

CHAPTER-4

SACRED PLANTS

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Since the ancient era, divine status to trees and plants. Myths, epics and rituals of worship are built around them. It is well known that trees improve water quality and help recharge of groundwater supply. Many trees and plants have edible leaves rich in vitamins and other nutrients. Trees impact our daily lives in so many ways, even in the midst of busy concrete city centres. Considering the great culture of our country, it was well referred in the *Mahabharata*, *AnusasanaParva*, that those who want a better future should plant good trees around lakes and tanks used by the public, and raise them like sons. There are references in the *Siva Purana* and the *Padma Purana*, among others, about the spiritual significance of various plants and trees. Tree worship is inherent in all religions emanating from India in general and Bundelkhand in particular. The relationship between the tree and its patron deity is an intricate web. Sacred trees form an important part of the ecological heritage of our country. Most temples, towns, and villages are associated with trees. Some plants are sacred to the individual deity; others, to the place. Sometimes, the tree is an integral or even larger part of the sanctity of the shrine; towns, cities and dynasties have been named after sacred trees. Worship of plants is an ancient phenomenon in India, probably the oldest form of worship. Sanctification of plants reveals the socio-economic and health concerns of the ancient peoples, their knowledge of the environment and its conservation.

Plant worship is probably the oldest form of religion because of the sheer magnificence and antiquity of huge trees. The *Rg Veda* (X.97) says that plants are 'those that grew in old times ... much earlier than even the shining ones (*devas*)... and are different from many different places ...' Trees were called *vanaspati* (lord of the forest) and invoked as deities along with the waters and mountains. Soma is the most important plant in the *Rg Veda*. Mandala IX of the *Rg Veda* is called the *Soma mandala*, devoted to the ritual of *Soma pavamana* or 'purification of Soma', and six hymns in other *mandalas* are devoted to its praise. Soma was a ritual drink extracted from a plant. Where the Soma plant grow? According to the *Mahabharata*, it grew on Mujavant, a mountain located in the Himalayas. The plant had long stalks and was yellow in colour. In the *Vedic* period, all of nature was, in some sense, divine, part of an indivisible life force uniting the



world of humans, animals, and vegetables. Besides trees, grasses and herbs were also held sacred. Trees, says the *Rg Veda*, are the homes and mansions of the gods. The udumbara (cluster fig) was used for making the *yupa* (sacrificial pole), udumbara and khadira for making the *sruva* (ladle), nyagrodha for making the *chamasa* (sacrificial bowl), and bilva for its fruit and for making the *yupa* for the sacrifice. Varuna is the root of the Tree of Life, the source of all creation, a great *yaksha* reclining in *tapas* (meditation) on the waters from where a tree springs from his navel (*Atharva Veda*). In the *Yajur Veda*, this quality is inherited by Prajapati. The tree is the *asvatta*, but later the Creator was seated on the lotus, which was issued from Narayana's navel. The pipal was held in great esteem in the *Vedic* period. A tree of huge dimensions, it was symbolic of the cosmos and even

of the *Brahman*. The imperishable pipal was later called the *akshaya vata*, the eternal tree. The pipal tree was the basis of a profound metaphysical doctrine in the *Rg Vedic* and later *Vedic* literature. The *Rg Veda* says that plants personify the divine, and trees are the Vanaspati or lords of the forest, self-regenerating and eternal. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* says that a tree of huge dimensions filling the space around it with its numerous branches and foliage, with a lofty trunk and many stems rising high in the sky, was the symbol of the Cosmic Tree or *Brahman*.

According to the *Chandogya Upanishad*, the Cosmic Tree symbolises life while the *Taittiriya Brahmana* equates *Brahma* with the forest and the tree: *Brahma tad vanam, Brahma sa vriksha asa* (Brahma is the forest, *Brahma* is the tree).

According to Buddhist scriptures, sacrifices were performed to *yakshas* or spirits of the trees. Even today, Hindus circumambulate the pipal seven times to the prayer *vriksha rajaya namah*. Trees in Buddhism, Buddhism and Jainism, being offshoots of the *Vedic* religion, continued many of the earlier traditions. One of these was the sanctity of the tree, particularly the peepal. Each form of the Buddha and each of the Jaina Tirthankaras was associated with his own tree, under which he attained enlightenment.

