



Exploring the religious plants and their uses in Devghat Dham, Chitwan

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Abstract

Nepal is one of the richest sources with respect to the occurrence of religious plants. Devghat Dham is one of the famous holiest place of central Nepal and also rich source of religious plants. The objective of this paper is to explore the socio cultural and religious value of plant species. Presented here are the descriptions of 50 religious plant species used traditionally by local people in the Devghat Dham for various religious activities. The species of plant were collected and identification by using participant observation and interview. Religious activities has played a significant role in conservation of plants.

Key Words: Religious plants, , religion, Devbhumi, worship, culture.

Introduction

Plants and its products of Nepal are important from economics and cultural point of view. It is the sources of energy, medicine and raw materials of industrial process. Plants provide food, medicine, energy, wood, shelter etc to the human beings. It provides major products to sustain our life. Human activities have been depending up on the plants and their products. Plants are used in several cultural & spiritual dimensions of human life.

Religion is a cultural system of behaviors & practices world views ethnics & social organization that related humanity to an order of existence. The study of religion encompasses a wide variety of academic disciplines, including comparative religion & social scientific studies. Religion as “relatively bounded system of belief, symbols and practices that address the nature of existence.”(Peter madndarille and Paul James). Edward Brunett defined religion as “belief in spiritual beings.”

Nepal is a multi lingual, multiethnic and multireligious country. Most of the peoples are Hindu where some are Buddhist, Christians, Muslims and others. All the Nepalese peoples of different religion have to perform pujas (religious rituals) on certain occasions and is itself partially responsible for producing for procuring the ritual objects necessary for them (Phole, 1990). These could be daily *puja* seasonal, monthly, annual, periodic

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and occasional.

Nepalese society has high value on *dharma & path Puja*. It helps to develop their belief, value, system, attitude opinion etc. This makes difference in their behavior, thinking of social customs on the basis of their own life system it includes number of activities like festivals, *Bhajan*, Dances etc. Many religious and rituals activities of society are carried out from dharma.

During celebration of various religious ritual people worshipped deities by using plant products. Some of the common social activities are construction of temple, pilgrimage, *chautara* etc. People celebrate religious festivals like *dashain*, *Tihar*, *Chhath*, *Teej* as well as various rituals activities like *Nawaran*, *bratabandha*, *Bibaha* etc. All such activities are performed by use of plants and their products since ancient time. our ancestors preserved our religion and cultural value that are called religious & cultural heritage. There is no religious rituals which doesn't require plants and their products.

Significance of study

Most of the religion and religious activities are our prides, identity, source of income, inspiration, creativity, history and civilization. (Sahayogee 2009). Religion has great significance in Nepal because it is the motivations force behind many activities of Nepalese people (Ethnic Himalaya). Religious heritages are closely related to people. If people practice their religious principle properly, they will be in discipline and help to develop harmony in the society.

Religious activities also enhance the conservation of natural environment various components of religious heritage like ponds, rivers, forest are part of natural environment components such as temple, statues, stupas and houses are physical environment therefore cultural heritage are integral part of an environment.

Study area

Devghat Dham is one of the great historic place of Nepal. It is Situated all Northern side of Chitwan District, Southern Part of Tanahu District and eastern part of Nawalparasi District. Hence, It is the tricentre of Tanahu, Chitwan and Nawalparasi District. Geographically, It is located between 84° 22' 30" & 84° 30 east longitude & 27° 42' 30" & 27°, 44', 30" North Latitude. Its elevation range is 200m to 575m from sea level. It is located at junction of trishuli and Kaligandaki river. It occupies 5434 hector land (Pokhrel 2015)

It is surrounded by tropical deciduous forest at southern region and sub-tropical forest towards Northern areas this was also called Devbhumi. This area boasts many natural features due to its geography and climate including forest, wild animals and birds.

It is one of the holiest place in hindu mythology as well as holy place for Hindu gods and goddess (Devghat Darpan, 2009). It lies 7 km far from Narayangardh city of chitwan and 150 km from capital city Kathmandu of Nepal.

Devghat is home to various temples and caves of Hindu gods, goddess & saints including sita's cave, Bashista cave, Harihar Temple, Galeshwor Asram, Bageshwori Temple, Sitaram Temples, Radhakrishna Temple, Bishwashanti Dharmashala etc. Various religious activities are performed in Maheshasram, yogi Narhari Nathasram, Galeshwor asram and Harihar Asram. Maghesakranti is one of the ceremony with largest gatherings of people in Devghat Dham. Hindu pilgrims bath at the junction of Kaligandaki and Trisuli Rivers in special holy day.

