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Ethnobotanical Study of Kanker Sacred Grove, Chhattisgarh, India



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Abstract

A sacred grove is a religious common existing in traditional societies of the different countries and is managed by the traditional institutions. By studying the management practices of these groves one can see a similarity as well as variation existing in the procedure of the management of these groves. Generally it provides multiple functions to the society. Besides, providing religious function, it is used for social, cultural, economic and ecological purpose.

Chhattisgarh (Kanker region), the state of forest is famous for its religious culture, traditions and pronounced as dev Bhoomi (land of gods). The study was undertaken in sacred groves of Kanker district. People of this state are highly religious and variety of rituals related to god, goddess worships are performed in various ways, throughout the year by the local people in which plants have their defined roles and health-care system are well known. The folklore religious tree enumerated, and the information about their uses, were collected during the field trips to various sacred groves of Kanker district during 2011-2012. Local inhabitants were consulted to find out the uses to these plants. Information regarding religious aspect was gathered from persons having familiarity and knowledge with religious plant. Culture of this tribal district is characterized by the indigenous traditions and beliefs of the inhabitants. Several tribes are residing in this district. Culture of Kanker district also includes the colorful festivals, arts and crafts of the local people wood craft & bamboo crafts contribute heavily to the culture of this district. People residing in this district have their own religious beliefs. It was observed that 25 plant species and 6 flower species have highly utilized and their importance in such religious activities as well as traditional healing system. These believes not only show the human relation with plant diversity but also help in conserving these species.

Over increasing population and growth of infrastructural facilities has resulted in the decline of sacred groves. Modernization and commercialization in order to increase productivity are causes of disappearing traditional knowledge among the people. Through this traditional knowledge we can initiate peoples to participate to conserve biodiversity. There is strong need to initiate people's participation, training for promoting the indigenous traditional knowledge and conserve the medico-diversity plants through this traditional knowledge. Well-preserved sacred groves are storehouses of valuable medicinal and other plants having high economic value, and serve as a refuge to threatened species.

Keywords: Sacred Grove, Dev Bhoomi, Folklore, Kanker, Medicinal Plants etc.

Introduction

Chhattisgarh, the state of forests is famous for its religious culture, traditions and pronounced as dev Bhoomi (land of gods). The study was undertaken in sacred groves of Kanker district of Chhattisgarh. People of this state are highly religious and variety of rituals related to god, goddess worships are performed in various ways, throughout the year local people in which plants have their defined roles and health-care system are well known. There has been, of late, enormous interest in the study of nature conservation by traditional societies. The protection of patches of forest as sacred groves and of several tree species as sacred trees belongs to the religion-based conservation ethos of ancient people all over the world. Although such practices became extinct in most parts of the world, basically due to changes in religion, and during recent times due to changes in resource use patterns, sacred groves and sacred trees continue to be of much importance in religion, culture and resource use systems in many parts of India (Chandran and Gadgil, 1998).

A sacred grove is a religious common existing in traditional societies of the different countries and is managed by the traditional institutions. By studying the management practices of these groves one can see a similarity as well as variation existing in the procedure of the management of these groves. Generally it provides multiple functions to the society. Besides, providing religious function, it is used for social, cultural, economic and ecological purpose. 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 (Gadgil and Vartak, 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. Some NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves. Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove (Sudha et al., 1998). Indian sacred groves are sometimes associated with temples / monasteries / shrines or with burial grounds (which is the case in Shinto and Ryukyuan religion-based sacred groves respectively in Japan). Sacred groves may be loosely used to refer to other natural habitat protected on religious grounds, such as Alpine Meadows. Historical references to sacred groves can be obtained from ancient classics as far back as Kalidasa's *Vikramuurvashiya*.

