

# **SACRED AND MAGICO- RELIGIOUS PLANTS OF INDIA**

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## FOREWORD

In the Indian traditional system of Medicine, the religious and spiritual aspects have been innately synchronized. Hence, the system treats an individual holistically taking into account the physical, mental and spiritual aspects. The practitioners of this system of medicine also consider the planetary positions of the stars before administering medicine.

The system apparently appears to be ritualistic but, in reality it is based on experience and deep scientific inquiry. The patenting of 'Neem', 'Turmeric', 'Basmati Rice', etc. after scientific documentation are clear-cut examples of the old wisdom that sacred and religious plants of India stand for. There are specific plants used in ceremonies, as food adjuncts in medicine and for propitiating Gods, deities and even evil spirits and their use is being revealed to be based upon their potentialities as health promoters and health balancers or as purifiers of environment.

The compilation, 'Sacred and Magico-religious Plants of India', therefore, is an indispensable compendium which brings at one place the relevant information on these traditionally enriched plants of India and Himachal Himalaya. This will be helpful in recognizing the vast wealth of diversity of plants in India and will interest biologists, chemists and biochemists equally who can utilize the information for further analysis to strengthen the traditional knowledge. I am sure, this will fill a long gap between the practitioners of Indian system of medicine and scientists and encourage them to rationalize it suiting the modern requirements of biotechnology.

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## **PREFACE**

India i.e. Bharat, not merely a physical land mass but, a vibrant and spiritually charged mass of land, known as 'Tyag Bhoomi', 'Yog Bhoomi', and 'Karama Bhoomi' (land of sacrifice, yoga and action). It is a land, where, every component of nature is worshipped : the plants, animals, planets and the five elements. In all ceremonies related to worshippings — a large number of plant varieties are used which are sacred and possess properties : which purify the environment. Such plants have been investigated and listed differently by different people. Therefore, the information available is segmented or fragmented. For scientifically documenting such ritualistic information, it needs to be collected and gathered at one place. The present attempt to enlist 'Sacred and Magico-religious Plants of India' is a first attempt in this direction. This will provide a broad base for any further investigation to be carried out.

This compendium lists 468 such plants spread over 133 families and 340 genera. The plants selected for listing have been thoroughly verified from the existing literature and also for ethnobotanical studies undertaken by the authors for the last almost twenty years. It is hoped, that, this compendium will stimulate researchers to undertake studies so that the traditional technical knowledge is authenticated.

The authors are greatly indebted to Prof. L.R. Verma, the Vice-Chancellor of Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla for writing the foreword to this publication. Also, we are delighted to acknowledge Mr. Dhiraj, Mr. Suresh, Mr. Moonish, Mr. Sanjay, Mr. Balkrishan, Ms. Ruchika, Ms. Anjana and Ms. Monika for their assistance in the compilation in various ways. Last but not the least, we extend our heartfelt sentiments and feelings of indebtedness to our beloved Parents. Mrs. Anju Sood (wife of the senior author) and Mrs. Mridula Lakhanpal, who had to bear the opportunity cost.

Suggestions for further improvements of the compendium will always be welcomed and entertained wholeheartedly.

**SHIMLA**

**S.K. Sood**  
**Vandana Thakur**  
**T.N. Lakhanpal**



# ABBREVIATIONS

&	= And	Mal.	= Malayalam
A.P.	= Andhra Pradesh	Mar.	= Marathi
Ass.	= Assam	m.	= meter
Beng.	= Bengali	N.	= North/Northern
Bo.	= Bombay	N.E.	= North-east
C.	= Central	N.W.	= North-west
E.	= East/Eastern	P.	= Punjabi
Eng.	= English	Sans.	= Sanskrit
et al.	= <i>et alia</i> (and other authors)	S.	= South/ Southern
etc.	= <i>et cetera</i> (so on)	Sp.	= Species
Fig. (s)	= Figure (s)	Spp.	= Species (plural)
G.	= Gujarati	Subsp.	= Subspecies
H.	= Hindi	Syn.	= Synonym
H.P.	= Himachal Pradesh	Tam.	= Tamil
i.e.	= <i>id est</i> (that is)	Tel.	= Telugu
Kan.	= Kannada	U.P.	= Uttar Pradesh
Kash.	= Kashmiri	var.	= variety
M.	= Meghalaya	W.	= West/Western
M.P.	= Madhya Pradesh		



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Figure 1 A-D. Various Hindu Deities



Fig. 1(A). Various offerings to Lord Ganesha, Goddess 'Lakshmi' and Goddess 'Saraswati' at the time of worshipping.



