



Role of Plants in Different Religious Ceremonies Common to Uttarakhand Region


Singh M.^{1*}

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^{1*} Maneesha Singh, Professor, Department of Botany, School of Basic and Applied Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Patel Nagar, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.

Abstract: Many traditional religious ceremonies and festivals in India are associated with specific plants. Association of plants like *Azadiracta indica* with Gudipadva, *Ficus benghalensis* with vatpurnima, *Bauhinia racemosa* with dashara and *Ocimum sanctum* with tulsi vivaha is well known. The present study deals with some of the important plants such as *Ficus religiosa* (peepal), *Ficus benghalensis* (vat), *Ocimum sanctum* etc. which are related to pujas or other religious ceremonies in which they are offered by the women of Uttarakhand region.

Keywords: Religious ceremony, Uttarakhand, Ethanobotany, Medicinal values

Corresponding Author	How to Cite this Article	To Browse
Maneesha Singh, Professor, Department of Botany, School of Basic and Applied Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Patel Nagar, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. Email: maneeshasingh@sgru.ac.in	Maneesha Singh, Role of Plants in Different Religious Ceremonies Common to Uttarakhand Region. IJAHR. 2023;1(1):19-22. Available From https://ahr.a2zjournals.com/index.php/ahr/article/view/4/version/4	

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Introduction

The plants have a strong connection to and influence on human culture, customs, ethos, religious ceremonies, stories and myths, folktales and folksongs, food, and medical practises (Badoni and Badoni, 2001). The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that traditional medicine serves the primary healthcare requirements of around 80% of the world's population (Sheldon *et al.*, 1997; Azaizeh *et al.*, 2003). The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in India is known for its religious customs and culture. Its name is Dev Bhoomi. The residents of this state are very religious, and they engage in a wide range of ceremonies linked to god and goddess worship throughout the year, each of which gives specific functions and significance to plants (Ghate Vinaya, 1998). Our endeavor in the present studies was to study plants used in various religious ceremonies in Uttarakhand.

The organization of the paper is as follows: In the section 2, the material and methodologies utilized in the paper is described. Section 3 explains the result and discussion of the study conducted. The last section 4 provides the conclusion of the study.

Material and Methodologies

The present investigation was carried out during February-June 2021-22 in different parts of Uttarakhand and in School of Basic and Applied Sciences, Sri Guru Ram Rai University, Patel Nagar, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. Situated between two of India's most powerful rivers, the Ganges on the east and the Yamuna on the west, in the Shivalik mountains at the foot of the Himalayas. Its latitude and longitude are 29055 and 38031 and 77035 and 78020 respectively. Its area is 2002.4 square kilometres, and its elevation is 2000 metres above sea level. It is the capital of Uttarakhand.

Dehradun's climate is mostly moderate, yet it may change based on the season and local altitude from tropical to extremely frigid. Even though it snows frequently in the adjacent steep areas throughout the winter, Dehradun's temperature never drops below 0°C. Here, the summertime temperature ranges from 27 to 400 degrees Celsius, while the wintertime ranges from 0 to 240 degrees Celsius. Rainfall is frequently strong and continuous

Throughout the monsoon season. Every year, the major synclinal trough averages 210 cm of rain. Although the Doon valley is frequently hot, the temperature is thought to be favorable throughout the winter in the steep areas. The fertile alluvial soil, sufficient water drainage, and rainfall all contribute to the area's successful agriculture.

Result and Discussion

The results of the current investigation showed that 24 plant species were connected to aesthetic qualities. The indigenous population frequently employed these plant species in a variety of religious rituals and traditional medical practices and some of them are shown in the figure 1. The data pertaining to the detail of plants with its religious importance has been presented species wise as follows:

- **Aak (*Calotropis gigantea*):** White-purple flowers of this plant is offered to Lord Shiv Pooja.
- **Amla (*Embllica officinalis*):** On AmlaNavmi in the month of Kartik Shukla Navmi, ladies worship the plant. On this day, milk, water, and lit candles are offered to the tree as a form of respect.
- **Aam (*Mangifera indica*):** In Havana, wood from the tree is utilised for religious ceremonies and fire sacrifices. Its leaves are used to make strings for doorways on all auspicious occasions in order to draw in the benevolent forces of nature because it is associated with Venus.
- **Badri Tulsi (*Oreganum vulgare*):** As a duplicate of Maa Lakshmi, who is the half-dhangini of Lord Narayan, Badritulsi has been serving as prasaad to the Badrinath temple in Uttarakhand, India, from ancient times.
- **Bargad (*Ficus benghalensis*):** The plant is normally planted on roadsides, places of public gathering like village yards, and near temples. It is regarded as the place of Hindu gods and demons. Women worship the plant in the month of Jaishet Krishna Trayodashi. The same pooja was done by Savitri to get back her dead husband Satyavan into the life by worshipping this tree. Often, around the large trunk of the tree numerous stones are placed and worshipped as symbols of Lord Shiva for getting success in litigations and many more such matters.

