



## Plants used in Magico-religious belief and religious ceremony by Kokni tribe of Nasik and Dhule district of Maharashtra state, India

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### Abstract

The Maharashtra states Nasik and Dhule districts are incredibly diverse in terms of both their flora and their ethnic composition. Tribal people with extensive traditional knowledge of plant resources live in the Nasik and Dhule areas. From September 2021 to March 2023, ethnobotanical surveys were carried out in the Maharashtra in Districts of Nasik and Dhule to examine and record the plants employed by the Kokni tribe in their diverse magico-religious beliefs and cultural rituals. In the present study, 38 plant species used in religious and ceremonial activities were identified. The Kokni Tribe of Nasik and Dhule districts makes use of these plants in a variety of ways, such as in their worship of gods and goddesses for their protection and well-being. They also require these plants for the success of their cultural practices and religious services. These plants were discovered to be necessary to start all magico-religious beliefs, lucky spells, and cultural celebrations. Without their use, no tribal ritual was discovered to be complete. These herbs also had healing properties. It was discovered that almost all tribal societies regarded particular plants as holy in origin and necessary for religious and cultural purposes. In the present study, it was also discovered that certain plant species were used by tribes for particular roles and purposes.

**Keywords:** magico-religious, Kokni, Nasik, Dhule, Maharashtra

### Introduction

Nasik and Dhule districts tribal folklore is full of taboos and magical-religious beliefs. They have the belief that some gods and deities live on forest trees. They depend entirely on them. Their entire clan will be wiped out if they do not treat them with mark respect. As a result, people protect the plants they consider sacred for social, cultural, and religious reasons. The surrounding vegetation that has been conserved on religious property is strongly related to their taboos, festivals, ceremonies, and other cultural characteristics. Local populations eventually turn to worshipping the spirits and making sacrifices and offerings to appease them out of fear of being attacked by forest spirits or having their lives cursed by gods. The use of plants in various religious rituals is arguably the earliest and most widespread form of religion, despite the fact that taboos, restrictions, and extra care shown by the community have significantly contributed to keeping the religious plants intact and in good shape and conserving a wide range of biodiversity that is housed in them.

Every human society practices worship through customary rites. There is not a single religious or cultural ceremony that does not call for plants and anything made from them. Tribal groups uphold their traditions through folklore and the worship of their gods from the moment of birth to the moment of death. To uphold their beliefs, they use a variety of plants and their products. Few plants are considered sacred and ritually significant by them. These plant spirits have a big impact on people's lives. Although younger tribe generations are relocating to towns and cities and losing faith in their traditional ways, these tribe traditional practices are dwindling. Since there is now no systematic information available, it is imperative that the values of these beliefs and the accompanying plants be recorded and preserved for future generations. This work makes an effort

to research and catalogue the spiritual and cultural significance of plants to the Kokni tribe of Nasik and Dhule district tribal area of Maharashtra.

### Materials and methods

Many ethnobotanical field surveys were carried out during the year 2021 to 2023 in different Kokni tribal villages of Nasik and Dhule districts of Maharashtra. During the field study the plant samples were collected from different villages and the uses were noted down. The digital images of the plants were taken and plant specimens were collected for proper authentication and preparation of herbarium sheets. The plant specimens were identified with the relevant floras. The fresh specimens were compared with the earlier collected herbaria for authentication in Blatter herbarium, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai, Maharashtra. The Global position systems (GPS coordinates) of the collected samples were also recorded for further reference.

### Results

Magico-religious practices involve using prayers or rituals to invoke supernatural means to fulfil a particular wish. The Kokni tribal people of Nasik and Dhule districts are reported in the present study as using a total of 32 plants in various categories of magico-religious beliefs and practices. The following plant species use by Kokni tribal along with their scientific names, common names, plant families, parts used and magical or religious uses is given below:

#### Plants used in magico religious belief and religious ceremonies by Kokni tribal

##### 1. *Adiantum lunulatum* Burm. F. (Pteridaceae)

Common name: Rajhans

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Stem is used for preparation of Amulet (*Tabij*) and tied around neck or arm to keep evil spirits and prevent black magic.

**2. *Aegle marmelos* Correa ex Koen. (Anacardiaceae)**

Common name: Bel

Plant part used: Leaves

Uses: The leaves are offered to lord Shiva and used in various other religious ceremonies by the tribal.

**3. *Achyranthes aspera* L. (Amaranthaceae)**

Common name: Sonaru

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: The piece of stem is tied around women's hip for easy delivery. A piece of root is tied around the neck of the woman if she is not conceived. The bhagats (medicine man) eat seeds for 8-10 days and perform pooja to get some work done for the tribal like some court matter to get resolve and give 5 stem pieces to the tribal and chant mantras for the successful completion of the work.

**4. *Argemone mexicana* L. (Papaveraceae)**

Common name: Pivala dhotra

Plant part used: Root

Uses: Root is knotted into the hair of pregnant women to help them cope with labour pain.

