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Sacred Groves of Hadoti Region: A Case Study of Tehsil Hindoli, District Bundi, Rajasthan

Rajendra Prasad¹, Dilip Kumar Rathore²

Assistant Professor, Department of Botany, Government College, Bundi, Rajasthan, India¹

Assistant Professor, Department of Botany, Government College, Bundi, Rajasthan, India²

ABSTRACT: The sacred groves are those pieces of protected forests that have spiritual and religious significance. Tehsil Hindoli is a typical example of the Hadoti region characterized by natural beauty and specific cultural heritage. Numerous sacred grove areas are found in Hindoli tehsil of Bundi district. These sacred groves are shelter for many animals, plant species, and tribal, nomadic communities. All these sacred forests have been protected by tribal and nomadic groups as well as local residents living in tehsil Hindoli since long time. The present study highlights the main sacred groves located in Hindoli tehsil known for their spiritual, religious, and cultural significance.

KEYWORDS: Sacred groves, Tribal.

I. INTRODUCTION

An important tradition of nature worship prevails among the tribals as conservation technique. In this, a part of the forest near the village is preserved with the belief that it is inhabited by ancestors and local deities. For this reason, they are considered sacred and any destructive work is prohibited in these sacred forests. Worship is done according to tradition only from time to time. These types of forests are called sacred forests. Sacred groves are considered as "Sacred Natural Sites" (IUCN) (Oviedo et al., [1]). Botanists have tried to define these forests. According to Hughes and Chandran in [2], sacred groves are segments of the landscapes, containing trees and other forms of life and geographical features, date is delimited and protected by human societies because it is believed that to keep them in a relatively undisturbed state is an expression of important relations to the divine or nature.

Tribals consider these places to be a means of connection with their ancestors and invisible divine power. Therefore, to keep its purity unbroken, the entry of human beings is generally forbidden in it. According to the Botanists, these forests were probably the "first shrines" of the early humans. The remains of this type of forest are found in Greece. The study of these remains suggests that a part of the forest was surrounded by stones and kept safe. They were called "Teminos" in Greek.

Two Indian scientists studying the history of sacred forests, Professor Madhav Gadgil and Vartak in [3], conclude that the concept of Virgin forests in the human mind hypothesis dates back to around 3000–5000 years BC when human beings were depended on hunting and obtain their food from forests. At this time man had not learned to cultivate. It is possible that humans have started farming on empty land by burning forests. At that time small parts of forests have been dedicated to their ancestors and local deities. Generally, these forests were located in the watershed area, where they had water available throughout the year. Hence, it may have been recognized that water is available to them by the grace of gods and goddesses living in these forests.

Anthropologist, Kalam in [4], is of the view that these sacred forests are the result of an ancient tradition which led to the formation of a socio-cultural institution in which the tribal people began to perform their religious, social and cultural work near these forests. He believed that the souls of the ancestors and the local deities reside here. Whatever the reason may be, even today the presence of holy forests in different countries of the world indicates the love of man towards nature and his sense of protection.