Sacred grove are tracts of near-virgin forests, the vestiges of an ancient practice in which people protected forest patches. A repository of medicinal plants is a unique example of the all embracing concept and practice of the Indian way of in-situ conservation of biodiversity. The tribal and non tribal communication depend largely (80%) on trees and herbs for their medicinal needs, since the sacred is a segment of the landscape containing plants and other forms of geographical features that are protected by human society, it is of great ecological significance (Rahangdale et al., 2013). The tribals and local people who reside near and around the sacred grove still depend on the mediflora to cure various ailments. Sacred groves depict cultural, traditional, sociological, biological, ecological values and are the chief methods of in-situ conservation of biodiversity (Basa et al., 2013).

Information regarding religious aspect was gathered from persons having familiarity and knowledge with religious plant. Culture of this tribal district is characterized by the indigenous traditions and beliefs of the inhabitants, several tribes are residing in this district. Culture of Kanker district also includes the colorful festivals, arts and crafts of the local people wood craft & bamboo crafts contribute heavily to the culture of this district. People residing in this district have their own religious beliefs. This scenario the study an attempt has been made in this paper to explore the status and culture, and management of sacred grove in the Kanker region of Chhattisgarh.

Study Site

The study area was undertaken in sacred groves of Kanker district. The study site, is a part of Kanker district, Chhattisgarh and located in the southern region of the state with the latitudes 20 0 6 - 20024 and latitude 80048 - 81048. the total area of the district's is 5285.01 sq km. and the population is 748,593 (2011). Mixed deciduous type forests in this district, because of diverse locality factors harbor plenty of medicinally important plants. The floristic vegetation of the sacred groves stent as a typical dry deciduous type forests with local variations. In Kanker district Sal, teak, and mixed forest are found. The folklore religious trees enumerated, and the information about their uses, were collected during the field trips to various sacred groves of Kanker district during 2011-2012.

Material and Method

The entire area of the sacred grove was thoroughly studied by survey and regularly visit of the year 2011-2012. In order to meet the objective, it was essential to do fieldwork in the region by interacting with the people. For the same, data were collected from the secondary sources on demographic profile, physical features, forest conditions and types etc., The selection of villages for the study, was based on the factors of, the number of groves existed in the village, and dominant communities residing in the village. Purposive selection was done to identify the villages for the study. Four villages namely; Uarkuda, Chikhli, Sedesar and Haradula were selected for the fieldwork. The study villages were extensively surveyed and the whole villages were covered in order to know the different perspectives the population regarding the belief, knowledge, practices, participation and management of sacred groves in the village.

Result and Discussion

The detail of Sacred groves of study area are presented in Table No. 01, 02 and 03. The local name, botanical name, family, plant part used and uses of product were investigated. The people of Kanker regions/villages strongly depend on these sacred groves trees and medicinal plants for indigenous cultures and rituals, sacred grooves are distributed over a wide ecosystem and helps in conservation of rare and endemic species. The important sacred grooves are extracted from all four villages and 31 species were recorded. Out of 31 species; 16 species are trees, 05 species are shrubs and 10 species are herbs respectively. The total collected 31 Species are belonging total number of 21 Family and 31 genera.

Out of this, 31 plants are traditional folklore culture species. Plants are enumerated with botanical names, local names, family and use of different parts in their religious rituals presented in Table No. 01. The following families Moraceae, Fabaceae & Poaceae was the dominant in Study site and maximum 03 species was found in each family followed by Rutaceae & Annonace (02). Apart from this, total number of 08 families represented only single species during study.

The Table No. 02 presented that the details of Indian festivals related to the trees and plants. The

Ficus religiosa is one of the most sacred tree, associated with planet Saturn and Jupiter, & worshiped to need of blessing on almost all rituals. *Ficus benghalensis* 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 (raksa sutra), and listening to the sacred Savitri-Satyavan story. *Azadirachta indica* Caitra 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. Associated with lord Vishnu, the creator of this universe. This sacred plant is worshiped daily due to a belief that it wards off the evil spirits from home. The leaves are used with common salt to cure toothache and decoction in common cold. *Cynodon dactylon* It is used in almost all religious ritual supposed to please Lord Ganesh. *Musa paradisiacal*. The stems are used to make pavilion during various sacred rituals. Vaisakha, Magha or Kartika sukla caturdasi banana tree is planted and nurtured till it bears fruit; wishing the welfare of one's family.

