

# Magicoreligious beliefs about plants in Bhil Tribe of Pratapgarh Tehsil, Rajasthan (India)

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## Abstract:

The Present paper deals with the magico religious beliefs in plants by tribes of Pratapgarh Tehsil (Rajasthan) major tribes of this region are Bhil, Mina and some are nomadic: Garasiya, Ninama, Damor. During present investigation 20 plants from 12 different families recorded. Documented plants are arranged alphabetically with their local names, family, part used, modes of use and the ailments for which they are used.

**Keywords-** Magicoreligious plants, Pratapgarh, Bhil tribe.

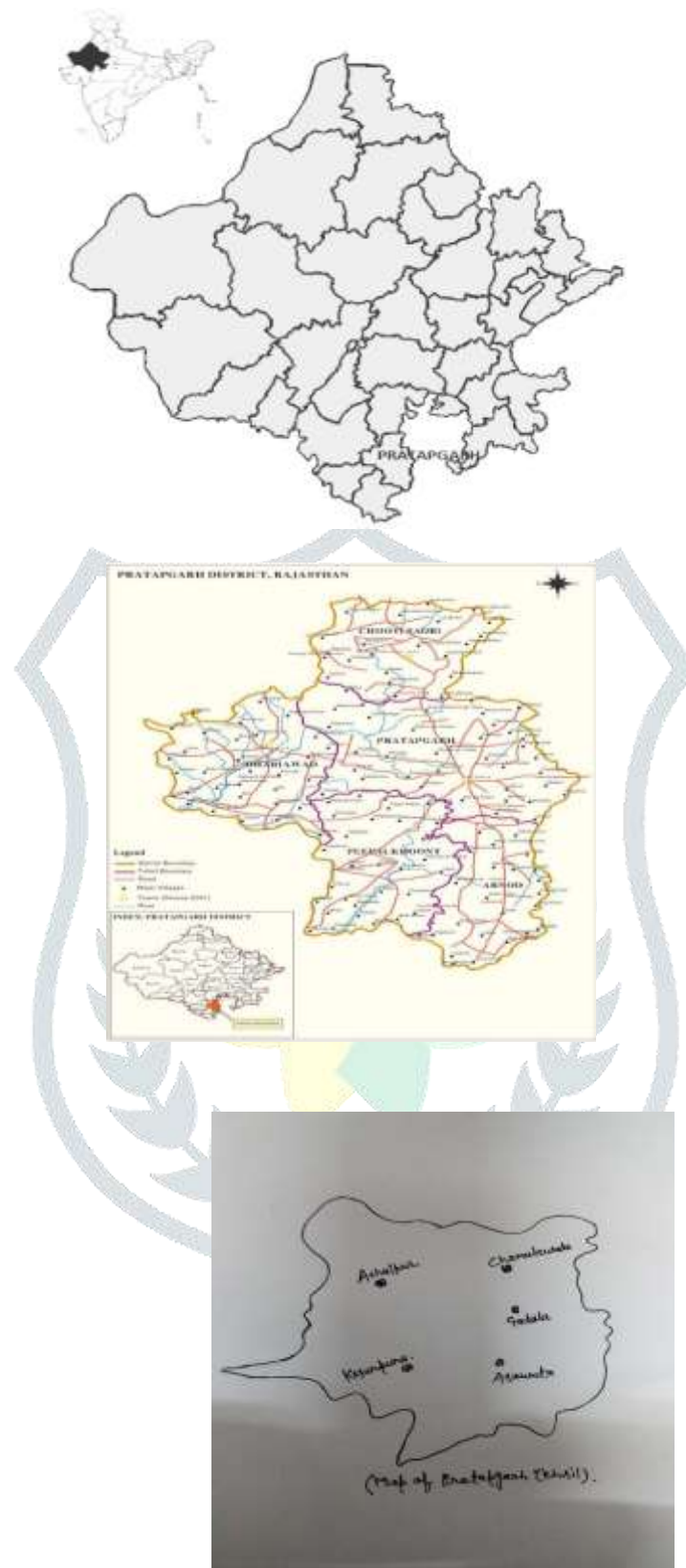
## Introduction:

Tribal's have deep faith in paranormal activities or supernatural beings like ghosts, demons and evil spirits. They promptly attribute their mishappenings to these forces. In their daily routine superstitious based on plant have a great deal of impact, which may appear irrational scientifically. However they have developed this thinking generation after generation and appeasement of these supernatural forces is done for the betterment of their society. In the present investigation, authors have surveyed five villages of Pratapgarh Tehsil of Rajasthan and collected the information of about twenty plants in which Bhil tribe has strong magico religious beliefs. In Rajasthan, Bhil tribe represents 1.67 per cent of the total tribal population and majority of them spread over in district Udaipur, Pratapgarh, Dungepur, Banswara. Hence, the present study focuses on Bhil tribe.

