



Folklore for Religious usage of Plants in Kumaon Region of Himalaya

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Abstract. In Himalayan region of Uttarakhand State of India, there is a diverse variety of medicinal plant which are frequently used by local people on different ceremonial practices. They commonly use the name of these plants in folklore. The religious activities and rituals in Kumaon region served as a living museum of cultural practices, leading to the conservation of traditional knowledge and the conservation of plants of Kumaon region. These rituals are woven in the lives of people traditionally from generation to generation. The present study aimed to explore the information about the use of various plant parts in the traditional folklore. A total of eight folklore based on six religious plants were selected from documented 104 plants during the field survey i.e. *Pati* (Hay fever weed), *Ganna* (Sugarcane), *Gehun* (Wheat), *Doob*, *Supari* and Flowers. These plants are traditionally well used in the rituals and Havan in Kumaon region. During the study, it was also observed that in the last three decades some changes have come in the method of usage of important religious plants in the performance of various rituals and ceremonies of the region.

Keywords. Religious plants, Folklore, Havan, Kumaon, Himalaya

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Introduction

In the Indian Central Himalayan region, various religious plants are used on different auspicious occasions and during rituals to get the blessing of divine for peace, prosperity, and happiness of the family. The tradition of burning different parts of plant in Havan ritual has been used in Indian society from North to South and from East to West. Indian society contains plethora of communities, tribes, and races. Kumaon region in Himalaya constitutes a small microcosm containing a wide variety of communities inhabiting a wide variety of climates (sub-tropical, sub-temperate, temperate, and alpine zone). Hindus in this region basically follow the same religio-cultural beliefs as other parts of India with selective variation.

The religious activities and rituals in Kumaon region served as a living museum of cultural practices, leading to the conservation of traditional knowledge and the conservation of plants of Kumaon region. Traditionally, these rituals involve use of specific plants and materials available in surroundings. Vedic texts describe many medicinal and aromatic plants in religious practice of Havan. These plants contribute to humans' good health and happiness and protect them from various diseases. [1]. The aromatic plants used culturally in Indian Central Himalayan regions to conduct their different religious activities for family, society and surroundings welfare are *Aam*, *Jatamansi*, *Jaw*, *Paiyan*, *Pati*, *Timur*, *Til*, etc. Additionally, nature worship is a strong religious activity aiding conservation of many natural environmental systems and traditional knowledge in this area [2].

These rituals are woven in the lives of people traditionally from generation to generation. The present study aimed to survey the folklore related to religious plants specifically in use for Havan ritual.

Material and Methods

A questionnaire (Supplement Document 1) was designed and survey was conducted in three districts out of six districts of Kumaon region namely Almora, Nainital and Champawat dis-

trict. About 60 informers were interviewed during the survey. Folklore based on religious plants were recorded and also documented from the secondary source of information. This secondary sources were literature and research articles.

During the survey, a total of 104 religious plants mentioned in four different historical ages were studied. Out of 104 plants, six religious plants selected were traditionally most commonly used in rituals and were present in dominant Folklore of Kumaon region. Related Folklore along with their meanings and details of plants used in the documented Folklore were presented in the study.

Result and Discussion

Folklore based on religious plants

Due to the important role of religious plants in various sociocultural activities and their frequent usage, they have become an inseparable part of the common man's life. This can be seen in the expressions which come in the form of folklore related to some important plants. Some of them are described below along with their approximate translation-

1. *Pati* (*Hay fever weed*)

फूल पाति को स्याव ।

Phool Patti ko syaav

Meaning: To serve God using flowers and leaves of *Pati*. (Source: Smt. Chandra Devi, Pandekota Village, Ranikhet Road, Almora, Uttarakhand)

पेड़ ठुल ठुल पतेल नान नान ।

सूखे बे कुट्टल धूपक काम आल ॥

Per thul-thul patel naan-naan

Sukhaibe kutul dhoop ka kaam aal

Meaning: The small leaves of the shrub of *Pati* are dried, ground, and used as *Dhoop* (Havan). (Source: Smt. Vimala Devi)

Botanical name of *Pati* is *Artemisia Edgeworth* Balakr; Family: Asteraceae. Name of *Pati* in traditional Hindi is *Pati*, *Titpati*, *Kunjapati*, while the name in Garhwali is *Kurnj*, San. - *Pati*

Its leaves are mostly used in the preparation of traditional incense. Its plant is believed to be

auspicious. Leaves are offered in the temples. Its leaves are used as fodder in high-altitude areas [3]. The dried leaves were burned as incense in Nepal [4]

2. Ganna (Sugarcane)

बनिया गुड़ दी दे या गुड़ कैसी बात कर दे ।

Baniya gur di de yaa gur kasi baat kai de

Meaning: To speak sweetly just like sweet jaggery (a sweet product of Ganna). (Source: Smt. Chandra Devi, Pandekota Village, Ranikhet Road, Almora, Uttarakhand)

Botanical name of *Ganna* is *Saccharum officinarum*; Family: Poaceae. Name in Hindi is Ganna, Ikh; Sans. - *Vrihi*, *Dhanya*, *Sarkara*, *Khanda*.

