

# RITUALS AND OSADHI VIDYA OF BHARAT: SACRED PLANTS AND TRIBAL SYMBOLISM

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## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT

Bharat's (India) ethnobotanical landscape is not limited to medicinal and ecological value but extends deeply into ritual, spiritual, and cultural domains. This paper explores the sacred and symbolic significance of plants in India, spanning mainstream Hindu and Buddhist practices as well as tribal and regional traditions. By synthesizing literature from ethnobotanical surveys, anthropological studies, and scriptural sources such as the Rigveda, Atharvaveda, and Charaka Samhita, this study documents the role of plants in rituals, ceremonies, and folk practices. Tables present regional and tribal ritual plants, their symbolic meanings, and applications. The study emphasizes the importance of biocultural conservation, linking ecological preservation with cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

India's geography—spanning the Himalayas, Indo-Gangetic plains, deserts, and tropical forests—has fostered extraordinary plant diversity that shaped its ritual and spiritual consciousness. Plants are not only utilitarian but are personified as deities, guardians, or healers.

India's cultural and ecological diversity has given rise to an intricate web of human-plant interactions that extend beyond utilitarian purposes into ritual and symbolic domains. Sacred plants, ritual trees, and herbal offerings form an essential part of religious, social, and tribal practices across the subcontinent. Classical texts like the Rigveda and Atharvaveda document early references to sacred plants, highlighting their significance in spiritual and healing practices. The Rigveda (c. 1500 BCE) mentions the sacred Soma plant as divine essence; the Atharvaveda catalogues medicinal and protective herbs; the Charaka Samhita classifies plants into therapeutic categories linking body, spirit, and cosmos. (Jain, 1991). Ethnobotanical fieldwork demonstrates that this tradition continues robustly among tribal communities, where plants are used in rites of passage, fertility rituals, seasonal festivals, and protective ceremonies (Pushpangadan & Atal, 1984).

Bharat's (India) ritual practices been since time immortal are deeply rooted in Sanatan Dharma that emphasise on sacred practises, life cycle ceremonies (Samaskars) and cosmic order, that that lays emphasis on puja, fire sacrifices, chanting of hymes and mantras inculcating a discipline in spirituality, honouring nature, connecting with the divine or supreme power.

Ritual Plants in Indian Civilization that are sacred, occupy a central place in Hindu, Buddhist, and folk religious traditions. Plants like Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), and Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) symbolize purity, longevity, and cosmic life, and their worship is recorded both in scriptures and contemporary practice. Tulsi, for instance, is revered for both spiritual purification and medicinal properties, highlighting the integration of ritual and practical utility (Singh & Panda, 2020). Similarly, Bael (*Aegle marmelos*) leaves are offered to Lord Shiva, and the Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) represents purity in goddess worship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 1: Pan-Indian General Ritual Plants

Pushpangadan and Atal (1984) underscored the dual identity of plants like Tulsi—devotional and pharmacological. Jain (1991) compiled over 4000 folk medicinal and ritual plants, establishing a lexicon for Indian ethnobotany. Gadgil and Vartak (1976) showed that sacred groves functioned as ecological sanctuaries. Maheshwari (2014) analysed plant symbolism among Gond and Bhil tribes, emphasizing gendered rituals using Mahua and Palash. Kala (2015) documented Himalayan sacred species such as Juniperus and Ficus, noting how belief systems ensure forest conservation. Singh and Panda (2020) linked ritual plant use to sustainable resource management within AYUSH and community forestry programs.





Together, these works reveal that Indian ritual botany is both ancient and adaptive, integrating environmental stewardship with cultural continuity.





## METHODOLOGY






- The study employs a qualitative, comparative ethnobotanical approach.
- Data sources: secondary ethnographic monographs, Ayurvedic scriptures, and regional flora databases.
- Zonal classification: North, South, East, West, Central, North-East, and Andaman-Nicobar.
- Analytical framework: thematic coding of plant use into symbolic categories—purification, fertility, protection, prosperity, and transformation.
- Interpretation: cross-referencing botanical identity with ritual function to reveal ecological and sociocultural linkages.

## ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS

Regional and Tribal Ritual Plant Traditions are documented in Tables 1 and 2, these uphold significance ritually, culturally, ecologically and have medicinal important plants across major Indian regions and tribal groups & traditions. Although due to its rich cultural heritage and vast forest areas, India has many plants & herbs used for rituals and varied ceremonies. Of the many plants only 15 in general, are represented here in table 1.

	Scientific Name	Common/Cultural Name	Ritual/Cultural Significance	Usage
1.	<p><b>Ocimum sanctum</b></p> 	<p>Tulsi</p> <p>(वृंदा, वृंदावनि, विश्वपूजिता, विश्वपावनी, कृष्ण जीवनी, हरिवल्लभा)</p>	<p>Woven into the cultural fabric of India, it is sacred to people of Bharat's Hindu homes and temples. This is the holiest plant. Often represented 'Queen of Herbs'. Living Goddess and married annually to Lord Vishnu.</p>	<p>Daily puja, in prasad, offerings, purification, funerary rites etc., has both therapeutic &amp; spiritual uses.</p>
2.	<p><b>Ficus religiosa</b></p> 	<p>Peepal (Bodhi tree/Sacred Fig, अश्वत्थ, पिप्पल, चलदल, गजाशन)</p>	<p>Literally means 'wisdom', where leaves symbolise Shiv, trunk symbolise Vishnu, and the roots as Brahma. Also, a symbol of Buddha. As of religious faith the God/Goddesses reside on this tree. Hindu scriptures (Vedas) have rich figurative and corresponding reference of peepal tree.</p>	<p>Apart from ritual purposes during Somvati Amavasya worship, Parikrama (Circumambulation), lightning of oil diyas to remove obstacles, and honour ancestors, the peepal tree also has scientific aspect - releases oxygen 24 hours a day. As per Ayurveda every part of the tree has several benefits, since ancient times to cure diseases like bleeding diarrhoea, poor appetite, stomach pain, asthma, snake bite, skin diseases, eczema itching, cracked heels, blood purification and impotency.</p>
3.	<p><b>Aegle marmelos</b></p> 	<p>Wood Apple (Golden Apple बिल्व, श्रीफल, बेलपत्र, शाण्डिल्य और मानूर)</p>	<p>Worshipped for Longevity and good health. Sacred to Shiva, it is believed that three leaves represent trinity i.e., Brahma Vishnu Mahesh or three eyes of Shiva.</p>	<p>Leaves offered in worship, fertility rituals, having medicinal and spiritual significance. Rich in antioxidants Beta carotene, Vitamin C and Vitamin B. Generally, leaves used for regulating body sugar, while fruit for treating diarrhoea/dysentery, whereas ripened fruit to treat constipation.</p>
4.	<p><b>Nelumbo nucifera</b></p> 	<p>Lotus (पंकज, पद्म, जलज, नीरज, सरोज)</p>	<p>Associated with Bhagwan Vishnu and Brahma. Has symbolic meaning In Indian culture (rise above adversities and attain enlightenment &amp; highest level of consciousness.), Hinduism (represents prosperity wealth and auspiciousness attracting wealth) &amp; Buddhism along with purity, grace and divine creation.</p>	<p>Used as Offerings to Lakshmi/Saraswati. Its fragrance and beauty. Help reduce anxiety and stress. Also has nutritive value. As its seeds are good for cardiac health, while roots are high in fibres, aiding digestions. Not only this it is also rich in antioxidants and vitamin C reducing acne, treating fever, diarrhoea and liver problems, its cooling property helps balance one's pitta dosh.</p>

