



Study of some Sacred plants of Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh, India

KEYWORDS

Sacred plants, Worshipping, Traditional culture, Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Plants occupy an important place in Indian mythology. Every nation has its own set of sacred plants. Plants are integral parts of Indian life and culture and worshipped among various tribes in India. The present article attempts to highlight the importance of some sacred plants which are traditionally worshipping in Kadapa District. About 35 plant species belonging to 31 genera and 24 families were documented. Significance of these plants in different ceremonies and their role in festivals has been discussed. People of this study area are highly religious and variety of rituals related to god and goddess worship are performed in various ways by the local people in which plants have their defined roles and importance. These plants are found in wild as well as grown in close vicinity of people in various places of this study area. These beliefs are not only showing the human relation with plant diversity, but also help in the conservation of species.

Introduction:

India is famous for its religious culture and traditions hence it is regarded as Veda Bhoomi, Punya Bhoomi, Karma Bhoomi (Land of Gods). Indian mythology records a plant *kalpavriksha*, i.e a tree fulfilling all human desires. In India coconut plant is known as *kalpavriksha*. One of the most common offerings in Indian temples is a coconut. It is also offered on occasions like weddings, festivals, the use of new vehicle, house etc. The coconut is broken and placed before the Lord. It is later distributed as *prasada*. Coconut fruit is also offered as *tambulum* along with betel leaves and areca nuts. Even in *purnakumbha* a coconut is part of *kalasha*. A brass or copper pot is filled with water. Mango leaves are placed in the mouth of the pot and a coconut is placed over it. Red or white thread is tied around its neck. Such pot is known as a *kalasha*. *Kalasha* is placed with due rituals on all important occasions like traditional house warming, wedding, daily worship etc. Every part of this tree is useful. The most important occasion of tree worship is during *Durga Puja*. Along with goddess *Durga* nine leaves are worshipped with the chanting mantras. In different regions of India certain trees are still worshipped as deities by the tribals of pre-asutraloid stock. Certain plants, flowers and leaves are offered daily in the worship of God (Neeraj et al, 1984). People of this country have been worshipping various plants, animals and rivers since ancient time. The human culture, customs, ethos, religious rites, legends and myths, folk tales and folk songs, food as well as medicinal practices are deeply associated and influenced by the plants (Badoni and Badoni, 2001). Plants are considered sacred because, its close association with a diety (Bilva with Lord Shiva and Tulasi with Lord Krishna). Some plants are believed to have originated from bodies or limbs of Gods and hence the sanctity (Butea is believed to have originated from the body of Lord Brahma). Some plants became sacred owing to their association with great individuals. (Peepal under which Gouthama Budha attained enlightenment is considered sacred by the Buddhists). Plants play vital role in the enhancement of socio-economic status of people. It provides to the people food, fodder and building material. Indian culture has cosmic beliefs for all happenings in their life including sickness and sufferings and also has close association and respect for many animals and plants in religious activities (Ranta and Pirta,

2007). Indian women offer leaves of *Mangifera*, *Prosopis*, *Ocimum*, *Aegle* etc to god in different vratas and worship to give health and wealth. They also make *pradakshinas* (go around certain number of times) around the *Ficus benghalensis* to pray to it for the longevity of their husbands and for fulfillment of their wishes. In India, houses are associated with different plants. *Ficus benghalensis* tree on the eastern side, *Ficus religiosa* in the south, *Cocos nucifera* in the east is always auspicious. *Mangifera indica* is auspicious at every place and believe it gives wealth. Religious importance of trees can be seen from the birth to marriage of a Hindu. Hindu religion and culture firmly preached that all constituents of our ambient nature are part and creation of supreme power itself (Vijay Sharma and Joshi, 2010). The God has bestowed some specific power to certain plants, animals, rivers, mountains and places, which play important role in prosperous human life (Bharat and Prakash, 2014). Hindu scriptures stated that a wide range of plants like *Ficus religiosa*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Curcuma longa*, *Centella asiatica*, *Cynodon dactylon* have divine qualities. Therefore these plants are used in a number of religious activities and rituals (Robinson and Cush, 1997). Kadapa District was explored taxonomically and ethnobotanically by different workers (Madhusudhan Rao, 1989). But information regarding sacred plants is not available. Hence the present study was undertaken to study the some traditional worshipping plants of Kadapa District.

