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STUDY OF SACRED GROVES AND SACRED PLANTS OF R.D.F. POSHINA FOREST RANGE OF SABARKANTHA DISTRICT, NORTH GUJARAT, INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Significant tradition of nature worship is that of providing protection to patches of forests dedicated to deities or ancestral spirits. These vegetation patches have been designated as sacred groves. Historical background, ethnic beliefs and information about sacred plants were collected from the tribal of these forests. Total six sacred groves observation viz., *Choliyawala Mahadev/ Choliyanagri Mahadev* Sacred grove, *Ambaji Mata* Sacred grove, *Bhamrawali Mata* Sacred grove, *Chhibadi Mata* Sacred grove, *Chamunda Mata* Sacred grove and *Mevadwala/Devda Bhagvan* Sacred grove studied during the year 2011-12.

KEY WORD: *Sacred groves, Sacred plants, R.D.F. Poshina forest range.*

INTRODUCTION:

Sacred groves of India are forest fragments of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a significant religious connotation for the protecting community. Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these patches. Indian SGs are sometimes associated with temples / monasteries / shrines or with burial grounds (Gadgil, M. and Vartak, V.D.1975). Other forms of forest usage like honey collection and deadwood collection are sometimes allowed on a sustainable basis. Sacred groves did not enjoy protection via federal legislation in India. Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove (Sudha *et al.*, 1998). Around 14,000 SGs have been reported from all over India, which act as reservoirs of rare fauna, and more often rare flora, amid rural and even urban settings. Experts believe that the total number of sacred groves could be as high as 100,000. (Ramachandra, 2000 and Malhotra, 2001). Twenty nine SGs have been reported from Gujarat. (Gupta *et al.*, 2000). The sacred groves found in India can basically be classified under three categories (based on analysis of studies on sacred groves): Traditional Sacred Groves – It is the place

where the village deity resides, who is represented by an elementary symbol, Temple Groves – Here a grove is created around a temple and conserved and Groves around the burial or cremation grounds.

STUDY AREA:

Sabarkantha District is the backward District of Gujarat state. The total population according to 2001 census is 1027 million. The rural population is 15, 75,918 (86.48%) and tribal population is 18.41%. The rural commonly are Brahmin, Patel, Vania, Rajput and Muslims etc. The adivasi commonly are Bhils, Parmar, Pardhi, Sarar, Dabhi, Angari, Kher, Kapedia, Rohisa, Bangadia, Lakhumada, chunara, Damors and many more. Their principal means of livelihood is agriculture and live stalk. The main crops raised are maize, whete, chana, peddy, tuvar, bajra, and rajko.

Poshina is situated in Khedbrahma taluka and 12 km away from Ambaji-Khedbrahma highway which is divided into two ranges (1) Poshina forest range and (2) R.D.F. (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forest) Poshina forest range. The R.D.F. Poshina forest range is a tribal area located in Khedbrahma taluka of Sabarkantha District of North Gujarat, India. The R.D.F. Poshina forest range belongs to Sabarkantha forest division of Gujarat state. The total area of R.D.F. Poshina forest range is 8156.03 H.A., of which reserve forest under section-20 is 921.43 H.A. and un-classed forest under section-4 is 7234.60 H.A. Total 25 villages in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Extensive field trips were organized during the year 2010-2011 in R.D.F. Poshina Forest range area of Sabarkantha District in North Gujarat. Forest areas and villages of such regions were frequently visited, to collect the information about the forest wealth and uses of plant species were noted. Village wise men, experienced informants, elderly people, head man of the hamlets, tribal medicine men, 'vaidya', 'bhagat', 'bhuwa', etc. were contacted and by repeated queries and thus data was gathered. These people are the only source of information about the local plant names and their ethnobotanical uses. This is the original and ancient knowledge, which was not documented systematically earlier but from last few decades several ethnobotanical workers have been worked on this subject.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Choliyawala Mahadev/ Choliyanagri Mahadev Sacred grove:

Choliyawala Mahadev Sacred grove is situated on the bank of the river Sabarmati near the forest area of cholia village.

According to the local prayer, the tribal of the village coming daily for good worship and the deity is represented by milk. The folk believes that after fulfillment of the wish the deity represented by flag

which is made up of Narvans *Dendrocalamus strictus* Nees (Poaceae) and the cloth of cotton *Gossypium herbaceum* L.(Malvaceae).

The grove mainly surrounded by few trees of Vad *Ficus benghalensis* L.(Moraceae), Limdo *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.(Meliaceae) and Kesudo *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub.(Fabaceae). Ficus is now considered to play an important role in the conservation of many kind of insects, birds etc. The Neem trees having various medicinal benefits. Butea is employed in hindu ceremonies and having medicinal benefits.

