesses has been described in different bedas and it could be seen in the hymns. In India amongst Hindu many plant species are associated with religious function, rituals and also in celebration of festival. Such useful plants have been recorded in the religious book and knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation. Assam is a state having more than 33 castes with Hindu religion. Brahma et al. [1] described 48 plant species used in socio-cultural and religious practices used by Bodo tribes of BTC, Assam, India. Bhatla et al. [2] highlighted importance of some plants known to be traditionally worshipped in different part of India and its significance. Each cast has some different beliefs and tradition regarding worshiping of gods and goddesses. The Hindu religious peoples are very much concern about the use of plants for each and every occasion from birth to funeral ceremony. But, despite of having such traditional ceremony literatures regarding this Hindu beliefs and worship is insignificant and proper scientific study in this area is very poor. Thus, the present paper attempts to emphasis on the use of plants in some common Hindu traditional worship involved in different socio-religious practices such as, upanayan (traditional ritual ceremony of Hindus for wearing sacred thread), sradha, marriage, common worship of gods and goddesses like lord Vishnu, Laxmi, Kali, Durga, Saraswati, Ganesh, Krishna, Siva, etc. of Nalbari and Sonitpur districts of Assam.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Study on documentation of plant species that are used in different traditional worship among Hindu community of Nalbari and Sonitpur districts was carried out during 2013 to 2014. Different traditional Hindu socio-religious occasions and information's of plant species used in different pujas, socio-religious ceremony or festival were recorded. Importance of the plant species, uses of plant parts in traditional practices, beliefs and benefits were collected through semi structured personal interview with the specialized persons like priests, who performed different ceremonies and rituals, and some knowledgeable old persons who are involved in different religious practices. Due to inadequate references authors attended different occasions to collect relevant data. Photographs of different worships involved during different occasions like, marriage, dead anniversary (sradhas) and some other worship are taken from different places for record of evidence. The collected plant specimens were carefully identified with the help of relevant scientific literatures [3]. Finally, the specimens are deposited in the Ecology and Biodiversity Lab., Herbarium Unit of the Dept. of Environmental Science, Tezpur University, Assam.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total numbers of 54 plant species under 51 genera and 30 families were reported from the present study. In Hindu tradition, it has been believed that different gods and goddesses have some specific character and they love different plant depending upon their colour, fragrant, etc [4]. *Aegle marmelos* locally called belboron is used to worship lord Siva (**Figure 1, A**) it is also believed that lord Siva rest under *Aegle marmelos* tree, *Oryza sativa* is believed as the plant of goddesses Laxmi and it is believed that lord Krishna love *Anthocephalus cadamba*. Sradha is one of the important Hindu religious practices held before all the occasions to worship the ancestors. *Musa sp.*, *Areca catechu*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Mangifera indica*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Ocimum sanctum* and different other flowers are used in this form of worship (**Figure 1, B**).

In Hindu marriage ceremony the brides and grooms are sanctify taking bath with turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), black gram (*Vigna mungo*), etc. under banana plant (**Figure 1, C**). Generally in Hindu marriage ceremony a very special drawing (Rangoli) has been prepared using the powders of *Bixa orellana* seeds, *Aegle marmelos* leaves, *Curcuma longa* rhizomes, etc. (**Figure 1, D**). This Rangoli depicts the sacred welcoming areas for the Hindu deities and thought to bring good luck. The worship of Lord Agni (fire) is common in Hindu tradition. In Hindu marriage ceremony it has been seen that bride and grooms takes oath in front of Lord Agni and during the worship whole plant of dry *Desmostachya bipinnata*, dry woods of *Mangifera indica* and *Prosopis cineraria* are used (**Figure 1, E**). Twig of *Mangifera indica* plant with 5 or 7 leaves are kept in earthen pot with water and used for all worship (**Figure 1, F**). *Prosopis cinerarium* is also used to worship the lord Agni (fire) in the ritual ceremony of Mundan (Surhakaran) and upanayan. *Prosopis cinerarium* is a very rare species in natural abundance. Now a days, due its unavailability most of the Hindu peoples are planting this species in their home to fulfil the need for worshipping. Ashok plant (*Saraca asoca*) is very important for Hindus and is worshipped on a very special occasion Ashok astami.