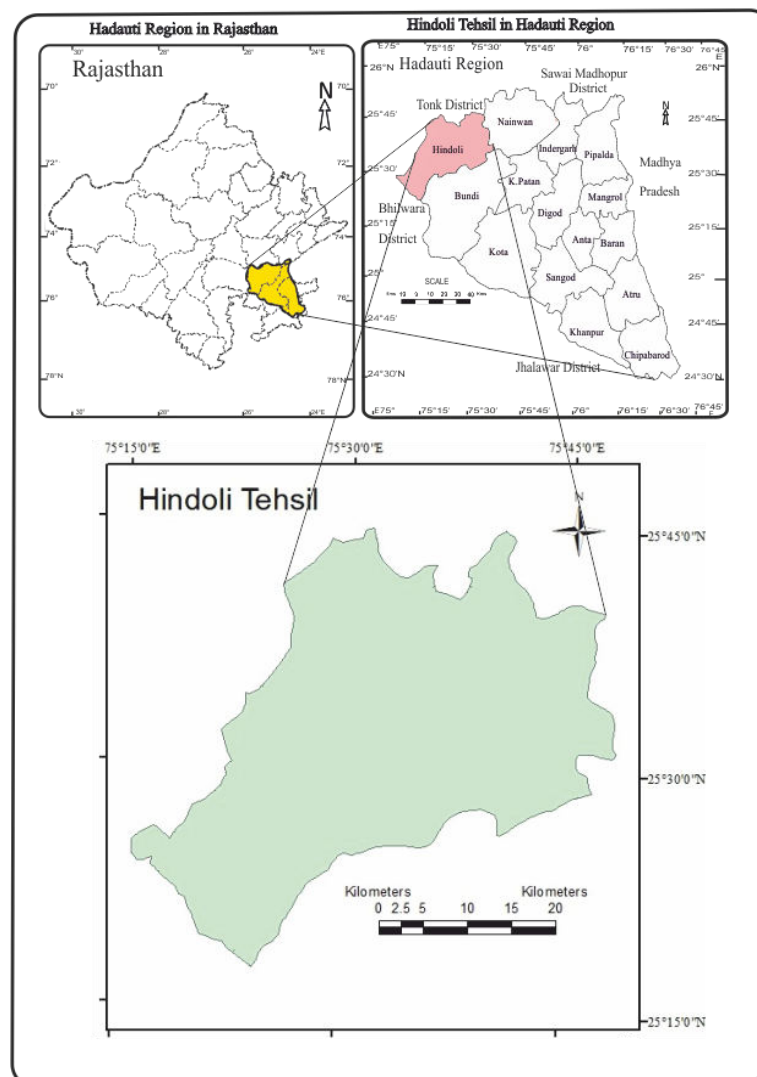
In fact, these sacred forests are rich in biodiversity. These places have social and religious significance. They are protected by local residents, nomadic groups, wild men and tribals. These people have belief that in such places the

deities reside and many times the idols of Hindu deities are properly established in these sacred forests. Local residents have immense devotion towards the sacred forests. The belief of the people is that the Gods and Goddesses get angry on any kind of cutting down trees and damage to the plants grown in these places. As a result, natural calamities like floods, storms, droughts, etc. begin. Not only this, various types of diseases start spreading, and crops are destroyed. This is the reason why the fallen dry leaves and fruits of some sacred forests are not even touched. For example, the *Garo* and *Khasi* tribals of North Eastern India have completely banned the use of fruits, flowers and leaves, etc. of the trees of sacred forests; Whereas in Central India, it is forbidden to cut trees in the '*Gond*' tribals. Use of only fallen leaves and fruits is permitted.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The sacred groves of Rajasthan are known with the names *Oran*, *Jogmaya*, *Deora*, *Thanak* etc. All these sacred forests have been protected by tribals, nomadic groups, and local residents living in Rajasthan since long time. Most of the sacred groves of Rajasthan are found in the Aravalli Mountain range. Apart from this, sacred groves are found in some form in every village of the Rajasthan. Bundi district is a gift place of nature. Hindoli tehsil is full of natural and geographical beauty. Numerous areas of the Hindoli tehsil are surrounded by many residual hills, folding, faulting, waterfalls, and many more sacred groves. Many sacred groves are found in this area. The observation is based on a field survey of the whole Hindoli tehsil region during different seasons which is as follows.

Key Map



Naidia (Nala-Daha) sacred grove-

Naidia (Nala-Daha) is situated in south part of Bundi district between 25° 13'52.747" North Latitude and 75° 30'57.298" East Longitude in Loicha gram panchayat, tehsil Bundi district Bundi. Naidia (Nala-Daha) is located 30 km away from district headquarters. This place is on Upper mall plateau. The climate of the area is semi-humid. The average annual rainfall is 800 mm with 90% rainfall between June to September. This place is full of natural and geographical beauty. Flow of the water on rocks is the centre of attraction. Inside the Naidia waterfall, there is an ancient Shiv temple. The forests surrounding this area are known as religious and sacred forests. Many tribal, local, and nomadic communities are found near this area which protects and worship these sacred forests. In this forest along with the waterfall, there are many Jamun trees. The area is well dominated by waterfalls as well as Jamun trees. This area is also known as the Jamun forest. The forest also consists of *Terminalia arjuna* (Arjun), *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), *Ficus religiosa* (Pipal), *Acacia nilotica* (Babool), *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Butea monosperma* (Dhak), *Ziziphus mauritiana* (Ber), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Kadam), etc.