Study area:

Colonel Wilks says that, each stream in this part of Kadapa District has its song to sing, and every hill its story to narrate, but unfortunately they do not narrate them or if they do, do it in language unintelligible to the modern historian (Gribble, 1875). The Kadapa District with an area of 15,378.41 Sq.Km is situated in the south central part of Andhra Pradesh. It is bounded on the north by Kurnool, on the south by Chittoor, on the east by Nellore and on the west by Anantapur Districts. Geometrically the district is located between 13°43' and 15°14' of the northern latitude and 77°55' and 79°29' of the eastern longitude. The district spreads northwards beneath the western slopes of the Eastern Ghats as a rough parallelogram dented deeply in its southern, western and northern boundaries. The im-

portant hill ranges are Velikonda, Palakonda, Nallamalais and Yerramalais. Most of the forests of Kadapa District possess the remnants of dry deciduous forests indicating that these were deciduous forests in the past which have been gradually degraded to scrub type (Champion and Seth, 1968). The Kadapa District is mainly drained by the river Penna and its numerous tributaries and many streams. The important tributaries to the Penna River are Kunderu, Sagileru, Cheyyeru, Papagni and Chitravati. The forest possesses diverse plant species. There are number of historical temples, hills, streams which are associated with various sacred plants. Sacred grooves also present in considerable number.

Materials and methods:

The present study was carried out in Kadapa District in the year 2013 to find out some traditionally worshipping plants which are used in various religious activities. The information regarding traditionally worshipping plants was collected through consulting the local people through interviews, discussions and own observations (Jain and Rao, 1977). Many remote areas were visited to interact the people and gathered information related to local name and sacred significance of the plants. In this way total of 92 persons were contacted for present study. Several specimens of plants were collected. The collected specimens were identified with the help of Floras (Pullaiah and Chennaiah, 1993). The voucher specimens are deposited in Yogi Vemana University herbarium. The plant species are arranged alphabetically with botanical names followed by local names, English names, family and sacred significance of plants.

Results and discussion:

The present study shows that 35 plant species are associated with sacred beliefs and have religious importance. They are belonging to 31 genera and 24 families. The dominant families of sacred interest are Fabaceae (7 sps), Moraceae (3 sps), Lamiaceae (3sps), Oleaceae (2sps) and remaining families contributed one species. These plant species regularly worshipped by the local people as dei-

ties themselves or offered to god during rituals. The sacred significance of each plant is enumerated in table 1. The importance of plants in human life as food, fibre, cosmetics, medicines, wood, gums, resins, oils etc was discussed time to time by many researchers. But the religious aspects of plants are not given any attention and not much explored. Therefore it is needed to explore various parts of India to find out traditionally worshipping plants. Some researchers are recognized some specific plants in human culture. *Azadirachta indica* is worshipped in India and its leaves used to keep away the evil spirits and also associated with the farmers traditional methods of weather forecasting (Narjas and Trivedi, 2003). Traditional knowledge is a record of human achievement in comprehending the complexities of life and survival of human society. Since time immemorial conservation of natural resources has been an integral part of diverse cultures in different ways. The traditional worship practices show the symbiotic relation of human beings and nature. Indigenous communities all over the world lived in harmony with the nature and conserved its valuable plants. It is very important to uphold traditions and beliefs in order to protect and conserve these sacred plants. Sacred plants are growing by local people in different sacred gardens like Navagraha vana, Raasi vana, Nakshatra vana, Ashoka vana, Brinda vana, Nandana vana, Santana vana and Vinayaka vana etc. The traditional culture and religion of human beings have deep faith in the nature and its components in every walk of life. The greater religious involvement play as a protective factor in human activities (Shirazi and Morowatisharifabad, 2009). Similar to this study, during present investigation it was observed that the religious activities boost up the mental health of local people of Kadapa District. Many of these sacred plants are found in every household in the study area and are used in religious activities as well as health care. These sacred plants are worshipped by local people for getting blessing of health and wealth by positive powers of nature. In this way these sacred plants play a major role in mental as well as physical health of people.

S.No	Botanical Name	Local Name	English Name	Family	Sacred Significance
1	<i>Acacia catechu</i> (L.f.) Wild.	Sandra	Red cutch	Fabaceae	The fragrance of wood repels poisonous animals like snake and scorpion. Women worship it to remove <i>kujadosha</i> .
2	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Maredu	Golden apple	Rutaceae	Leaves are offered to Lord Shiva at the time of Mahasivarathri.
3	<i>Artemisia pallens</i> Wall.	Davanam	Mugwort	Asteraceae	Leaves mixed with ghee are used as incense to attract positive powers.
4	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A.Juss.	Vepa	Neem	Meliaceae	The whole plant is worshipped by the people for good health.
5	<i>Bauhinia variegata</i> L.	Deva Kanchanam	Indian orchid	Fabaceae	The twig is carried with new born child in traveling to repel evil spirits.
6	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Moduga	Parrot tree	Fabaceae	The trifoliate leaf is represented by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The red flowers are offered to gods for blessings in various religious activities.
7	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) Dryand.	Tella jilledu	Madar	Asclepiadaceae	The plant leaves are offered to lord Shiva and floral buds are offered to Hanuman for blessings.
8	<i>Calophyllum inophyllum</i> L.	Ponna	Alexandrian Laurel	Clusiaceae	It is believed to have the power of scaring them from evil spirits and counteracting dominion influence of various kinds of evil spirits.
9	<i>Cassia fistula</i> L.	Rela	Indian laburnam	Fabaceae	The twigs are kept in houses to keep away evil spirits.