A review of ethnobotanical literature reveals that few studies have been made on magico religious beliefs in Rajasthan (Singh and Pandey), 1982; Sebastian and Bhandari, 1984; Kothari, 1984; Joshi, 1995; Khandelwal and Shrivastava, 1999 etc). Vartak and Gadgil (1981) studied the beliefs of tribal people about plants of Maharashtra and Goa and. Hajra (1981) among Khasis in Meghalaya. The role of magico beliefs and practices among Bhil has not been investigated in detail so far; therefore, the present study is being undertaken.

## Study area:

Pratapgarh Tehsil is located in eastern part of Pratapgarh district and district is located at 24.03°N 74.78°E. It has an average elevation 491 meters (1610 feet). The climate of this region is subtropical type characterized by winter, summer, and monsoon seasons. The average rainfall recorded is 750 mm. It is the second highest place in Rajasthan after Mount Abu. Pratapgarh is situated on the junction of the Aravali hills range and Malva plateau. Its geographical area is 1117.36 sq km. this southern region is known for rich flora and fauna. As per census 2011 in Pratapgarh Tehsil, out of total population, 16.9 % people lives in urban areas while 83.1% lives in rural areas.



(Location of Pratapgarh District and various Tehsils of Pratapgarh District and study area of Pratapgarh Tehsil)

**METHODOLOGY:**

The study covers five villages namely Achalpur, Chamalawada, Gadola, Asawata, Kesarpura, in which majority of the population is Bhil tribe. The information was collected from the key informants like

village head man, elderly people, Bhopas, and Naths. The data collection methodology involved focus discussion, in-depth interviews, observation and photography.

### **OBSERVATION AND RESULTS:**

Bhil tribe of Tehsil Pratapgarh consider following plants as auspicious and magico religious plants.

#### **Auspicious plant:**

During the study, authors found that cutting of certain plants in to the surroundings of Bhil was considered a sin and if someone tried to cut them, he was either punished or boycotted from the village. These plants are; *Ficus benghalensis* (Bad), *Ficus racemosa* (Gular), *Madhuca indica* (Mahuwa), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Kadamb), *Santalum album* (Chandan), *Musa paradisiaca* (Kela), *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi), *Mangifera indica* (Aam), *Phyllanthus emblica* (Anwala), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Acacia catechu* (Khair), *Aegle marmelos* (Bael), *Datura metel* (Dhatura), *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* (Harsingar) and *Calotropis gigantea* (Safed Aakra).

#### **Inauspicious plants:**

Bhil consider some of the plants as inauspicious mainly because of their strong belief regarding these plants as abode of ghosts and evil spirits, secondly due to morphological and physiological characters of certain plants which brings some other types of disturbance in the family. These plants are.

*Syzygium cumini* (Jamun), *Tamarindus indica* (Imli), *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajoor), *Annona squamosa* (Sitafal), *Cuscuta reflexa* (Amarbel), *Terminalia bellirica* (Bahera), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Bander bati/Churil), *Ziziphus nummularia* (Ber), *Bombex ceiba* (Semal).

#### **Magico religious beliefs practices:**

Bhil have many plant based folk beliefs which have originated from coincidence or accident. Many of them are common in other tribes as well following are the beliefs collected among Bhils.

- 1- *Acacia catechu* (Linn.f) Willd. Local Name- Khair, Family- Mimosaceae- A solid cylindrical pestle (Musal) made up of acacia catechu wood wrapped in mother's lehenga is kept on the main door of a new born baby, which is believed to bless the child with long life.
- 2- *Achyranthes aspera* Linn. Local name-Adailo kato/Oondho kanto, Family- Amaranthaceae- Bhopas of Bhil tribe brush their teeth with the twig of this plant for professional perfection. They believe that after brushing of it they will get some supernatural power and evil eyes can't get them harm during rituals.
- 3- *Albizia lebbek* (Linn.) Benth. Local name- Siris, Family-Mimosaceae- A tree of *Albizia lebbek* in the vicinity of the house is thought to lower the prosperity of the house so Bhil tribe never believe to grow it near home territory as they believe the bitter fragrance of this plant don't liked by Goddess Laxmi.
- 4- *Azadirachta indica* A.Juss. Local name-Neemdo/Neem, Family-Meliaceae- Bhopa's of Bhil tribe uses twigs of this plant to cure evil eye as they believe brunt smell of leaves helps to run away these sprits and cure patients.
- 5- *Bauhinia variegata* Linn. Local name- Kachnar, Family-Caesalpiniaceae- This plant brings wealth in the family.
- 6- *Calotropis gigantea* (Linn.) R.Br. Local name- Safed aakdo/Aak/Akra, Family- Asclepiadaceae- Bhil and all the natives of southern rajasthan worship this plant as abode of Lord Shiva and believe it to

bring prosperity and happiness in the family. Its twigs are not allowed to be cut, being considered as arm of Lord Shiva.

