

Sacred Groove in Dahanutaluka, Palghar District, Maharashtra.

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Abstract:

Sacred groves are large area of virgin forest with a diverse range of species that have been safeguarded by local people because of cultural and religious taboos that the deities reside in them and protect the villagers from various misfortunes. Every sacred grove has its own set of tradition, history and mythology that are an essential element of the sacred grove's identity. Religious and traditional beliefs, cultural mores, and practices play a crucial role in the conservation of environment and biodiversity. This paper briefly reviews the studies on sacred groves in Dahanu Taluka of Palghar district, Maharashtra highlighting that the tradition of sacred groves could provide a powerful tool for ensuring biodiversity conservation through community participation.

Key Words: Sacred Groves, Dahanu taluka, Biodiversity Conservation

Introduction:

Plant communities play a pivotal role in sustainable management by maintaining biodiversity and conserving the environment (Saxana K.G.1996). In many regions of the world, including India, conservation of nature and natural resources has long been a component of the cultural ethos, particularly in remote rural and tribal communities. These communities see themselves as part of a spiritual thread that connects them to their biophysical surroundings. They lived in harmony with nature and thereby played an important role in conservation of biodiversity Kandari, (2014). Vegetation is the most precious gift, plant has provided to us as meeting all kinds of essential requirement of the humans in the form of food, fodder, fuel, medicine, timber, resin and oil etc. (Tosh, 1996, 2004 & 2012, Patil D., et al. 2017, Gaur R.D.1999). One of the important traditions of nature reverence is to conserve those patches of forest that have been dedicated to a god or goddess or ancestral spirits as "Sacred groves." According to Hughes and Chandran (1997), sacred groves are defined as "segments of landscape containing vegetation, life forms and geographical features, delimited and protected by human societies under the belief that to keep them in a relatively undisturbed state is expression of an important relationship of humans with the divine or with nature." In short, sacred groves are the forest that preserved in the name of religion and culture. These groves are mostly associated with temples and are also culturally important. They manifest the spiritual and ecological ethos of rural indigenous communities. Various cultural and religious festivals are often arranged by local people within these patches, which they call "Mela." As a way of conservation of nature, Sacred Groves have proven to be a well-trieed and tested method over thousands of years (Islam et al. 1998).

Material and Methods

During the present works we have regularly observed plants from study area during 2016-2021. Simultaneously discuss with surrounding tribal people with their cultural and conservation of this groves. Field data has been noted in the field diary. The plants were

collected, identified by using flora (Cooke.T. 1901-1908) and preserved in the form of Herbarium and Photography.

Result and Conclusion:

Sacred grove in Dahanu Taluka:

Scared forests are storehouse of wild species which have been maintained by the local people for many years for cultural and religious beliefs and taboos. Tribal people collect the plant in various purposes like food, medicine, fodder, fuel and other miscellaneous thing but they uses plants according to their needs without destroying the forest areas. Due to strong religious beliefs tribal respect the nature well. Their religious myths and taboos directly or indirectly protect the nature.

In Dahanu areas there are places where we have come across sacred grove. In Kasa range the grove is associated with the deity 'Mahalakshumi-mata' and has 2-3 hectares area. In Aashagad range, the deity is 'Santoshi-mata' and grove has occupied 4 hectares area. In Sarwan, the grove is associated with the deity 'Gambhirgad-dev' and has 6 hectares area. During Diwali and Dasera days all tribals go and offer sacrifices to the Gods and Goddesses. The Friday is considered an auspicious day when several pilgrims from nearby village come offer the puja to Santoshi-mata and Mahaluxmi-mata.

