

# A STUDY OF SOME SACRED PLANTS IN ANANTHAGIRI RESERVE FOREST OF VIKARABAD DISTRICT, TELANGANA STATE

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**Abstract:** Sacred groves are the pockets of almost climax vegetation. Preserved on religious grounds. They are located in the remote tribal areas. There are many plants grown near the temples, which are regarded as the sacred plants by different ethnic groups of the country. Sacred groves are not only the sacred ecosystems functioning as a rich repository of nature's unique biodiversity, but also a product of the socio - ecological philosophy that our fore fathers have been cherishing since days. In India, from time immemorial, the concept of conservation of nature has been carefully woven in to the various religious beliefs and customs. Sacred groves are significant also in tracing the past history area they act as model for social forestry, as they help in finding out the species composition in particular geographical area. The groves replicate the situation of the natural forest to a considerable. Sacred groves are also the home of many medicinal plants which not only help in curing several diseases of the rural population but also keep alive the heritage of traditional system of Indian medicine. Tribal folklore is rich in Magico-religious beliefs and taboos. Sacred groves are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna of the past. In the district many centers are considered under sacred grove category.

**Keywords:** Sacred groves, local communities, Vikarabad district

## INTRODUCTION

Sacred groves are small groves that vary in size from a few hectares to a few kilometers protected by local communities as being the sacred residences of local deities and sites for religio - cultural rituals. There are about 14,000 sacred groves. In India various Gods and Goddesses are worshipped in Hindu religion throughout India, various plant parts like bark, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds are offered to Gods. There are many plants grown near the temples, which are regarded as the sacred plants by different ethnic groups of the country. Sacred groves are not only the sacred ecosystems functioning as a rich repository of nature's unique biodiversity, but also a product of the socio - ecological philosophy that our fore fathers have been cherishing since days. In India, from time immemorial, the concept of conservation of nature has been carefully woven in to the various religious beliefs and customs. Tribal folklore is rich in Magico-religious beliefs and taboos. They believe that some Gods and deities reside in forests. The famous Indian botanist, J.D Varthk has museums of living giant trees, a treasure house of rare, endemic and endangered species, a dispensary of medicinal plants, and a garden for botanist, a gene bank for economically important organisms, a paradise for nature lovers and a lab for environmentalists. These sacred groves are commonly undisturbed from human interference due to religious beliefs. Sacred groves are assumed to be an abode of the forest God. Sacred groves may be termed as the natural islands of climax vegetation maintained and preserved for centuries in the name of God, a village deity or a forest spirit usually looked after by the local communities but seldom touched for any kind of its produce. Sacred groves are also the home of many medicinal plants which not only help in curing several diseases of the rural population but also keep alive the heritage of traditional system of Indian medicine. Very rare and economically important medicinal plants inhabit the groves Hindu people celebrate different festivals on various religious occasions throughout the year. In these ceremonies people use various plants and their parts to perform different rituals and rites. The plants, which are used in religious ceremonies, are considered sacred. They are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna a single or cluster of sacred trees. This amazing and rich sacred plants are getting depleted these days as Many industries are leaving harmful gases into the atmosphere which mixes with the air and makes it toxic and eventually leads to acid rain which affects the growth of sacred plants. Human activities such as urbanization may lead to decrease in the forest level leading to ecological imbalance. Due to all this reasons plants are affected by some air borne diseases also Habitat destruction, Habitat fragmentation, over exploitation of resources, invasion of exotic species, pollution, Global environmental changes and predators have been main reason for the destruction of sacred plants. All this leave adverse effect on us such as Loss of valuable Gens, Loss of cultural diversity, Loss of ecosystem etc, .Hence it is our duty to save the Sacred plants by some of the measures like, Protection of Habitat, Preventing the over exploitation of sacred plants, Reducing the pollution, Checking deforestation and promoting afforestation, Restriction of exoctic species, public awarenass.