In early Buddhist monuments, the Buddha (563-483 BCE) was never represented in human form but as his symbol, the tree. The tree is a substitute for the Buddha himself, as are other symbols like the *dharma chakra*, footsteps, and so on. There are several scenes of common people, kings, queens, and Brahmanas worshipping the Buddha represented as a tree, mounted on a platform and festooned with garlands.



Kalpa Vriksha

The *Kalpa Vriksha* is the wishful filling tree of life, first mentioned in the *Rg Veda*. It was one of the gems that came out of the ocean during the *samudra manthan* (churning of the ocean), and Indra the king of the heavens, took it away to paradise. It is a very special tree that can bear any kind of fruit, which is why it is associated with different trees in different places. It is a symbol of life and prosperity, a focal point for one's spiritual quest.

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism were placed on images housed either in a rock-cut cave or beneath a tree. From the *Puranic* period onwards, the emphasis was on the construction of impressive temples and temple complexes. The protector tree gave way to the tree of the sacred spot (*sthal*). *Puranic* literature is replete with the importance of pilgrimages to sacred *sthalas*. Similar to the worship of sacred trees is reverence for sacred groves dedicated to local deities and/or ancestral spirits. Often, sacred groves are homes of sacred trees. Sacred groves probably represent the single most important ecological tradition of ancient Indian culture. Their conservation is a long tradition of conserving nature by giving it a spiritual dimension.

The forests are the property of the gods of the villages in which they are situated, and the trees cannot be cut without leave from the headman, whose office is hereditary and who is also the pujari (priest) of the sacred grove. All forms of vegetation in the sacred groves are supposed to be under the protection of the deity of that grove, the removal of even a small twig being taboo. Sacred groves serve as a seed source (through dispersal by birds) through which ecological restoration can be achieved. Sacred groves are an important refuge for rare, endangered, and threatened medicinal plants.

Sacred groves are also associated with perennial water bodies like streams, ponds, lakes, and wells and serve as valuable resources for nearby localities in terms of water supply in the dry season. Transpiration from the sacred groves increases atmospheric humidity and reduces the temperature in the immediate vicinity, producing a more favourable microclimate for many organisms. Soil erosion is prevented because of the trees' capacity to retain water and bind the soil. The soil itself has few nutrients with which to support the large biomass of the sacred grove. Many microorganisms, invertebrates, fungi, and a vast array of other species also live on these root systems. Bundelkhand region in general and Sagar, in particular, has good forest around it; most of the population followed Hinduism and Jainism. Many villages surround the Dr. Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya Sagar area, and inhabitants use many plants for their worship. In the

present chapter, an attempt has been made to list plants that signify the ancient/Vedic culture representing plants related to Navagarh, Nakshatras, Rashi, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Even the plants depicted in the Quran were also enlisted.

Table 15: Plants related to Nakshatras

S.N.	(Nakshatra)	Botanical Name
1	Ashwini	<i>Strychnos nux-vomica</i> L.
2	Bharani	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> L.
3	Kritika	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.
4	Rohini	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels
5	Mrigashira)	<i>Acacia catechu</i> (L.f.) Willd.
6	Ardra	<i>Aquillaria malacencis</i> Lam.
7	Punarvasu	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> Nees.
8	Pushya	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.
9	Aslesha	<i>Mesua ferrea</i> L.
10	Magha	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.
11	Poorvaphalguni	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.
12	Uttaraphalguni	<i>Ficus virens</i> Ait.
13	Hasta	<i>Sapindus mukorossi</i> Gaertn.
14	Chitra	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.
15	Swati	<i>Terminalia cuneata</i> Roth
16	Vishakha	<i>Feronia limonia</i> (L.) Swingle
17	Anuradha	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.
18	Jyeshtha	<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L.
19	Moola	<i>Shorea robusta</i> Gaertn.f.
20	Poorvashadha	<i>Calamus rotung</i> L.
21	Uttarashadha	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> Lam.
22	Shravana	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Ait.) R.Br.
23	Dhanshita	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce
24	Satabisha	<i>Neolamackia cadamba</i> (Roxb.) Bosser
25	Poorvabhadrapada	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.
26	Uttarabhadrapada	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss
27	Revati	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i> (Koen.) Mac Bride

