



Select Religious Medicinal Plants from Marathwada region of Maharashtra: A Critical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

The Marathwada region of Maharashtra served as the primary data source for the current study. By studying religiously significant plants and speaking with locals, data were gathered. This study also examines Buddhism, Islam, and other religions. Meswak Tree, AjanVruksh, Bael, Apata, and Vad are the five religious medicinal plants (five species and five separate families) in total. All of these plant varieties were crucial for their medical usefulness in religion. The majority of them are unaware of the medical benefits of these plants in their daily lives despite the fact that they are required to complete their rituals, ceremonies, and events. The purpose of this research was to comprehend the religious importance and practical uses of a few medicinal plants.

Keywords: Religious Plant, Religious value and Medicinal properties

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INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest rituals in existence is the worship of plants. Additionally, throughout ancient times, people have considered sacred or adored plants to have therapeutic characteristics. The *Puranas* hold that trees are the most cherished, sacred, and connected to Gods and Goddesses. Hinduism holds that all species of plants and trees are home to Gods and Goddesses, who can be appeased by worshipping them. By correcting the flaws connected to them, these *Navagraha*-associated trees and plants can receive favorable benefits. Those whose worship is the grace of God who have all their desires may be granted. The most comprehensive religion that enables adaptability to new technologies and a wholistic way of life is Islam. In Islam, the Holy Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad are connected with the ethical precepts of biomedical ethics. Nearly 22 distinguishable plants from seventeen different plant families are mentioned in the Holy Quran including *Olea europaea*, *Brassica nigra*, *Ficus carica* and many more. Buddhism places a strong emphasis on how ecology and culture interact. Buddhist philosophy regards nature as a force for life and has done so for thousands of years. The Buddha was born, became enlightened, and was taken under the Bodhi tree, according to the scriptures. The majority of Buddhist literature makes reference to the trees and forests that are connected to the Lord Buddha. Therefore, plants and trees continue to be important in religion today. As a result, current study will concentrate on different therapeutic herbs and spiritual principles.

Area of Research:

Marathwada is a part of Maharashtra state. The area of this region is "64,590 km² (24,940 sq mi)".¹ It was created under the reign of the Nizam and belonged to the Hyderabad area. It is located west of Vidarbha and east of the North Maharashtra districts of Maharashtra, bordering the states of Karnataka and Telangana. Aurangabad is the major city in the Marathwada region. Their native tongues are Marathi, Hindi, and Urdu. In the Marathwada region, there are eight districts, including Aurangabad, Jalna, Hingoli, Nanded, Parbhani, Beed, Latur, and Osmanabad. These districts were chosen as the study region for the current investigation (Fig: 1)



(Fig:1) Map of the study area

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To gather the therapeutic properties of a few sacred plants from the Marathwada region.
2. To comprehend the therapeutic status of a few Marathwada-regional herbs used in religion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The researcher performed three interviews with an Ayurveda student, a plant enthusiast, and local experts to determine the state of plants, herbs, and their therapeutic capabilities during an initial exploratory tour to various districts in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. In the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, this study was carried out, and information was gathered through participant observation and interviews. To identify the sacred medicinal plants and their therapeutic powers, the researcher sought the aid of local expert Manojkumar Navse, plant enthusiast Milind Girdhari, and Ayurvedic student Sampada Randive. The methodology of this work is field survey, personal interviews, interviews with local residents and plant collection. (Fig. 2 and 3)



(Fig.2: Personal interviews and talks with local residents)



(Fig.3: A collection of Meswak Tree, Ajan Vruksh, Bael, Apata, and Vad)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

India is known as the land of Gods and Goddesses and has a history spanning thousands of years. Spiritually significant trees have a ceremonial position similar to that of Gods and Goddesses, and some are even revered in India. The chosen species of medicinal plants used in religion offer therapeutic benefits. Each of them is essential for carrying out rites, celebrations, and ceremonies, but people are unaware of the medical benefits of these plant species in everyday life. Therefore, this study looks into the scientific grading and therapeutic worth of a few sacred plants from the Marathwada region of Maharashtra state.

Plant Profile (Scientific Classification):

Plant-Meswak Tree

Kingdom- Plantae

Division-Magnoliophyta

Class-Magnoliopsida

Order-Brassicales

Family-Salvadoraceae

Genus-Salvadora

Species- *S. persica*

Botanical Name-Salvadorapersica L.

Description:

Salvadorapersica L. is a small tree and shrubs typically have crooked trunks that are no larger than one foot in diameter. It has pale bark that is scaly and fissured and has an overhanging end. It tastes warm and spicy and has a lovely scent. It is known by the names Gudaphaa, Lakhupeelu, and Pilukaa in Sanskrit, while Miswaak, Araak, and other names in Unani are used to refer to it. It is frequently referred to as the "Miswak tree," which is an Arabic term for a staff for brushing teeth. The Indian subcontinent and Islamic nations both use it as a chewing stick and as one of the most widely used medicinal plants. In Hindi, it is also referred to as "jaal, meswak, pilu."² Some reports claim that ancient Babylonia was where the Meswak tree was first used as a chewing stick some 6,000 years ago. It is described as a sacred tree with curative properties in both Unani and Ayurvedic medicine.

