

Totemic And Magico-Religious Beliefs of Plants Among Tribals of Hindoli and Nainwan Tehsils of Bundi District (Rajasthan)

Dr. Ramlaxman Saini

*Assistant Professor, Department of Botany
Government College Kota*

Abstract—Totemism is a belief system, found in traditional societies, establishing a spiritual kinship between a clan and a specific natural object, usually an animal or plant, known as a “totem”. Totemism and magico-religious beliefs play a crucial role in conservation of biodiversity and natural resources. We also observed this, while studying the tribal life style of the study area and their routine activities, that totemism and magico-religious beliefs help in conserving the surrounding biodiversity of tribal region. Documentation of totemic beliefs of all ethnic groups is very essential for identifying plants which are under conservation and protection of the plant wealth and wild life by tribes.

Index Terms—Totemism, Magico-religious beliefs, Biodiversity,

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethnobotany deals with traditional and natural relationship between human societies and plants. It has been recognized as a multidisciplinary science comprising many interesting and useful aspect of plant sciences, history, anthropology, culture and literature. The term ‘Ethnobotany’ was coined by John W. Harshberger (1895), a botanist in Pennsylvania University to study the existing relationship between the plants and the aboriginal communities. The aboriginies of India are called tribes. Rajasthan is quite rich in floristic diversity due to the presence of different variable and diversified climatic, physiographic, edaphic and habitat conditions. The Hadoti region has a rich floristic diversity and has various plant species.

Study Area:

Rajasthan is one of the largest states situated in the North-western part of India and represents 10.41% of

the country’s total geographical area. It has rich heritage of culture and diversified habitat. Rajasthan state is a broadly divided in to four main parts viz. Western Rajasthan, Central Rajasthan, East Rajasthan and South-east Rajasthan. South-east Rajasthan is also known as Hadoti region and it comprises Kota, Bundi, Baran, and Jhalawar districts. (Figure;1.1) Bundi is divided in 6 tehsils: Bundi, Hindoli, Nainwa, Keshoraipatan, Indergarh and Talera (Figure;1.2). Hindoli and Nainwa’s Local communities have rich knowledge of plant based traditional and herbal medicines used in many ailments for remedies. Hindoli tehsil comprises following villages; Badodiya, Nathawa, Bheel ka Khera, Deva ka kheda, Kabul, Raghunathpura, Net, Danta, Khatikhera etc. having 50% to 100% scheduled tribes. Nainwa tehsil comprises villages; Balod, Bhanjari, Bhaopura, Jakhroon, Daulatpura, AmliKhera, Gadarya, Ramgarh, Dabeta-Vishdhari, Meeno ki jhoparyan, Sabalpura etc. having 50% to 100% Schedule tribes’ population. (Figure 1.1)

The common tribes of Hindoli and Nainwa tehsil (Hadoti region) are Minas, Bhils, Bhil-meena, Shahria, Sansi, etc. Nomadic communities viz. Gadhialohar, Jogi, Banjara, Kanjar, Bhat, Nut also live in Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils. The Mina and Bheel represent the largest population of the area. Very less study has been done in the proposed study area Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi district. The selected study area covers 307.00 sq. km. Hindoli Tehsil has a Wildlife Sanctuary called Ramgarh Vishdhari which has rich flora. Ethnobotanical study i.e., role of plants in tribal life of this region has not been much studied so far hence this area has been selected for present study.



Figure 1.1 Map of Rajasthan

(Source-Rajasthan Census Bundi-2011)



Figure 1.2 Map of Bundi District Tehsils (Showing Hindoli and Nainwan Tehsils in Green and Blue Colors Respectively, Which Are Study Area of Present Ethnobotanic Work).

(Source-Rajasthan map-Rajasthan Gyan)

II. METHODOLOGY

The Ethnobotanical investigation in various selected study areas will be carried out at different time and in different seasons. First of all, we will develop cordial relationship with tribal/local people so that we can interact amiably with them and establish a dialogue session with them to collect valuable information. Information regarding plants and tribal life will be collected through interviews, group discussion and semi-structured questionnaires. For accuracy, visits will be repeated and ethnobotanical information will

be collected from selected study area and then reviewed. Older men, women, Bhopa, Gotheeya and quacks who are well versed in the identification of plants and those who visit forest to gather plant products and to cure various ailments will be questioned and interviewed. Tribal people who are forest dwellers or always live-in deep forest will be contacted for the study. Photograph of interacting with tribals, plants, plant specimens and various articles will be collected during visit. Information will be gathered how and in what manner these plants are used by tribals in totemic and magico-religious Beliefs of plants in various ceremonies, festivals and rituals of tribes of the study area. Plant specimen will be identified with the help of subject expert.

III. OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

The ethnic people have affinity with the forests and they have a very strong belief system. Their socio-cultural and religious aspects of life is always controlled by their strong beliefs. Totemism is a class of material objects which is regarded with superstitions and it is an effective tool for conservation of biodiversity and wildlife among ethnic people. The totems protect the men and men also show respect towards totem in various ways by not killing animals, by not cutting plants etc. Their belief system is that Gods protect the community from any harm, famine, drought, barrenness, impotence, epidemics and quarrels among others.

The tribal of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils and local communities believe that they have a unique relationship with some plants and animals, so they never go for collecting and consuming plants and never go for killing or eating the animals. The species which are regarded sacred, are multiplied because clans associate their survival with a totem plant and never allow that specific plant to become extinct. According to the report of Rana et al., (2016), tribals and rural people of cameroon (South Africa), have their own traditions, beliefs, totems, rituals, folk proverbs and valuable information about the medicinal usages of plants. Pandey (2023) reported that religious beliefs serve as an instrument for protection of forest species which is similar to our observations. Whole plants and different plant parts like leaves, roots, stem, bark, flowers, fruits, seeds and tubers are used for many socio-cultural, religious and ritual purposes in

our study area (Plate-1). About 24 religious and spiritual plant species which are used and protected by tribal and local residents of the Hindoti and Nainwan tehsils region (Table-1). By the present research work, it has been proved that plants have an important place in religion also. Ethnic people of the study area, have rich and diverse culture based on a profound relationship with their land and natural resources of surrounding area. They always consider themselves the realm of nature so, they are attached to their land and crop production. Their crop production is always based on their unique traditional knowledge of their surroundings and their region's specific environment.

Tribal and Nomadic communities (Bhils, Meenas, Gadulia-lohar, Kanjars, Kalbelia) of the study area have kept their culture alive by carrying forward their traditional unique knowledge of customs, traditions, rituals art, religious and totemic practices for future generations as they still follow these. Their cultural heritage is also included speaking and teaching their own language and protecting their sacred sites and important objects of the area. During the field survey it was observed that the tribal people are associated with many totemic and magico-religious beliefs plants.

Table: 1 Totemic and Magico-religious Beliefs of Plants among Tribal of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi District (Rajasthan).

S. No	Botanical Name & Local Name	Family	Plant Habits and Name of using parts	Totemic and Magico-religious beliefs
1.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (Bel, Bel-patra)	<i>Rutaceae</i>	Tree Leave	In Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils, tribals and local community have a strong belief of offering the bel leaves to Lord Shiva in the month of shravan for timely marriage. It is toem in this community.
2.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem)	<i>Melliaceae</i>	Tree Twigs	The Meena and Bhil tribals of study area hang twigs of neem on the doors of their houses or under the bed of the lady at the time of delivery with belief that neem leaves keep away the evil spirits. Local communities believe that if a married women with a container of water with neem leaves (Ganga ji ki chari) crosses the way of a person, he or she get success in mission. The bhopas of the study area use the neem twigs for jhada rituals to keep away the evil spirit and groom use the neem twigs to strike the toran at the time of marriage with the same intent.
3.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Dhak, Palash)	<i>Fabaceae</i>	Tree Three leaflets of leaves	In Nindoli and Nainwan tehsils tribals and local community believes that three leaflets of leaves are considered as "Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh", and spread over the bier which is used to carry the dead for funeral. Bhils and Meenas of Bundi district don't allow the pregnant ladies to go near the palas tree as they believe that evil spirits reside on the tree. This tree is usually planted by the tribals near "devra and deity" and flower are offered to the God and Goddess.

