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TRADITIONAL WORSHIPPING AND CONSERVATION OF PLANTS

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INTRODUCTION

The incredibility of India resides in its oneness inspite of diversity in culture, religion. Ethnic groups, castes, languages etc.; 31 states 1618 languages. 6400 castes, 6 ethic groups 29 major festivals and one country. Isliye mera desh mahan hai. The diversity in culture and religion is reflected in diverse traditions faiths and beliefs. These faiths and beliefs in context with human relationship with supreme power has led to the protection and conservation of numerous plants thereby helping in maintenance of biodiversity.

In Hindu families after a child is born 'Janam Patrika' is prepared depending on date time and place of birth to know his/her future. It is believed that rashi, nakshatra and positions of the navgraha at the time of birth has a great bearing on the nature and the events happening in the life of the child. There are twelve Janam (birth) rashis and twenty two nakshatras and nine navgahas (planets). Each of these is associated with a specific plant. It is believed that worshipping, Plantation and protection of plants associated with one's birth rashi, nakshatra keeps at bay some of the adversities in life and also gives solutions to their problems. It would be interesting to study why when and how a particular species has come to be associated with above birth signs.

Following are the plants associated with navgrahas, rashis and nakshatras of the Hindu almanac (Dubey 1998).

Navgrahas

Graha	Botanical name	Common name
Surya (Sun)	Calotropis procera	Swallow Wort
Chandra (Moon)	Butea monosperma	Flame of the forest
Mangala (Mars)	Acacia Catechu	India Catechu
Budha (Mercury)	Achyranthes aspera	Devil's Horsewhip
Guru (Jupiter)	Ficus religiosa	Peepal tree
Sukra (Venus)	Ficus glomerata	Indian Fig tree
Sani (Saturn)	Prosopis spicigera	Indian Mesquite
Rahu	Cynodon dactylon	Dhub grass
Ketu	Imperata cylindrica	Cotton grass

Rashis

Rashi	Botanical name	Common name
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Mesham	Pterocarpus santalinus	Red Sanders
Rishabam	Alstonia scholaris	Indian Devil Tree
Mithunam	Artocarpus integrifolia	Jack fruit tree
Kadagam	Butea monosperma	Flame of the forest
Simham	Stereospermum suaveolens	Trumpet flower
Kanni	Mangifera indica	Mango tree
Tulam	Mimusops elengi	Indian Medler
Vrischikam	Acacia catechu	Indian Catechu
Dhanusu	Ficus religiosa	Peepal tree
Makaram	Dalbergia latifolia	Rosewood tree
Kumbham	Prosopis spicigera	Indian Mesquite
Meenam	Ficus benghalensis	Banyan tree

Nakshatras

Nakshatra	Botanical Name	Common name
Ashwini	Strychnos nuxvomica	Poison nut tree
Bharani	Phyllanthus emblica	Indian Gooseberry
Krittika	Ficus glomerata	Indian Fig tree
Rohini	Syzygium cumini	Indian Black Plum
Mrigasira	Acacia catechu	Indian Catechu
Arudra	Piper longum	Long Pepper
Punarvasu	Bambusa bambos	Bamboo
Pushya	Ficus religiosa	Peepal Tree
Aslesha	Calophyllum inophyllum	Alexandrian Laurel
Makha	Ficus benghalensis	Banyan tree
Poorvaphalguni	Butea monosperma	Flame of the forest
Uttaraphalguni	Nerium odorum	Indian Oleander
Hastha	Spondias mangifera	Wild Mango
Chitta	Aegle marmelos	Bengal Quince
Swathi	Terminalia arjuna	White Marudha
Visakha	Limonium acidissima	Woodapple
Anuradha	Mimusops elengi	Indian Medler
Jyeshta	Streblus asper	Sandpaper tree
Moola	Hardwickia binata	Anjam
Poorvashada	Tinospora cordifolia	Bile killer
Uttarashada	Artocarpus integrifolia	Jack fruit tree
Sravana	Calotropis procera	Swallow wort

Hindus believe in existence of thirty three corore god & goddesses. People are diverse in their upbringing, character and temperament; also there is Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic ways of worship so people choose their 'Ishta' ideal god/goddesses according to their nature as well as depending upon their lineage of ancestor's faith. Commonly used plants in religious ceremonies are coconut (Cocos nucifera) rice 'akshat' (Oryza sativa) betelnut, betel leaf (Piper betel) supari (Areca catechu) haldi (curcuma longa) sandal wood (Santalum album) clove (Syzygium aromaticum). Chuara (Phoenix dactylifera) kaju (Anacardium occidentale).

But when it comes to specific deities there are some prohibitions for eg. Ganesha is offered doob grass (Cyanadon dactylon) and other flowers but not tulsi (Oscimum sanctum).

तुलसी वर्ज्यित्वा सर्वाण्यपि पत्रपुष्पाणि गणपतिप्रियाणि (आचार भूषण)।

This is probably because tulsi is considered as wife of Vishnu and who loves tulsi most. Flowers & fruits of lotus, kadamb, champa, kela (Musa sp.), harsinger (Nyctanthus arbotristis) ashok is recommended in worshipping him. He is never offered bhang, datura and aak. Bhagavati is worshipped with red flowers. Other plants recommended are bela and chameli (Jasminum sp.) palash (Butea monosperma) apamarg (Achyranthus aspera) maulsiri (Mimusops elangi) kaner (Nerium indicum) kamal (Nelumbo nucifera). Doob is not offered to Durga.