	Scientific Name	Common/Cultural Name	Ritual/Cultural Significance	Usage
5.	<p><b>Cocos nucifera</b></p> 	<p>Coconut (नारियल, खोपरा)</p>	<p>Known as 'Narikela' or 'Sripal' has reference in Mahabharat, Ramayan, Purans (Matsya Puran) &amp; Jatak stories in Buddhism, in context with Prosperity, Purity, Fertility, offering to Gods &amp; Divine blessings. It represents trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. In other reference the kernel symbolises Devi Parvati, the coconut water is thought to be associated with Ganga &amp; the outer shell represents Kartikeya.</p>	<p>Very Versatile plant; also referred to as 'tree of life', has multifaceted usage: offered to God and Goddess in temples, havan &amp; yajna and other auspicious events. Used in cosmetics food industries. Construction. Skin and hair care metabolic health and immune system (Contains lauric acid, which has antibacterial effects).</p>
6.	<p><b>Musa paradisiaca</b></p> 	<p>Banana (केला, प्लॉटैन)</p>	<p>A herbaceous plant that is sustainable, adaptable &amp; culturally important, that emblemize prosperity, fertility &amp; auspiciousness.</p>	<p>The entire plant is used in some form or the other. For example, Leaves are used during worship, festivals, wedding ceremonies &amp; rituals. It also has nutritive and culinary values, rich in potassium &amp; iron supporting Heart Health. Various parts are used in traditional medicines to treat issues like digestive disorders; skin burns and infections.</p>
7.	<p><b>Mangifera indica</b></p> 	<p>Mango (आम, <u>आम, अमृतफल,</u> <u>कैरी, रिसालू</u>)</p>	<p>Holds immense sacred, cultural, and ritualistic significance in Hindu tradition, vitality, life force as well as cultural significance. Associated with worship &amp; festivals.</p>	<p>Usage significance includes cultural, ritualistic and sacred significance in Hindu traditions and abode of deities. Has importance in Ghatasthapana (Kalash) during Navratri, worship of Lord Murugan &amp; Lord Ganesha. Assumed to be modification of Lord Prajapati, Kamdev. Emitting positive energy, acts as the natural purifier. Toran (Entrance /main door hangings), marriage rituals.</p>
8.	<p><b>Curcuma longa</b></p> 	<p>Turmeric (हल्दी, हरिद्रा, <u>कुरकुमा,</u> <u>भारतीय केसर,</u> <u>गौरी. और</u> <u>विषगन)</u></p>	<p>Rhizome herb having cultural spiritual and domestic significance particularly in India. Symbolises fertility purity and prosperity, healing.</p>	<p>The entire globe has embraced the wellness benefits of Haldi, and in India it is considered. as a way of life that bridges the gap between sacred traditions and daily health care, acting as a cornerstone of Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine. Haldi has significance in rituals, ceremonies, festivals etc. Apart from Culinary applications, as it is not only a spice but, also a healer, therefore used as an antiseptic for wounds, cut and bruises. Is also considered a rasayan herb meant to counteract ageing. Also finds usage in cosmetology and dermatology, textile dyes.</p>

