



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Plants of Temples and Religious Places in Khandesh Region (Maharashtra): An Ethnobotanical Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Plants have been, since time immemorial, the focus of religious purposes for many human societies worldwide. Because of efficacious use in religious aspects, some plant species are said to be important. Certain plants are held sacred due to their intimate association with special locations like temple courtyards. These locations are easily overlooked for scientific investigations. People are closely associated with the plant-wealth in such places as well although on religious ground. These need to be tapped for indigenous wisdom for human welfare. The present authors inventorised three districts of Khandesh region (Maharashtra) to divulge plantlore. Total 28 species belonging to 27 genera and 21 angiospermic families are presently focussed touching four aspects viz., sacredness, miscellaneous uses, cosmetics and medicinal utilities. The worshippers, trustees and people intimately associated with temples and religious places have been interviewed to tap down traditional ethnobotanical information. This work provides an account of religious and cultural ways of conserving biodiversity. At the same, these places help improve local environment. Further studies in a country like India are desired to unearth the potentials of religious locations.

**Keywords:** Sacred plants, Temples, Khandesh, Ethnobotany

## INTRODUCTION

The region of Khandesh occupies a north-western part in the state of Maharashtra (India). Presently, it is comprised of three districts viz., Jalgaon, Dhule and Nandurbar. Satpura Mountain on its north-western side, while few extended ranges of Western Ghats also extend on south westernly directions. In general, the forests are dry deciduous type. Agriculture is although main stay, some tribal people like Bhil, Pawara, Kokani, Mavachi, etc. also use bioresources from wild. The region is dominated by Hindus. People from other religious also dwell in this region. Khandesh region has been well investigated floristically (Patil, 2003; Kshirsagar and Patil, 2008) and ethnobotanically (Pawar and Patil, 2008), apart from intensive studies on agrobiodiversity and homestead gardens (Khairnar, Patil and Patil, 2020). Recently, the medicinal knowledge of herbal vendors have been also tapped (Ahirrao and Patil, 2018, 2020). However, the literature resume indicated that the temple courtyards (religious places) have been ignored botanically (Sood *et al.*, 2011). The treasure-trove of these public and socio-religious places deserve special efforts. It was, therefore, thought worthwhile to extend ethnobotanical investigation in these places which may reveal some more information on this line. The results of this investigation are being published (Khare *et al.*, 2020, 2021), the present one is a part of this investigation.

## METHODOLOGY

The present authors inventorised temple courtyards, religious places and festivals of different tribes and Hindu people in Jalgaon, Dhule and Nandurbar districts of Khandesh region of Maharashtra during 2013 to 2017. Trustees, worshippers and individuals closely concerned with these places were inventorised. Plants or botanicals were determined by using regional, state and district floras (Cooke, 1958; Sharma, *et al.*, 1996; Singh *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Patil, 2003; Kshirsagar and Patil, 2008). Information was tapped down w.r.t. native plant name, part used, medicinal recipes, doses and diseases treated. Plants used in worships or any other religious purposes, besides miscellaneous uses were documented carefully. The information accrued is provided in the Table-I.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous plantlore is developed and preserved in different societies world over. It is maintained by native people through their constant observations and experimentations, besides timely interactions. It is thus developed as a result of the co-existence and co-evolution of native cultures and their traditional practices. Every

society has unique wisdom about their ambient plant-wealth. Plants are utilised for both concrete and abstract uses. Apart from material use, plants are interwoven with rites, rituals, worships, religious, ceremonies, etc. Temples and such other religious places have been maintained by every society. These are places where generally sacred plants are maintained. In some temples, particularly of tribal societies, boundaries of their temples are not certain. Some wild plant species growing in such places are also thought sacred. Krishna and Amirthalingam (2014), Sood *et al.* (2005, 2011), Patil (2020) emphasized importance of sacred plants in India. Sharma (2019) surveyed ethnomedicoreligious plants of Assam. The present authors inventorised plants in temple courtyards as an exclusive topic of research. They extended ethnobotanical inventories in temple yards or religious places of both tribal and non-tribal people in Khandesh region of Maharashtra. These observations are presented in the following.

**(i) Floristic Composition:** This communication includes information on plants thought sacred or employed for religious purposes. A total of 28 angiospermic species belonging to 27 genera and 21 families. Of these, the dicotyledonous taxa have major share (25 species, 24 genera and 18 families). However, the monocotyledonous ones are represented by few taxa (03 species, 03 genera and 03 families).