Some plants used as religious and social rites such as *Ficus religiosa*, Linn., *Ficus bengalensis*, Linn., *Ficus racemosa*, Linn., *Aegles marmelos*, (L.) Corr., *Ocimum tenuiflorum* Linn., *Bauhinia racemosa*, Lam., *Calotropis gigantea* (L.) Ait., *Azadirachta indica*, A. Juss., *Mangifera indica*, Linn., *Santalum album*, *Butea monosperma*, (Lam.) Taub. var. *monosperma*, *Oriza sativa* Linn., *Prosopis spicigera*, Linn., *Uvaria narum*, (Dunal) Bl., *Milluosa tomentosa* (Roxb.), *Tectona grandis*, L. f., *Terminalia elliptica*, Willd., *Syzygium cumini*, (L.) Skeels.

Some common of the species are found in sacred grove:

Dalbergia latifolia, Roxb., *Mangifera indica*, Linn., *Bauhinia racemosa*, Lam., *Pongamia pinnata*, (L.) Pierre, *Holoptelea integrifolia*, Planch., *Syzygium cumini*, (L.) Skeels., *Albizia leonurum*, Willd., *Ficus hispida*, L. f., *Mallotus philippinensis*, (Lam.) Anogeisensis, (Wall.) Wul., *Careya arborea*, Roxb., *Erythrina suberora*, Roxb., *Sterculia urens*, Roxb., *Carissa indica*, (Du Petit-Thou.) Choisy, *Carvia callosa* (Wall.) Bremek., *Mitragyna parviflora*, Kunt., *Terna cordifolia*, Roxb., *Ixora parviflora*, Vahl, *Woodfordia fruticosa*, (L.) Kurt., *Terna cordifolia*, Roxb., ex Horn., *Holarrhena antidysendrica*, Wall., *Wrightia tinctoria*, Br. ex Horn., *Oroxylum indicum*, (L.) Vent., *Sterospemum xylocarpa*, Bth & Hook. f., *Begonia venosa*, Dryand, *Kydiacalycina*, Roxb., *Pongamia pinnata*, (L.) Pierre, *Ficus religiosa*, Linn., *Ficus bengalensis*, Linn., *Ficus racemosa*, Linn., *Aegles marmelos*, (L.) Corr., *Azadirachta indica*, A. Juss., *Santalum album*, *Butea monosperma*, (Lam.) Taub. var. *monosperma*, *Prosopis spicigera*, Linn., *Uvaria narum*, (Dunal) Bl., *Milluosa tomentosa* (Roxb.), *Tectona grandis*, Linn., *Terminalia elliptica*, Willd., *Terminalia bellirica* (Gaertn.) Roxb., *Isamum multiflorum*, (Roxb.) Andr., *Tinospora cordifolia* (Willd.) Miers, orchids like *Habenaria grandiflora*, (Druce) &

Gibs., *H. marginata*, Coleb. var. *marginata*, *Nervilia plicata* (Andr.) Schltr., epiphytic orchids like *Rhyncostylis retusa*, Bl., *Acampe praemorsa*, Blatt. & McC., root parasite like *Striga gesnerioides* (Willd.) Vatke var. *gesnerioides* and *Aeginetia indica*, Linn. are found on pteridophytes fern like *Adiantum* and *Nephrolepis*.

1) Mahalakshumi-mata Sacred Grove:

In Kasa range, the grove is associated with the deity 'Mahaluxmi-mataDogar'. The highest peak of this area is 580.6 m. During festival like Deewali and Dasera days, all tribals go and offer sacrifices to the Godness. Local people of this study area coming daily for worship and also take vow for the good health of their children, protection against ghost of the women. After the completion of wish, the deity is represented by coconut fruit and agarbatti. During this survey it was observed that many tourists also came in this area. During Dasera festival and Mahaluxmi-Jatra area was much crowded. Some dominant species of this area:

Table 1. List of Some Dominant species in Mahalakshumi-mata Sacred Grove:

Name of the Dominant plant species	Numbers of individuals
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> Linn.	03
<i>Ficus racemosa</i> Linn.,	02
<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss.,	03
<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.var. <i>monosperma</i>	05
<i>Aegles marmelos</i> , (L.) Corr.,	02
<i>Holarrhena antidysendrica</i> , Wall.,	07
<i>Oroxylum indicum</i> ,(L.) Vent	03