Its sweet products like Batasa and Gur are used during worship and cultural practice Hawan. The whole plant of sugarcane is worshipped in Deepawali and it represents to goddess Lakshami. In addition to that Ganna or Ikshu [5] and jaggery (gur) [6] is also used in hawan as an ingredient.

3. Gehun (Wheat)

ग्युं दगड़ घुंण पिसी ।

Gyu daige ghoon pisee

Meaning: To get involved in other person's problems just like worms are also grinded along with wheat.

जिसको मिले ग्युं, वो काम करे क्युं?

Jisko mile gyun, vo kaam kare kyun

Meaning: This folklore emphasizes the importance of work to get food (wheat) or can say one should work hard to get food. (Source: Smt. Vimala Devi, Kusumkhera-Haldwani, Uttarakhand)

Botanical name- *Triticum aestivum* L.; Hindi- Gehun; Sans. - *Godhuma*, *Mahagodhuma*, *Madhuli*, *Mihsuki*; Kumauni- *Gyon* or *Gyun*; Family: Poaceae.

Wheat in the Vedas is mentioned by the name 'Godhood'. It is used on every auspicious occasion. Wheat flour is generally considered pure. It is used for making 'Suwal' (Chapati

shaped) during 'Suwalpathai'. These *Suwals* are dried in sunlight and then fried in mustard oil. In Kumaun, *Suwals* are prepared a day before *Ganeshpooja* (Ganesha worship). Their number varies according to need. Generally, five *Suwals* are made for offering to gods (*Panch-parmeshwar*). *Rolee*, *Chandan*, *Akshat*, flowers, and coins are put on these *Suwals* and these are then offered to gods. Wheat flour is used for making sweet and oily dishes and its seeds and flour for donating to the Brahmin on auspicious occasions.

4. Doob

दुबक जस जड़ हैजे, गदुवक जस जाल हैजे।

स्यावक जस बुद्धि, श्यों को पराण हैजे।।

Dubak jas jad haije, gaduvak jas jaal haije

Syavaak jas budhi syaon ko praan haije

Meaning: These lines are uttered in the form of blessings by elderly people to the young ones. It means: May you get the roots like that of Doob, may you spread and flourish like Kaddu, get a sharp mind like the fox and become strong like a lion. (Source: Smt. Vimala Devi, Kusumkhera-Haldwani, Uttarakhand)

Doob Botanical name is *Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Persoon, Family: Poaceae. Name in Hindi is *Doob*; Sans.- *Durva*.

Doob grass is applied in almost all the religious rituals supposed to please lord Ganesha (the elephant head god) [7]. Its leaves and stems are used in hemostasis [8]. It is also used as an ingredients in Hawan Samagri [9].

5. Supari (Nut)

नानि-नानि दुरकुलि पाल ज पेट।

का जै दुरकुलि राजा क देश।।

Naani-naani durkuli paal jao pet

Kaa jai dhukruli raja ka desh

Meaning: This folklore tells about the utility of *Supari* along with a description of its shape and size [7, 10].

Botanical name of it is *Cupressus torulosa* D. Don. Dried leaves are burnt as incense [4, 6].

6. Flowers

फूल मंत्रों आदेशो॥

Phool mantra aadesh

Meaning: To give blessings with flowers along with chants.

Flowers are offered to the gods and goddesses during worship.

Conclusion

The aromatic smell of studied plants i.e. *Pati*, *Dhoop*, *Supari* etc. plays important role in making healthy environment through burning in the process of Havan. During last three decades the utilization, cultivation of these plants in Kumaon region has drastically changed. If these important religious plants cultivated in their native places which connects social life, then it can be a fruitful step in the cultural, social as well as economic development of the inhabitants in these remote areas.

These plants are mentioned in scriptures and are medicinally useful. These folklore and folk-songs based on them are not only helpful to reduce the stress of common man but can also encourage farmers for cultivation in hilly area. The present study presented an approach to documenting these religious plants associated with Folklore, cultural values, life joy, rituals, and traditions in Kumaon region for preserving their sustainable biodiversity.

Compliance with ethical standards Not required.

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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