	Scientific Name	Common/ Cultural Name	Ritual/Cultural Significance	Usage
9.	<b>Santalum album</b> 	Sandalwood (चंदन)	An Incredible wood, also referred to as Srigandha that is aromatic, having long lasting fragrance, medicinal properties, spiritual, purifying, & sacred (Tilak, deity anointment) significance.	Sandalwood is a staple luxury. Used in calming rituals, perfumes and cosmetics, having strong antiseptic and inflammatory uses in Ayurveda (Skin ailments, headaches. respiratory infections and inflammations). Its tea is used as a cure for treating liver, gallbladder & mental problems.
10.	<b>Saccharum officinarum</b> 	Sugarcane (गन्ने, ईख, ऊँख, पौड़ा, मधुतृण)	Sugar cane has an important place In Indian traditions and rituals, agriculture, culture and medicine & particularly during harvest festival. A symbol of sweetness, abundance and fertility.	Used as offerings to Goddess Lalitha Tripura Sundari, Bhagwan Ganesh & Shiva (abhishekam that brings relief from poverty and attracts happiness). During the festival of Pongal, Makar Sankranti Chhath puja and harvesting festivals. Its medicinal properties cure diseases like liver and jaundice, diuretic and kidney health, hydration, digestive aid, skin health (presence of alpha hydroxy acid), and balances the stomach PH.
11.	<b>Oryza sativa</b> 	Rice (चावल, धान, तण्डुल)	Rice indicates life, prosperity, abundance & cyclic nature of life. Used in rituals from birth to death.	Represents the Goddess earth, essential in annaprasan, in festivals like Naukhai, Bihu & Pongal symbolising nourishment and divine connection. Used in marriage ceremony, as Akshat, in housewarmings, as tradition rangoli (kolam) & in treatment of skin or gastric conditions. Also used as pind daan (पिंडदान) ritual to honour ancestors indicating a connection between soul and sustenance.
12.	<b>Pyllanthus emblica</b> 	Indian gooseberry (आंवला, धात्रीफल, अमृतफल)	An exceptionally nutritionally dense berry with medicinal properties in Ayurveda (Balancing 3 Doshas - Vata, Pitta & Kapha), that makes it a household name in India. Symbolises longevity, prosperity and health.	Associated with Devi Lakshmi & Bhagwan Vishnu, significance in Amla Navmi & Ekadashi, believed to be emerged from Vishnu's tears, also considered as a nectar of immortality (amrit). Its antioxidant properties are highest on the planet, and rich in vitamin C and polyphenols, best as anti-inflammatory, anti-ageing and immunomodulatory agent that helps in improving metabolism, inhibits chronic disease like cancers (uterine, breast and gastric) prevention and health care.
13.	<b>Azadirachta indica</b> 	Indian Lilac (नीम, निम्बा)	Referred to as 'village pharmacy', & 'Sarva Rog Nivarini', believed to be originated from drops of philtre (amrit) of immortality and woven into socio-cultural matrix of Bharat has great importance as it is sacred with medicinal and purifying symbol.	Initiated as a form of Shakti worshipping Devi Durga, Kali, Sithala (शैतला माता) and Mariammam symbolising protection, divinity and health. Used for treating smallpox, measles, acne and varied skin diseases, as it has antibacterial, antifungal and other medicinal properties.










	Scientific Name	Common/Cultural Name	Ritual/Cultural Significance	Usage
14.	<p><b>Saraca asoca</b></p> 	<p>Ashok (देवानांप्रिय, प्रियदर्शी, अशोकवर्धन सीता अशोक, हेमपुष्पा, कंकलि).</p>	<p>Related to as 'sorrow less tree' (A - shok) is cultural significant and scared to Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, with medicinal potion, symbol of fertility, prosperity, love &amp; happiness, eliminating negative energy and sorrow.</p>	<p>As narrated In the Ramayan epic, devi Sita sat under this tree in Ashok Vaatika of Sri Lanka, Gautam Buddha was born under this tree. Time immortal it has been used as a traditional medicine, particularly for treatment related to gynecological disorders, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial and uterine disorders. Also used in rituals related to health &amp; healing.</p>
15.	<p><b>Withania somnifera</b></p> 	<p>Indian ginseng / Indian winter cherry (अश्वगंधा)</p>	<p>Referred to as Satvik Kapha Rasayan is the essence of Unani, Ayurvedic &amp; indigenous medicine system of India.</p>	<p>Find mention in ancient Vedas &amp; scriptures (Atharva Ved, Charak Samhita &amp; Susruta Samhita Medicines). Symbolized as a royal herb promoting youthfulness, happiness, mental and physical health, commonly used as household remedies and considered the 'Queen of Ayurveda'. Therapeutic uses include adaptogenic stress reducer, memory deficit neuroprotective diseases - like Alzheimer's Huntington's Parkinson's, for athletes to give strength, immune system booster, aphrodisiac and fertility, anti-inflammatory and analgesic.</p>