## HISTORY OF SACRED GROVES OF VIKARABAD DISTRICT

Sacred groves (SGs) are small groves that are specific places which are protected and conserved by the local communities as being the sacred residences of local deities and sites for religious and cultural rituals. They serve as valuable store houses of biodiversity. They are part of biological heritages and systems that has helped to preserve the representative genetic resources existing for generations. Sacred groves are the important places in which biodiversity is preserved in mostly undisturbed condition because of certain taboos and religious beliefs. Sacred groves are ancient natural sanctuaries that have supported the growth of several interesting and rare species of flora and fauna of the past. In the district many centers are considered under sacred grove category. Places of sacred groves. In the above sacred groves species like *Achyranthes aspera*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Butea monosperma*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Cannabinus sativa*, *Clerodendrum indicum*, *Cynodon* sp., *Eclipta prostrate*, *Ficus benghalensis*, *Ficus glomerata*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Ficus retusa*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Hordeum vulgura*, *Lawsonia inermis*, *Madhuca indica*, *Mangifera indica*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Pongamia glabra*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Saraca indica*, *Streblus asper*, *Syzygium jambolanum*, *Tamarindus indica* and *Tectona grandis* are commonly found in this district.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF SACRED GROVES

They are part of biological heritages and systems that has helped to preserve the representative genetic resources existing in the surrounding regions for generation. Sacred groves were a feature of the mythological landscape and the cult practice. Altogether the taboos, self-imposed restrictions and extra care exhibited by the community have significantly contributed in preserving the groves intact and in good shape there by conserving the whole range of biodiversity that is housed in it. The sacred groves offer manifold ecological benefits in conservation of biodiversity. In fact the sacred groves represent the first major effort in conserving the biodiversity. The sacred groves also provide an ideal surviving habitat to several species of endemic flora and fauna.

### ABOUT VIKARABAD DISTRICT

Vikarabad was founded and is named after fifth Paigah Amir (premier noble) H.E. Nawab Sir Vikar-ul-Umrah Bahadur, Sikander Jung, Iqbal-ud-Daula and Iqtadar-ul-Mulk, Nawab Muhammed Fazaluddin Khan KCIE served as prime minister of Hyderabad State and Berar Province between 1893 and 1901. This district central part of the Decan plateau and lies in between 17° 20' and 18° 20' of North latitudes and 77° 54' and 79° of East longitudes at Mean sea level 625.67mts. The forest cover is classified as a Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous type. Categorized, under group 5 A/C-3 type of forest. The forest is of inferior type because of less rainfall, poor soil conditions and ever increasing biotic influence. The climate of the area is characterized by a hot summer of long duration and generally a dry weather, except during South-West monsoon season. The average annual rainfall is about 960mm, the bulk of which is received through the South West monsoon during June to September. The types of soils are predominantly black and red. The Mandals under the study are partly covered by the forest area with interspersed human habitations, small villages and tribal thandas.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Intensive field work was undertaken by the author for a period of five years from January 2007 to December 2011. Good rapport was established with the people locally well known herbal healers during these visits various religious people who are still practicing traditional medicine are identified, religious ceremonies were made to collect the information different folk role group of people who use plants materials in different rituals, ceremonies and any other religious purposes. The information on medicinal uses of the plants was also gathered from the local and folk role people residing in the interior areas of the district and the published literature. The data on the botanical names, family, vernacular names, religious virtues, parts used and medicinal uses along with active principle and status were also mentioned in the work. Important voucher specimens have been kept in the Herbarium, Department of Botany, SAP College Vikarabad.

## SACRED GROVES FLORA OF VIKARABAD DISTRICT

Botanical name	Botanical name	Religious virtue	Parts used	Diseases Cured	Availability status
Amaranthaceae	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>	The plant is offered to the Hindu deity Ganesh during holy month of Badrapada.masam	Whole plant	Fever, Tooth problem, Scorpion sting	Wild
Anacardiaceae	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Leaves are used in all religious ceremonies; twigs are used as samidha and as offering to sacred fire (Havan kunda).	Leaves, fruits, bark, seeds	Leaves are used for cough, asthma, bronchitis, diarrhea, fever, diabetes and high blood pressure; fruits are digestive given in hemorrhoids of uterus, lungs and intestine; laxative and diuretic, seeds anthelmintic, bark is useful in amoebic dysentery.	Cultivated
	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Twigs are used as samidha and offered to sacred fire (Havan kunda)	Latex Unripe fruits.	Heal cracks Unripe fruits	Cultivated
		Used in death rituals	Whole plant	Cough and Fever	Wild
Arecaceae	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. Ln. Narikol	All religious, rituals, ceremonial sacrifices etc from cradle to grave, coconut plays very important role. Its leaves are also used in decorating Marriage gate	leaves	Coconut water cooling, diuretic, nutritive, aphrodisiac used in dysentery and diarrhoea.	Cultivated
Asclepidaceae	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R.Br.	Leaves and flowers are used to worship lord Shiva and Ganesha	Letex	Bone Fever	Wild
	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R.Br.	Ganesh puja, shiva Hanuman puja	Whole plant and flower	Cough, asthma, fever	wild
Asteraceae	<i>Eclipta prostrata</i> (L.) L.	Used in death rituals, Nepali people used the plants at the time of offering panda.	Whole plant	Leaves used for cough and fever, used in hepatic and spleen enlargements and in skin problems, root emetic and purgative, applied in wounds	Wild
	<i>Tagetes erecta</i> L.	Wreath (Mala) made of flowers used in Bhatriditiya, a brother-sister's festival.	Flower, bark, root, and whole plant	Infusion of herbs used against rheumatism, cold and bronchitis. Leaves and flowers used as carminative, diuretic and vermifuge.	Cultivated
Dioscoreaceae	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> L.	Tubers regarded sacred boiled and eaten in Magh Bihu	Tuber	Tubers used for abscess and ganglionar inflammation, tubers used in piles, dysentery	Wild
Fabaceae	<i>Pongamia glabra</i> (L.) Pierre	Marriage Ceremony	Leaves	feaver	Wild