The Table No. 03 shows the most of the cultural plants are growing in wild condition. Some are rare, common, frequently, abundant & endemic categories species. Only 14 trees shrubs species namely Peepal, Bargad, Neem, Tulsi, Bael, Mahua, Imali, Lamon, Dhan, Doob grass, Lotus and Marigold represented by common species in Kanker region. The occurrences and distribution pattern of sacred groves plants was studied and their status was observed. The three (03) species viz. Downy jasmine, Gular, Ramfal are rare in all the three study villages of Kanker region of CG. And 12 species (Ashok, Coconut, Seetafal, Turmaric, Pan, Marigold, Champa, China rose, Jasmine, Sal, Amla, Bamboo) are frequently & wild frequently available in all villages. The other two species Khamar, kadamb are wild but abundantly found.

Summary and Conclusion

In Kanker region there is special importance to Sacred groves from past times people worship then from older times it is depended on trees for its need. For this they worship then so that they could conserve and prevent forest covers. They used forest products and for that they pay a great respect to them. Peoples faith help is conservation of forests as they prevent from cutting trees. Peoples conserve them as their culture. This tradition is helpful for creating bond between humans and nature. The Sacred Groves have great cultural importance. Peoples celebrate many festival related to trees. This is helpful for sustaining forests.

There is need to replicate such study in different villages, forest villages of Kanker district and other districts of Chhattisgarh for arriving a sound

conclusion on Sacred grove in traditional societies of Chhattisgarh and their folklore cultural knowledge.

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Table No. 1 :- List of Sacred grove of Tree & medicinal plants in study site (Kanker C.G.)

S. No	Common Name	Botanical Name	Family	Beliefs/Uses	Habit
1	Peepal	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Moraceae	A sacred tree	Tree
2	Bargad	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Moraceae	A sacred tree	Tree
3	Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Meliaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
4	Bail	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Rutaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
5	Banana	<i>Musa paradisiacal</i>	Musaceae	A sacred Plant	Shrub

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6	Ashok Tree	<i>Saraca indica</i>	Fabaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
7	Bamboo	<i>Bambusa bambos</i>	Poaceae	A sacred tree	Shrub
8	Coconut	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	Arecaceae	A sacred tree	Shrub
9	Mango	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Anacardiaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
10	Amla	<i>Embllica officinalis</i>	Euphorbiaceae	A sacred tree	Shrub
11	Mahua	<i>Maduka indica</i>	Sapotaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
12	Siris	<i>Albizzia lebbbeck</i>	Fabaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
13	Emali	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Fabaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
14	Kadamb	<i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i>	Anthocephalus	A sacred tree	Tree
15	Sal Tree	<i>Soria robusta</i>	Dipterocarpaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
16	Lemon Plant	<i>Citrus limon</i>	Rutaceae	A sacred Plant	Shrub
17	Khamar	<i>Gamilena arobica</i>	Lamiaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
18	Seeta Fal	<i>Annona squamosa</i>	Annonaceae	A sacred tree	Shrub
19	Ram Ful Tree	<i>Annona reticulate</i>	Annonaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
20	Gular tree	<i>Ficus racemosa</i>	Moeaceae	A sacred tree	Tree
21	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Lamiaceae	A sacred Plant	Herbs
22	Turmeri	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	Zingiberaceae	A sacred Plant	Herbs
23	Rice (Dhan)	<i>Oryza sativa</i>	Poaceae	A sacred Plant	Plants
24	Doob Grass	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Poaceae	A sacred Plant	Plants
25	Pan	<i>Piper betle</i>	Piperaceae	A sacred Plant	Climber
Sacred Flower Species					
26	Kamal (Lotus)	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i>	Nelumbonaceae	Sacrad flower	Aquatic plants
27	Marigold	<i>Tagetes spp.</i>	Asteraceae	Sacrad flower	Flower plant
28	China rose	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i>	Malvaceae	Sacrad flower	Flower plant
29	Champaka	<i>Michelia champaca</i>	Magnoliaceae	Sacrad flower	Flower plant
30	Downy Jasmine (Kundphool)	<i>Jasminum multiflorum</i>	Oleaceae	flower	Flower plant
31	Jasmine (juhi)	<i>Jasminum grandiflorum</i>	Oleaceae	Sacrad flower	Flower plant