Fig. 1. Dense sacred grove (Naidia, Nala-Daha)



Fig. 2. Ancient Shiv Idol (Naidia sacred grove)

Saint Durvasa sacred grove-

Saint Durvasa sacred grove area is considered to be one of the ancient sites of the Bundi district. Saint Durvasa grove area is located 33 km away from district headquarters. It is situated in the middle of the Aravalli hills. The main attraction of this area is the ancient Shiv temple and the beautiful *Dhokara* forest. Inside the Shiv temple a continuous flow of water falls into a small pond. The small pond is the main source of drinking water there. The shore area of waterfall is well dominated by *Phoenix dactylifera* (Khajur) trees. Khajur trees indicate the presence of water. The surrounding hills are predominantly covered by *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), which turn into a green canopy in the rainy season, adding to the charm and beauty of the Saint Durvasa sacred forest. The area is mostly compact with the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Churel), *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Kadam), etc. Local residents have immense devotion towards the Saint Durvasa sacred grove. According to the local priest, the tribal villagers come daily for worship. Especially, on the day of *Sivaratri*, "Aamligiyarus" and every Monday of "Shravan mas" villagers come for worship, and the deity is represented by milk. The folk believes that the area is protected and conserved due to the presence of the deity. The people believe that the Gods and Goddesses will get angry on cutting down trees and on damage to the plants grown in these places. In that area, trees are not used for personal use.



Fig. 3 Saint Durvasa ancient Shiv Temple surrounded by sacred grove



Fig. 4 Saint Durvasa sacred grove

Lakdeshwar Mahadev sacred grove –

Lakdeshwar Mahadev sacred grove is situated near Petch ki bawari on the bank of the Mej River. This area is one of the most ancient places of Bundi district. The ancient Shiv temple, dense forest area, and Mej river attract the

tourists most. The flow of the Mej river increases the beauty of this area. It is located about 35 km from district headquarters. The forests are rich in biodiversity. This place has social and religious significance. This area is protected by local residents, nomadic groups, wild men, and tribals. Locals believe that a dive into the nearest water pond will cure any kind skin disease. The tribals, local residents, nomadic groups of the area come daily for worship. This grove is surrounded by the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Churel), *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Elaeocarpus ganitrus* (Rudraksha), etc.

Other Sacred groves-

Apart from all these main sacred groves, many minor sacred grove areas are also found in this tehsil. The care and protection of this area is done by the villagers together. The main minor sacred groves are as follows. *Kalnda mataji sacred groves*, *village-Datunda*, *Shri Dundhleshwar Mahadev sacred groves-Gudha Dam*, *Bijashan mata sacred groves*, *Hindoli*, *Gangangrav ji maharaj sacred groves*, *village-Chatragang*, etc.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study is an attempt to bring the light to the knowledge of different sacred groves protected by the tribal, nomadic, and local residents of the various locality of Hindoli tehsil. The result of this survey of sacred trees has been described with Spiritual and religious significance in Table-1.

Table -1
Some important sacred trees of the tehsil Hindoli and belief behind these trees.

