

Indian Culture and Festivals Related To Plants: A Blessing to Mankind and Environment

Abstract

Indian culture, traditions, rituals and festivals are so philosophically bind with nature, that every god is offered some special plant part or plant product. There are so many plants as datura, bilva, tulsi, kans, mango, aak, bargad, peepal, amla etc which are used for offerings in pooja in festivals like makarsankranti, navratri, dassahara deepawali, rakshabandhan, shiratri and so on. All plants have medicinal value and scientifically related to human health and environmental protection. Deep roots of Indian festivals with nature are blessings to mankind.

Keywords: Festivals, Rituals, Traditions.

Introduction

India is a land of festivals. There is an important festival every month and each festival is related to benefits of human and of environment. Hindu culture is to give respect to trees, forests and also to animals. They worship many gods and their offerings are related very scientifically to the nature. God's idols can be seen with animals as their vahanas, the holy river Ganga is seen in the jatas of Lord Shiva. Temples are made on the banks of rivers or ponds. The Indian festivals directly or indirectly are related to conservation of nature and well being of environment. Various Indian tribal communities perform religious rituals and ceremonies very carefully, all related to nature.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is, try to explain scientific connection of Indian festivals with gods and relation of plant produce with their worship.

Materials and Methods

The paper is written with the help of hindu calendar months details and own general observation about festivals.

Review of Literature

In India festivals are celebrated with scientific rituals and many plants and plant parts are used in ceremonies. As Trivedi (2003) has mentioned that neem (*Azadirachta indica*) is worshipped in India and its leaves are used to keep away evil spirits. We have seen in some communities that before wedding ceremony family go for "mata poojan" ritual. They keep neem leaves along with them. Neem twigs and leaves are also kept with patients suffering with chicken pox. Dr P.Padma (2017) studied 36 plants species associated with regional festivals of Telangana region. Dr Padma mentioned that Bathukamna is the floral festival falls in the month of September –October (bhadrapad amawasya). A beautiful flower stack is formed with flowers as *Cassia auriculata* (L). Rob., *Celosia argentia* L., *Cucurbita pepo*, *Gomphrena globosa*, *Ipomea coccinia*, *Luffa acutangula*, *Tagetes erecta* etc. After festival flowers are released in water. These have capacity to purify water and have antimicrobial activity. On Ganesh Chaturthi festival 21 different varieties of leaves are used "Ekavimshati (means 21) Patra Pooja" is there and these pooja leaves are also immersed in water i.e. rivers, canals, lakes, sea for the same reason. Dhiman (2003) discussed medicinal importance of sacred plants with reference to Indian context. Ashwani Kumar (2010) emphasizes that there is declined interests for festivals. In order to save plants, revival of festivals is essential.

Indian Festivals, Gods and Plants

There are trees of Bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), banyan tree or bargad (*Ficus bengalensis*), peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), fig tree (*Ficus carica*). In Vedas, Lord Shiva is called the Lord of



Sunita Gupta

Professor,
Deptt. of Botany,
Veer Sawarkar Govt. College,
Obedullaganj, Raisen, M.P, India.

the forests (Vanaspati), Lord of the trees (Vrkshanaampati), and Lord of the animals (Pashupati) in several hymns (mantras) ,Satnam Swaminathan,2015 . Some trees are considered holiest as banyan tree (Nyagrodha), peepal tree (Asvatta), fig tree (Udumbara). These names are also given in Vishnu Sahastranama (1000 names of Vishnu) in Vishnu Stotra.

In the month of January, there is Makarsankranti, dedicated to the Surya (the sun). People bathe in holy rivers viz. Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada. Other names of the related festivals are, Pedda Panduga in Andhra Pradesh, Makarsankranti in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Magh Bihu in Assam. In Makarsankranti people used to bath with til seeds (*Sesame indicum*) paste, til laddu are offered as Prasad and til is used in homa (yagya). In the month of January and February several festivals are celebrated as til chauth and all are related to til, gud (jagery, made from juice of sugarcane i.e. *Saccharum officinales*) and peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) which are healthy in winter season. In February Vasantpanchmi (magh shukla panchmi) is celebrated, it marks the arrival of spring, pleasant environment with many plants like genda (*Tagetis* species) saraswati pooja is performed. In February, Mahashivratri is also celebrated .Lord Shiva is offered milk, belpatra leaves, flowers and fruits of datura and aak (*Calotropis procera*). Amla Navmi (or Akshay Navmi , kartik mas shukla paksh ki navmi) and Amlki Ekadashi (falgun shukla ekadashi) are celebrated to worship lord Vishnu. Importance of Amla tree (*Phyllanthus emblica*) is known to everybody. Holy is the festival of colours and love and signifies end of winter. Weather changes during spring season. Powder of herbs were sprayed and applied to body, prescribed by ayurvedic vaidhyas, to avoid viral infections, cough and cold. Variouly coloured herbal powder were called gulal. At this time so many flowers were available with different colours. Dhak or palash orange (*Butea monosperma*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), red sandal wood (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), china rose (*Hibiscus rosa chinensis*), madar tree (*Calotropis prosera*), raddish (*Raphanus sativus*), pomegranate (*Punica granatum*), saffron or kesar (*Crocus sativus*), mehendi (*Lawsonia inermis*), gulmohar (*Delonix regia*),haldi (*Curcuma longa*),species of chrysanthemum, marigold (*Tagetes*) and so many others. Nowadays problem with playing holy is replacement of herbal colours with harmful chemical colours, both to health and environment.

In both the navratri festival wheat seeds are germinated (jaware). It is a test for vitality of stored seeds and also purify air in turn by photosynthesis. Also juice of jaware is so healthy for us to drink.

In rainy season there are so many festivals, related to plants and animals. Hariyali amavasya is related with plantation, nagpanchmi is related to snakes and forests, halshashthi is related to use of pasai or tinni rice (*Oryza rufipogon* Griff), janmashtami, govats ekadashi etc. are related to cows,duba grass and flowers. Shraddh paksh is related to use of java (*Hordium vulgare*) and kans (*Saccharum spontanium*).

Vat savitri festival is related to worship of bargad tree, very useful as medicinal plant. Religious feelings motivate people to plant them. In festivals related to Lord Shiva, plants of dhatura, aak, bilva of bael are of utmost importance. Their medicinal value all we are aware of.

Tulsi plant is available in every hindu home and people daily water the plant in the morning. Medicinal uses of tulsi are enormous (mosquito repellent, radioprotectant and anticancer activities)

These are only some of the festivals related to plants. The list is too long, as can be seen if we thoroughly study the hindu panchang calendar. From this discussion it is pretty much clear that Indian traditions are deeply related to plants and animals and environment and human health and also the availability of the plant or its products in that season.

Conclusion

It can be said that the Indian culture has deep roots of plant protection and conservation. Because when they are used in rituals related to festivals or otherwise, they will be planted and protected. This deep philosophy of our rishi munies is really a blessing for the environment and mankind.

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