**(ii) Habital Categories:** The plant species employed for varied purposes belong to different habital categories. These are trees (12 species), shrubs and herbs (06 each) and climbers (04 species). The arborescent categories viz., trees, shrubs and bamboos are perennial bioresources and can be used nearly throughout all seasons of a year. The herbaceous are useful seasonally. Their status regarding wildness or cultigens is: (i) exclusively cultivated (03), exclusively wild (18), either wild or cultivated (07). The figures in parenthesis denote number of species.

The plant species inhabiting these places have been revealed for four different aspects viz., (i) sacredness or religious ones, (ii) miscellaneous purposes, (iii) cosmetic applications, and (iv) medicinal utilities.

**(i) Sacredness:** As many as 09 species belonging to 08 genera and 07 families are in vogue as botanicals for various worships of both tribal and non-tribal (Hindus) people for rosaries, to keep away evil spirit, useful in festivals, in decoration of pandals of marriages and religious ceremonies and also thought abodes of gods. Native people have deep faith in these plant taxa traditionally. They employ various plant parts such as seeds, fruits, inflorescence, wood, bamboo, dried plants for raising roofs of religious

structures and 7-leaved twigs. Even occurrence of some plant species is thought auspicious.

(ii) **Miscellaneous Purposes:** Out of 28 species, only 04 species belonging to 03 genera and 03 families are reported for various purposes such as: sources of fire wood, agricultural tool handles, rat and snake repellent, furniture and to raise abodes.

(iii) **Cosmetics:** Only 04 plant species are used to promote hair growth, to prevent hair fall, as tooth paste and tooth-brush.

(iv) **Medicinal Utilities:** This inventory revealed fair a large number human diseases or afflictions treated such as: indigestion (02), antiseptic (03), cuts (06), wounds (08), rheumatism (01), swellings (01), joint pains (02), diabetes (02), urinary infection (01), cough (04), gum swelling (01), tooth-ache (01), throat infection (01), malaria (04), insect bite (05), skin diseases (03), abdominal pain (01), scabies (01), fever (05), dysentery (03), immunity (01), scorpion sting (04), body swelling (01), blood purification (01), cooling of body (01), memory loss (01), head-ache (01), bronchitis (01), asthma (01), jaundice (02), piles (01), arthritis (01), stomach-ache (02) and bone fracture (01). The figures in parenthesis stand for number of species employed to treat the respective disease or affliction. Maximum species are found useful for wounds (08), cuts (06) and fever (05) in descending order. Others are employed by 04, 03 and 01 species. Different recipes are advised such as paste (07), powder (05), oil (01), extract (08), decoction (12), juice (02) and latex (01). The figures in parenthesis denote number of use-reports. These recipes are prepared using various plant parts such as: leaves (20), roots (11), bark (15), stem (05), entire plants (04) and young twigs (02). The figure in parenthesis stand for number of applications. In addition to principal 28 species, two species are also used as supplementary e.g. ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc.) and lemon [*Citrus aurantifolia* (Christm.) Sw.]. Few domestic substances e.g. cane sugar, jaggery, honey, etc. are also added in preparations of various recipes.

It appeared from the above resume that temple yards and religious places harbour plants species not useful as sacred ones but also meet various human necessities. These species are easily available to the needy ones without any cost generally. Moreover, these religious places help conserve indigenous floral elements. There is hardly any compartment of human sustenance which is not served by the plant species introduced, maintained and conserved in these public locations on religious ground. The role played by the plant-wealth in such places is also dynamic and constant. Our country India is not merely a physical land mass. It is a vibrant and spiritually charged mass of land

where every component of nature is worshiped, nay respected. It is, therefore, appealed that such religious places should be inventorised scientifically for the welfare man and to know forces of conservation entwined with them.