गणेश तुलसी पत्रैर्दुर्गा नैव तु दूर्वयाः

All goddesses except Durga are not worshipped with aak/madar (Calotropis procera).

टर्कमन्दारनिषेधो दुर्गेतरदेवी विषयः। दुर्गा पूजाधिकारे तयो पाठात् (आचाररेन्दु पृ. 159)

The flowers and plant parts recommended to worship & decorate Shiva are aak (Calotropis procera) datura (Datura alba) kaner (Nerium indicum) pilikaner (Thevetia nerifolia) bilva (Aegle marmelos) bhang (Cannabis sativa) kush (Demostachya bipinnata) rudraksha (Elaeocarpus granites) shankhapushpi (Evolvulus alsinoides) aparajita (Clitoria ternatea) khas (Vetiveria zizanoides) gular (Ficus glomerata) kamal (Nelumbo nucifera) kesar (Crocus sativus) chandan (Santalum album) tagar (Valeriana hardwickii).

But he is not offered maulsiri, kadamb (Anthocephalus chinensis) kevda, baheda (Terminalia bellaria) kapas (Gossipium sp.) semal (Salmalia malabarica) anar (Punica granatum) shirish, Ketaki.

क्दम्बं फलगुपुष्पं च केतकं च शिरीषकम् ।
तिन्तिणी बकुलं कोष्ठं कपित्थं गु नं तथा ॥
विमीतकं च कापीसं श्रीपर्णी पत्रकण्टकम् ।
शाल्मली दाडिगीवर्ज्यं धातकी शंकरार्चने ॥
केतकी वातिमुक्तं च कुन्दो यूथी मदन्तिका ।
शिरीषसर्जं बन्धूककुसुमानि विवर्जयेत् ॥

—वीरमित्रोदय, पूजाप्रकाश

Sometimes there appears to be a controversy as it goes.

बकपुष्पेण चैकेन शैवमर्चननुमुत्तमम्
(Shiva is worshipped with bakul)

बकुलैर्नार्चयेद देवम्
(Bakul is prohibited)

सयाहे बकुलं शुभम्

(Bakul is used in the evening but at other times it is prohibited).

कन्दपुष्पस्य निशेधेपिमाधेनिषेधाभावरू

(Kund flower is prohibited in offering to Shiva except in the month of magh-feb)

(Mishra & Mishra Nityapuja Prakash)

Flowers offered to the Sun god are:

Aak, Kaner Bilva, Maulsiri, Kush, Shami, Neelkamal, Keser. Those that are prohibited are Gunja, Dhatura, Kanchi, Aparajita, Bhatkataiya & Tagar.

कृष्णलोन्मत्तकं का तथा च गिरीकर्णिका
न कण्टकारिपुष्पं च तथान्यद गन्धवर्जितम्

देवीनामर्कमन्दारौ सूर्यस्य तगरं तथा
न चाम्रातकजैः पुष्पैरर्चनीयो दिवाकरः

– (वीर मित्रोदय)

These are a few examples. With these shashtras also have enumerated the days on which plucking of flowers and leaves are prohibited for example Tulsi should not be plucked on Tuesday, Friday, Sunday, Dwadashi & Amavasya (no moon day) belpatra should not be plucked on Chaturthi. Ashtami, Naumi, Chaturdashi, Amavasya, Monday & sankranti.

अमारिक्तासु संक्रान्त्यामष्टग्यामिन्दुवासरे
बिल्वपत्रं न च छिन्द्याच्छिन्द्याच्चेन्नरकं व्रजेत् ।

– (लिङ्गपुराण)

If fresh bilpatra is not available then the one used earlier can be washed and again offered to the deity.

अर्पितान्यपि बिल्वानि प्रक्षल्यापि पुनः पुनः ।
शंकरायार्पणीयानि न नवानि यदि क्वचित् ॥

–(सकन्दपु आचारेन्दु पृ. 165)

Above described are the plants offered to panch deva. In Indian ancient texts several hundreds of plants are described which are offered to other god & goddesses and also those associated with human faith and traditions. Jain and Kapoor (2007) have named the study of these plants as divine botany. Variations in plants offered to deities may be attributed to the fact that all flowers and other parts may not be available at all times and at all parts of the country. India's geographical position is such that it has all known types of agro climatic, ecologic and edaphic conditions which support different types of ecosystems. This ranges from temperate alpine & sub-tropical regions of north west and trans Himalayas, rain forest, wet evergreen humid tropics of western ghats and arid & semi- arid regions of peninsular India, dry deserts of Rajasthan & Gujrat to the tidal mangroves of sunderban (Rawat & Uniyal 2003). Due to this diverse conditions India is bestowed with rich plant diversity. This is also a reason for the use of numerous plants. Human faith and beliefs has resulted not only in reverence and conservation of biodiversity but also restricted over exploitation of a single plant and monoculture of plants.

The various religious beliefs related to the nature has been a constructive device for conservation of plant diversity not only in ancient time but it holds a promising greenery in present scenario of industrialization, urbanization, over- exploitation and habitat loss due to fragmentation of ecosystems.

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