Table 2: Some Common Tribal and Regional Ritual Plants

Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
Central India (Gond, Halba, Munda, Santhal, Baiga, Bhil)	<p><b>Madhuca longifolia</b></p> 	<p>Butter tree (महुआ / मदकम, मोहुलो, इलुप्पई, इप्पा-चेट्टू)</p>	<p>Tree of life or Kalpavriksha is mainstream of social economic and cultural life in central and eastern India. Important in marriage and harvest ceremonies.</p>	<p>Symbol of Fertility and abundance. Used in three mains and scars. Of Tonda (birth), Manda (marriage) and Konda (death), in festivals like Sarhul &amp; Naya Khai and nature spirits-worship ancestors (Hanaal) and village deities, to ask for permission before hunting or fishing. An essential source of food, income and medicine, while being deeply rooted in rituals. Thus proves a life savior for marginalized regions</p>
	<p><b>Terminalia arjuna</b></p> 	<p>Arjun (कहुआ / साइडी, धवल, ककुभ, नदीसर्ज)</p>	<p>Sacred and revered groves in Ayurveda, referred to as 'Guardian of the Heart', ancestor worships. The tree symbolises resilience, reflects sentinel animistic relationship providing physical healing as well as spiritual strength.</p>	<p>Plant's bark used as offering to Bhagwan Vishnu &amp; Shiva and its paste applied on the hands of bride and groom. Worshipped for prosperity, strength &amp; protection. leaves used to feed moth that produces a wild silk (tassar silk). Used as samida (fuel wood), in Havan and fire rituals to invoke divine blessings. Tribal healers (Dashari or Baiga) use it for medicinal purpose, as it has anti allergic potion for heart &amp; respiratory diseases, wounds or bone fractures. Also considered a totem.</p>
	<p><b>Butea monosperma</b></p>	<p>Palash (टेसू, ढाक / पुरसा, झूल, कांकेरी,</p>	<p>Referred to as 'Flame of the Forest'. Deeply integrated in the life cycles of tribals (from birth</p>	<p>Shrine decoration, Holi (Dol) festival (making natural, organic colour). Used as garlands. Flowers are boiled to give traditional bath toddlers having medicinal and protective properties, traditional remedies for treating</p>



	"जंगल की ज्वाला")	till death), considered incarnation of Agni God - symbolises purity and fire.	diseases and wounds. Also used for making plates and bowls during marriage ceremony. Acts as a economic pillar by providing lac resin for jewellery.
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Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
North-East India (Khasi, Naga, Mizo)	Areca catechu & Piper betel 	Betel nut & Betel Leaf (सुपारी, ताम्बूल/ 'तामुल, 'कवै, गुई, 'कुआ, 'कुहवा')	Cornerstone of cultural social and economic life. Offered in marriages, peace rituals	Indispensable element of daily etiquette rituals and livelihood. Symbol of respect, social bonding, & fertility. A traditional medicine used for digestion, deworming agent and for treating goon infections.
	Zingiber officinale 	Ginger (अदरक / आदा, स्काइन, सेंग)	Key to conventional rituals, cultural ceremonies and healing, & purification rituals.	Used for ipak & Murung rituals, also valued for medicinal properties like treatment of cold induced diseases, to increase overall stamina and stomach ailments. In folk medicines, protective against evil spirits
	Curcuma caesia 	Black turmeric/ Black zedoary (काली हल्दी / कचूर, नकरचूर, याइंगंगमुबा (मणिपुर), बोरंगसाधैन (मोनपा - अरुणाचल)	Healing, exorcism & traditional rituals.	The rhizome is native to Northeast India, has therapeutic and medicinal values and is integrated part of food habits, being used as paste in cut and injury, to reduce inflammation, in treatment of tonsils, gastric disorders, stomach disorders, leprosy, asthma epilepsy, fever, piles, cancers, to take fertility impotency, vomiting, snake and scorpion bites, skin ailments, tumour & anti-diarrhoeal agents.
	Capsicum Chinese Jacq	Ghost pepper (भूत जोलोकिया /नागाहारी, नागालैंड/मणिपुर: किंग चिली, उमरोक.	Indigenous cultivar referred to as 'Bih Jolokia'. Deeply rooted in their	An emotion staple to local diets like pickles, curries, and sauces etc. Capsaicin present helps fight heart diseases, also applied to joints to cure