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Table-I: Ethnobotany of Indigenous Sacred Plant In Khandesh Region			
Sr. No.	Botanical Name & Family	Local Name	Use Reports
1.	<i>Abelmoschus manihot</i> (L.) Medik Malvaceae	Kasturi bhendi, Ran bhendi	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Bhil tribe of Dhadgaon and Toranmal region believed that seeds if stored in house are auspicious.</p> <p>II. Occasionally the powder of seeds is used for the preparation of food for offering to god.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Bark paste is topically used as an antiseptic on cuts and wounds.</p> <p>II. A teaspoon powder of bark is mixed with coconut oil. The paste is used topically on rheumatism and swellings.</p> <p><b>Miscellaneous Uses:</b></p> <p>I. Fiber is used for domestic purpose. .</p>
2.	<i>Abrus precatorius</i> L. Papilionaceae	Gunj, Ratti	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Rosary of the seeds tied on the hand if a person obstructed by evil spirit.</p> <p>II. The tribal beliefs are the seeds are used for black magic in many regions by the tribals.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Root paste is used as antiseptic on cuts and wounds.</p> <p>II. A cup of leaf extract is diluted with a glass warm water. Half teaspoon ginger (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>) extract and three teaspoon honey is added in this extract. Two teaspoon of this mixture is given thrice a day in the treatment of the cough until its cure.</p> <p>III. In gum swelling, fresh leaves are chewed daily for 3-4 days.</p>
3.	<i>Abutilon indicum</i> L. Malvaceae	Sikka, Atti.	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Fruit of the plant is used in the worship of 'Gramdevta' in Pawra tribe.</p> <p>II. Presence of the plant in the forest is conceived as sacred thing by tribals.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Oil extracted from the roots is used topically on joint pain.</p> <p>II. A teaspoon powder of stem is mixed with a cup boiled water with two teaspoon sugar; this is prescribed twice a day in the treatment of diabetics.</p> <p>III. A teaspoon leaf powder is mixed with turmeric powder (<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.). It applied on the swellings as well as on the wounds.</p> <p>IV. Half cup bark extract is mixed in a cup of warm water with some jaggery. Two teaspoon of it thrice a day is advised in the treatment of urinary tract infection.</p>
4.	<i>Acacia chundra</i> Willd. Mimosaceae	Khair	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. The pods are buried around the four corners of the house for preventing the evil eye in Kokani tribe.</p> <p>II. Tribals celebrate Dindan or Ger festival. They dance during this festival. While</p>

			<p>dancing they uses 'Tiparya'(sticks) made from the wood of this tree.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Bark powder is recommended to use as tooth powder in the treatment of toothache.</li> <li>II. The bark paste is topically used in the treatment of boils and ulcer.</li> </ol> <p><b>Miscellaneous Uses:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Wood is used for handles of agricultural tools.</li> <li>II. Bark is also used as Kattha powder in chewing betel leaf (<i>Piper betle L.</i>)</li> </ol>
5.	<i>Acacia ferruginea</i> DC. Mimosaceae	Devbhabul	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Wood is used in to create fire (Agni) by Parshi community in some ritual.</li> <li>II. Inflorescence is used in the worship of Gramdevta by the tribals.</li> </ol> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. A cup of decoction of root is mixed with a teaspoon honey and half teaspoon ginger (<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Rosc.) extract. Two teaspoon of it thrice a day is prescribed in the treatment of throat infection until cure.</li> <li>II. A glass of bark decoction is mixed with three teaspoon honey. A cup of it, twice a day, is recommended in the treatment of malaria until it cures.</li> </ol> <p><b>Miscellaneous Uses:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Bark is also used as rat and snake repellent.</li> <li>II. Gum is edible.</li> </ol>
6.	<i>Acalypha indica</i> L. Euphorbiaceae	Kokali	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Occurrence of plant near abodes is thought auspicious.</li> </ol> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. A cup of decoction of whole plant is diluted with a cup warm water with two teaspoon cane sugar. Two teaspoon thrice a day is advised to cure the cough for six days.</li> <li>II. Leaf paste is topically applied on snake and insect bite.</li> <li>III. Paste of leaf is locally applied on skin diseases.</li> </ol>
7.	<i>Acorus calamus</i> L. Araceae	Vekhand; Yekhand	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Dried plants are tied to the roof of a house for prevention from the evils and bad spirits by Mauchi tribe</li> </ol> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. A cup decoction of the bark is mixed with a cup warm water with two teaspoon honey or jaggery is prescribed two teaspoon thrice a day in the treatment of abdominal pain.</li> <li>II. Paste of the stem is topically applied on scabies.</li> <li>III. A cup of bark decoction mixed with sugar or jaggery is prescribed, three teaspoon twice in a day, before sunrise and after sunset in the treatment of malaria.</li> </ol> <p><b>Miscellaneous Uses:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Dried plants are placed near above the door and windows for preventing the entry of snake.</li> </ol>