Medicinal Use:

According to hadiths relating to the Prophet's life, the Prophet utilized twigs from the Arak tree. As a result, their use is recorded in those hadiths. Millions of individuals in Arab nations, the Indian subcontinent, and their diaspora continue to religiously heed the hadith's recommendation to apply miswak on Fridays, before religious practises, etc. Miswak is famous for its toothbrush twigs, but it also has other aspects that are beneficial to civilization. With the Middle East and Africa, meswak leaves are taken for their astringent qualities, which are thought to aid in digestion and metabolism. Salvador can be used in the conventional treatment of ulcers, rheumatism, and skin inflammations since the active ingredients have analgesic and diuretic qualities. The fruits, a pleasant substitute for bitter leaves, are also used to cure stomach and liver disorders and have diuretic qualities. The bark produced from the stem and roots is distinct, and as a result, it has distinctive qualities and applications. Salvador bark contributes to the creation of a decoction used to control women's menstruation. Additionally, it cures skin issues, stomach ulcers, and epilepsy. To treat gonorrhoea, the root bark is made into a paste. Salvadora seeds, like the leaves, are used to cure rheumatism and skin inflammations. They also function as diuretics and laxatives.

Plant Profile (Scientific Classification):

Plant-AjanVruksh

Kingdom- Plantae

Division-Magnoliophyta

Class-Magnoliopsida

Order-Boraginales

Family-Boraginaceae

Genus-Ehretia

Species- *E. laevis*

Botanical Name-EhretiaLaevisRoxb

Description:

The term "tree of God" refers to the select few trees that possess certain supernatural characteristics that foster spirituality. Indian culture is home to the tradition of good tree worship. One such tree, AjaanVruksh, may be found at the Mukundaraj Swami *Samadhi* (Memorial) in Ambejogai (Maharashtra). From the perspective of the *Warkari* (Pilgrimage) sect, AjaanVruksh has a special significance. It can be found in three locations in Maharashtra, including Adyakavi (the first poet), Mukundaraj Swami *Samadhi*

(Monument), Ambajogai, and Saint Dnyaneshwar Maharaj's birthplace at Aapegao, Paithan. "By sitting below AjanVruksha and meditating improves the human brain. Also, if you eat one leaf of this tree regularly, your confidence will increase told by Prof. Krishna Gurav, a practitioner of Ajan Vruksh."³ SantEknath Maharaj while talking about AjaanVruksha says that: "Consumption of the fruit of this tree in milk gives long life."⁴ To treat bodily illnesses, crushed AjaanVruksha leaves are ingested. Saint Namdev Maharaj describes the significance of this tree as follows:

समाधीसुखदिधलेदेवा ! ज्ञानांजनअलंकापुरीठेवा !!

अजानवृक्षीबीजवोल्हावार, भक्तजनीं !!. ⁵

It implies that Alankapuri has been preserved for all time in the form of knowledge.

The Sanjivan Samadhi (Mortal Monument), which gives happiness to Shri Dnyanesh.

Medicinal Use:

The plant AjaanVruksha, often referred to as the medicinal plant KhanduChakka, can be helpful as an antiviral and for COVID-19 symptoms like fever and other related diseases. "In Ayurvedic literature, uses of this plant are for Prameha (Diabetics) and Vishaghna (Anti-venom)."⁶ Its medical benefits are applied to eczema, diphtheria, syphilis, and as an aphrodisiac. The leaves are used to cure lung ailments, urinary infections, headaches, ulcers, and headache-related symptoms. An infusion of the bark is used as a gargle for throat infections. Has anti-malarial, anti-fever, anti-fungal, and hepatoprotective effects. The plant's ability to combat viral infections and other problems is beneficial. Locals utilise this herb for lung illnesses, headaches, sedation, and diphtheria. The decoction can be used for sore throats since it can be gargled for throat infections. One sign of a viral illness is a sore throat. Antimalarial medications are beneficial in treating COVID-19, according to a recent study. Therefore, this medicinal plant will open doors for more study and present excellent chances for employment and agriculture to increase global economic growth. The human race can advance thanks to this spiritual plant.

Plant Profile (Scientific Classification)

Plant- Bael

Kingdom- Plantae

Division- Magnoliophyta

Class- Magnoliopsida

Order- Sapindales

Family- Rutaceae

Genus- Ehretia

Species- A. Marmelos

Description:

The bael fruit has an enormous history of agriculture and therapeutic practice in India, where it has been known since the beginning of time. It is renowned for having a wide spectrum of therapeutic and nutritional benefits. Its tough shell, slimy texture, and abundant seeds make it challenging to eat raw. The single plant in the genus Aegle is the medium-sized, hardy, subtropical tree known as Bael. The tree only produces fruit once a year from March through June, which is considered summer in India. The fruits, which come in many shapes—round, pre-shaped, oval, or oblong—have both nutritional and therapeutic purposes. The fruit normally ripens after 11 months. It contains mucous membranes and is thick, sweet, and scented. Native to India, the bael tree is revered by Hindus as a sacred species. The fruit of the tree serves as a necessary component of a holy offering to God and Goddess through a holy pyre, while the leaves are revered and dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Medicinal Use:

