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STUDY OF CERTAIN SACRED GROVES AND SACRED PLANTS OF AMBAJI FOREST AREAS OF BANASKANTHA DISTRICT, GUJARAT, INDIA

ABSTRACT:

Gujarat is situated in the Central Western part of India, with an area of 1, 96,020 Sq. km. The Eastern hilly region is formed by Southern, Western and Northern extension of Aravalli, Satpura and Sahyadri (Western Ghat) Mountain ranges respectively. Ambaji range forest belonging to Banaskantha District. It is a part of Ambaji-Balaram wildlife sanctuary. Ambaji is a town within taluka Danta of District Banaskantha, North Gujarat, India. The Pin code of Ambaji town is 385110 It is known for its historical and mythological connections. Ambaji town is known for possessing mines which produce fine quality marble and granite. Ambaji town is located at 24.33°N 72.85°E. It is at altitude of 480 metres (1,570 ft) surrounded by Aravalli hills. Ambaji range forest is a part of Danta taluka of 300 sq. km. geographical area of the range. North Gujarat is following under Boswellia forest type (Champion & Seth 1968), the following are the three main forests upon which the local people depending for various purposes. Present paper deals with total 9 Sacred groves and 51 sacred plants are enumerated from the different sacred groves of forest patches protected by the local people through religious belief and cultural practices evolved to minimize destruction. These sacred groves are being protected for generations together to maintain the unique diversity, endemic, medicinal and useful valued species. Extensive field trips were carried out in the sacred grove at monthly intervals. Specimens of flowering plants were collected and identified with the aid of different regional floras.

KEY WORDS : Sacred grove, Traditional, Tribals, Ambaji forest areas

INTRODUCTION:

Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Mehsana and Patan are the four districts of North Gujarat, among them in Banaskantha district the Danta and Ambaji range forests are the part of Danta taluka having the part of Aravalli hills. Ambaji range forest is a part of Danta taluka situated on eastern part of the Banaskantha district in North Gujarat. The forest type is dry deciduous and scrub (Champion and Seth, 1968) harbors about 400 tracheophyte plant species, including pteridophytes, gymnosperms and angiosperms. These forest areas are inhabited by around 20 tribes. These forests are inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups including the tribes like Bubadiya, Parghi, Taral, Bhemiyat, Dhrangi, Khair, Laur, Makwana, Dabhi, Solanki, Chauhan, Gamar, Parmar, Rohisa, Rathod, Mansi, Damor, Khermal, Kodarvi etc. These tribes cover 48 per cent of the total population. The *adivasi* (local people) dwelling in the forest have good knowledge of herbal medicine. The herbal practice is a part and parcel of their life and is developed into an efficient method of healthcare system, though it is diffused outside their societies. The present investigation was carried out in Ambaji range forest of Banaskantha district of North Gujarat.