Fig. 1(B). An image of Baba 'Balak Nath' in meditating posture inside the cave of his temple at 'Dheoth-Sidh', Dist. Hamirpur, H.P.

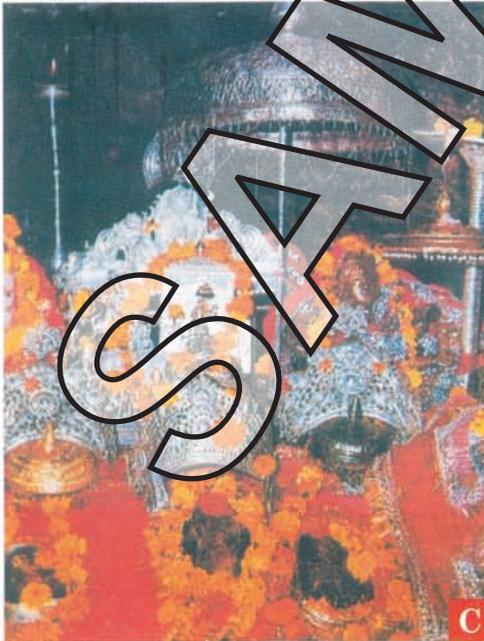


Fig. 1(C). Inner sanctum of 'Vaishnu-Devi' shrine at Jammu, showing the deity being worshipped in the form of 'pindies'



Fig. 1(D). Inner sanctum of 'Chintpurni' shrine at Chintpurni, Distt. Kangra, H.P.

Figure 2 A-C. Hindu, Buddhist Deities and Different Types of Rosaries



Fig. 2(A). Idols of Lord Rama with his wife 'Sita' and younger brother 'Lakshmana', and the monkey god, 'Hanuman' at the famous Ram Mandir temple, Shrinala.

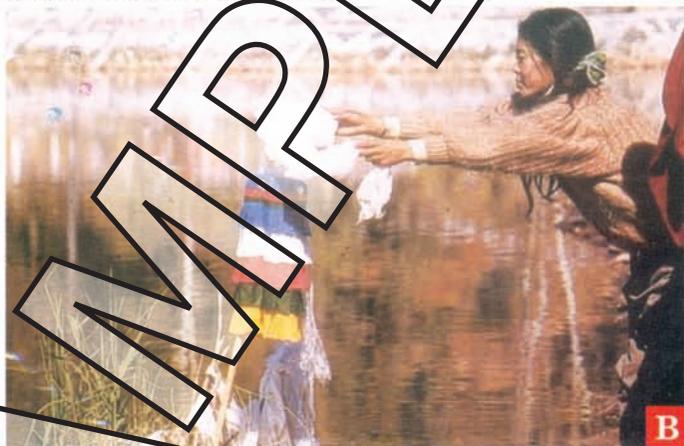


Fig. 2(B). A lady worshipping the floating island, representing the abode of seven Buddhist deities at Rewalser, Distt. Mandi, H.P.

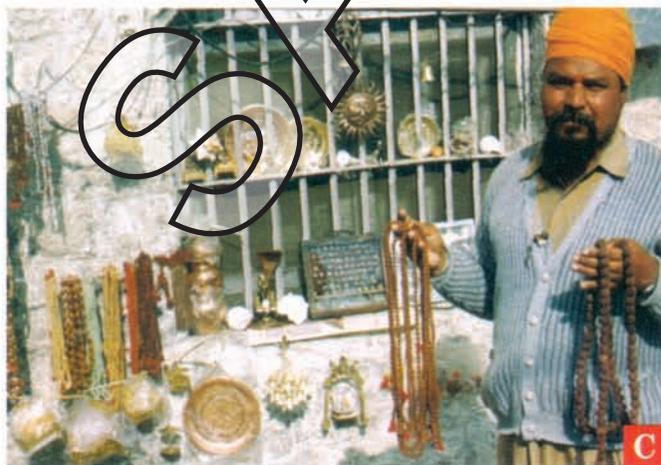


Fig. 2(C). A road-side vendor selling rosaries made from *Elaeocarpus sphaericus* and *Ocimum sanctum*.