**5. *Bauhinia tomentosa* L. (Caesalpinae)**

Common name: Bhutacha mul

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Stem pieces are kept in Amulet (*Tabij*) and tied around neck to prevent from evil power.

**6. *Biophytum sensitivum* (L.) DC. (Oxalidaceae)**

Common name: Lajalu

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: Dried plants are kept in pocket by the tribal for some work to be got done from others. Dried plants are kept in Amulet (*Tabij*) given by bhagats and fastened around the neck or arm to prevent from magic power.

**7. *Boerhavia diffusa* L. (Nyctaginaceae)**

Common name: Rakth-asud

Plant part used: Roots

Uses: The root pieces of 1 cm each are used as garland and tied around the neck of children who have jaundice, believed that the size of garland increases automatically as the disease cures.

**8. *Bombax ceiba* L. (Bombacaceae)**

Common name: Savar

Plant part used: Branch

Uses: The branch of the plant is kept in front of huts or house before marriage to avoid witchcraft or black magic.

**9. *Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub. (Papilionaceae)**

Common name: Palas

Plant part used: Leaves & flower

Uses: Leaves are weaved together and used as dining plates and dishes for serving food during different community festivals. Twigs are tied on horns of bullocks on occasion of "Pola" festival where the bulls are worshipped.

**10. *Calotropis procera* (Ait.) R. Br. (Asclepiadaceae)**

Common name: Rui

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: The plant is considered as a symbol of good luck if it grows automatically around huts or house.

**11. *Cardiospermum halicacabum* L. (Sapindaceae)**

Common name: Dabbamani

Plant part used: Seeds

Uses: Seeds are tied in black cloth and tied on the stomach of small children to reduce stomach swelling.

**12. *Casearia graveolens* Dalzell. (Flacourtiaceae)**

Common name: Kirmira

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Stem pieces are kept in pocket by the tribal to keep the poisonous reptiles away during their stay in forest.

**13. *Cassine glauca* (Rottb.) Kuntze. (Celastraceae)**

Common name: Bhutya palas

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: To ward off evil spirits, stem pieces are tied in all corners of houses. To keep the cattle away from evils and black magic, the cows are tied to a toggle made up of the plant wood.

**14. *Celosia argentea* L. (Amaranthaceae)**

Common name: Kurdu

Plant part used: Root

Uses: Root pieces are kept under waist of pregnant women for easy delivery.

**15. *Cissampelos pareira* L. (Menispermaceae)**

Common name: Tanyal

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: The maternal uncle of the infant put bangles made from the stem and put in hand legs of child in the morning. The tribal believe that by putting these bangles the loose motions stops within 1 or 2 days.

**16. *Cryptolepis dubia* (Burm.f.) M.R. Almeida. (Periplocaceae)**

Common name: Mendhol

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: To treat severe headaches, a string with three pieces of stem is tied around the neck.

**17. *Cucumis melo* var. *agrestis* Naud. (Cucurbitaceae)**

Common name: Chibhadu

Uses: The fruits are bitter so the tribal keep the fruits in pocket to keep evil spirits away.

**18. *Cyathocline purpurea* (Buch.- Ham. Ex don) Kuntze (Asteraceae)**

Common name: Runggal

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: The tribal use this plant for worshipping the newly harvested crops.

**19. *Cyperus pangorei* Rottb. (Cyperaceae)**

Common name: Lahul

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: After the death of any family member, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day the tribal worship for the soul and pooja is perform on

behalf of the dead member at river bank. A stem piece of the plant is given to the family members who interchanged the stem piece, broke it and throw into the water.

**20. *Dendrophoe falcata* (L.f.) Ettingsh (Loranthaceae)**

Common name: Bandgul

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Stem pieces with black thread is tied on pregnant women stomach to avoid abortion.

**21. *Desmodium gangeticum* (L.) DC. (Papilionaceae)**

Common name: Asud

Plant part used: Twig

Uses: The Bhagat (Medicine man) passes the plant over the body of a person who is posses by any spirit and to get rid from evils.

**22. *Diplocyclos palmatus* (L.) C. Jeffrey (Cucurbitaceae)**

Common name: Mahadev pind

Plant part used: Seed & fruit

Uses: When the baby is not straight during delivery, 3 to 5 seeds are tied in black cloth and handed to the mother for a peaceful delivery. Seeds are kept in an amulet (Tabij) and worn around the neck or arm to ward against evil spirits. Fruits are kept under hen before laying eggs. Tribal believe that the new born chicks will be of different colours just like the fruit.

**23. *Eleusine coracana* (L.) Gaertn. (Poaceae)**

Common name: Nagali

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: The crop is called as 'Kansara mata' and worshiped by Kokni tribal. The idol of *Kansara mata* is also established in temple by the tribal of these districts.

**24. *Euphorbia neriifolia* L. (Euphorbiaceae)**

Common name: Sabar

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: It is planted in front of the house or on the boundary of houses/huts to drive away bad evil spirits.