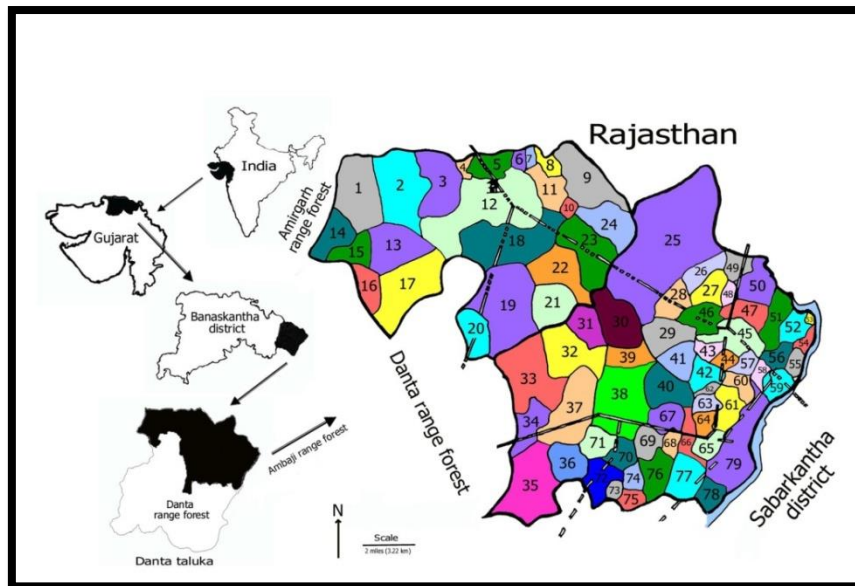


Fig:1 Map of Study area

Tribal people of Ambaji forest range directly depend upon forest resources for their daily needs. Ambaji is within the Aravali Range literally meaning 'line of peaks', is a range of mountains in western India running approximately 800 km in a northeastern direction across Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. It is also called Mewat hills locally. Ambaji town also in between the borders of North Gujarat and Abu Road of Rajasthan. As of 2001 India census, Ambaji had a population of 13,702. Males constitute 53% of the population and females 47%. Ambaji has an average literacy rate of 66%, higher than the national average of 59.5%, with 60% of the males and 40% of females literate. 14% of the population is under 6 years of age.

Ambaji enjoys all types of weather. In Summer, it's hot and humid and temperature remains between 26-46°C Degrees with hot winds. In Winter, the temperature ranges between 10 and 36 degrees Celsius during this period, which is quite cold and best time and in Monsoon Season, the average rainfall is about 15 to 30 inches per season, sometimes even heavy rainfall. Ambaji is at Altitude: 480 m. Therefore, weather remains relatively pleasant throughout the year.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:



Fig: 2 Preparation of Sacred Plants Herbarium in KKSJ Lab, Ahmedabad

The study area was surveyed regularly to record the floristic wealth of sacred grove of Ambaji forest areas. Various field trips were arranged and specimens were collected, identified with the help of Flora of the Presidency of Bombay (Cooke, 1958) and Gujarat Flora (Shah, 1978) and properly processed through standard methods. Special note on the ethnobotany were noted. Plant species were arranged according to Bentham and Hooker's classification given in the Gujarat Flora. Here documented 51 plant species were belonging to 79 genera and 46 families. Field notes with special reference to their distributional and regeneration status were noted. Followings are of some important contributors worked on North Gujarat flora: Plants of North Gujarat (Saxton & Sedgwick, 1918) and Saxton (1922), Flora of Visnagar Taluka - N. G. (Bharathi, 1959), Addition to Gujarat Flora (Ahuja and Pataskar, 1970), Floristic study of North Gujarat (Yogi 1970, Patel 2001, Patel(s) 2002). But nobody has concentrated on sacred groves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Total Numbers Of 9 SGS Are Reported From The Ambaji Forest Area. Each Sacred groves Have Its Own Religious Value, Myths, Rituals & Vegetation. The Information About SGS Was Collected From The Tribal Of This Area. Fig 1 Sows the map of study area (Fig 1) Fig 2 Preparation of Herbarium of Sacred Plants in KKSJ Lab, Ahmedabad, Fig. 3: shows Rakhevad Bavji SGS (500-600 Years old). Kesarabhai Begadiya & Nareshbhai Begadiya (Worshipper) Fig:4 shows Ratio of Dicot and Monocot of Sacred Plants Fig:5 shows Subclass wise view of the Sacred Plants Fig: 6 shows Status of the Vegetation from the Reported species (Very common, Common, Rare Plant species) Table 1: shows Checklist of Sacred plants reported from certain Sacred groves Table: 2 shows Ratio of Dicot and Monocot of Sacred Plants Table: 3 shows Subclass wise view of the Sacred Plants Table: 4 shows Status of the Vegetation from the Reported Species (Very common, Common and Rare Plant species). Details of the studied sacred groves are as under.

KALIDEVI SGS

Name of the village : Mota Pipodara

Informators : Mohanji Lakhji Thakor, Ishwarbhai Virabhai Shenna & Pratapji Panaji Thakor.

Sacred Plants : The grove is surrounded by the plants like Kanji, Khakhro.