Lamiaceae	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Hindus plant this tree in their houses as a holy plant and offer a diya to it.	Leaves	Coughs, Ringworm, Skin diseases and Earache	Cultivated
	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Puja and Prosad in Kati Bihu, Assamese people plant the sapling and kindle a diya under it, the disciples of Lord Krishna, Chaitayanya wear 'Tulsi Mala' around their necks	Whole palnt	Leaves used for coughs, inflammations, ringworm and other skin diseases, earache, root is given in Malaria, root soil used for skin disease.	Cultivated
Lythraceae	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.	Marriage Ceremony	Leaves	Skin disease, Typhoid	Cultivated
	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.	Marriage ceremony and sacrifice.	Leaves	Leaves used as cooling agents, hair dye, used in skin disease, tuberculosis and typhoid.	Cultivated
Malvaceae	<i>Gossypium arboretum</i> L.	Cotton used in Diya and all religious ceremonies, sacrificial thread 'lagun' used by Brahmins	Roots, seeds	Roots diuretic, used in diarrhea, dysentery, leprosy and skin disease, seeds used in gonorrhea	Cultivated
Meliaceae	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> Juss. L.	Twigs are hanged over the doors when there is smallpox in epidemic form. Twigs are also used widely in festival of Bonalu.	Twigs and leaves	Tooth Problems, Skin problems	Wild
Mimosaceae	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce	Festaval of Dasara	Leaves	Un wanted hairs	Wild
Moraceae	<i>Ficus baghalensis</i> L.	Marriage ceremony	Bark and latex	Powder of bark and latex are applied in rheumatic pains, infusion of bark is effective in diabetes, dysentery, gonorrhea and seminal weakness.	Wild
	<i>Ficus glomerata</i> Roxb.	Used in Marriage ceremony	Stem Bark Fresh Fruits.	Snake bite Red discharge Diarrhoea	Wild
	<i>Ficus racemosus</i> L.	Ceremonial sacrifice, Mising people eat the tender leave in various rituals. and Tribes people make dish from the leaves for any religious festivals	Bark and latexan fruit	Used for piles, and diarrhea, fruits are carminative bark anti-diabetic.	Wild
	<i>Ficus religeosa</i> L.	Vishnu and Pitri puja, in Yayna Karma, marriage, 'Upanayan'	Bark, fruits	Bark used for gonorrhea, young shoots and fruits laxative, fruits used in asthma.	Wild
	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Used in Marriages and 'Upanayan'	Stem bark	Wounds, Sprains	Wild
	<i>Ficus retusa</i> L.	This leaf is one of the pancha bilwas and used in Devi pooja	Leaf		