8.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr. Rutaceae	Bel phal, Bel mool, Bel.	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Leaves and fruits are commonly used in the worship of God Mahadev Shankar by Hindus.</p> <p>II. Rural and even urban people believe that Lord Mahadev resides in this tree, hence its leaves are offered religiously during worship.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Leaf juice, about half cup, is also taken orally for diabetes twice a day to control sugar.</p> <p>II. Leaf juice, about half cup, is taken to stop omitting.</p> <p>III. Leaf juice, about half cup, is taken once a day for a weak to cure dysentery</p>
9.	<i>Alstonia scholaris</i> R.Br. Apocynaceae	Saptaparn	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Seven leaved twig is used in the worship of Varundevta in the Toranmal and Dhadgaon region.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Milky latex of the tree is topically used as an antiseptic on the cuts and wounds.</p> <p>II. Half cup of root extract is mixed with two cup of boiled water with some of jaggery. It is given two teaspoon twice a day in the treatment of malaria up to ten days.</p> <p>III. Latex is also used topically in the case of snake bite.</p>
10.	<i>Andrographis echinoides</i> L. Acanthaceae	Kalmegh	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. A cup of decoction of the leaves mixed with a teaspoon sugar is prescribed twice a day for blood purification and improve the immunity.</p> <p>II. Half cup of root decoction diluted with a glass warm water. Three to four drops of lemon [<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i> (Christm.)Sw.] is added. This is prescribed thrice a day in the treatment of dysentery until cure.</p> <p>III. A glass of decoction of the leaves and stem is mixed three teaspoon sugar. Three teaspoon of it twice a day in the treatment of fever and malaria is advised.</p> <p>IV. Paste of the stem and leaf is topically used in case of scorpion sting.</p>
11.	<i>Anogeissus latifolia</i> (Roxb. Ex DC.) Wall. Combretaceae	Dhavda	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Paste of the bark is topically applied to treat body swellings.</p> <p>II. Two teaspoon powder of bark is mixed with a cup of water and prescribed as twice a day to check diabetics.</p> <p>III. Paste of the bark is topically used in the treatment of scorpion sting.</p>
12.	<i>Argyreia nervosa</i> (Burm. f.) Bojer Convolvulaceae	Samudrashok	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Boiled leaves are tied with the help of cloth on swellings and cuts.</p> <p>II. Half cup of fresh leaf extract is used as mouth wash in ulcer treatment.</p> <p>III. Root paste is topically applied on dog bite for ten days.</p>

13.	<i>Aristolochia bracteolata</i> Lamk. Aristolochiaceae	Kidamar	<b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. Root paste is topically used on snake and scorpion sting. II. Root paste is also useful topically on the skin infection.
14.	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i> Willd. Liliaceae	Shatavari, Chinyar	<b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. Stem is deeped in the coconut oil. This oil is used on the treatment of hair fall regularly in tribal region. II. Powder of stem is widely used for the nourishment of female fertility. III. A teaspoon root powder is prescribed with a glass of milk in a day to a mother for improving the immunity and maintains the level of breast milk. Two to three drops of leaf extract are dropped in nose to stop bleeding.
15.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss. Meliaceae	Kadu neem	<b>Sacred Aspect :</b> I. Healthy twig is used in used for making the Gudhi at the festival Gudhi padava. II. For the worship of Varun Dev god raining (called Pandav), the leaves are wrapped around the waist of a boy and others dance around him. The boy is called 'Dhondya'. Water is poured on Dhondya and people offer them some food grains. <b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. Young twig is used as tooth brush. II. Two spoonful of decoction of twig is useful on scabies. III. Leaf paste is applied on the cuts, wound used as an antiseptic. IV. Half cup of leaf juice leaf juice is taken once a day for blood purification prescribed for blood purification.
16.	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i> (L.) Wettst. Scrophulariaceae	Brahmi	<b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. Two drops of extract of the plant is dropped into the eyes for cooling effect. II. Decoction of whole plant is prescribed twice a day in the treatment of cough. III. Extract of the plant is given regularly thrice a day to the patient suffering from loss of memory. IV. A cup of extract of leaves is mixed with jaggery and is prescribed twice a day to treat headache.
17.	<i>Balanites aegyptiaca</i> (L.) Del. Balanitaceae	Hinganbet	<b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. Root paste is applied on insect bite.
18.	<i>Baliospermum raziana</i> Keshav et Yog. Euphorbiaceae	Danti	<b>Medicinal Uses :</b> I. A cup of decoction of leaf mixed with ginger ( <i>Zingiber officinale</i> Rosc.) is given to to treat the asthma and bronchitis. A teaspoon of it twice a day is advised. II. Half cup leaf extract is administered in the treatment of jaundice. III. Leaf paste also used as antiseptic on cut and wounds. IV. Root and leaf paste is also used locally in the treatment of piles.