10	<i>Curcuma longa</i> Linn.	Pasupu	Turmeric	Zingibera ceae	Paste is applied on face and body of the bride and groom for getting blessings on the day of marriages and other rituals.
11	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	Garika	Doob grass	Poaceae	It is used in all religious rituals to pray Lord Ganesh.
12	<i>Dalbergia sissoo</i> DC.	Iridi	Indian rose wood	Fabaceae	It is planted near houses and believed that it protects home from natural lightning strokes.
13	<i>Evolvulus alsinoides</i> (L.)L.	Vishnukantham		Convolvula ceae	By worshipping this plant life would be lengthened.
14	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Marri	Banyan	Moraceae	This is the most sacred tree, associated with planet Saturn and women worship to it for the longevity of their husbands.
15	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Medi	Cluster fig	Moraceae	It is believed to have mystic powers by worshipping this tree.
16	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Ravi	Peepal	Moraceae	It is believed that, sitting under this tree one will get enlightenment.
17	<i>Jasminum pubescens</i> L.	Manchi malle	Jasmine	Oleaceae	The flowers are offered in Lakshmi puja.
18	<i>J. sambac</i> (L.)Sol.	Gundu malle	Arabian Jasmine	Oleaceae	The flowers are used in all rituals.
19	<i>Madhuca indica</i> (Roxb.) A.Chev.	Ippa	Indian butter	Sapotaceae	The smoke of leaves inhaled to ward of the evil spirits. The leaves are used in religious ceremonies.
20	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Mamidi	Mango	Anacardia ceae	The leaves are making string for doors on all auspicious occasions to attract positive power of nature.
21	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Pogada	Indian medlar	Sapinda ceae	Its leaves are used in all religious ceremonies to Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth)
22	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> Linn.	Arati	Banana	Musaceae	The stems with leaves and bunch of fruits are used in entrance of houses during marriages.
23	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Tamara	Sacred lotus	Nelumbona ceae	It is used in almost all religious rituals supposed to please Lord Shiva.
24	<i>Nymphaea nouchali</i> Burm.f.	Nalla Kaluva	Indian water lilly	Nymphaea ceae	It is worshipped because of Brahma seated on the Lotus sprung from the navel of Vishnu.
25	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	Bhu tulasi	Sweet basil	Lamiaceae	The leaves are used in the funeral ceremonies of the Hindus.
26	<i>O. sanctum</i> L.	Krishna tulasi	Sacred basil	Lamiaceae	This is the most sacred plant and found in every household throughout India. It is very much dear to Lord Vishnu. Women worship it by lighting a lamp every day.
27	<i>Origanum majorana</i> L.	Maruvam	Marjoram	Lamiaceae	The leaves are used to make garlands along with other flowers for deities.
28	<i>Pandanus odorifer</i> (Forssk.) Kuntze	Mogali	Screw pine	Pandana ceae	The leaves are offered to deities to get their blessings.
29	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce	Jammi	Khejri	Fabaceae	The bride and bride groom rotate around this plant for blessings of Lord Vishnu.
30	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Srigandham	Sandal wood	Santalaceae	The paste derived from wood is given as an offering to the gods and incense made of sandal wood shavings is burnt before them.
31	<i>Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) Willd.	Sitamma asoka	Sorrowless tree	Fabaceae	This plant is worshipped by people for getting peace in their life.
32	<i>Shorea robusta</i> Gaertn.f.	Guggilam	Sal	Dipterocarpaceae	It is offered to god to give prosperity, stability and unity among all the people.
33	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels	Neredu	Black plum	Myrtaceae	It is employed for psychological problems for various superstitious rites to ward off evil eyes and evil spirits.
34	<i>Tabernaemontana divaricata</i> (L.)R.Br	Nandivardhanam	Crepe jasmine	Apocyna ceae	The flowers are very much favour to Lord Shiva and offer it during Karthik mahotsavas.
35	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i> (Roxb.ex DC.) Wight&Arn.	Tella maddi	Myrobalan	Combreta ceae	These plants are offered to god to protect crops from natural calamities.