Table 16: Navagraha

S. No.	Planet	Common Name	Direction	Botanical Name
1	Sun	Aak / Shwetark	Middle	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R. Br.
2	Moon	Palash	South-East	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.
3	Mars	Khadhir (Nalla Sandra)	South	<i>Acacia catechu</i> (L.f.) Willd.
4	Mercury	Apamarg	North	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i> L.
5	Jupiter	Peepal / Ashvath	North-East	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.
6	Venus	Gular / Anjeer	East	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.
7	Saturn	Shami / Khari	West	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce.
8	Rahu	Durva	South-West	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.
9	Ketu	Kush / Darbha	North-West	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (L.) Stapf

**Table- 17 : Enlisting different gemstones and their plant substitutes**

S.N.	Botanical Name	Hindi name	Name of Gemstones	Name of Planet	Colour of threads
1	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> (L.) R.Br.	Anantamul	Coral	Mars	Red
2	<i>Withania somnifera</i> (L.) Dunal	Ashwagandha	Moonstone	Ketu	Black
3	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Sweta Chandan	Hessonite Garnet	Rahu	White
4	<i>Justicia adhatoda</i> L.	Vasaka	Diamond	Venus	White
5	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bel	Ruby	Sun	Red
6	<i>Sida rhombifolia</i> L.,	Berala	Blue Sapphire	Saturn	Blue
7	<i>Chamaesyce hirta</i> (L.) Millsp. (syn. <i>Euphorbia hirta</i> L.)	Dudhi	Pearl	Moon	White
8	<i>Argyreia nervosa</i> (Burm. f.) Boj.	Vridhha	Emerald	Mercury	Green
9	<i>Clerodendrum indicum</i> (L.) Kuntze	Bharangi	Topaz	Jupiter	Yellow

Table -18 : List of plants used in sacred fire (Havans)

S. No.	Botanical Name/ Family	Hindi name	Parts used
1	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Ait.) R.Br.	Ak	Wood
2	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Palash, Dhak	Wood
3	<i>Acacia catechu</i> (L. f.) Willd.	Khair	Wood
4	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i> L.	Chirchira	Wood
5	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Pipal	Wood
6	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Umar	Wood
7	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce.	Shami	Wood
8	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	Doob	Whole plant
9	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (L.) Stapf	Kush	Whole plant

Table-19 : Plants related to Festivals and Vratas (Fasts)

Hindi name of the Tree	Botanical Name	Related Festival or Vrata	Time of Celebration and Rituals
Aonla	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> L.	Amala Ekadasi	11th day of Phalguna sukla; bath with water soaked in „Aonla“ fruit; eating it; worshipping it; and worship of Radha-Krishna.
Am or Mango	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Amra-puspa Bhaksana Vrata	1st day of Chaitra sukla; eating of mango blossoms and worship of Kamadeva.
Asoka	<i>Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) De Wilde	Asoka Pratipada	1st day of Chaitra sukla; only women worship the tree; they also observe fast seeking longevity.
Bakula	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Bakula Amavasya	„Bakula“ flowers are offered to the manes, seeking their blessings.
Vata or Bargad	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Vata Savitri Vrata	Jyestha purnima or amavasya day; having fasted for three previous days, married women worship the bargad tree by circumambulating, tying with the