19.	<i>Bambusa arundinacea</i> (Retz.) Willd. Poaceae	Kalak; Bambu.	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Dried bamboos are used to prepare 'Dholi' for carrying dead body.</p> <p>II. Long erect culms of Bambu are placed in a common place and other fuels are arranged around it on the day of Holi festival by tribals. It is then worshipped and ignited. The ignition ceremony is called 'Melada'.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Root paste is topically used in the treatment of skin problems.</p> <p><b>Miscellaneous Uses :</b></p> <p>I. It is used for house or hut construction in tribal area.</p> <p>II. Used for making furniture and various artifacts like table, chairs, various containers, pet's abode, brooms etc.</p>
20.	<i>Boswellia serrata</i> Roxb. Burseraceae	Salayi.	<p><b>Miscellaneous Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Ash of the bark is used as toothpaste.</p>
21.	<i>Bridelia retusa</i> Hook.f. Euphorbiaceae	Asana	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. A teaspoon bark powder is mixed with a cup warm milk. It is recommended at morning and evening against arthritis for a fortnight.</p> <p>III. Bark paste is topically applied on cuts and wounds.</p>
22.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub. Papilionaceae	Palas, Dhak	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Single plant found in the Sonkhamb village. It is believed that Lord Hanuman is stays inside the tree. So it is much auspicious in the region.</p> <p>II. Vaghdev festival is celebrated by the tribals. Branch of this tree is placed erect in a place. If a tiger looks at this branch, then it is supposed that the tiger will not harm anybody in this region.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Paste of stem bark is applied for rheumatism regularly.</p>
23.	<i>Cajanus cajan</i> (L.) Millsp. Papilionaceae	Tur, Tor.	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Roof prepared from dried stems is placed on house entry at the time of marriage ceremony to ward off evils eye in rural part of Khandesh.</p>
24.	<i>Cassia auriculata</i> L. Caesalpinaceae	Aawali	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Roots decoction is given three teaspoon twice a day in the treatment of fever for about a week.</p> <p>II. Whole plant powder, about a teaspoon, is given twice a day in the treatment of jaundice.</p>
25.	<i>Cissus quadrangularis</i> L. Vitaceae	Kandvel	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Root paste is applied on cuts and wounds topically.</p> <p>II. Half cup of decoction of roots is prescribed, teaspoon twice a day, to check dysentery.</p> <p>III. A cup of decoction of leaves and stem is prescribed three teaspoon twice a day in the treatment of stomach-ache.</p> <p>IV. Stem extract is applied in the treatment of bone fracture.</p>



			<p>V. Half cup decoction of stem is prescribed, teaspoon thrice a day, in the treatment of joint pain.</p> <p>VI. Stem paste is also applied to treat swellings.</p>
26.	<i>Cordia dichotoma</i> Forst.f. Boraginaceae	Bhokar	<p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. A cup of bark decoction is prescribed in the treatment of fever and dysentery. A teaspoon of it is advised for few days.</p>
27.	<i>Crataeva adansonii</i> DC. Capparidaceae	Waiwarna, Varuna.	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Leaves are used in the worship of gods and goddesses.</p> <p>II. Leaves are also used in decoration purposes during auspicious ceremonies.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. Decoction of bark is about two spoonful, advised to check stomach ache till cure.</p> <p>II. Bark paste is topically applied on the wounds and cuts as antiseptic.</p> <p>III. Decoction of bark is prescribed one teaspoon twice a day to control fever.</p>
28.	<i>Justicia adhatoda</i> L. Acanthaceae	Adulasa	<p><b>Sacred Aspect :</b></p> <p>I. Levees are used in worship of Vanadevta by tribals at Toranmal.</p> <p><b>Medicinal Uses :</b></p> <p>I. A cup of decoction of leaves is diluted in a cup of boiled water. Two teaspoon honey is added and prescribed three to four teaspoon of it is prescribed, thrice a day, in the treatment of cough for about a week.</p> <p>II. A cup of decoction of leaves is diluted with a cup of water and a pinch of sugar is added. Two teaspoon of it is given, thrice a day in the treatment of fever and cold.</p> <p>In the treatment of indigestion, a cup of decoction of fresh leaves is mixed with ginger (<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Rosc.) paste. Three teaspoon of it, twice in a day is advice.</p>