### Figure 3 A-D. Sacred Plants



Fig. 3(A). *Aegle marmelos* (Linn.) Corr.



Fig. 3(B). *Aesculus indica* Colebr.



Fig. 3(C). *Betula utilis* Don Prodr.



Fig. 3(D). Stem bark of *Betula utilis*

### Figure 4 A-D. Sacred Plants



Fig. 4(A). *Cannabis sativa* Linn.



Fig. 4(B). *Cedrus deodara* (Roxb. ex D. Don) G. Don.



Fig. 4(C). *Ficus religiosa* Linn. and *Musa sapientum* Linn.



Fig. 4(D) Cotton bolls.

Figure 5 A-D. Sacred Plants



Fig. 5(A). *Geranium pratense* Linn.

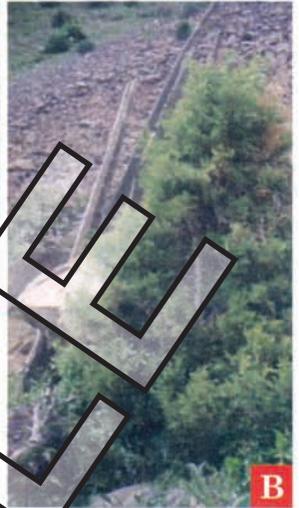


Fig. 5(B). *Juniperus macropoda* Boiss.



Fig. 5(C). *Picea smithiana* (Wall.)  
Boiss.



Fig. 5(D). *Myricarica germanica* (Linn.) Desv.

Figure 6 A-C. Sacred Plants



Fig. 6(A). *Rhododendron anthopogon*  
D. Don



Fig. 6(B). *Rhododendron arboreum* Smith

Figure 7 A-C. Sacred Plants



Fig. 6(C). *Rosa webbiana* Wall. ex Royle

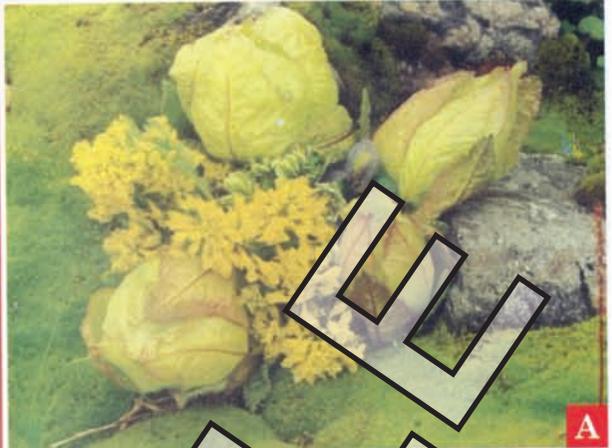


Fig. 7(A). *Saussurea obvallata* (D.C.) Edgew.



Fig. 7(B). *Salvia coccinea* Linn.



Fig. 7(C). *Urtica dioica* Linn.

Figure 8 A-E. Plant Parts used for Religious Worshipping



Fig. 8(A). Nuts of *Areca catechu* Linn.



Fig. 8(B). Black and yellow variety seeds of *Brassica campestris* used in various types of religious *pooja*



Fig. 8(C). Stem resin of *Commiphora wightii* (Arn.) Bhandari. 'Dhoop' made from the roots of *Jurinea* sp.

## Figure 8 A-E. Plant Parts used for Religious Worshipping

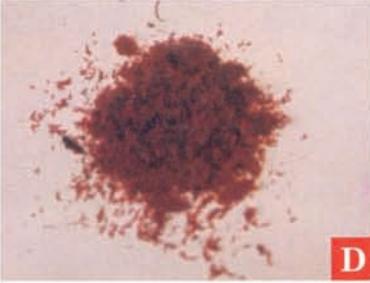


Fig. 8(D). Red dye obtained from the flowers of *Crocus sativus* Linn.



Fig. 8(E). Yellow dye extracted from the dried stem rhizome of *Curcuma longa* used for applying 'Tilak'

## Figure 9 A-D. Plant Parts used for Religious Worshipping



Fig. 9(A). Roots of *Selinum candollii* De. Prain



Fig. 9(B). Seeds of *Sesamum orientale* Linn.