			sacred protective thread (rakhsa sutra), and listening to the sacred Savitri-Satyavan story; some women stay awake during the night and complete the vow feeding a Brahmin; in western parts of India, devout women observe this vow for five consecutive years.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bilva Tri-ratri Vrata	On a Tuesday of Jyestha purnima when the constellation is Jyestha; worship of the „Bel“ tree for three consecutive nights as per Hemadri's injunctions in the Skanda Purana; the vow comprises bath with water mixed with mustard seeds, partaking of sacred sattvic food (havisyanna), adorning the tree with two pieces of red cloth and placing the image of Uma-Mahesvara beneath it; homa is performed and 1,008 „Bilva“ leaves are offered; Brahmins are fed.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Sravana Krsna Ekadasi	Ceremonial offering of water to the bel tree. The leaves of „Bel“ tree are offered to Lord Shiva in month of Shravana.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bhadra Sukla Caturthi	Offering of trifoliate leaves of „Bel“ to Lord Ganesa.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bilva Nimantrana	Asvina sukla sasthi; summoning the tree-goddess and worshipping the Devi.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bilva Saptami	Asvina sukla saptami; a twig of „Bel“, bearing two fruits, is offered to Devi.
Bilva or Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr.	Bilva Navami	Asvina sukla navami; bel leaves are offered to Siva.
Karavira or Kaner	<i>Nerium indicum</i> Mill.	Karavira Vrata	Jyestha sukla prathama tithi; kaner roots and branches are bathed and adorned with red cloth; offerings of seven cereals (sapta dhanya) and fruit are made followed by fasting; Savitri, Satyabhama, and others performed this when they were in trouble
Kadali or Kela	<i>Musa sapientum</i> L.	Kadali Vrata	Vaisakha, Magha or Kartika sukla Chaturdasi a banana tree is planted and nurtured till it bears fruit; wishing the welfare of one's family, a person should worship the tree with flowers, fruit, etc and circumambulate it.
Kadali or Kela	<i>Musa sapientum</i> L.	Yaksa-Samantaka Kadali	A golden banana tree is



		Vrata	worshipped and offered to a Brahmin on any auspicious day.
Kevada or Screw Pine	<i>Panadanus odoratissimus L. f.</i>	Kevada Teej	Bhadra sukla trtiya; soliciting unbroken married life, women offer „Kevada“ leaves to Lord Siva.
Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica A. Juss</i>	Sitala Puja	Chaitra navaratri; goddess Sitala who is said to reside in the „Neem“ tree is propitiated ritually; Pat Gosain festival in Bengal means neem tree worship; Neem leaves are eaten on Vaisakha sukla saptami.

Table 20 : Plants associated to Tirthankaras

S.N.	Tirthankara	Hindi Name	Botanical Name
1	Rishabhanath or Adinath	Banyan	<i>Ficus benghalensis L.</i>
2	Ajitanath	Shala	<i>Shorea robusta Gaertn. f.</i>
3	Sambhavanath	Prayala	<i>Buchanania lanzan Spr.</i>
4	Abhinandana	Priyangu	<i>Aglaia elaeagnoidea (Juss.) Benth.</i>
5	Sumatinath	Shala	<i>Shorea robusta Gaertn. f.</i>
6	Padmaprabha	Priangu	<i>Aglaia elaeagnoidea (Juss.) Benth.</i>
7	Suparshvanath	Shirisa	<i>Albizia lebbek (L.) Benth.</i>
8	Chandraprabha	Naga	<i>Mesua ferrea L.</i>
9	Pushpadanta or Suvidhinatha	Shali	<i>Boswellia serrata Roxb. ex Colebr.</i>
10	Sitalanath	Priyangu	<i>Aglaia elaeagnoidea (Juss.) Benth.</i>
11	Shreyanshanath	Tanduka	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon Roxb.</i>
12	Vasupuja	Patali	<i>Stereospermum chelonoides (L. f.) DC.</i>
13	Vimalanath	Jambo	<i>Syzygium cumini (L.) Skeels</i>
14	Anantanath	Ashoka	<i>Saraca asoca (Roxb.) De Wilde</i>
15		Dharmanath	Dadhi
16	Santinath	Nandi	<i>Toona ciliata Roem.</i>
17	Kunthunath	Tendu	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon Roxb.</i>
18	Aranath	Mango	<i>Mangifera indica L.</i>
19	Mallinath	Ashoka	<i>Saraca asoca (Roxb.) De Wilde</i>
20	Munisuvrata	Champaka	<i>Michelia champaca L.</i>
21	Naminath (Nimi or Nimeshvara)	Bakula	<i>Mimusops elengi L.</i>
22	Neminath (Arishtanemi)	Vetasa	<i>Calamus rotung L.</i>
23	Parshvanath	Dhataki	<i>Woodfordia fruticosa Kurz</i>
24	Mahavira (Vardhamana)	Shala	<i>Shorea robusta Gaertn. f.</i>