Table No. 02 :- Important Festivals of Kanker Sacred Groves

S. No	Common Name	Botanical Name	Family	Related Festival	Sacred Belief with their uses
1	Peepal	Ficus Religiosa	Moraceae	Somvari Amavasya	This is one of the most sacred tree, associated with planet saturn and Jupiter, & worshiped to need of blessing on almost all rituals.
2	Bargad	Ficus Benghalensis	Moraceae	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 (raksa sutra), and listening to the sacred Savitri-Satyavan story.
3	Amala	Embilica Officinalis	Euphorbiaceae	Amala Ekadasi	11th day of Phalguna sukla; bath with water soaked in amala fruit; eating it; worshipping it; and worship of Radha-Krsna.
4	Mango	Mangifera Indica	Anacardiaceae	Amra-Puspa Bhaksana Vrata	1st day of Caitra sukla; eating of mango blossoms and worship of Kamadeva
5	Asoka	Saraca Indica	Fabaceae	Asoka Pratipada	1st day of Caitra sukla; only women worship the Tree; they also observe fast seeking longevity.
6	Bel	Aegle Marmelos	Rutaceae	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.
				Sravana Krsna Ekadasi	Ceremonial offering of water to the bel tree.
				Bhadra Sukla Caturthi	Offering of trifoliate leaves of bel to Lord Ganesa
				Bilva Navami	Asvina sukla navami; bel leaves are offered to Siva.
7	Kela	Musa Paradisiaca	Musaceae	Kadali Vrata	This sacred plant is worshiped mainly on Thursday, as associated with planet Jupiter. The stems are used to make pavilion during various sacred rituals. Hindi name of months ; Vaisakha, Magha or Kartika sukla caturdasia

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					banana tree is planted and nurtured till it bears fruit; wishing the welfare of one's family.
8	Neem	Azadirachta Indica	Meliaceae	Sitala Puja	Caitra 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.
9	Tulsi	Ocimum Sanctum	Lamiaceae	Tulsi Vivaha	Associated with lord Vishnu, the creator of this universe. This sacred plant is worshiped daily due to a belief that it wards off the evil spirits from home. The leaves are used with common salt to cure toothache and decoction in common cold.
10	Dhan /Rice	Oryza Sativa	Poaceae	Deva Dhanya	Its husked seeds are used in various sacred rituals and worship. It is also used for auspicious mark (Tilak) on forehead with turmeric or sandalwood paste as blessing of fertility. Rice paste is also used to decorate palace of worship.
11	Pan	Piper Betle	Piperaceae	Pooja	Its leaves are used in all religious ceremonies and regarded as a pleasure to Goddess Lakshmi.
	Haldi (Turmeric)	Curcuma Longa	Zingibareceae	Manja-Kumkumam	Powder of rhizome is considered as a good antiseptic. Associated with planet Jupiter, as an auspicious ritual on the day of marriage.
13	Doob Grass	Cynodon Dactylon	Poaceae	Achaman	It is used in almost all religious rituals supposed to please Lord Ganesh.
14	Marigold	Tagetes Spp.	Asteraceae	Pooja	The flowers are used to make garlands for deities.

