

Ethnobotanical study of Sacred groves of Poshina forest of Sabarkanth district, North Gujarat

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SUMMARY

The concept of biodiversity has been known to man ever since he began to observe minutely the living being around him. As we are losing our biological diversity and the delicate balance of ecosystem, the need to initiate conservation of biodiversity is greater than ever before. Sacred groves are a group of trees or a patch of vegetation protected by the local people through cultural and religious practices evolved to minimize destruction. Their plant wealth and conservation potential were impressive enough to acknowledge them as “mini biosphere reserve”. Poshina is an adivasi belt, popularly known as ‘Poshina Patti’. Poshina is a village of Khedbrahma tehsil of Sabarkantha district, North Gujarat. In the present paper seven sacred groves namely Piplawali Mata sacred grove, Shankar Mahadev sacred grove, Kal Bhairav sacred grove, Shankar mahadev- Gormata sacred grove, Shitala mata sacred grove, Sundha Mata sacred grove and Ghatawala Mahadev sacred grove, located in the Poshina forest have been studied. Information about the groves were collected from villagers, local people and local caretakers of the groves. Plant species growing near the sacred groves are considered as sacred plants which have either religious value or therapeutic value or both.

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Biodiversity, an umbrella term for the degree of nature’s variety, including both number and frequency of ecosystem, species or genus in a given assemblage, encompasses all species of plants, animals and microbes and the ecological complexes in which they occur (McNeely *et al.*, 1990). India is one of the biologically wealthiest nations of the world. Apart of being exceedingly rich in flora and fauna, India has also inherited a tradition of conserving nature by sacred groves. Sacred groves are groups of trees or patches of vegetation protected by the local people through religious and cultural practices. The people worship the sacred trees associated with sacred groves. These trees are protected by the indigenous people because of their cultural and religious importance (Israel *et al.*, 1997). Natural sacred groves are found on all continents of the world except Antarctica. Among all countries of the world, sacred groves are reported from 33 different countries (Bhagwat and Rutte, 2006). In India

sacred groves exist in 19 out of 28 states (Malhotra *et al.*, 2001). Out of 13,720 sacred groves, 29 have been reported from Banaskantha district of Gujarat state (Gupta *et al.*, 2000). Looking to the importance of sacred groves in the conservation of plant species, attempts were made for ethnobotanical study of the seven sacred groves of Poshina forest of Sabarkantha district of North Gujarat

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Poshina is situated in Khedbrahma taluka (Tehsil) of Sabarkantha district of North Gujarat. It is located 12 kms away from Ambaji-Khedbrahma highway. It is divided in to two ranges *i.e.* 1) Poshina forest range 2).R.D.F. (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Poshina range. The Poshina forest range measures an area of 12978 hectares. It’s northern and eastern parts leads to Rajasthan state, western part joins with the border of Ambaji forest range of Banaskantha district and in southern part there is a R.D.F. Poshina range. The minimum and maximum temperatures recorded in the area are 10°C in winter and 42°C to 45°C in summer. 15th June to 15th August is a monsoon period. Biogeographically the area belongs to hilly tract of Aravalli mountain range. According to Gujarat State Forest Department (GSFD), it is an unclassified forest area (under section-4) and ecologically it comes

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