

RESEARCH PAPER:

Natural heritage of forest conservation in Bhor region of Pune, India

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SUMMARY

Bhor area in Pune district was famous from the earlier period as a "Territory of Pant Sachiv" and surrounded by many historical forts like Rajgad, Rayareshwar, Rohideshwar, etc. The natural heritage of forest conservation is known as Dev-Rahati or sacred groves. Bhor division was under control of Religious committees and that are monitored by forest department, Maharashtra government. In the study area eight sacred groves were surveyed for plant diversity and results have been presented and discussed accordingly.

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The western part of Maharashtra, (India) has certain protected vegetation areas (forest patches) preserved on religious ground and known as *Sacred groves*, or *Deo-Rahat*, or *Deo-Rai*. These groves have enjoyed complete immunity from human interference. Due to firm belief and mystic folklores, nobody dares to commit any offence which will disturb the sanctity of the forest spirit.

These forest patches (sacred groves) are preserved for a very long period of time, probably for centuries of years or even thousands of years. Sacred groves from Pune district are surveyed for multidimensional aspects by several workers. Detailed floristic account of submerged sacred groves in Panshet and Varasgaon dam sites were recorded by Vartak and Gadgil (1981) and Kulkarni and Kumbhojkar (1999), Tetali and Gunale (1990). Threat to medicinal plants in Pune district was reported by Upadhye *et al.* (2004). Gadgil and Vartak (1981) made inventory of sacred groves from Maharashtra state in general and recorded 11 sacred groves from Bhor Taluka. Waghchaure *et al.* (2006) recorded 14 sacred groves from Parinche valley of Pune district for their cultural and ecological point of view. Kulkarni and Sindikar (2005) made plant diversity evaluation of Shirikai sacred grove situated at village Shirkoli from Bhor Taluka. Kulkarni and Nipunage (2009) reported

floristic diversity and ecological evaluation of 'Dhup-rahath' sacred grove situated in Bhor region of Pune district. The sacred grove is specifically known as '*Dhup-Rahath*' due to magnificent trees of *Dhup i.e. Canarium strictum* Roxb. The grove is situated southwest of Hirdoshi village on Bhor-Mahad Road in Pune district and on one of the descending spurs of Rairi hills at an elevation of about 1050 m. It covers an area of about 5 hectares along a gentle slope near Varandha pass, only a few km below the origin of 'Nira' river, flowing through a narrow ravine passing along the grove. The reigning deity of the grove is goddess 'Durga'. It indicates that Bhor region has heritage of forest conservation since ancient time. However, very scattered studies on sacred groves from Bhor region have been carried out so far.

Bhor area was famous in earlier period as a "Sansthan of Pant Sachiv" surrounded by many historical forts like Rajgad, Rayareshwar, Rohideshwar, etc. Bhor area is famous as Karmbhumi of Maharaja Chatrapati Shivaji. Sacred groves from Bhor Taluka are under control of Devasthan committees and that are monitored by forest Department, Maharashtra Government. The sacred groves are under threat because of anthropogenic pressure and developmental activities like Bhatghar, Nira, Devodhar and Gunjavani dams. In the study

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