It was recorded that during goddess Durga puja the very first day there is a tradition to worship the *Aegle marmelos* and it has been believed that goddess Durga comes from this plant and take her sacred place of worship and on the day of Vijayadashami Aparajita (*Clitoria ternatea*) is worshiped. Kusha (*Desmostachya bipinnata*) is commonly used as floor mat to seat on during all the worshipping and other holy occasions. *Musa sp.* is very important plant and all parts of the plant are widely used during all form of Hindu worship. Each and every part of *Musa sp.* is important from worship point of view. *Aegle marmelos* (**Figure 1, G**), *Ocimum sanctum* and *Cinodon dactylon* are three integral part of worshipping of all gods and goddesses. Without this three species no worship takes place or not complete. There are some species related to some particular god and goddesses. While, *Areca catechu* and *Piper betle* are two most important component of each and every ceremony (**Figure 1, H**). *Alocasia macrorrhiza*, *Euphorbia nerifolia*, *Mimusops elengi*, *Benincasa hispida* are some plant species used for worshipping goddesses Kali. *Ficus glomerata* and *Ficus benghalensis* are used in worshipping Lord Vishnu. Details of the recorded 54 plant species in terms of their vernacular name, scientific name, family, life form and their uses are given in **Table 1**.

Table 1: List of plants used for worshipping of gods and goddesses in different socio-religious practices of Hindu tradition with reference to Nalbari and Sonitpur district of Assam.

Sl.no.	Vernacular name (Assamese)	Botanical name	Family	Habit	Part used	Use
1.	Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corrêa	Rutaceae	Tree	Whole plant	All worship
2.	Man kochu	<i>Alocasia macrorrhiza</i> (L.) G. Don	Araceae	Herb	Whole plant	Kali Puja
3.	Kadam	<i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i> (Roxb.) Miq.	Rubiaceae	Tree	Whole plant	Worshipping of Lord Krishna
4.	Tamol	<i>Areca catechu</i> L.	Arecaceae	Tree	Fruit	Basically in all occasion
5.	Kothal	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> Lam.	Moraceae	Tree	Leaf twig and fruit	All worship
6.	Naal	<i>Arundo donax</i> L.	Poaceae	Grass	Whole plant	In some specific occasion
7.	Baah	<i>Bambusa</i> sp.	Poaceae	Herb	Whole plant	All worship
8.	Bogakomora	<i>Benincasa hispida</i> (Thunb.) Cogn.	Cucurbitaceae	Climber	Fruit	Specially in Goddess Kali puja
9.	Sendur	<i>Bixa orellana</i> L.	Bixaceae	Tree	Seeds	All worship
10.	Dhuna	<i>Boswellia serrate</i> Roxb. Ex Colebr.	Burseraceae	Tree	Resin	All worship
11.	Kola Sarioh	<i>Brassica rapa</i> L.	Brassicaceae	Shrub	Seeds	To remove devil sprit
12.	Bhang	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L.	Cannabaceae	Shrub	Fruit	Worship of Lord Siva
13.	Nayantora	<i>Catharanthus roseus</i> (L.) G. Don	Apocynaceae	Shrub	Flower	All worship
14.	Nemu	<i>Citrus indica</i> Yu. Tanaka	Rutaceae	Shrub	Fruit	Durga puja