History : Kalidevi sacred grove is situated near the village Mota Pipodara of the Ambaji Data range forest. The grove was established by their ancestors and is 600 to 700 years old. The local Informators of the grove are Mohanji lakhji Thakor, Ishwarbhai Virabhai Shenna & Pratapji Panaji Thakor.

Pledge : The deity is revered for well being of the cattle mainly for buffalo & after fulfillment they represented the sweet "*Sukhdi*", coconut fruit & Dhupstick and also "*Garba*".

MARGHI MATA SGS

Name of the village : Kegora

Informators : Arjanbhai Lalabhai Dungaisha, Somirabhai Dharmabhai Dungaisha, Ladubhai Ghanabhai Dungaisha

Sacred Plants : The grove is occupied by the plant species like Khakro, Kher, Ankol.

History : The grove is situated near the village Kegora & is more than 100 years old. Tribal people of this area done specially pray to the god during Holly celebration.

Pledge : Tribal people take vow in case of animal disease & represents goat sacrifice, coconut fruit & Mithi puja.



Fig. 3 : Rakhevad Bavji SGS (500-600 Years old). Kesarabhai Begadiya & Nareshbhai Begadiya (Worshipper) RAKHEVAD BAVJI SGS

Name of the village : Halad

Informator : Kesarabhai Begadiya & Nareshbhai Begadiya (Worshipper)

Sacred Plants : The grove is surrounded by the plant species like Limdo, Baheda, Ankol.

History : This sacred grove is situated near the village Halad. Kesarabhai Vakhabhai Begadiya is a local Informator. Rakhevad Bavji & Chamunda mata both are situated here. People worship both. This grove 500-600 Years old. Firstly, father of Kesarabhai was taking care of this grove, now at present Kesarabhai is taking care of this grove. People of this area believed that vow is completed within a week.

Pledge : After the completion of vow people represented sweet-penda, coconut fruit, and some time goat sacrifice. They also offer horse idol on completion of their vow as per their belief. They bring horse idols from the nearest village Poshina. Rakhevad Bavji God is under *Terminalia bellerica*, this tree is very old with the largest girth and height. Chamunda mata is situated under *Alangium salvifolium*.

SUKHI MATA SGS

Name of the village : Machkoda

Informator : Indubhai Raghobai Raisi

Sacred Plants : Limdo

History : The grove is situated near the village Machkoda. It is about 100 years old. Indubhai Raghobai Raisi is a local Informatory. The grove is established under the Neem plant. The people of that area believed that once upon a time that area was totally dried but due to well wishes of god further this area became evergreen.

Pledge : After completion of the vow the deity represented coconut fruit, dhupstick and sweet sukhadi on Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday in the morning time in the Gujarati month "Vaishkh". Milk of cow, buffalo and goat is represented during the Rakhsabandhan, Dhanteras and other Hindu festivals .People of this area take vow of in case of Animal Protection etc.

MAMAJI SGS

Name of the village : Chikhla

Informator : Gamabhai lalubhai Dungaisha

Sacred Plants : The grove is surrounded by the plant like Timru, Piplo, Kanji, Mitho indrajav, Arduso.

History : The grove is situated near the village Chikhla. Gamabhai lalubhai Dungaisha is a local informatory and the grove is 80-100 years Old. Annual tribal fair takes place on the day of Gujarati month "Vaishakh Sud Pacham".

Pledge : In case of non pregnancy people take vow and after completion of vow, the deity represented milk, burnt clay idol of horse on the festival like Rakhsabandhan and Diwali.

KHERAVALIMATA SGS

Name of the village : Begadiavas, Kesarpura

Informators : Nathabhai Solanki (75 Years)

Sacred plants : The sacred plants are Khakhro, Kanjo, Baval and Arni.

History : This grove is about 2000 years old. Nathabhai Solanki is a local caretaker of this grove. The tribal people worship goddess regularly. The fair is organized in the Gujarati month of "Vaishakh".

Pledge : When people are suffering from any difficulties such as family crises or any severe diseases, they pray goddess to help them out from that, for that they take vow to offer coconut, milk, sukhdhi & makai ni ghughri and also goat sacrifice to Goddess Kheravali and they offer it when the vow is completed.