				Tribals have a peculiar belief that if a stone is placed on the wood piece of Dhak on Sunday their crops would not be attacked by pets. On the occasion of marriage/dhapa (Bride's cost), people are served liquor in the cups made of dhak leaves with the belief of successful marriage.
4.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (Safed-akra)	<i>Asclepiadaceae</i>	Shrubs Leaves and Flowers	The Bhil and Meena tribals worship the akra plant leaves and offer flowers with the belief that Lord Shiva lives in it and Lord Shiva keep away the evil spirits and help in getting good partner for marriage. Rural people take a burning twig of safed-akra and move this in to the whole house believing that evil spirits will be finished or will vacate their houses.
5.	<i>Capsicum annuum</i> (Mirch)	<i>Solanaceae</i>	Herbs Dried Fruits	The Bhil and Meena tribals of study area move dry red chillies around the head of a person suffering from fever or Najar and placed at the chouraha (crossing of roads) with the belief that the patient will be cured and evil spirits will be warded off. Green chillies are tied with lemon (<i>Citrus spp.</i>) and charcoal on the gates of shops and houses to keep the evil spirits away and for prosperity.
6.	<i>Cassia fistula</i> (Amaltas)	<i>Caesalpinaceae</i>	Tree Dried fruits	The Bhil and Meena tribals protect their children from getting frightened by keeping the dried fruits (Badyavan ki falli) under their pillows with the belief that they keep away the evil spirits.
7.	<i>Cuscuta reflexa</i> (Amer-bel)	<i>Cuscutaceae</i>	Herbs Stem	The bhopa of Bhils use stem and banches of amer-bel for jhada ritual to ward off evil spirits.
8.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (Dub, Dobri)	<i>Poaceae</i>	Herbs, Whole plant	The grass is widely used by hindu community in various customs and ceremonies. During Gangaur festival in Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi district, the unmarried girls put the grass on their heads with the belief that they will get a husband of their own choice.
9.	<i>Datura innoxia</i> (Kala-dhatura)	<i>Solanaceae</i>	Herbs, Fruits	The fruits are offered to Lord Shiva by Hindu community including tribals with the belief that Lord Shiva likes these fruits and and will fulfil their wish.
10.	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (Dab, Dabh)	<i>Poaceae</i>	Grasses Whole plant	In the study area, the grass is kept with edible things at the time of solar and lunar eclipse (<i>Ghraham</i>) with the belief that edible things will not be affected by harmful radiation. The leaves (Dab) are also spread on the ground and dead person is placed on it. The leaves are also spread on the bier used to carry the dead body for funeral.
11.	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> (Bans)	<i>Poaceae</i>	Grasses Whole plant	In the study area, at the time of marriage ceremony, tribals and other rural community make a thumb-like structures from the culm as a symbol of Lord Ganesh with the belief that marriage ceremony will be successfully completed and married couple will lead

				happy and prosperous life. They believe keeping the newborn child in the winnowing pans called “Chhajla” made of culms of bamboo, will find long and prosperous life.
12.	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i> (Bargad, Bar)	<i>Moraceae</i>	Tree Twigs/Whole Plant	The tribals ladies worship this tree on the occasion of local festival called “Bar-Amavasiya or Vat-Savitri Pujan for being blessed with son, prosperity and long life of their husband which falls on Krishan-Amavasiya of Jyeshth-Mass”. The tribals and local community believe that this tree is the home of evil spirits and idol of deities are also established. The twigs are used in the Jhada rituals by the Bhopas.
13.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> (Pipal, Peepali)	<i>Moraceae</i>	Tree Twigs/Whole Plant	It is a holy tree for Hindu community. It is a belief that Lord-Vishnu lives in it. People offer water and sweets to pepal tree for prosperity so they worship it. The twigs are used in the Jhada rituals by the Bhopas. Bhils make a garland of pepal leaves and placed on the entrance of room where the patient suffering from skin sores lives. It is believed that as the leaves dry up, the patient gets relief and ultimately cured. The plant species is considered as a plant totem of Rathod and Maira clans of Bhils and worshipped by them.
14.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> (Aam)	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>	Tree Leaves, Stem, Twigs/Whole Plant	Bhils and Meenas tribals and local community tie the garland made up of its leaves at main gate of their houses at the time of marriage and katha puja. Such laces are also hung in front of their deity. The wood is used in “Hawan” and on several other occasions including marriage for happiness and prosperity. Spoons made of folded leaves are used to transfer or sprinkle “ghee” at the time of Hawan. A leafy twig of this tree and bamboo are erected below the mandap at the time of marriage among Bhils. Five leaves are moved up and down on a person to remove effect of evil-eyes in Bundi district.
15.	<i>Nerium oleander</i> (Kaner)	<i>Apocynaceae</i>	Shrubs Twigs	Toran made of kaner twigs are used by bridegroom at time of marriage for the prosperous and married life.
16.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> (Tulsi)	<i>Lamiaceae</i>	Herbs Leaves and Whole Plant	The Hindu ladies, including tribals of study area, worship the tulsi plant for prosperity and happiness of their family and to keep away harmful spirits. Leaves are put in the mouth of a dead person with the belief that his soul will find rest in heaven.
17.	<i>Papaver somnifera</i> (Afeem)	<i>Papaveraceae</i>	Herbs Fruits	The afeem plant is considered sacred and served in marriage. It is a totem of Datunda clans of Bhils.
18.	<i>Phoenix sylvestris</i> (Khajoor)	<i>Arecaceae</i>	Tree Fruits	The fruits are offered to the God & Goddess and leaves are used by Bhopas of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of bundi district in Jhada rituals to ward off evil spirits.