Table-21: Plants associated with Buddhas

S.No	Buddha's name	Botanical name of wisdom tree
1	Tanhankara	<i>Alstonia scholaris (L.) R.Br.</i>
2	Medhankara	<i>Butea monosperma (Lam.) Taub.</i>
3	Saranankara	<i>Stereospermum chelonoides (L.f.) DC.</i>
4	Dipankara	<i>Thespesia populnea (L.) Soland. ex Corr.</i>
5	Kondinya	<i>Lannea coromandelica (Houtt.) Merr.</i>
6	Mangala	<i>Mesua ferrea L.</i>
7	Sumana	<i>Mesua ferrea L.</i>



8	Reveta	<i>Mesua ferrea</i> L.
9	Sobhita	<i>Mesua ferrea</i> L.
10	Paduma	<i>Oroxylum indicum</i> (L.) Vent.
11	Narada	<i>Oroxylum indicum</i> (L.) Vent.
12	Padumuttara	<i>Pinus insularis</i> Endl., <i>Cedrus deodara</i> (Roxb. ex Lamb.) G. Don
13	Sumedha	<i>Melia azadirach</i> L.
14	Sujata	<i>Bambusa arundinacea</i> Willd.
15	Piyadassi	<i>Terminalia cuneata</i> Roth, <i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.
16	Atthadassi	<i>Michelia champaca</i> L., <i>Cananga odorata</i> (Lam.) Hook. f. & Thoms., <i>Artabotrys hexapetalus</i> (L. f.) Bhandari
17	Dhammadass+	<i>Stereospermum fimbriatum</i> DC.
18	Anomadass+	<i>Terminalia cuneata</i> Roth, <i>T. elliptica</i> Willd., <i>Pavetta indica</i> L.
19	Siddhattha	<i>Pterospermum acerifolium</i> (L.) Willd., <i>Cochlospermum religiosum</i> (L.) Alst.
20	Tissa	<i>Pterocarpus marsupium</i> Roxb., <i>Terminalia elliptica</i> Willd.
21	Phussa	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> L.
22	Vipassi	<i>Stereospermum chelenoides</i> (L.f.) DC.
23	Sikhi	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.
24	Vesabbhu	<i>Shorea robusta</i> Gaertn.f.
25	Kukusandha	<i>Albizia lebbeck</i> (L.) Benth.
26	Konagamana	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.
27	Kassapa	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.
28	Gautama	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.
29	Maitreya	<i>Mesua ferrea</i> L.

Table 22: Plants mentioned in Quran

S.No.	Hindi Name	Botanical Name	Quranic Name
1	Jawasa, Turanjbin	<i>Alhagi pseudalhagi</i> (Bieb.) Desv. <i>Tamarix mannifera</i>	Mann
2	Khajur	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> L.	Nakhl
3	Jaitun	<i>Olea europaea</i> L.	Zaitun
4	Angur	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.	Inab
5	Anar	<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	Rumman
6	Anjir	<i>Ficus cairica</i> L.	Teen
7	Sidr	<i>Cedrus deodara</i> (Roxb.) Loud. / <i>Ziziphus</i> sp.	Sidrah
8	Jhau	<i>Tamarix aphylla</i> (L.) Karst.	Athl
9	Pilu	<i>Salvadora persica</i> L.	Khamt
10	Hinna/Kafur	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L. / <i>Cinnamomum camphora</i> (L.) Nees & Eberm. / <i>Dryobalanops aromatica</i> Gaertn.f.	Kafur
11	Sonth	<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Rosc.	Zanjbil
12	Masur	<i>Lens culinaris</i> Medic.	Adas
13	Piyaj	<i>Allium cepa</i> L.	Basal
14	Lahsun	<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	Fum
15	Khira	<i>Cucumis melo</i> L.	Qithatha
16	Kikar	<i>Acacia senegal</i> Willd.	Talh
17	Lauki	<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i> Standl.	Yaqtin
18	Rai	<i>Brassica nigra</i> (L.) Koch	Khardal
19	Babui Tulsi	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	Raihan
20	Thohar	<i>Euphorbia neriifolia</i> L.	Zaqqum
21	Dhari	...	Dhari
22	Tuba	...	Tuba



Figure 3: A- *Ficus benghalensis* B- *Aegle marmelos* C- *Ficus religiosa* D- *Ocimum sanctum*