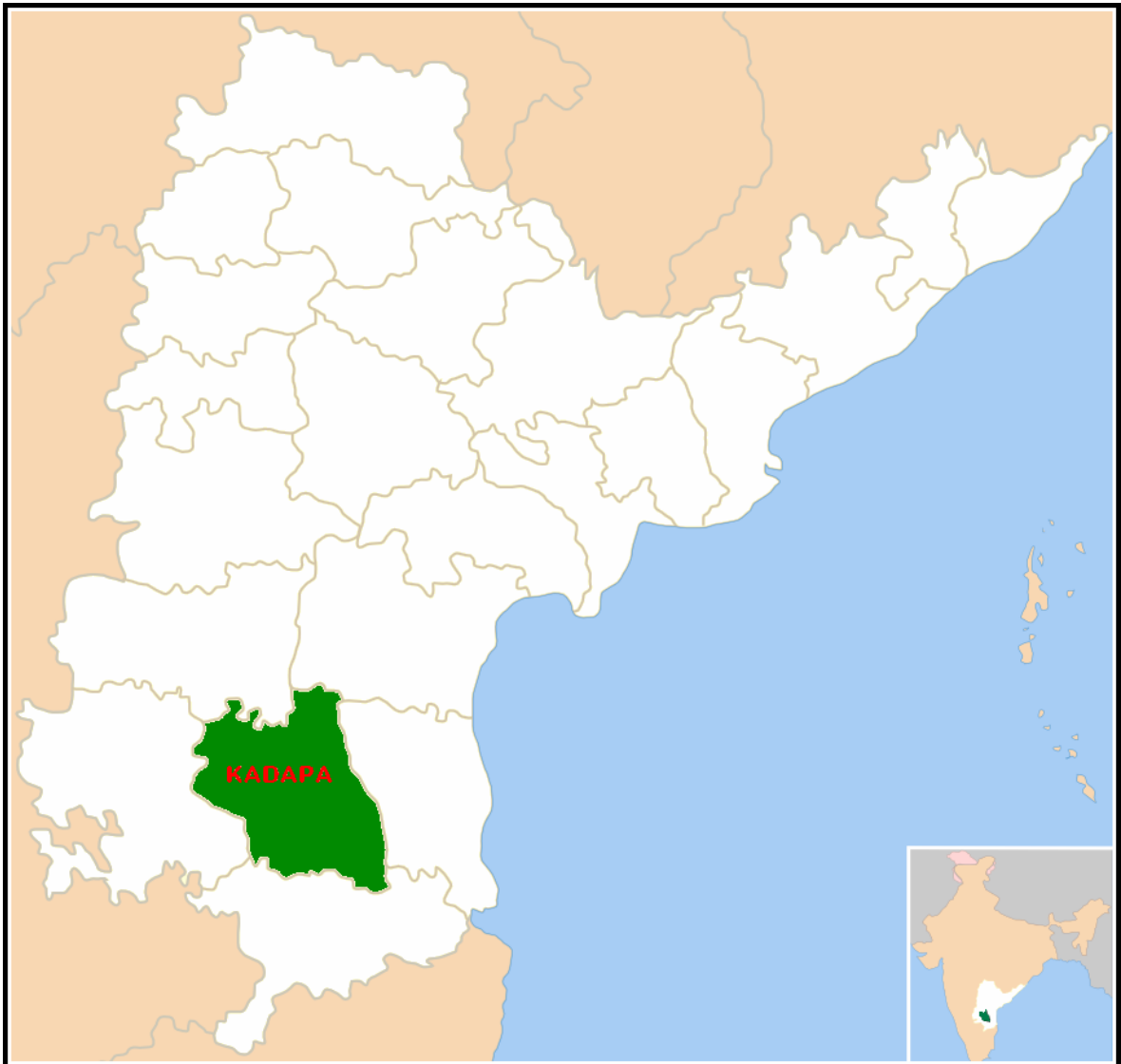
Conclusion:

Since ancient time plants are associated with human beings. Plants provide everything to humans. Indians believe that some plants are represented by gods. Therefore people are worshipping plants and offer their flowers, leaves, fruits, seeds, wood etc to gods in various religious ceremonies for getting blessings. It is believed that the gods and fairies visit sacred gardens on special occasions on full moon nights with supernatural powers. These traditional beliefs support the sustainable utilization of natural resources. The local people and temple archakas of this study area possessing sound knowledge of sacred plants. Therefore it is need of the hour to conserve the traditional

knowledge and also to pass on this to our present and future generations effectively. The religious customs protect the forests where deities reside which can be preserved as sacred grooves. The religious activities as well as hypothesis act as conserving tool for biodiversity and nature, which will play an important role in betterment of human beings.

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Map showing Andhra Pradesh with Kadapa District

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