		<p>असम: बिह जोलोकिया, बोरबिह जोलोकिया</p>	<p>culture serving both culinary and traditional medicinal purposes.</p>	<p>arthritis with other ingredients. Used in treatment like stomach pain, headaches &amp; sometimes night blindness</p>
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Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
<p>Eastern India (Santhal, Ho, Munda)</p>	<p>Azadirachta indica</p> 	<p>Neem tree (नीम / निम्ब, कडु लिम्ब)</p>	<p>Associated with Divinity. Worship for healing. Purifying properties. epidemic prevention</p>	<p>Wooden carvings of Lord Jagannath Balwadra and Subhadra at Puri Temple. Hung at doors for purification, protection</p>
	<p>Bambusa vulgaris</p> 	<p>Bamboo (बाँस / हरा सोना, बोना)</p>	<p>Deeply rooted in Karbi culture their food, shelter and rituals, house building, death rites.</p>	<p>Is of deep significance in tribal communities of eastern and northeastern India, forming essential part of their daily life economic feasibility and cultural identity, of rebirth &amp; resilience. Used in construction &amp; farming, making instruments like Tirio (flute) &amp; Banam (folk fiddle), in festivals like Mage Parab or Sarhul, Cheraw (bamboo dance of mizo), Chapchar Kut etc. representing close bond with nature and agricultural cycles. Young bamboo shoots are harvested and prepared as foods.</p>


Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
	<p>Prosopis cineraria</p>	<p>Indian Mesquite (खेजड़ी / मरुस्थल का कल्पवृक्ष, रेगिस्तान का 'स्वर्ण वृक्ष', जीवनरेखा, जांटी, खिजरो, सुमरी, शमी, झंड)</p>	<p>State tree of Rajasthan, rooted in economics spiritual and ecological essence, notably for Bishnoi community. A wishful tree as</p>	<p>A tree of life, survival &amp; sanctity. Worshipped during festivals like Vijay Dashmi, as Shami and on Janmashtami, during wedding rituals (Jhandi Katana), symbolizing good luck. Fixes nitrogen and prevents soil erosion. The pod Sangri are nutritious delicacies (in Panchkuta), its leaves known as Loong- provide nutritious</p>

Western India (Rajasthan, Gujarat - Bhil, Garasia)			every part of it is used in the arid environment.	fodder, food source during severe famine. The bark is used to treat skin diseases mouth ulcers.
	Calotropis gigantea 	Giant Milkweed/ Crown Flower (मदार / आक, अकौआ, आंकड़, अकवन)	Not just a medicinal plant, but has deep rooted magico-religious, cultural and spiritual significance. Offered to Shiva	Worship for prosperity happiness and protection. Destroys negative karma. Asceticism, transformation. Tribal healers and the shamans use extensively to treat pain, inflammation, skin diseases, snake bites, respiratory & digestive issues.

Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
Southern India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala - Irula, Kani)	Ocimum sanctum 	Holy Basil (तुलसी / वृक्ष देवी, पवित्र तुलसी, थुलासी)	Mother medicine of nature. Domestic rituals & Vishnu worship.	Purity, wellbeing, in treating common cold, cough, fever, digestive issues, skin diseases. Purifies the air, has high level of oxygen releasing capacity, absorbing harmful gases.
	Ficus religiosa 	Sacred Fig/ Bodhi tree (पीपल / रावी चेट्ट, पेरुगु चेट्ट, अरसू, अश्वत्थम, अश्वत्था, अरली, अरयाल )	Fertility and serpent worship in Kerela	Cosmic life & continuity. Tree has medicinal properties As every part. Of it is used By tribal healers to treat diseases like asthma, diarrhoea, skin disease and gastric issues and leaves are applied to wounds. It is a taboo cutting this tree
	Artocarpus heterophyllus	Jackfruit (कटहल / चक्का, पला, इडि-चक्का, चक्का-पजहम, हालसु, पनासा)	Engraved as a pillar in their traditional medicines, food security and culture identity, as it is not only a food, but a	Sacred symbol of abundance fertility. And prosperity. The timber is sacred and preferred for crafting idols as well as making mukkali (A three-legged traditional stool) for religious purposes. Referred to as mother tree (Ammachiplavu). Used as folk