- 7- ***Calotropis procera*** (Ait.)Ait.f. Local name- Aakdo/Aak/Akra, Family- Asclepiadaceae- This plant is considered to bring about feud in the family, hence not planted in the compound of the house and brings different type of problems in family. In Bhil tribe, Mother of a new born baby is not allowed to cut the twigs of this plant under the belief that mother's milk get dried up with drying up of latex of the twig.
- 8- ***Cassia fistula*** Linn. Local name- Amaltas/ Barr-bharavan, Family- Cesalpiniacea - Bhil keeps the pods of these trees under the pillow ward off nightmares.
- 9- ***Commiphora wightii*** (Arn.) Bhandari. Local name- Gugar/Guggal, Family- Burseraceae- Bhopas of Bhil tribe drive off the evil spirit by making the victim inhale the fumes of the oleogum resin of this tree.
- 10- ***Capparis sepiaria*** Linn. Local name- Karil/ Kair/ Tainti, Family- Capparaceae- A twig of this plant is kept on the roof of the room of a new born baby to save the child from evil spirit and it is believed that along with the twig the umbilical cord of the child gets dried up.
- 11- ***Dalbergia sissoo*** Roxb. Local name- Tali/Seesham, Family- Fabaceae- it is thought to reduce the economy of the house and bring sorrow in the family. Hence it is prevented being grown near the house
- 12- ***Ficus benghalensis*** Linn. Local name- Bad/Badla, Family-Moraceae- This plant is considered to bring about feud in the family, hence not planted in the compound of the house. And bring different type of problems in family. As Bhil tribe believes that evil spirits lives on this plant and they control the headman of family with their desires. So no one is allowed to go near plant in night for natural calls.
- 13- ***Moringa oleifera*** Lam. Local name- Sainjna, Family- Moringaceae- Bhil keeps the pods of these trees under the pillow ward off nightmares.
- 14- ***Musa paradisiaca*** Linn. Local name- Kela/Kell, Family- Musaceae- This plant considered sacred and bring peace and happiness in the family. Marriage ceremonies in Bhil tribe starts with this plant leaves, they invite Lord Ganesha offering them sweets and fruits on Kela leaf as they believe Brashpati Dev lives in this plant and when they offer Lord Ganesha to come in home first, it brings pursuit of happiness and wellness.
- 15- ***Ocimum sanctum*** Linn. Local name- Ram tulsi, Family-Lamiaceae- This plant considered sacred and bring peace and happiness in the family. Bhil tribe uses this whole plant and parts on auspicious occasions as they believe Lord Vishnu lives in this plant and he is the supreme God in Hinduism.

- 16- *Prosopis cineraria* (Linn.) Druce. Local name- Khejari/Jati, (Family- Mimosaceae) - Dusshaura festival starts with this plant twig, placed in front of Orans of Lok Devtas as this tree is prayed with the following verse “Shami Shamayate papam shami lokhitkantaka Dharinyarijunbananam Ramasya priyavadini| karishmanyatraya yathakal such mya tatra nirvighanktri twam bhav sree Rampujite” means “The Shami tree cleanses sins, helps to defeat enemies .it is Lord Rama’s favorite tree and in such a tree Pandavas hid their arms. O Shami, Lord Rama has worshipped you. I now embark upon my journey to victory. May you make it pleasant and free from obstacles” Bhil tribe men perform dance during Navratra and Dusshaura in front of Local devta’s taking twigs of this plant in hands to show respect and for inner peace.
- 17- *Prosopis juliflora* (Swartz.) DC. Local name- Vilayati kikar, Family- Mimosaceae – Scorpion sting is cured if thorns of this tree after chewing are spitted on the injured portion. As they believe local Devta lives on this plant and sap of this plant can cure from poisonous venom.
- 18- *Ricinus communis* Linn. Local name- Arand/Arandi, Family- Euphorbiaceae- This tree is placed in the compound of the house that relieves the patient from rheumatism.
- 19- *Tamarindus indica* Linn. Local name- Imali, Family- Caesalpiniaceae- Its shadow is thought to be hazardous in Bhil tribe for health causing rheumatism and lethargy. As they believe witches lives on this plant and curse children’s with poor health that’s why children’s are not allowed to go near this plant in Noon and night.
- 20- *Zizypus nummularia* (Brum.f.) Wight & Arn. Local name- Jhar beri, Family- Rhamnaceae- The curved stipular spines of this plant once entangled in the cloths are difficult to extricate and is believed to take away the pride of the family.

## DISCUSSION:

Magico religious beliefs of tribes are very ancient and are indulged as their customs and rituals. Twenty plants of twelve families has been observed, out of them family Fabaceae, Asclepidaceae are dominant. Many of the plants discussed above in the present investigation for Bhil tribe have common auspicious and inauspicious bearing in other tribal communities like Kathodies and Mina’s besides Bhil’s Bishnoie’s also worship *Prosopis cineraria*. Twigs of *Achyranthus asperus* are used as toothbrush for professional perfection by bhopas of Garasia and bheels (Singh and pandey, 1998). *Datura metel* auspicious to Bhil’s is equally considered scared by Chinese. Tribals of Rajasthan use pods of *Cassia fistula* to ward off nightmares, whereas tribals of Garo hills use *Thysanolaena maxima* a grass under the bed for the same purpose, (Hajra, 1986). The criterion employed for majority of the plants to be auspicious has a religious bearing. The other verdict being their importance in ethno medicine. Tribal’s on the basis of religious ground and their beliefs of deities both good and evil residing on the trees, have resulted in the preservation of vegetation in the form of sacred groves.

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