- **Bel (*Aegle marmelos*):** The plant is planted at places of worship. Its three leaflets resemble the trishul. The leaves are offered at the Shiva temple. On Shivratri day, special prayers are offered to lord Shiva along with bilva leaves. During the great festival of Durgapooja, it is regarded that the goddess Durga descends to the earth through a newly sprouting bilva tree. The twigs and leaves are used in the performance of Homa.
- **Buransh (*Rhododendron arboretum*):** Flowers are offered to deities in almost all religious functions.
- **Darbha, Doob (*Cynodon dactylon*):** Hindus consider the plant to be sacred, and Lord Ganesh loves it. As the three gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh live in the three portions of the plant's anatomy—the base, the plant body, and the tips of the leaves, respectively—the plant is considered as the remover of all sins. On Durva Ashtomi, which falls during Bhadrapad Shukla Ashtomi, the plant is revered.
- **Dhan (*Oryza sativa* ()):** Its husked seeds are utilised in a number of religious rites and devotional practises. Additionally, it is employed to bless fertility by applying a sacred mark (Tilak) on the forehead using sandalwood or turmeric paste. Another method of decorating a place of worship is using rice seed paste.
- **Dhatra (*Datura metel*):** This flower is offered to Lord Shiva to remove negative emotions like hatred, envy, ego etc.
- **Gainda (*Tegetes erecta* (Linn)):** Garland for gods is made from the flowers.
- **Goolar (*Ficus racemosa*):** The plant is grown near sacred places like temples. In the Hindu mythology, the plant is regarded as the place where Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh live. Women folk worship this plant and light lamp around it sunset.
- **Kandale (*Urtica dioica* (Linn.)):** In order to fend off evil spirits, the newborn infant travels with a twig.
- **Haldi (*Curcuma longa*):** The herb, which is linked to the planet Jupiter, is used to make a paste that is applied on the bride and groom's faces and bodies on the wedding day in order to get blessings.
- **Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*):** Fragrant flowers of this plant is used along with vermilion for pleasing the Lord Hanuman.
- **Kela (*Musa paradisiaca*):** Every part of the plant is regarded as sacred. The plant is worshipped by women during October – November by wishing for male child. Leaves are used in offering during religious ceremonies. A bunch of banana and a few betal leaves are essential plant parts required in all religious functions. Every Thursday, women worship the plant as it is the mark of Vishnu by offering water, gram seeds and a lighted lamp. During SatyanarayaPooja (on full moon day) this plant is a important part. On this day, Panjiri, a prasad is distributed on the leaves of this plant.
- **Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*):** Lotus flower and its seeds garland is used to pleased Goddess Lakmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity.
- **Mirch (*Capsicum annum*):** To drive away evil spirits, people inhale the smoke from red chillies.
- **Paati (*Artemisia nilagirica*):** To draw in good energy, the leaves of this plant are combined with ghee and burned as incense.
- **Pan (*Piper betel* (Linn.)):** All religious rites employ its leaves, which are seen as pleasing to the goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth).
- **Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*):** The plant is considered as one of the important sacred trees in Hindu mythology as the lord Vishnu- the Vasu Dev. The plant is associated with planet Saturn, Jupiter. Every Saturday the tree is lighted with Deepak. The tree is worshiped by the woman on Monday. The plant is worshiped on MooniAmavasya in the month of Magh.
- **Suyal (*Euphorbia ligularia* (Roxb.)):** The plant is potted on the roof top and is believed that it protects home from the natural lighting strokes. The plant is also worshiped to please lord Shiva.
- **Timura (*Zanthoxylum aromatum* (DC.)):** To ward off bad spirits, people keep the twigs in their homes.
- **Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*):** Every home has the plant, which is highly revered. Its symbol is Hari Priya, which signifies beloved of Lord Vishnu. On Tulsi- Akadashi in the month

- of Kartik Krishna Akadashi, the plant is honoured. On Kartik Shukla Akadashi, the plant is also revered as a Tulsi bride. Its roots are cut and made into beads to make mala which is used for chanting of mantras. Its leaves are used in every pooja. Dried pieces of tulsi plants mixed with sandal wood are distributed to the persons present during cremation for offering on the burning body. This is known as Panchlakri.



Figure 1. Common plants used in different religious ceremonies (a) Haldi (*Curcuma longa*), (b) Dhatura (*Datura metel* Linn.), (c) Badri Tulsi (*Oreganum vulgare*), (d) Darbha, Doob (*Cynodon dactylon*), (e) Goolar (*Ficus racemosa*), (f) Kandale (*Urtica dioica* (Linn.))

Conclusion

Present studies showed that various plants have been aesthetically used in religious ceremonies as they have traditional medicinal values also to cure human diseases as it contains valuable secondary metabolites.

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