Fig. 9(C). Rhizomes of *Valeriana muskbbala* Jones



Fig. 9(D). Seeds of *Wrightia tinctoria* Br.

## Figure 10 A-B. Religious Offerings

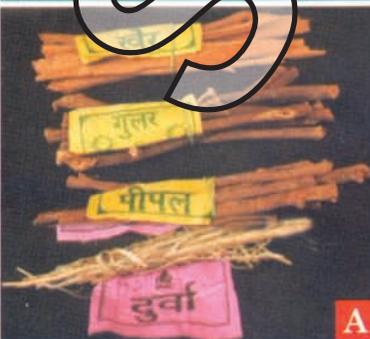


Fig. 10(A). Wood of different plants used in religious rites and for making rosaries.



Fig. 10(B). Leaves of *Piper betle* Linn. containing pieces of nut of *Areca catechu* and other ingredients used for offering to appease deities.

Figure 11 A-D. Plant Parts Used for Worshipping Deities



Fig. 11(A). Portions of stem and its dust of *Santalum album* Linn.

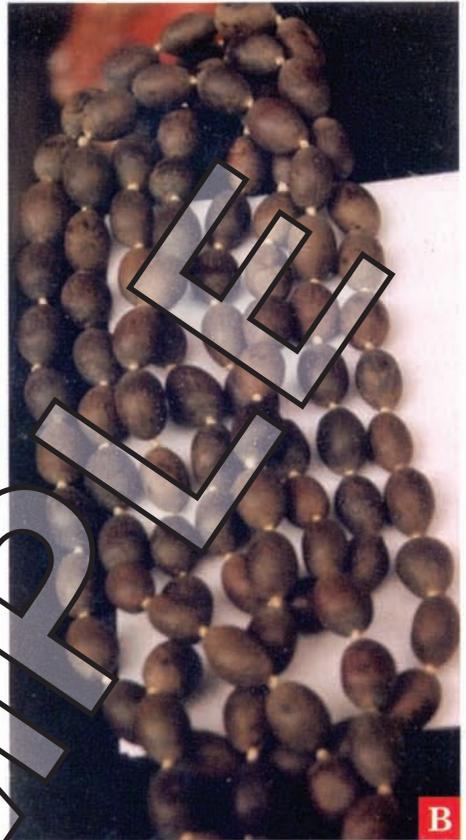


Fig. 11(B). A rosary made from the seeds of *Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.



Fig. 11(C). Portions of stem of *Tinospora cordifolia* Miers.



Fig. 11(D). Fruit of *Trapa natans* Linn.

Figure 12 A-E. Plants Used in Sacred Ceremonies and for Warding off Evil-Eyes



Fig. 12(A). A capitulum of *Tagetes erecta* Linn.



Fig. 12(B). Totems made from dried capitulum of *Tagetes erecta*, used to adorn the caps of the people of Lahoul & Spiti on ceremonial occasions.



Fig. 12(C). Women-folk from bride-side welcoming the members of marriage party by offering totems of *Tagetes erecta* and germinating plantlets of *Zea mays* and *Hordeum vulgare* Linn.

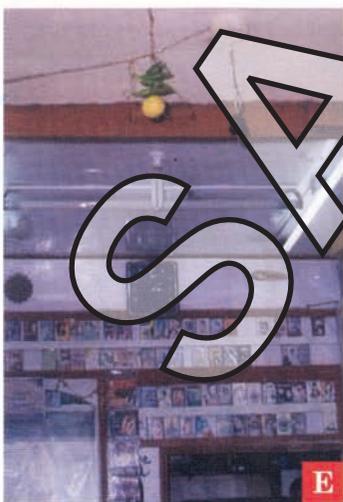


Fig. 12(E). A garland of the fruit of *Capsicum annuum* Linn. and *Citrus medica* Linn. hung to the roof of shop to ward off evil-eyes.



Fig. 12(D). A close-up view of Totems.

**Fig. 13 A-D. Sacred Plants Adorning the Ancient Hindu and Buddhist Paintings and Sculptures.**



Fig. 13(A). Goddess 'Lakshmi' holding a lotus, with a lotus throne and footstool (7th-8th century, Sandstone, National Museum)

Fig. 13(B). 'Krishna' lifting 'Govardhan' mountain covered with mango trees (13th century A.D.)