Table No. 03 :- Existing Status and Culture of Sacred Grove in Kanker Regions

S. No	Local Name	B. Name	Plant Description	Cultural important/Aspect	Status
1	Peepal	Ficus Religiosa	Peepal is a large fast growing tree. Leaves- heart shaped, Bark-light gray & peels, Fruit-purple in colour.	This is one of the most sacred trees, associated with planet Saturn and Jupiter, & worshiped to need of blessing on almost all rituals.	Common
2	Bargad	Ficus Benghalensis	Banyan tree is an evergreen tree with very extensive branches. Its leaves are 10-20 cm. long. Its fruits are purple.	It symbolizes Trimurti with Vishnu as bark, Shiva as branches and Brahma as the roots.	Common
3	Neem	Azadirachta Indica	It is a fast growing evergreen tree that grows up to 15-20 m. in length its canopy of leaves make it useful shade tree.	It is one of the most sacred trees. It is believed to be a manifestation of goddess Durga and Kali.	Common
4	Bail	Aegle Marmelos	It is the only member of the monotypic genus Aegle. It is a mid-sized, slender tree. Growing up to 18 m. in height.	This tree is considered to be associated with Lord Shiva. It is said that Lord Shiva is pleased by offering bael leaves.	Common
5	Banana	Musa Paradisiacal	It is the largest herbaceous flowering plant. These plants are normally tall and often mistaken as trees.	The leaves are used to make the ceremonial pavilion. In some poojas it is used to serve "prashad"	Common
6	Ashok Tree	Saraca Indica	The Asoka is a rain forest tree. It is very handsome, small, erect evergreen tree, with deep green leaves growing in dense clusters.	It is used in temple decoration it is revered by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. It is said that Lord Buddha was born under this tree.	Frequently
7	Bamboo	Bambusa Bambos	Bamboo is a perennial grass. Approximately 1,500 species of bamboo exist around the world. They range in size from several inches all the way up to 100 feet.	The common names of Lord Krishna Bansilal, Murali, Venugopal reflect his association with Bansuri or Venu.	Wild Frequently
8	Coconut	Cocos Nucifera	It is a tropical plant from the palm family grown primarily for its fruit, coconuts.	To break a coconut is the beginning of any event is considered to be very auspicious. Coconuts are offered in temples to worship to	Frequently

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				various gods and goddesses.	
9	Mango	Mangifera Indica	It grows up to 35-40 m. is length. The trees are long lived as some species fruit after 300 years. It is evergreen .	It is very sacred tree. Its importance is mentioned in Ramayana and purans.	Common
10	Amla	Embllica Officinalis	The tree is small to medium in size, reaching 8-18 m. in height, with a crooked trunk and spreading branches.	It is used in lord karthik's pooja. On kartik poornima.	Wild Frequently
11	Mahua	Maduka Indica	it is large deciduous tree reaching 20 m. in height it has thick leaves and small flowers.	The mahua tree s intimately related to death. This tree is associated to lord shiva.	Common
12	Siris	Albizzia Lebbeck	Medium to large tree with grey brown bark. The primary leaflets subopposite, 2-4 pairs .	It is associated with lord shiva and goddess durga.	Abundant
13	Emali	Tamarindus Indica	It is a long lived, medium growth , bushy tree which attains a height of 12.1-18.3 m.	It is connected to the usha the daughter of goddess parvati. It is also associated with lord shiva in northern parts of country.	Common
14	Kadamb	Anthocephalus Cadamba	It grows upto 45m. it is a large tree with a broad crown and straight cylindrical bole.	This tree is associated with lord Krishna. In southern parts it is associated with goddess parvati.	Abundant
15	Sal Tree	Soria Robasta	Sal is moderate to slow growing tree and attains height up to 2-2.5 m. the leaves are 10-25 cm. long.	In hindutradition it is said to be favoured by lord Vishnu.	Wild Frequently
16	Lemon Plant	Citrus Limon	The true lemon reaches 10-20 ft in height and usually has sharp thorn on its twigs.	the fruit is an emblem of devi or shakti. Garlands made of limes are offered to deity.	Common
17	Khamar	Gamilena Arobica	Kahir is the moderate size deciduous tree, which is widely fgrown in c.g. it is used in dental problems	In tija and kamarchat festival the leaves and branches are used for completion of fast in tija.	Wild Abundant
18	Seeta Fal	Annona Squamosa	It is a small, semi deciduous, much branched shrub or small tree 3-8 m. in length.	It is a hindu belief that seta mata lives in seetafal tree.	Frequently
19	Ram Ful Tree	Annona Reticulata	It is a small deciduous tree or semi evergreen tree in the plant family annonaceae. It is best known for its fruit.	It is a hindu belief that god shri ram lives in ramfal tree.	Rare
20	Gular Tree	Ficus Racemosa	Fig tree is a tropical plante and shuld be grown. Size- Ficus racemosa can grow over 40 feet tall and 20 to 40 feet wide. Leaves- The ovale leaves measures 3 to 4 inches long and are dark green.	it is said that lord brahma lives in this tree.	Rare
21	Tulsi	Ocimum Sanctum	Tulsi is a heavy branched having ahir all over. It attains a height of about 75-90 cm. it has purple flowers.	It is associated with purity. It is used for many religious purposes. Tulsi mata is said to be live in this plant.	Common
22	Turmeric	Curcuma Longa	The plant of turmeric is herbaceous perennial, which is 60-90 cm high. It has a short stem.	It plays an important role in hindu and buddhist ceremonies. It is associated with purity, prosperity and fertility.	Frequently
23	Rice (Dhan)	Oryza Sativa	Rice is normally grown as an annual plant, although in tropical areas it can survive as a perennial and can produce a ratoon crop for 30 years	It is associated with goddess annapoorni and also goddess lakshmi.	Common
24	Doob	Cynodon	It is a grass native to north and	In hindu religion puranas reveal	Common

