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

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ABSTRACT: Those parts of forest that have spiritual and religious significance are known as sacred groves. A typical example is the Hadoti region that is characterized by its natural beauty, specific cultural heritage and houses numerous sacred groves in Talera tehsil of the Bundi district. Many animals, plant species, tribals and nomadic communities harbour in these sacred groves. Since a long time, these sacred groves are being well protected and preserved by the residents, tribal and nomadic groups. The study explores the spiritual, religious and cultural significance of the four major sacred groves in Talera tehsil. The study reveals that the concept of sacred groves has contributed significantly to the conservation of diverse plant species and wildlife, ultimately playing a vital role in environmental protection.

KEYWORDS: Sacred groves, Tribal, Hadoti, Nomadic groups, Tribal

I. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of nature worship in tribal communities is an important conservation technique. In this tradition, a part of the forest near the village is preserved with the belief that it is inhabited by ancestors and local deities. These areas are considered sacred and neither cutting nor destruction is allowed. These sacred forests are known as "Sacred Natural Sites", (IUCN) (Oviedo et al., [1]. which reflect the important relationships between human society and nature. These forests are an integral part of the cultural and religious traditions of tribal communities. Tribal communities consider these places to be a means of connection with their ancestors and the divine. To preserve their sanctity, human entry is often prohibited. According to botanists, these forests may have been the earliest sacred sites for ancient humans. Remnants of such forests can be found in Greece, where they were known as "Teminos" and were surrounded by stones for protection. According to Indian scientists Professor Madhav Gadgil and Vartak, the concept of sacred forests dates to around 3000-5000 years BC [2,3]. During this time, humans relied on hunting and gathering food from forests, and had not yet developed agriculture. It is likely that humans began farming by clearing forests through burning, and subsequently dedicated small areas of forest to their ancestors and local deities as a tribute. These sacred forests were often located in watershed areas, where water was available throughout the year, leading to the belief that the gods and goddesses residing in these forests provided water.

Anthropologist Kalam [4] suggests that sacred forests are a result of an ancient tradition that led to the formation of a socio-cultural institution. This institution allowed tribal people to perform their religious, social, and cultural activities near these forests, believing that the souls of their ancestors and local deities resided there. Regardless of the reason, the presence of sacred forests in various countries worldwide demonstrates humanity's affection for nature and its instinct to protect it. In reality, these sacred forests are rich in biodiversity and hold significant social and religious importance. Residents, nomadic groups, and tribal communities protect these areas. In some cases, idols of Hindu deities are established within these sacred forests. The local population have great respect for these forests, believing that any harm caused to the trees or plants will invoke the wrath of the gods, leading to natural calamities like floods, storms, and droughts, as well as the spread of diseases and destruction of crops. As a result, even fallen dry leaves and fruits in some sacred forests are left untouched. For instance, the Garo and Khasi tribes of Northeast India have banned the use of fruits, flowers, and leaves from sacred forest trees, while the Gond tribes of Central India prohibit tree cutting, allowing only the use of fallen leaves and fruits. Sacred groves are areas of forest protected due to traditional, religious, and cultural beliefs. They play a crucial role in conserving biodiversity and help in water and soil conservation [5].





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II. MATERIAL & METHODS

Oran, Jogmaya, Deora, Thanak etc. are the different names by which the sacred groves of Rajasthan are known as. Since a very long time, nomadic groups, tribals and residents of Rajasthan have been protecting these sacred groves. Aravalli range constitute most of the parts of these sacred groves. Bundi district is a beautiful place established by nature. Bundi is strategically situated in the southeastern region of Rajasthan, offering a unique blend of natural beauty and cultural heritage. Bundi, a quaint city in the Hadoti region of Rajasthan (India) is renowned for its majestic forts, palaces, and intricately designed step-well reservoirs, locally known as Baoris. Bundi district is located approximately 210 km from Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan. The district spans a total area of 5776 square km, accounting for 1.68% of Rajasthan's total geographical area. Located in the southeastern part of Rajasthan, Bundi is situated between the geographical coordinates of 24°59'11" to 25°53'11" north latitude and 75°22'30" to 76°19'30" east longitude.[6]. Bundi district is administratively divided into seven distinct tehsils, namely: Bundi, Hindoli, Nainwa, Keshoraipatan, Talera, Raithal and Indragarh. It is all parts are full of nature and beauty one of the examples is Talera tehsil. It is situated 17 km away from the district headquarters south of Bundi. Talera tehsil is known for its beautiful forests, waterfalls, sacred groves, flora, and fauna. After exploring the Talera tehsil some important sacred forest areas have been identified. Information was gathered from the local community living in the surrounding areas. The observation is based on a field survey (during 2023 to 2024) of the whole Talera tehsil region during different seasons which is as follows.