S.No	Scientific name of Plant	Local Name	Family	Spiritual and religious significance
1.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Bilpatra	Rutaceae	In Hinduism, its trifoliate leaf arrangement had a great spiritual significance. The leaf reflects the trinity of tridev (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv). It is known as very Spiritual and religious tree.
2.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Neem	Meliaceae	It is considered as Dhanvantri (the Aryan god of medicine). The ancestors have faith that planting neem trees assure a passage to heaven. It was believed that the goddess of smallpox, 'Sithala' lived in the neem tree.
3.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Safed Akada	Asclepiadaceae	Lord Shiva is worshipped with leaves of Safed Akada.
4.	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Bargad	Moraceae	It has a religious significance in the three major religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism). It is believed that the tree is the source for achieving enlightenment. It is the tree where the lord Adinatha (the first Jain) achieved spiritual enlightenment.
5.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Pipal	Moraceae	It is one of the most sacred tree among all the trees. People have belief that Lord Vishnu lives in this tree.
6.	<i>Adansonia digitata</i>	Kalp-vriksh	Malvaceae	A wish-fulfilling divine tree in Hindu mythology. The people have believed if we wish something from this tree than the wish will be fulfilled.
7.	<i>Elaeocarpus ganitrus</i>	Rudraksha	Elaeocarpaceae	Associated with Lord Rudra.
8.	<i>Madhuca latifolia</i>	Mahua	Sapotaceae	It is considered sacred by many tribal communities. They collect the flowers and consume the spirit. These tribal communities called themselves as guardian of Mahua.
9.	<i>Saraca indica</i>	Ashok	Fabaceae	It has a strong religious association with Hinduism and

				Buddhism. It is said that goddess Sita sat under this tree in Lanka and Gautam buddha was born under this tree.
10.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Tulsi	Acanthaceae	It is a very religious, spiritual and sacred plant in Hindu belief. They believe that goddess Tulsi lives in this plant, goddess Tulsi is known as the avatar of Laxmi.
11.	<i>Thevetia peruviana</i>	Pili kaner	Apocynaceae	The flowers of this plant are very toxic and immensely liked by Lord shiva therefore used as offering to lord shiva during worship.
12.	<i>Santalum album.</i>	Chandan	Santalaceae	This plant has strong spiritual properties. It is believed that it brings people closer to the divine and provides calmness and clears the mind.
13.	<i>Emblica officinalis</i>	Amla	Phyllanthaceae	It is believed that the deity of Vishnu, Krishna and Radha reside near this tree. the tree is worshiped to get the grace of the deity.
14	<i>Anthocephalus cadamba.</i>	Kadamba	Rubiaceae	The tree is associated with Lord Krishna.
15	<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i>	Parijat	Oleaceae	Parijata emerges during the churning of the ocean (samudra manthan) and had a great significance in the Hindu mythology.
16	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i>	Arjun	Combretaceae	Arjuna tree is Associated with Kishkinda Kanda in Ramayan.

Table 2
Religious festivals in tehsil Hindoli and associated sacred trees

S.No.	Festivals	Plant name	Family
1.	Maha shivratri	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Rutaceae
2.	Shitla asthami	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Meliaceae
3.	Aavonla akadashi	<i>Emblica officinalis</i>	<u>Phyllanthaceae</u>
4.	Somwati Amavasaya	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Moraceae
5	Dev-utani giyaras	<i>Ziziphus nummularia</i>	Rhamnaceae
6	Guruwar vart	<i>Canna indica</i>	Cannaceae
7.	Everyday worship	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Acanthaceae
8.	Vat Amavasaya	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Moraceae

Table-01 shows about 16 religious and spiritual plant species which are used and believed by tribal and local residents of the Hindoli Tehsil region. Table-02 shows about 8 different plant species related to fast (*Vrat*) that are protected by tribal and local residents. By this, it is proved that plants have a very important place in religions. Findings are supported by similar research work by Maru & Patel [5], Rawat & Dookia [6], Sharma [7], Rathore, et al., [8], Jamir [9], Gold & Gurjar [10], Singh [11], Chandrakanth et al. [12], Kothari et al. [13], Tiwari et al. [14], Hughes & Chandran [15], [16], Gadgil & Guha [17], Gadgil & Chandran [18], Bhandari [19]. They described many sacred groves and their spiritual and religious significance which also support present research work.

IV. CONCLUSION

The religious importance of the sacred groves of tehsil Hindoli has been emphasized in this study. These forests have been protected by the tribals and the local community considering them as sacred. These ancient forests play an important role in freeing the environment from pollution and producing oxygen. Due to modern developmental activities, sacred groves are reduced considerably. At present, the existence of these forests is being threatened due to the exploitation of forests and increasing encroachment in these areas. At present, there is a need that guidelines should be made to protect these sacred groves. These areas should be recognized by the local government. With all these efforts, we will be able to save these holy forests.

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