KHANDOR MATA SGS

Name of the village : Sebaliya, Ranpur.

Informator : Bhagabhai Ambabhai Solanki, Rupobhai Nathabhai Solanki

Bhuva : Khongabhai Lalabhai solanki (Goddess comes in his body)

Sacred Plants : The sacred plants like Arduso, Khakhro, Bordi, Khajuri, Vad, Kesudo, Piplo & Baheda are seen.

History : (From the time of Britishers) Here, Lannea coromandelica & Azadirachta indica , both have grown jointly. They are not cut due to goddess. Also here exists both, Khandor mata and Bhakhar bavji. The

goddess is represented mithipuja and melipuja, But Bhakhar bavji is offered only mithipuja like “churma na ladu”. The actual existence of Bhakhar dev is on the Ingva hill. They are not cut due to the flag. Piplo & Baheda are not cut because people take rest under its shade during the fair. The tribal people believe that they suffer from loss if they cut these trees. Horses are to be brought from the nearest village. The celebration takes place during Diwali.

Pledge : The goddess is represented Milk, Coconut , Horse idol of clay .If there is a big vow, goat sacrifice takes place. They take vow before goddess if any people is suffering from any disease and for less labour pain.

BALDAR BAVJI SGS

Name of the village: Meen

Informator: Reema Akhma Angari (60 years)

Sacred plants : The plants surrounding the grove are Mahudo, Ratanjyot , Kudo, Khakhro, Kothi, Khajuri.

History : This grove is 5 years old. The whole village is gathered and the people complete their vow. The original place of this grove is somewhere else But the Buffalo of the care taker Reema Akhma reproduced so due to his vow, he built this grove here.

Pledge : The God is represented Sukhdi, Goat sacrifice, coconut according to their vow during the Gujarati month of "Falgun".

BABO DEV SGS

Name of the village : Meen (Mahuda van)

Informators: Bheda Puna Angari (Sarpanch)(80 years), Bachuram (18 years)

Sacred Plants : The plants such as Golado, Ratanjyot , Kudo, Mahudo are found.

History : This grove is 5 years old. The grove is built under the *Butea monosperma* plant. The surrounding trees are not cut because of the existence of God.

Pledge : The God is represented White Flag, Coconut , Horse idol, locally known as “*Papdi*” (Sukhdi), when they take a vow during illness. The monkeys and goats eat the plant *gollo*(*Lannea coromandelica*).

Table 1: Checklist of Sacred plants reported from certain Sacred groves

Sr No.	Botanical name	Local name	Family
1.	<i>Milium tomentosum</i> (Roxb.) Sinclair	UMPH, UMBIYO	ANNONACEAE
2.	<i>Capparis decidua</i> (Forsk.) Edgew.	KERDO, KER	CAPPARACEAE
3.	<i>Crateva nurvala</i> Buch.-Ham.	VAYVARNO	CAPPARACEAE

4.	<i>Flacourtia indica</i> (Burm. f.) Merr.	KANTI	FLACOURTIACEAE
5.	<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L.	SIMLO, SAVAR	BOMBACACEAE
6.	<i>Sterculia urens</i> Roxb.	KADAYO	STERCULIACEAE
7.	<i>Grewia hirsuta</i> Vahl.	SISOTI	TILIACEAE
8.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Coee.	BILI	RUTACEAE
9.	<i>Limonia acidissima</i> L.	KOTHU, KOTHI	RUTACEAE
10.	<i>Ailanthus excelsa</i> Roxb.	ARDUSO	SIMAROUBACEAE
11.	<i>Balanites aegyptiaca</i> (L.) Del.	INGORIO, REGOREA	BALANITACEAE
12.	<i>Boswellia serrata</i> Roxb.	SALAD, DHUPELIO, GUGAL	BURSERACEAE
13.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss.	NEEM, LIMDO	MELIACEAE
14.	<i>Maytenus emarginata</i> (Willd). D. Hou.	VICKLO	CELASTRACEAE
15.	<i>Zizyphus mauritiana</i> Lam.	BOR, BOADI	RHAMNACEAE
16.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	KERI, AMBO	ANACARDIACEAE
17.	<i>Lannea coromandelica</i> (Houtt). Merrill.	GOLADO	ANACARDIACEAE
18.	<i>Moringa concanensis</i> Nimmo	JANGLI SARAGAVO	MORINGACEAE
19.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	KHAKHRO, KESUDO	PAPILIONACEAE