			<p>sacred resource. As Onam/Pongal offerings</p>	<p>medicine for treating stomach disorders, skin problems, diarrhoea, while the leaves are used to treat diabetes and their latex is applied for treating skin infections and wounds.</p>
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Region / Tribe	Scientific Name	Local/Tribal Name	Ritual/Cultural Context	Symbolic Meaning / Use
<p>Andaman &amp; Nicobar (Nicobarese, Shompens, Jarawas, Onges).</p>	<p><b>Pandanus odorifer</b></p> 	<p>Fragrant screw pine Breadfruit (केवड़ा/ केतकी , पाइन)</p>	<p>Maintain deep, spiritual and functional connection with jungles. Totemic rituals, food wrapping</p>	<p>Useful in sustenance &amp; continuity, where traditional healers use nearly 132 plants, species to treat ailments. Used as a staple food by Nicobarese and Shompens for feast and cultural rituals.</p>
	<p><b>Morinda citrifolia</b></p> 	<p>Indian mulberry/ Cheese Fruit (शहतूत, नोनो / नूना, नोनो,)</p>	<p>Due to its health-related features, has been used since ancient ayurvedic medicine for healing and appeasement</p>	<p>Since ages, it has been used by indigenous tribes Nicobarese for both medicine and food, due to its deep rooted cultural and therapeutic applications in Stomach aches. Fevers Joint pains, high blood pressure and heal injuries, broken bones, deep cut bruises, sores and worms. The traditional tribal knowledge use as an immune enhancer antibacterial and anti-inflammatory agent. Also used in treating health management of livestock. Spirit appeasement, protection from illness</p>
	<p><b>Alstonia kurzii</b></p> 	<p>Devil Tree (छट्टियन/Sing-ke-ral Tacho-roil Taungmook.</p>	<p>Is essence of traditional, endemic medicine, and cultural life of indigenous tribe of Shompens, Nicobarese and Great Andamanese</p>	<p>The Shompens use it in their daily needs to cater traditional health practices, in treating malaria, filaria, epilepsy, body aches and chest pains in form of paste and decoctions. Also, in childbirth and postnatal care (washing of Uterus after childbirth)</p>

	<p><b>Claoxylon indicum</b></p> 	<p>Savannah fern <b>Nappy tree</b> (एअॉग)</p>	<p>Has substantial value as traditional medicine (anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritis properties), culinary and daily lives of the indigenous communities due to its versatility in daily needs and health issues.</p>	<p>Generally used in snake bites, skin injuries severe itching, ringworm, joint pains, headaches, fevers, dizziness, body aches, bone fractures and paralysis, also applied to chest to treat asthma and congestion, in dysentery, vomiting of blood used as laxatives. Large leaves are sometimes used as nappy. for covering food.</p>
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## DISCUSSION

The ritual use of plants in India highlights a profound interconnection between ecology, spirituality, and cultural identity. Sacred plants often serve dual purposes: they are both symbolic and functional. For instance, Tulsi is venerated for spiritual purity while providing antiviral and immunomodulatory benefits. Sacred groves act as biodiversity sanctuaries, preserving species like Arjun (*Terminalia arjuna*), Mahua (*Madhuca longifolia*), and Bael (*Aegle marmelos*) while simultaneously sustaining cultural practices (Kala, 2015).

Tribal practices demonstrate an intricate ethno-ecological knowledge system, wherein the selection, cultivation, and ritual use of plants maintain ecological balance and social cohesion. Seasonal rituals, harvest festivals, and rites of passage are synchronized with local flora cycles, illustrating the biocultural interdependence of humans and plant species.

Ancient scriptures, including the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, provide textual evidence of ritual plants, emphasizing their historical continuity. These sacred references align closely with contemporary practices, demonstrating a persistent cultural valuation of specific species over millennia (Jain, 1991; Pushpangadan & Atal, 1984).

As such the conservation of ritual plants is the need of hour, that has to be done, which is not only ecological but also cultural. Sacred groves, temple gardens, and home courtyards serve as micro-reserves for species otherwise under threat from habitat loss and overharvesting. Encouraging community-led conservation and integrating ritual knowledge into biodiversity management strategies can protect both cultural heritage and plant diversity.

- Charaka Samhita. (1000 BCE). Ayurvedic compendium.

## CONCLUSION

Ritual and cultural botany in India exemplifies the intertwined nature of ecological stewardship, spiritual practice, and social identity. Recognizing and documenting these plants fosters appreciation of India's biocultural wealth and emphasizes the need for holistic conservation approaches that honour both biodiversity and cultural heritage.

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