The significance of the bael fruit is found in its therapeutic qualities, which elevate the tree to the status of one of India's most valuable medicinal plants. The Charak Samhita describes its therapeutic effects. In various Ayurvedic formulas, all components of the tree—including the stem, bark, root, leaf, flower, seed oil, and fruit at any stage of ripeness—are employed. It has been used for millennia in India for food benefits as well as for a number of additional therapeutic uses. The unripe fruit is highly advised for diarrhoea, particularly chronic diarrhoea, and is commonly taken as sherbet and murbha (jam). It works well in cases of persistent diarrhoea because it contains a lot of. Numerous polar and non-polar phytoconstituents found in aeglemarmelos play an important role in the plant's medicinal value. The unripe fruits of Aeglemarmelos' aqueous extract therefore have a preventive effect against IBD. A. marmelos decoction can somewhat manage giardiasis and rotavirus infections as well as a number of infectious diarrheal disorders caused by ETEC (Enteropathogenic Escherichia coli), EIEC (Enterotoxigenic

Escherichia coli), LT-producing ETEC, *Vibrio cholerae*, and *Shigella flexneri*. However, it is a crucial religious herb used for healing and is popular in Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and conventional medicine.

PLANT PROFILE (SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION)

Plant- Aapata

Kingdom- Plantae

Division- Magnoliophyta

Class- Magnoliopsida

Order- Fabales

Family- Fabaceae

Genus- Bauhinia

Species- B. racemosa

Botanical Name- Bauhinia racemosa

Description:

Bauhinia racemosa is a little, crooked tree with drooping branches that blooms from February to May. Fruit is a dark green, compact, oblong pod that is frequently twisted. Seasonal fruiting occurs all through the year. The bark is coarse and dark. The leaves are entire-margined, orbicular, bifoliate, and alternating. It can reach heights between three and five metres. The plant's scientific name is mountain ebony. Mountain ebony is the name of the plant; it is also known as Kachnal, Kanchanara, Sonpatta, Gul-e-anehnal, and Sona, Sonpatta or Apta in Marathi. It is frequently referred to as "bidi leaf tree."⁷ It is a rare therapeutic blooming shrub species with symbolic religious VALUE. It's an indigenous Indian tree. Because of the distinctive double leaves with a rough structure, it is quite simple to identify. It has tremendous religious significance in the Hindu religion. On the occasion of *Dussehra* (Hindu festival), Aapata plant leaves are exchanged like gold and looted from one to another as a ritual in Maharashtra. This tree has medicinal properties and is of immense importance in Ayurveda.

Medicinal Use:

Ayurveda, *Unani*, and *Sidha* indigenous systems of medicine have used the plant Bauhinia racemosa for thousands of years to treat a wide range of ailments, including headaches, fevers, skin and blood infections, jaundice, chronic dysentery, diarrhea, and leucorrhoea, malaria infections, ulcers, swollen glands, tumours, and cancer. Additionally, it is used as a contraceptive for women, to cure cattle food poisoning, and to soothe scorpion stings.

Plant Profile (Scientific Classification):

Plant- Vad

Kingdom- Plantae

Division- Magnoliophyta

Class- Magnoliopsida

Order- Urticales

Family- Moraceae

Genus- Ficus

Species- F. subg. Urostigma

Botanical Name- Buniyan

Description:

Ficus benghalensis is a swiftly growing tree that is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. Rainforests and monsoons in tropical and subtropical regions are where it is primarily found. The tree has a 20-meter height limit. However, when planted outside of the tropics, it rarely grows taller than 10 metres. It is most frequently seen in regions with heavy seasonal precipitation and is predicted to live for between 80 and 100 years. Additionally, it serves as India's national tree.

Medicinal Use:

The fig plant, Ficus benghalensis, does not harm people because it does not kill or stun animals. It is among the most well-known trees in the entire globe. The benefits of the banyan are numerous: First, because it covers a lot of ground, it can give shelter and shade. Additionally, it aids in the recovery of wildlife and the rainforest. Thirdly, this tree can serve as a barrier against some threats, such as cyclones, fires, and floods. He thinks that this tree provides defence against mambas, snakes, and scorpions. As a result, it is highly regarded in Hinduism and is revered as a sacred tree. It also has a variety of medical properties. People have utilized it in Ayurveda to treat a variety of illnesses.

CONCLUSION

One of the earliest types of religion in history is plant worship. Sacred and religious plants are also thought to have medicinal qualities. Selected religious medicinal plants are employed in both rituals and medical treatments. Therefore, we can infer from this survey how much individuals care about plant protection. It should be mentioned that the majority of sacred trees offer powerful healing effects. In light of this, it can be claimed that plants utilised in worship, rituals, and ceremonies have therapeutic effects.

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