**25. *Ficus racemosa* L. (Moraceae)**

Common name: Umbar

Plant part used: Twig

Uses: The tree is not chopped generally, if so, then the bhagats comes and performs Pooja, then the plant is cut down if necessary. Twig of the plant is kept on ceiling or tied on main door, one day prior to marriage in villages.

**26. *Gloriosa superba* L. (Liliaceae)**

Common name: Kal-lavi

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: The tribal throw the plants on the roof of others huts or houses to start quarrel in the concern house.

**27. *Kyllinga tenuifolia* Steud. (Cyperaceae)**

Common name: Golliband

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: Plant piece is kept in amulet (Tabij) and tied around neck or arm for good health and protect the tribal people from evil power.

**28. *Lepisorus thunbergianus* (Kaulf.) Ching. (Polypodiaceae)**

Common name: Lasani

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Stem pieces are kept in amulet (Tabij) and tied around neck or arm to keep evil power away.

**29. *Pentanema indicum* (L.) Ling. (Asteraceae)**

Common name: Bhansar

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: The stem of plant is used for worshipping "Dongarya Dev" (Mountain god) by Kokni tribal. The stem piece is kept on plate made of amalgam of Zinc and copper and wax is applied on stem piece. The stem is kept vertical on plate and pulled by both hands which make a vibrating sound. This is done to entertain the "Dongarya Dev" and used when a religious tale is told during someone death, overnight.

**30. *Pogostemon benghalensis* (Burm. f.) Kuntze. (Lamiaceae)**

Common name: Phangala

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: Seven stem pieces are tied in thread and put around neck to cure mouth ulcers and small boils on body.

**31. *Semecarpus anacardium* L. f. (Anacardiaceae)**

Common name: Bhilava

Plant part used: Nut

Uses: The nuts are employed in tribal magic and religion, and they are kept with them to protect them from evil doers.

**32. *Solanum virginianum* L. (Solanaceae)**

Common name: Bhui-ringni

Plant part used: Roots

Uses: Roots are given in Amulet (Tabij) after chanting mantra to small children to protect them from evils.

**33. *Tamarindus indica* L. (Caesalpinae)**

Common name: Chinch

Plant part used: Entire tree

Uses: The seed are used by Bhagat (Medicine man) to find out whether a person is possess by any evil spirit and treat the person accordingly. The tribal avoid to sleep below the tree since they belief that the tree houses witches and ghosts.

**34. *Thysanolaena latifolia* (Roxb. ex Hornem.) Honda. (Poaceae)**

Common name: Sarpghat

Plant part used: Entire plant

Uses: The branch is kept on the door to prevent bad spirits entering the house or huts and kept near the bed or near the newly born baby to keep them safe from evils

**35. *Typha domingensis* Pers. (Typhaceae)**

Common name: Ramban

Plant part used: Root

Uses: The roots are rubbed and tied on children necks to protect them from bad omen and evil spirits.

**36. *Ventilago denticulata* Willd. (Rhamnaceae)**

Common name: Arshishi

Plant part used: Stem

Uses: To treat a partial headache, the tribe tied a little bit of twig on the arm with black thread. The tribal use the stem piece to treat headaches by wrapping it around the ear and on the finger.

### 37. *Vitex negundo* L. (Verbenaceae)

Common name: Nirgudi

Plant part used: Twig

Uses: The Bhagat passed over the fresh twig from head to leg on patient for treating fever and ward off evil spirit.

### 38. *Xanthium strumarium* L. (Asteraceae)

Common name: Lepadi

Plant part used: Fruits

Uses: A garland is prepared from the fruits and tied around the neck of children suffering from fever and keep the children safe from bad omen.

### Conclusion

Following the socio-religious, auspicious, and cultural ceremonial plants analyses, it is clear that the Kokni tribe of Nasik and Dhule districts use these plants primarily for their well-being by offering them to their gods and goddesses, to ward off evil spirits in order to protect their homes and children, as well as during their auspicious rituals. The Kokni tribes of Nasik and Dhule districts were discovered to use a total of 38 plants. The majority of these plants are conserved by the ethnic communities because they are regarded as sacred by them. They also think that some Gods and other deities live in forests on trees. Thus, tribes work to domesticate and preserve these plants primarily for their ceremonies, as a sign of reverence for their gods, to ward off their gods curses, and to some extent for therapeutic purposes as well. From a conservation standpoint, it is wise for tribes to domesticate symbolic and holy plants. Therefore, traditional tribal knowledge of plants may aid in the discovery of new medications for the benefit of people.

The Kokni tribal people consider all large, old trees to be the homes of gods and goddesses. They viewed those old trees as sacred because they believed that even their ancestors or departed souls might be living there. They defend them using all available conservation techniques, such as fencing in the tree and constructing a recognizable platform out of stones and bricks. The tree was marked with flags or vermilion paint. They wrapped a particular tree's trunk in threads. They routinely participate in social gatherings and religious activities every year. Under the tree, they store idols of their gods fashioned of metal and stone. This understanding of nature benefits the preservation of plants.

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