Fig. 13(C). A 'Yogini' watering a 'Tulsi' *Ocimum sanctum* plant (Rajasthan School, 18th Century, Jaipur)

Fig. 13(D). A Buddhist Stupa showing garlands, pots with lotus flowers, auspicious emblems and lions (Ikshvaku period, 4th century, Nagarjunakonda)

**Fig. 14 A-B. Sacred Plants Adorning the Idols of Various Hindu Deities and Sculptures.**



Fig. 14(A). Goddess 'Ambika' seated under a mango tree (Indian cave No. 33 Ellora, 750-850 AD)

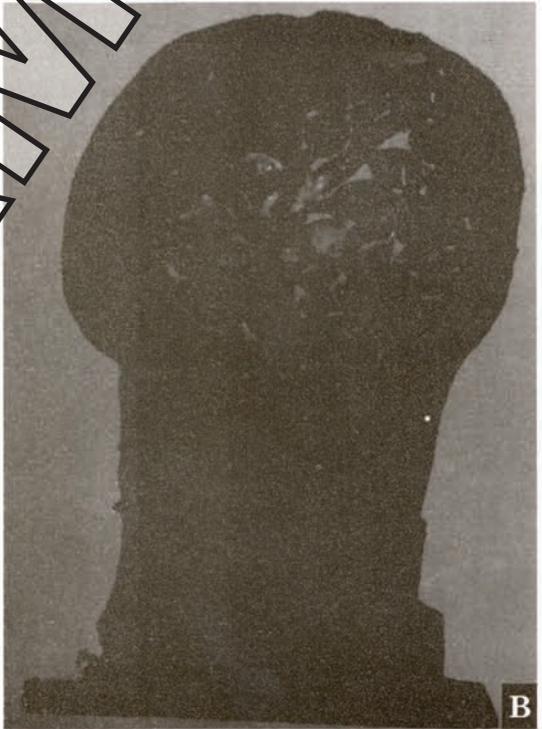


Fig. 14(B). The 'Kalpavriksha' capital from Vidisa. A typical example of folk and elite interaction.

SAMPLE

Fig. 15 A-D. Sacred Plants Adorning Hindu Paintings and Sculptures



Fig. 15(A). Lotus with signs of the zodiac (Pattancheruvu, A.P.)

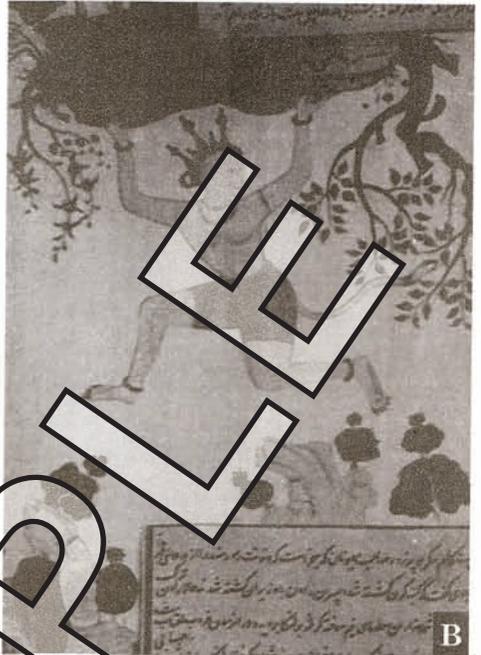


Fig. 15(B). The monkey God 'Hanuman' carrying the entire mountain covered with 'Sanjivani-butli' (Ramayana, Zain-ul-Abidin Akbar, 1587-99 AD)



Fig. 15(C). 'Radha' and 'Krishna' seated on lotus (Pahari School : Basohli, Varanasi)



Fig. 15(D). Palm leaf capital (Pre-Kushana Period : 3rd - 1st century)

Fig. 16 A-B. Sacred Plants Adorning Sculptures and Stupas



Fig. 16(A). Multi-headed cobra beneath the Bodhi tree, protecting the seat of 'Buddha' (Rauni, 2nd century BC)



Fig. 16(B). Stupa and tree (Chandavaram, Satavahana period)

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