Materials and Methodology

The information was collected from both site of Devghat i.e. Chitwan district site and Tanahu site where these two sites are separated by Trisuli Rivers. The old people of Devghat Dham area, students of Gurukulum, Guru purohit, Jyotishi were intensively interviewed and obtained information.

A total 4 days in separate times was spent for the field work in the study area. Structured interview methods were used for the study. A direct and Participant observation was also applied to collect information.

Collection of secondary information during the secondary data were collected from different reports of religious plants studies done in different place available in library of Birendra Multiple Campus, book shop of Devghat Dham various journals articles books were obtained from related literature and mail access. The plant specimens those were collected and presented were identified with the help of experts, local peoples and literatures

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Devghat Dham area of Chitwan and Tanahun district is rich in biodiversity. There are numerous plant species used for several purposes like religion and ceremonies, medicine, fire wood etc. A total of 50 plant species representing 28 family have been reported to be in use in festival and ceremonies of study area (fig.1). Both the

cultivated and non cultivated plant species have been mentioned in the study. Among these species, 19 trees, 11 shrubs and 20 herbs. According to their habit among them 25 are cultivated 15 wild and 10 are both (fig.2).

Different parts of plant are used for different purpose. Some plant parts may be used for number of gods and goddess and various parts of plant may be used for single gods and goddess. specially fruits, flowers, seeds, stem, rhizome, root and whole plants are used in religious purposes.