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	Grass	Dactylon	east Africa, asia, Australia and southern Europe. It is grey green in color and are short sized.	that it is extracted out of kshir-sagar at the time of samudra manthan by god sand devils	
25	Pan	Piper Betle	The betal leaf plant is a branching vine, that may climb as 10-15 ft.	Its leaves is used in all religious ceremonies and regarded as a pleasure to goddess	Frequently
26	Lotus	Nelumbo Nucifera	Lotus is a wholly edible species and is cultivated widely for its crisp rhizome and seeds, though the flowers and leaves are also eaten in some parts. The plant also possesses medicinal properties.	It is particular sacred to the Hindus. Almost all Gods & Goddesses of hindu. Vishnu is represented with a lotus emerging form his navel on Which Lord Brahma sits.	Common
27	Marigold	Tagetes Erecta	Tagetes species vary in size form 0.01-2.2 m tall. Most species have pinnate green leaves.	Marigold is one of the flowers commonly used in garlands and offering to Hindu deities in the nor than parts.	Frequently Present
28	China Rose	Hibiscus Rose-Sinensis	Hibiscus grow wild in many tropical, subtropical and warm-temperate regions around the world.	The Hibiscus flower are used in the worship of Hindu deities, especially Goddess Durga/Kali.	Frequently Present
29	Champa	Michelia Champaca	The large shaped flowers lack distinct petals or sepals. The large non-specialized flower parts, resembling petals, are called sepals.	Champaca is held sacred and offered to Lord Shiva as well as to Lord Krishna. It forms one of the darts of Kamadeva, the Hindu God of love.	Frequently Present
30	Downy Jasmine	Jasminum Multiflorum	D. jasmine can be either deciduous or evergreen and can be erect, spreading or climbing shrub and vines.	The flower is held sacred to lord Krishna and is offerd during Hindu religious ceremonies.	Rare
31	Jasmine	Jasminum Grandiflorum	Their leaves are borne opposite or alternate. They can be simple, trifoliate or pinnate. The flowerare typically around 2.5 cm in diameter.	Jasmine is used as religious offering symbolizing divine hope. They are held sacred to Vishnu and are used as votive offering in religious ceremonies.	Frequently Present