	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i> L.	Used in Marriage ceremony	Leaves, Roots	Hair growth Piles	Wild
	<i>Streblus asper</i> Lour.	A Widower whose spouse died untimely, marries a 'Saura' tree to overcome the ill effect of the planets after which he can marry again	Leaves, bark, roots	Ulcers, Sinuses, Swellings and boils, fevers, diarrhea and dysentery	Wild
	<i>Musa sapientum</i> L. Ln. Kol	Satya Narayan Puja, Prosad, Mandap and all other religious ceremonies, leaves used as plates for prosad, in Assamese society it is a sacred plant.	Whole plant	Fruits used in loose motion and flower juice mixed with curd given in dysentery and menorrhagia.	Cultivated and wild
Nymphaeaceae	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Ceremonial, puja and sacrifice.	Whole plant	Roots used for ringworm, dysentery and dyspepsia, seeds used to stop vomiting, diuretic, anti-fungal, flowers astringent and cooling	Wild
Papilionaceae	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lamk.) Taub.	Flowers offered to gods in 'Holy' festival	Bark	fever	Wild
		Flowers are using in 'Holy' festival	Bark	Piles, Tumors and menstrual disorder, antiseptic and cooling	Wild
Peperaceae	<i>Piper betle</i> L.	In all puja and sacrifice betel leaves are important.	Leaves	Free digestion	Cultivated
Poaceae	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers. Ln	Ganes puja, Shiv puja and in any other sacred rituals	Whole plant	Hemostatic and in uterine hemorrhage.	: Wild
	<i>Horduem vulgure</i> L.	Used in Marriage Ceremony	Seeds	Improve Digestion	Cultivated
	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	In all Poja and sacrifice rice is used, mixed with ghee, sesame used in fire sacrifice (Hom). The use of 'Rice tika' in the forehead is seen in some Hindu communities.	Grains	Leaves are used for asthma, , fever,	Cultivated
	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers. Ln	Ganes puja and in any other sacred rituals	Whole plant	Body cooling Diarrhoea	Wild
	<i>Demostachya bipinnata</i> . Stapf.	Rishi and Pitri puja, Kushasan, in every ritual.	Root	Roots used as diuretic, galactagogue, in Ashma and jaundice	Wild
Rhamnaceae	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> Lam.	The plant twigs used to expel the spirits from the house or from their compound by some tribal people of this region.	Leaves, fruits, root	Roots are useful for fever, wounds and ulcer, leaves used in typhoid fever, fruits are aphrodisiac, seeds used in pox.	Cultivated, wild
Rutaceae	<i>Citrus medica</i> L	Ceremonial sacrifice	Roots, Fruits		Cultivated
	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> L	Shiva Pooja cannot be performed without its leaf (Bilwa)	Leaves and Fruits	Diarrhoea, Dysentery and Skin Problems	Wild

Santalaceae	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Wood paste (Chandan) and wood stick are used in all pujas. The widows take white chandan spot on their foreheads.	Wood	Paste of wood stick applied on normal burns and prickly heat	Wild and cultivated.
Sapotaceae	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i> var. <i>latifolia</i> (Roxb.)Achev	Marriage Ceremony	Stem bark	Body pains Dog bite.	Wild
Solanaceae	<i>Datura metel</i> L.	Shiv Puja specially in Shivaratri	Leaves, seeds	Leaves used in Asthama, epilepsy, seeds are used in leprosy and dog bite.	Wild
Verbenaceae	<i>Clerodendrum indicum</i> (L.)Kuntze	For worshipping fire	Roots, leaves	The bark of root is used for Asthma, Chest pain, cough; leaves are useful for Cholera and fever.	
	<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Roxb. Ln.	Ceremonial sacrifice	Leaf	Cough and cold	Wild
	<i>Clerodendrum indicum</i> (L.) Kuntze	Used for worshipping Fire	Roots, Leaves	Asthma, Chest pain, cough, Cholera and Fever	Wild
	<i>Vitex nigundo</i> L.	Twigs used in Nepali marriage, in worshipping jungle god	Leaves	Leaves are used in blister, boil, body ache, cold, cough, fever, gum trouble, piles and rheumatic pain.	wild
Zingiberaceae	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Marriage ceremony and few other rituals	Rhizomes	Turmeric powder is antiseptic, used for skin disease, cough, cold and asthma.	Cultivated

## RESULTS

Altogether 47 different plant species have been identified as sacred plants by different ethnic groups of Vikarabad district. Though there is many more information about sacred plants but only some of the most commonly used plants having medicinal value are taken into consideration. During this project work some important information have been unearthed. Few such informations are given here below. There is a long experienced traditional belief among the people that they have selected some plants which are edible or not edible during or after the religious works. According to Gautamiya Tantra during the religious works, a person should eat boiled sunned rice and ghee. The Agasthya Samhita opines that the following materials may be eaten during the religious works. These materials are *Cocos nucifera*, *Musa sapientum*, *Mangifera indica*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *Terminalia chebula*, *Oryza sativa*, *Vigna radiata*, *Sesamum indicum*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Chenopodium album*, *Chorcorus capsularis*, *Raphanus sativa*, *Citrus aurantifolia*, *Citrus aurantium* etc. Plants not edible before or during religious works: According to Yoginitantra the following plants should not be taken before or during the religious works. The plants are *Tamarindus indica* (*Teteli*), *Cajanus cajan* (*Urohi*), *Benincasa hispida*, *Cocos nucifera* (*Narikol*) etc. The widows should not eat onion, all kinds of spices and chilly.

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