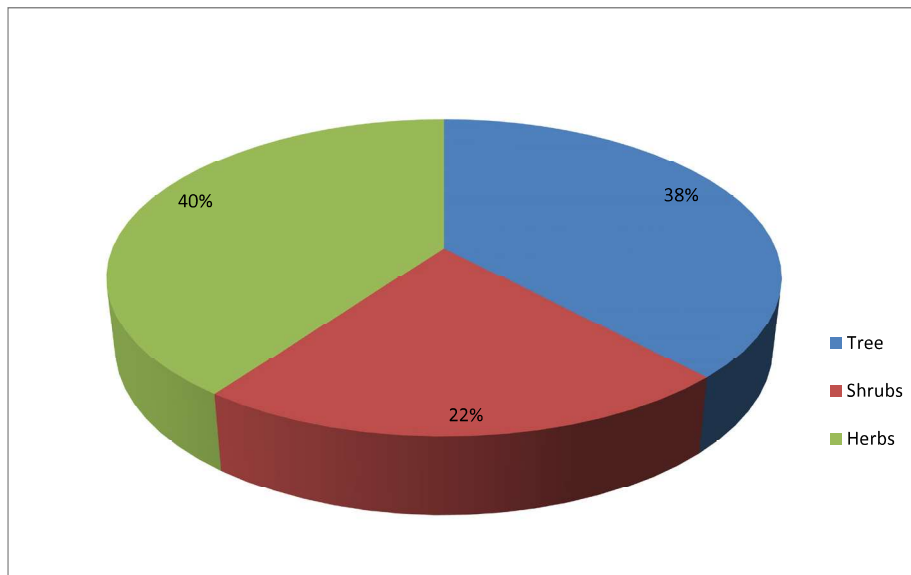


Fig. 1

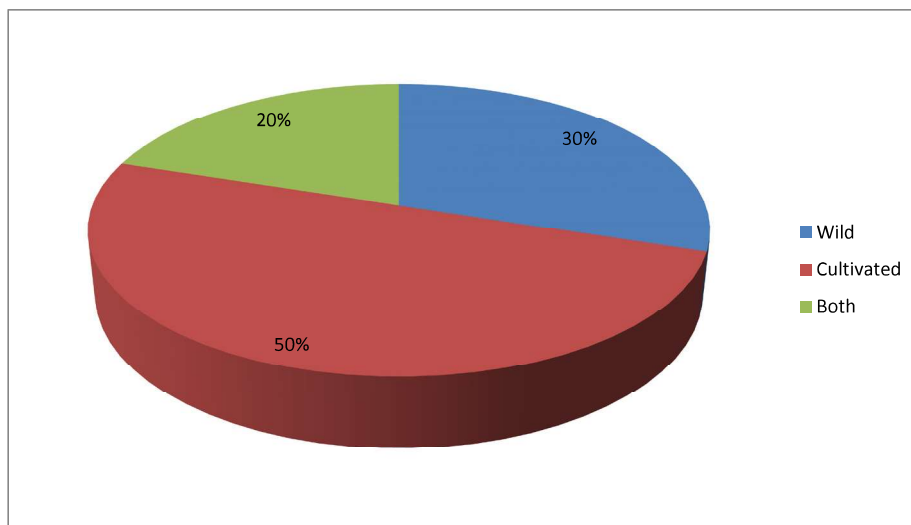


Fig. 2

Plants used ritually

The ritual value is most important in different community of the world. In different society they have their own rituals and believe to sustain their environment in Hindu mythology. The complete compound leaf of belpatra (*Aegle marmelos*) is used to worship *Shiva Bhagwan* in ritual activities i.e. Rudripuja and ShivaRatri in the naming ceremony (Nwaran) of brahman after 11 days of newly born baby. They use leaf of plant like Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), bar (*ficus benghalensis*), dubo (*Cynodon dactylon*), kush (*Desmostachya bibinata*), aank (*calotropis gigantea*) Dumri (*ficus racemosa*), Tite pati (*Artimesia india*), mango (*Mangifera indica*)

The ceromany *bratabandha* of male child while reaches ten years, stick of *painyu* (*Prunus cerasoids*), palas, Leaf of *kush* (*Desmostachy bipinata*) are most essential.

Peoples perform several ritual activities like *Bibaha*, Chaurasi puja Pitrishraddha etc. All such activities performed by using leaf rhizomes, seeds, stem, flowers and fruits of plant, species such as bar, peepal, shree khanda (*santalum album*) Jau, til, besar, titepati etc.

Use of plant in Ceremony & Festivals.

In several communities they celebrate many ceremonies and festivals linked with the religion that control and binds the community member. people celebrate swosti shanti puja, diwali, Shrawan Sakranti, Maghe Sakranti, Janai Purnima, Teej, Dashain Tihar, Chhat, Shiva ratri etc. During these ceremonies and festivals various plants species plays the vital role to perform celebration. The shrawan sakranti, the first day Shrawan, people celebrate lutophalne puja by using kurilo (*Asparugus racemous*) Siudi, (*Eupherbia roylena*), Siru (*Imperata cylindrica*), Lemon (*Citrus*), Rice (*Oryza Sativa*) in the evening. Bimiro (*Citrus Media*), Okhar (*Junglans regia*), Katus (*Castanopsis sp*), Marigold (*Tagetus Patula*) are essential plants to celebrate *tihar* festivals. Jamara is the sign of Dashain festival. People grow seedling of maize (*zea mays*) and Jau (*Hordeum vulgare*) in dark place to make *jamara*. People use Bhang (*cannabis sativa*) Dhaturu (*Datura stramonium*) and Bel patra (*Aegle marmelus*) to celebrate shiva Ratri. In different rituals and ceremony people use different plants and their parts. The plants are used in purification of environmental materials (Sapkota 2013). People offer specific plants such as dubo for Ganesh, Yellow & white flower of galaicha (*Plumeria sp*) for Pitri, Belpatra for lord shiva, Tulsi, Kush, Peepal for Vishnu and lakshmi goddesses.

People worship them as the symbol of god and goddesses. Several sacred plants are also mentioned in ancient holy books, including Bhagwat Gita, Ved Ramayan, Mahabharat etc.

Conclusion

The present study shows that the people of Devghatdham area use many plant species in religious ceremonies like *PitriShraddha*, marriage, *bratabandha*, *bastupuja* and festivals to worship gods and goddesses. They have good knowledge of using and conserving the plant species in the area. The study will help to conserve the faith of our religious activities and in turn will help to conserve biodiversity of our useful plants. There is a strong need to initiate peoples participation, training for promoting the indigenous knowledge and conserving the religious plants through traditional knowledge. The establishment of religious forest at the holy place should be managed by national policy.