15.	Aparajita	<i>Clitoria ternatea</i> L.	Leguminosae	Climber	Flower and Whole plant	Specially in Aparajita puja during Durga puja
16.	Narikol	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Arecaceae	Tree	Fruit	All worship
17.	Halodhi	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Zingiberaceae	Herb	Rhizome	All worship
18.	Durba	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.)Pers.	Poaceae	Grass	Whole plant	All worship
19.	Dhatura	<i>Datura metel</i> L.	Malvaceae	Shrub	Flower	Worship of Lord Siva
20.	Kusha ban	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (L.) Stapf	Poaceae	Herb	Whole plant	All worship
21.	Rudrakshya	<i>Elaeocarpus serratus</i> L.	Elaeocarpaceae	Tree	Fruit	Worship of Lord Siva
22.	Siju	<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i> L.	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Whole plant	During Bathu Puja
23.	Baatgoch	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Moraceae	Tree	Leaf and twig	During Lord Bishnu Puja and some other pujas
24.	Gagyadimoru	<i>Ficus glomerata</i> Roxb.	Moraceae	Tree	Leaf and twig	Vishnu yagya
25.	Aahot	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Moraceae	Tree	Leaf and twig	Worship of Lord Agni
26.	Kopah	<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i> L.	Malvaceae	Tree	Flower	Marriage and some other festival
27.	Joba	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i> L.	Malvaceae	Tree	Flower	All worship
28.	Aam	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Leaf, stem and fruit	All worship
29.	Bokul	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Sapotaceae	Tree	Leaf, twig and flower	Kali puja
30.	Vim Kal	<i>Musa balbisiana</i> Colla	Musaceae	Shrub	Whole plant	All worship
31.	Jaifal	<i>Myristica fragrans</i> Houtt.	Myristicaceae	Tree	Fruit	All worship
32.	Padum	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Nelumbonaceae	Herb	Leaf and flower	Goddess Laxmi, Durga and some other pujas also
33.	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Shrub	Whole plant	All worship, Holy plant of Hindu
34.	Dhan	<i>Oriza sativa</i> L.	Poaceae	Grass	Whole plant	Specially during Laxmi Puja
35.	Paan	<i>Piper betle</i> L.	Piperaceae	Climber	Leaf	All worship
36.	Champaphul	<i>Plumeria alba</i> L.	Apocynaceae	Tree	Flower	All worship
37.	Samidh	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce	Leguminosae	Tree	Stem	Mundan, Upanayan, Marriage ceremony, different yagya puja's.
38.	Raktachandan	<i>Pterocarpus santalinus</i> L.f.	Leguminosae	Tree	Stem	Lord Siva puja, Durga Puja and some other puja.
39.	Dalim	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	Lythraceae	Shrub	Fruit and leaf	Durga puja
40.	Golap	<i>Rosa</i> sp.	Rosaceae	Shrub	Flower	All worship
41.	Kuhiyar	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	Poaceae	Shrub	Whole plant	All worship
42.	Boga Chandan	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Santalaceae	Tree	Stem	All worship
43.	Ashok	<i>Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) Willd.	Leguminosae	Tree	Flower	Specially in Ashokastami during Durga puja
44.	Til	<i>Sesamum indicum</i> L.	Pedaliaceae	Shrub	Fruit	All worship
45.	Bogasarioh	<i>Sinapis alba</i> L.	Brassicaceae	Herb	Seeds	All worship
46.	Nityaphul	<i>Tabernaemontana divaricata</i> (L.) R.Br. ex Roem. &Schult.	Apocynaceae	Shrub	Flower	All worship

47.	Gendhaphul	<i>Tagetes patula</i> L.	Asteraceae	Shrub	Flower	All worship
48.	Silikha	<i>Terminalia chebula</i> Retz.	Combretaceae	Tree	Fruit	All worship
49.	Makoi	<i>Zea mays</i> L.	Poaceae	Herb	Fruit	All worship
50.	Aada	<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Roscoe	zingiberaceae	Herb	Rhizome	All worship
51.	Bogori	<i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> Mill.	Rhamnaceae	Tree	Fruit , leaf	All worship
52.	Matimah	<i>Vigna mungo</i> (L.) Hepper	Leguminosae	Herb	Seed	Hindu marriage
53.	Mug	<i>Vigna radiate</i> (L.) R.Wilczek	Leguminosae	Herb	Seed	All worship
54.	But mah	<i>Cicer arietinum</i> L.	Leguminosae	Herb	Seed	All worship



Figure 1: (A) Leaves of *Aegle marmelos* used in the worshipping of Lord Siva; (B) *Musa* sp., *Areca catechu*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Mangifera indica*, *Cynodon dactylon* and different flowers used in *sradhas* to worship the ancestors; (C) *Musa* plant, *Mangifera indica* leaf, *Areca catechu* arrange to bath the bride and grooms in marriage ceremony; (D) Patterns created by the priest on the floor using powder of *Bixa orellana*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Curcuma longa*, etc, essential in Hindu marriage ceremony; (E) *Desmostechnya bipinnata*, *Mangifera indica* and *Prosopis cineraria* used to worship god fire; (F) Twig of *Mangifera indica* with 5 or 7 leaves are kept in earthen pot and used for all worship; (G) Leaves of *Aegle marmelos* and other flowers ready for worship and (H) Bunch of *Areca catechu* used in marriage ceremony.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study on religious plants used in various Hindu traditional worshipping exhibits the important role of plants in human life. The present study help to understand how Hindu indigenous community of Nalbari and Sonitpur district of Assam are contributing towards the conservation of plants and forest in general of their own interest to safeguard their inherent socio-cultural and religious activities. Such activity of conserving and using plant species in the name of worshipping and socio-cultural beliefs reveal a strong significance in today's concern of biodiversity conservation.

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