19.	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> (Anwala)	<i>Euphorbiaceae</i>	Tree Whole plant	This plant is considered as plant totem of Bhils and Meena clans of study area, this plant is worshipped for prosperity and happiness of their family. Anwala tree is identified with Valmiki and Shri Hari-Vishnu, worshipped by Bhils and Meena on the 11 th day of Phalgun Shukla (Anwalaghyaras) month and 9 th day of Kartik Shukla month (Anwalanavmi). It is worshipped with the beliefs that remains away harmful spirits
20.	<i>Piper betle</i> (Pan)	<i>Piperaceae</i>	Creeper Leaves	The leaves and fruits are considered sacred and offered to diety in Hindu community including Bhils and Meenas. Pan leaves are chewed with lime, kattha and betels-nuts (Supari) etc. On all the auspicious occasion pan leaves are used. The leaves of this species are considered as plant totem of Bhilon ka Jhopra clan of Bhils and, therefore, the leaves are sacred.
21.	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (Khejri)	<i>Mimosaceae</i>	Tree Whole plant	The tree of khejri is worshipped in by Bhils and Meenas on occasion of marriage ceremony. Bhils lady don't go near this khejri plant when they are pregnant.
22.	<i>Ricinus communis</i> (Arandi, Andolli)	<i>Euphorbiaceae</i>	Shrubs Leaves	The plant is worshipped by the patients of jaundice with the belief for early cure. The leaves are used for Jhada ritual by the Bhopas to ward off evil spirits and for early recovery.
23.	<i>Saccharum bengalense</i> (Munj)	<i>Poaceae</i>	Herbs Culms with inflorescence	At the occasion of Holi and Deepawali festivals, the tribals of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi district worship the culms with inflorescence (Known as Hira-moti) with the belief that coming year will be prosperous.
24.	<i>Salvadora oleoides</i> (Jal, Khara-jal)	<i>Salvadoraceae</i>	Tree Whole plant	The tribals avoid to go near the jal tree as they believe that evil spiritis live on the tree.
25.	<i>Salvadora persica</i> (Jal, Mithi-jal)	<i>Salvadoraceae</i>	Tree Whole plant	The tribals of the study area don't allow pregnant ladies to go near the tree at noon and evening, believing that evil spiritis live on the tree.
26.	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (Jamun)	<i>Myrtaceae</i>	Tree Fruits and Twigs	The fruits are offered to God and Goddess. The leaves and leafy twigs of jamun along with the leaves of <i>Mangifera indica</i> (Aam) are tied at the end of a pole to make "Toran" in the mandap at the occasion of marriage by the Bhils and Meenas tribals of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of bundi district.
27.	<i>Vitex negundi</i> (Nirgundi)	<i>Verbenaceae</i>	Herbs Twigs	The Bhopas use the nirgundi twigs for Jhada rituals to keep away harmful spirits and for prosperity and happiness of their family.
28.	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> (Bordi, Bor)	<i>Rhamnaceae</i>	Shrubs Twigs	At the festival of "Holi", a twig is used as a symbol of "Prahlad" and it is kept in fire-lit. It is believed that the boy who takes it out from fire, gets a bride of his choice.

29.	<i>Ziziphus nummularia</i> (Jhar- Bor, Ber)	<i>Rhamnaceae</i>	Shrubs Whole plant	It is considered as a plant totem. They cover the plant with a cloth at the time of marriage and worship it.
-----	--	-------------------	-----------------------	--

Plate 1. Wild plant species of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi District.