2) 'Santoshi-mata' Sacred Grove:

In Aashagad, the deity is 'Santoshi-mata' and the grove has occupied 2- 4 hectares area. The Friday is considered an auspicious day when several pilgrims from nearby village come to offer the puja to Santoshi-mata. Local people of this study area coming daily for worship and also take vow for the good health of their children, protection against ghost of the women. After the completion of wish, the deity is represented by coconut fruit and aggarbati. During Navratri days so many ladies of surrounding area were came to worship of 'Santoshi-mata'. Some dominant species of this area:

Table No. 2. List of Some Dominant species in 'Santoshi-mata' Sacred Grove:

Name of the plant species	Numbers of individuals
<i>Milluosa tomentosa</i> , (Roxb.) Sin.	5
<i>Ficus hispida</i> , L. f.,	7
<i>Sygyinium cumini</i> ,(L.) Skeels,	9
<i>Aegles marmelos</i> , (L.)	5
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> Linn.	10
<i>Terminalia elliptica</i> ,Willd,	8
<i>Tectona grandis</i> Linn.	40

3) 'Gambhirgaddev' Sacred Grove:

In Saiwan range the grove is associated with the deity 'Gambhirgaddev' and has 4-8 hectares area. The highest peak are Gambhirgad in Saiwan range (684.4 m). Local people take vow for the good health of their children, protection of crop. After the completion of wish, the deity is represented by coconut fruit, flower and aggarbatti.

Table No. 3. List of Some Dominent species in 'Gambhirgaddev' Sacred Grove:

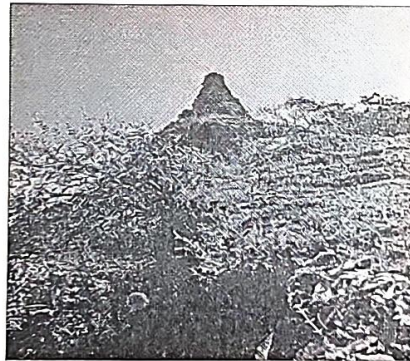
Name of the plant species	Numbers of individuals
<i>Tectona grandis</i> Linn.	12
<i>Azadiracta indica</i> A. Juss.	04
<i>Terminalia elliptica</i> , Willd,	07
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> Linn.	03
<i>Holarrhena antidysendrica</i> , Wall.,	14

Conclusion:

Sacred groves are banks of genetic diversity that must be preserved. Therefore sacred groves are a significant role in promoting sustainable utilization and conservation of flora and fauna of the particular region.

Acknowledgement:

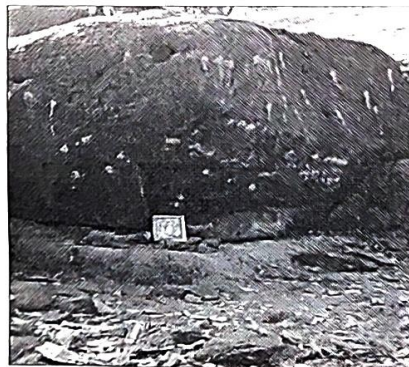
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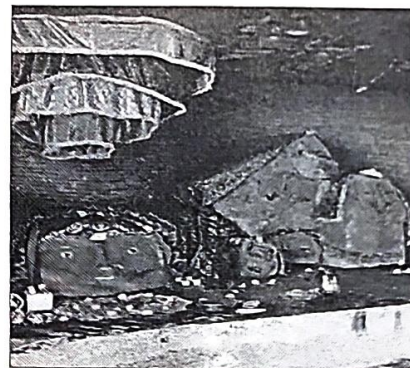
Mahaluxmi donger at Vivalvedhe



Gambhirgad Sacredgrove at Saiwan



'Sauri'deity Sacred Grove- Gambhirgad



Mahauxmi Mata- Sacred Gorve

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