The list of plant worshipped in gods and goddesses can be shown in following tables:

S.N.	Nepali Name	Species	Family	Nature	Ritual	Use Parts
1	Aank	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Asclpidaceae	Shrub	Nwaran	L.S.
2	Amala	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>	Phyllanthaceae	Tree	All	Wb
3	Aanp	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Anacardiaceae	Tree	All	L.S.
4	Asuro	<i>Justicia adhatoda</i>	Acanthaceae	Shrub	Samidha	Br.
5	Babiya	<i>Eulaliopsis binnata</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	L.
6	Bans	<i>Bambusa bambusa</i>	Poaceae	Shrub	All	S.L.
7	Bar	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Moraceae	Tree	All	L. W.
8	Baramasa	<i>Hibiscus rosa sinensis</i>	Malvaceae	Shrub	All	FL.
9	Barle	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	Gr.
10	Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Rutaceae	Tree	Shivaratri	L.
11	Besar	<i>Curcuma angustifolia</i>	Zingiberaceae	Herb	All	Rh.
12	Bhang	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Cannabaceae	Herb	Shivaratri	L & Se.
13	Bimiro	<i>Citrus medica</i>	Rutaceae	Shrub	Tihar	Fr.
14	Chameli	<i>Jasminum sp</i>	Oleacea	Shrub	All	Fl.
15	Dhatura	<i>Datura Stramonium</i>	Solanaceae	Herb	Shivaratri	Fr. Se.

16	Dubo	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	Wb.
17	Dumri	<i>Ficus glomerata</i>	Moraceae	Tree	All	L.
18	Galaincha	<i>Plumeria sp</i>	Apocynaceae	Tree	Pitrishraddha	Fl.
19	Gudawari	<i>Chrysanthemum sp</i>	Compositae	Herb	All	F1.
20	Gulab	<i>Rosa sp</i>	Rosaceae	Shrub	All	F1.
21	Jau	<i>Hordeum vulagre</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	Gr.
22	Kans	<i>Sacharum spontaneum</i>	Poaceae	Herb	Rishipanchhami	W.B.
23	Kadama	<i>Anthcephalus cadamba</i>	Rubiaceae	Tree	All	L.
24	Kapsa	<i>Gossypium arborium</i>	Malvaceae	Shrub	All	Fr.
25	Kapoor	<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>	Lauraceae	Tree	All	Ex.
26	Kera	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i>	Musaceae	Herb	All	WB
27	Khayer	<i>Accia catechu</i>	Leguminosae	Tree	Bratabandha	Br.
28	Kush	<i>Dsemostachya bipinata</i>	Poaceae	Herb	Al	L.
29	Makhamali Phool	<i>Gompherna globosa</i>	Compositae	Herb	Tihar	F
30	Mans	<i>Phaseolous mungo</i>	Leguminosae	Herb	All	Gr.
31	Painyu	<i>Prunus cerasoids</i>	Rosaceae	Tree	Bratabandha	Br.
32	Palas	<i>Bute monosperma</i>	Leguminosae	Tree	Bratabandha	Br.
33	Pan	<i>Piper bittle</i>	Piperaceae	Climber	Tihar	L.
34	Pine	<i>Pinus spp.</i>	Pinaceae	Tree	Rathjatra	W.
35	Peepla	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Moraceae	True	All	L.
36	Potato	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i>	Solanaceae	Herb	Sidda	Tu.
37	Rice	<i>Oryza sativa</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	Gr.
38	Rudraksha	<i>Elaeocarpus sphaericus</i>	Elaeocarpaceae	Tree	All	Fr.
39	Sal	<i>Shorea robusta</i>	Diprercarpaceae	Tree	All	L.
40	Shreek hand	<i>Santalum album</i>	Santalaceae	Tree	All	Stem
41	Siundi	<i>Euphorbia royaleana</i>	Eupherbiaceae	Shrub	Bastu puja	Wb.
42	Supari	<i>Areca cathechu</i>	Palmaceae	Tree	Al	Fr.
43	Sayapatri	<i>Ficus benzamina</i>	Moraceae	True	All	L.
44	Til	<i>Sesamum indium</i>	Pedaliaceae	Herb	All	Le.
45	Titepati	<i>Artemisia indica</i>	Compositae	Shrub	All	L.F1
46	Tori	<i>Brassica campestris</i>	Cruciferae	Herb	All	Gr.
47	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Lamiaceae	Herb	All	WB

48	ukhu	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	Poaceae	Herb	All	Wb
49	Sayapatri	<i>Tagetes erecta</i>	Compositae	Herb	All	Fl.
50	Parijat	<i>Nyctanthus arbortristis</i>	Nyctaginaceae	Tree	All	Fl.

F1 – Flower, Fr – Fruit, WB- Whole body Gr : Grain Br – Branch S – Stem, L Leaf, Se – Seed, Ex- Extract, Tu – Tuber, Rh – Rhizome

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