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Dev Dungari sacred grove-

Dev Dungari is situated in southern part of Talera tehsil between 25⁰13'52" north latitude and 75⁰30'57" east longitude in Laxmipura gram panchayat, tehsil Talera district Bundi. The famous sacred forest named as Dev Dungari is situated on a small Hill near the Bardha Dam (Hadoti ka Goa). From district headquarters it is located at 32 km distance. The climate of the area is semi-humid. The average annual rainfall is 800 mm with 90% rainfall between June to September. The place is well known for its natural beauty. Many sacred and religious forests are found in this area. These forests are well protected and worshiped by the tribal, local and nomadic communities residing in the nearby area. Specially the Gurjar communities is completely dedicated to this Hill. On this hill there is a large and magnificent ancient temple of local deity Devnarayan ji. Devnarayan Ji was a folk deity, ruler, and great warrior of Rajasthan. Lord Devnarayan Ji is also known as the God of Medicine, and his worship is performed using neem leaves. The entire Gurjar communities, along with other local people and nomadic groups protects the forests of this Hill. These forests are not used for any personal purposes. This hill is a habitat for numerous animal and plant species. The entire hill is covered with dense forests. The area is well dominated by waterfalls as well as Dhokara trees. The forest is also called as Dhokara forest. Azadirachta indica (Neem), Dalbergia sissoo (Shisham), Terminalia arjuna (Arjun), Anogeissus pendula (Dhokara), Ficus benghalensis (Bargad), Ficus religiosa (Pipal), Acacia nilotica (Babool), Ziziphus mauritiana (Ber), Mitragyna parvifolia (Kadam), etc. are also found in this area.



Fig. 1. Dev Dungari Google Map View

Fig. 2. Dev Dungari Hill



Fig. 3. Ancient Devnarayan temple on Hill

Fig. 4. Dense forests on Hill

Kalyanpura Mahadev sacred grove-

Kalyanpura Mahadev sacred grove area is considered to be one of the ancient sites of the Bundi district. The area is located 40 km away from district headquarters. The main attraction of this area is the ancient Shiv temple and the beautiful Jamun & 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 indicates the presence of water [7]. 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 Kalyanpura Mahadev 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 Kalyanpura Mahadev sacred grove. According to the local priest, the tribal villagers come daily for worship. Especially, on the day of Sivaratri, "Aamli giyarus" and every Monday of "Shravan mas" villagers come for worship, and Milk, Honey and Panchamrit are offered to the deity. The folk believes that the area is protected and conserved due to the





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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.1 Temple area

Fig. 2. Ancient Temple

Fig. 3. Ancient Stepwell



Fig. 4. Syzygium Tree

Fig. 5. forest

Fig. 6. Temple part

Teen Dhaara Mahadev sacred grove -

Teen dhaara mahadev sacred grove is situated near Talera on the bank of the Talera river. This area is one of the most ancient places of Bundi district. The ancient Shiv temple, dense forest area, and Talera river attract the tourists most. The flow of the Talera river increases the beauty of this area. It is located about 15 km from district headquarters. The forests are rich in biodiversity. This place has social and religious significance. This area is protected by 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, 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.



Fig. 1. Teen dhaara temple covered with dense forests Fig. 2. Shiv temple on Talera river bank

Chanda ka Talab Devi Mata Temple sacred grove -

This is an ancient temple built on a small plateau. The Temple is situated at 20 km distance from Talera tehsil and 8 km from Laxmpura garam panchayat The temple along with the surrounding forest area is being protected by the local community. Devimata temple has been worshiped by the tribals for a long time. The main castes around this forest are Gurjar, Bhil and Banjara. Due to faith of the Goddess this sacred forest has been conserved since a long time. Anogeissus pendula (Dhokara), Holoptelea integrifolia (Churel), Dalbergia sissoo (Shisham), Aegle marmelos (Bilpatra), Prosopis juliflora (Vilayati babool) etc. trees predominance in these areas.





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Fig. 1. Devi Mata's Chabutra with Dhokara forests

Fig. 2. Ancient Devi Mata's Temple

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 those area are done by the villagers. The main minor sacred groves are as follows. Hanuman Mandir sacred groves Bardha bandh, Bhartabawari Stepwell sacred groves village Bharta-Bawadi, Ganesh temple sacred grove Barundhan etc.

III. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The present study is an attempt to bring the light to the knowledge of different sacred groves protected by the tribal, nomadic, and residents of the various locality of Talera tehsil. The result of this survey of sacred trees has been described with Spiritual and religious significance in Table-01

TABLE 01 THE MAIN PLANT SPECIES FOUND IN THESE SACRED FOREST AREAS.

| S.No. | Plant name | Local name | Family |
|-------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Adansonia digitata | Kalp-vriksh | Malvaceae |
| 2 | Aegle marmelos | Bilpatra | Rutaceae |
| 3 | Anthocephalus cadamba. | Kadamba | Rubiaceae |
| 4 | Azadirachta indica | Neem | Meliaceae |
| 5 | Calotropis gigantea | Safed Akada | Asclepiadaceae |
| 6 | Elaeocarpus ganitrus | Rudraksha | Elaeocarpaceae |
| 7 | Emblica officinalis | Amla | Phyllanthaceae |
| 8 | Ficus benghalensis | Bargad | Moraceae |
| 9 | Ficus religiosa | Pipal | Moraceae |
| 10 | Madhuca latifolia | Mahua | Sapotaceae |
| 11 | Nyctanthes arbor-tristis | Parijat | Oleaceae |
| 12 | Ocimum sanctum | Tulsi | Acanthaceae |
| 13 | Phoenix dactylifera | Khajur | Arecaceae |
| 14 | Prosopis cineraria | Khejdi | Mimocaceae/ Fabaceae |
| 15 | Saraca indica | Ashok | Fabaceae |
| 16 | Terminalia arjuna | Arjun | Combretaceae |
| 17 | Thevetia peruviana | Pili kaner | Apocynaceae |

TABLE 02RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS IN TEHSIL TALERA AND ASSOCIATED SACRED PLANTS

| S.No. | Festivals | Plant name | Family |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1. | Maha Shivratari | Aegle marmelos | Rutaceae |
| 2. | Every Monday and Shravan | Datura stramonium | Solanaceae |
| | month (July -August) | | |
| 3. | Maha shivratari | Prosopis cineraria | Fabaceae |
| 4. | Shitla asthami | Azadirachta indica | Meliaceae |
| 5. | Ganesh Chaturthi | Cynodon dactylon | Poaceae |





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| 6. | Akshaya Navami | Emblica officinalis | Phyllanthaceae |
|-----|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 7. | Aavonla akadashi | Emblica officinalis | Phyllanthaceae |
| 8. | Somwati Amavasaya | Ficus religiosa | Moraceae |
| 9. | Dev-utani giyaras | Ziziphus nummularia | Rhamnaceae |
| 10. | Guruwar vart | Canna indica | Cannaceae |
| 11. | Everyday worship | Ocimum sanctum | Acanthaceae |
| 12. | Vat Amavasaya | Ficus benghalensis | Moraceae |

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Table-01 shows about 17 religious and spiritual plant species which are used by tribal and residents of the Talera tehsil region. Table-02 shows about 12 different plant species related to fast (Vrat) that are protected by tribal and residents. By this, it is proved that plants have a very important role in religions. Prasad & Rathore [8] conducted an in-depth study of the sacred forests in Hindoli tehsil of Bundi district. In this study, they elaborated on the religious and cultural significance of three prominent sacred forests in Hindoli tehsil-Naldiya Dah, Sant Durvasa, and Lakdeshwar Mahadev sacred forests. Shrama [9] reported that there are numerous sacred forest areas in Bundi district. These sacred forest areas are protected by the local tribal communities. Findings are supported by similar research work by Prasad[10], [11], [12] Maru & Patel [13], Rawat & Dookia [14], Sharma [15], Rathore, et al., [16], Jamir [17], Gold & Gurjar [18], Singh [19], Chandrakanth et al. [20], Kothari et al. [21], Tiwari et al. [22], Hughes & Chandran [23], [24], Gadgil & Guha [25], Gadgil & Chandran [26], Bhandari [27]. They described many sacred groves and their spiritual and religious significance which also support present research work.

IV. CONCLUSION

Talera tehsil in Bundi district is a densely forested region of significant importance, boasting numerous sacred groves and a rich cultural diversity, with various tribal communities residing here. The religious importance of the sacred groves of tehsil Talera has been emphasized in this study. These forests have been protected by the tribals and the local community considering them as sacred. The four major sacred grooves discussed above are playing an important role in maintaining the ecosystem of the area. A lot of endangered species of flora and fauna also reside there. These areas have such a good air quality which significantly reduced the pollution of that area ensuring good health. 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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