1. *Aegle marmelos* (Belpatra)

2. *Azadirachta indica* (Neem)

3. *Butea monosperma* (Dhak, chhura)



4. *Calotropis gigantea*, (Safed Aakra)

5. *Cassia fistula* (Amaltas)

6. *Cuscuta reflexa* (Amer-bel)



7. *Datura metel* (Dhatura)

8. *Ficus bengalensis* (Bargad, Bad)

9. *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal)



10. *Oscimum sanctum* (Tulsi)



11. *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajur)



12. *Piper betle* (Pan)



13. *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri)



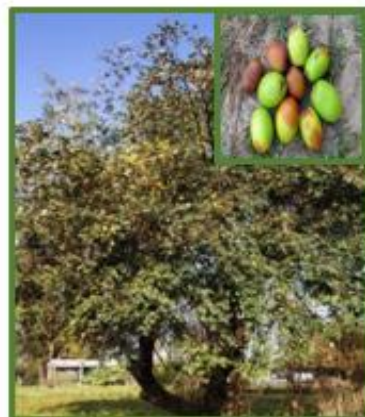
14. *Ricinus communis* (Arandi)



15. *Salvadora persica* (Pilu)



16. *Syzygium cumini* (jamun)



17. *Ziziphus mauritiana* (Bordi)



18. *Ziziphus nummularia* (Jhar-ber)

IV. CONCLUSION

Totemism and magico-religious beliefs play a crucial role in conservation of biodiversity and natural resources. Documentation of totemic beliefs of all

ethnic groups is very essential for identifying plants which are under conservation and protection by tribes. We also made an attempt to document the totems and magico-religious beliefs of tribals of our study area

which protect and conserve the plant wealth and wild life.

Because of the increasing anthropogenic pressure on land and plant resources, and the erosion of traditional beliefs leading to encroachment of sacred groves by local tribes themselves, there is an urgent need to protect these groves to conserve regional plant diversity. This not only benefits ecosystem health but also supports the indigenous tribes who rely on local plant diversity for their daily needs. Effective management and protection are essential for conserving plant diversity in the region and benefiting the indigenous tribes. To conclude, the traditions followed by tribes indirectly support ecosystem balance. Resources in the groves should be used in a controlled manner or only in cases of dire necessity.

REFERENCES

- [1] *Census of India*, "District Census Handbook: Bundi," Rajasthan, Series 09, Part XII-A, pp. 101–106, 597–609, 2011.
- [2] M. D. S. Chandran and M. Gadgil, "Sacred groves and sacred trees of Uttara Kannada," in *Lifestyle and Ecology*, B. Saraswati, Ed. New Delhi, India: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 1998.
- [3] M. Gadgil and V. K. Vertak, "The sacred uses of nature," in *Social Ecology*, R. Guha, Ed. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 90–119.
- [4] Y. Geng, G. Hu, S. Ranjitkar, Y. Shi, and Y. Wang, "The implications of ritual practices and ritual plant uses on nature conservation: A case study among the Naxi in Yunnan Province, Southwest China," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, vol. 13, p. 58, 2017.
- [5] P. E. Jagdale, "Role of sacred groves in conservation of biodiversity," *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, vol. 8, no. 9, pp. 721–728, 2021.
- [6] S. K. Jain, "Magico-religious beliefs about plants among the Adivasi of Bastar," *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, vol. 54, pp. 73–84, 1963.
- [7] G. Kothari, "Kaise honge bhavi pidhi ke Bhope" (in Hindi), *Rajasthan Patrika*, Feb. 14, 1984.
- [8] R. P. Meena and D. K. Rathore, "Sacred groves of Hadoti Region: A case study of Tehsil Hindoli, District Bundi, Rajasthan," *International Journal of Innovative Research*, vol. 10, pp. 7335–7359, 2021.
- [9] N. Mohanty, P. K. Das, and T. Panda, "Use of plant diversity in household and rituals by tribal people of Dhenkanal district Odisha, India," *Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Science*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 79–82, 2011.
- [10] D. N. Pandey, *Ethnobotany: Local Knowledge for Sustainable Forestry and Livelihood Security*. New Delhi, India: Asia Forest Network Himanshu, 1998.
- [11] N. K. Rathore, P. S. Chauhan, and V. K. Yadav, "Traditional wisdom and potential of community conserved areas of Jhalawar District, Rajasthan, India," *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 3203–3211, 2021.
- [12] S. Sharma and R. Kumar, "Sacred groves of India: Repositories of a rich heritage and tools for biodiversity conservation," *Journal of Forest Research*, vol. 32, pp. 899–916, 2021.