2. Ambaji Mata Sacred grove:

Ambaji Mata Sacred grove is situated near the forest area of Jotasan village. The believes that the deity fulfills everyone wish and after fulfillment of the wish, the deity represented by burnt clay idols of horse. The grove is surrounded by the trees Australian baval *Acacia senegal* Willd.(Mimosae), Khajuri *Phoenix sylvestris* (L.) Roxb.(Arecaceae), Kanji *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Roxb.) Planch. (Ulmaceae), Sitafal *Annona squamosa* L. (Annonaceae), Simlo *Bombax ceiba* L.(Bombacaceae) and Ambo *Mangifera indica* L.(Anacardiaceae).

3. Bhamrawali Mata Sacred grove:

Bhamrawali Mata Sacred grove is situated on the bank of the river Sabarmati near the forest area of Dotad village. The believes that the deity fulfills everyone wish and after fulfillment of the wish, the deity represented flag which is made up of Narvans *Dendrocalamus strictus* Nees (Poaceae) and the cloth of cotton *Gossypium herbaceum* L.(Malvaceae) and burnt clay idols of horse.

The grove is surrounded by the trees Simlo *Bombax ceiba* L.(Bombacaceae), Bili *Aegle marmelos* (L.) Rutaceae, Arni *Clerodendron multiflorum* (Burm.f.) (Verbenaceae), Saragavo *Moringa oleifera* Lam.

4. Chhibadi Mata Sacred grove:

Chhibadi Mata Sacred grove is situated on the bank of the river Sabarmati near the forest area of Dantral village. The grove was built by their ancestors before 130-150 years ago in the time of the origin of the village. They believes that the deity fulfills everyone wish and after fulfillment of the wish, the deity represented flag which is made up of Narvans *Dendrocalamus strictus* Nees (Poaceae) and the cloth of cotton *Gossypium herbaceum* L.(Malvaceae) and burnt clay idols of horse.

The grove is surrounded by the trees Kanji *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Roxb.) Planch. (Ulmaceae), Nagod *Vitex nagundo* L.(Verbenaceae), Kesudo *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub.

(Fabaceae), Vad *Ficus benghalensis* L.(Moraceae), Bordi *Zizyphus mauritiana* Lam.(Rhmaceae), Moto Arduso *Ailanthus excelsa* Roxb.(Simaroubiaceae) and the shrub *Calotropis procera* (Ait.) R.Br. (Asclepiadaceae).

5. *Chamunda Mata* Sacred grove:

Chamunda Mata Sacred grove is situated near the forest area of Movatpura village. The grove was built by their ancestors before more than 150 years ago during the time of Darbar Mahobbatsinhg who was the king of Poshina.

The grove is surrounded by the trees Kanthar *Capparis sepiaria* L.(Capparaceae), Simlo *Bombax ceiba* L.(Bombacaceae), Mordhundhiyu *Dichrostachys cinerea* (L.) W. & A. (Mimosaceae), Baval *Acacia chundra* (Roxb. Ex Rottl.)Willd. (Mimosaceae), Dhav *Anogeissus latifolia* (Roxb) Wall.(Combretaceae), Kanchner *Bauhinia purpurea* L.(Caesalpiniaceae), Dudhi Zad/Dudhlo *Wrightia tinctoria* R.Br. (Apocynaceae), Khajuri *Phoenix sylvestris* (L.) Roxb.(Arecaceae).

6. *Mevadwala/Devda Bhagvan* Sacred grove:

Mevadwala/Devda Bhagvan Sacred grove is built near Malvas village of this forest area by their ancestors before 200 years ago.

Addition to their culture, when a girl of Mevad-Rajasthan married with a boy of this area, after a month girl's parents and relatives coming by walking with the idol of Lord *Mevadwal/Devda Bhagvan* , to established near the house of their son of low and they believed that god will protect their daughter to ghost.

The grove is surrounded by the trees Baval *Acacia chundra* (Roxb. Ex Rottl.)Willd. (Mimosaceae), Limdo *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.(Meliaceae), Dudhi Zad/Dudhlo *Wrightia tinctoria* R.Br. (Apocynaceae), Kanji *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Roxb.) Planch. (Ulmaceae), Bordi *Zizyphus mauritiana* Lam.(Rhmaceae).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

At now this time, we are facing the major problems of the conservation of bio diversity, sacred groves play an important role in the conservation of biodiversity, recharge of aquifers and soil conservation. Sacred groves, it is strictly prohibited to cutting, climbing of trees and removal of wood; it is protected by their natural condition.

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Fig.1 Choliyawala Mahadev Sacred grove



Fig.2 Ambaji Mata Sacred grove



Fig.3 Bhamrawali Mata Sacred grove



Fig.4 Chhibadi Mata Sacred grove



Fig.5 Chamunda Mata Sacred grove



Fig.6 Mevadwala/Devda Bhagvan Sacred grove

Plate 1: Sacred groves