20.	<i>Derris indica</i> (Lam.) Bennet.	KARANJ, KANJO	PAPILIONACEAE
21.	<i>Erythrina suberosa</i> Roxb.	JAGRAIYO KHAKHARO	PAPILIONACEAE
22.	<i>Delonix elata</i> (L.) Gamble	HINDRO, SANDSRO	CAESALPINIACEAE
23.	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> L.	AMLI, AMBLI	CAESALPINIACEAE
24.	<i>Acacia chundra</i> (Roxb. ex Rottl.) Willd.	KHAIR, KAIR	MIMOSACEAE
25.	<i>Acacia leucophloea</i> (Roxb.) Willd.	RUNGIO	MIMOSACEAE
26.	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> (L.) Del. subsp. <i>indica</i> (Bth.) Brenan	BAVAL	MIMOSACEAE
27.	<i>Albizia odoratissima</i> (L. f.) Bth	KALIYO, DHOLOSARAS	MIMOSACEAE
28.	<i>Albizia procera</i> (Roxb.) Bth.	GORIO, GORIJO	MIMOSACEAE
29.	<i>Dichrostachys cinerea</i> (L.) W. & A.	MORDHUNDHIYU	MIMOSACEAE
30.	<i>Pithecellobium dulce</i> (Roxb.) Bth.	GORAS AMLI	MIMOSACEAE
31.	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Drace	KHIJADO, SHAMI	MIMOSACEAE
32.	<i>Anogeissus latifolia</i> (Roxb.) Wall. ex Bedd.	DHAVDO	COMBRETACEAE
33.	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i> (Roxb.) W. & A.	ARJUNSADAD, SADAD	COMBRETACEAE
34.	<i>Terminalia bellirica</i> (Gaern.) Roxb.	BEHDR, BEHDA	COMBRETACEAE
35.	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels	JAMBU	MYRTACEAE
36.	<i>Alangium salvifolium</i> (L. f.) Wang	ANKOLI, ANKOL	ALANGIACEAE
37.	<i>Dyerophytum indicum</i> (Gibs. ex wt.) O. Ktze.	RATO CHITRO	PLUMBAGINACEAE
38.	<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i> L.	CHITRO, CHITRAK	PLUMBAGINACEAE
39.	<i>Madhuca indica</i> J.F.Gmel.	MHOVA, MAHUDO	SAPOTACEAE

40.	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i> Roxb.	TIBRU, TIMBRU	EBENACEAE
41.	<i>Holarrhena antidysenterica</i> (L.) Wall ex G. Don	KUDA, DOLA KUDA	APOCYNACEAE
42.	<i>Wrightia tinctoria</i> R. Br.	KUDA, DUDHLO	APOCYNACEAE
43.	<i>Tecomella undulata</i> (Sm.) Seem	RAGAT ROHIDO	BIGNONIACEAE
44.	<i>Lantana camara</i> L.	DHANI DHARIYA	VERBENACEAE
45.	<i>Vitex negundo</i> L.	NAGOD	VERBENACEAE
46.	<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i> L.	THOR	EUPHORBIACEAE
47.	<i>Holoptelea integrifolia</i> (Roxb.) Planch.	KANJO	ULMACEAE
48.	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	VAD, VALLO	MORACEAE
49.	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	UMBRO	MORACEAE
50.	<i>Phoenix sylvestris</i> (L.) Roxb.	KHAJURI	ARECACEAE
51.	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> Nees.	LAKADI	POACEAE

Table: 2 Ratio of Dicot and Monocot of Sacred Plants

Monocot	49
Dicot	2

Fig:4 Ratio of Dicot and Monocot of Sacred Plants

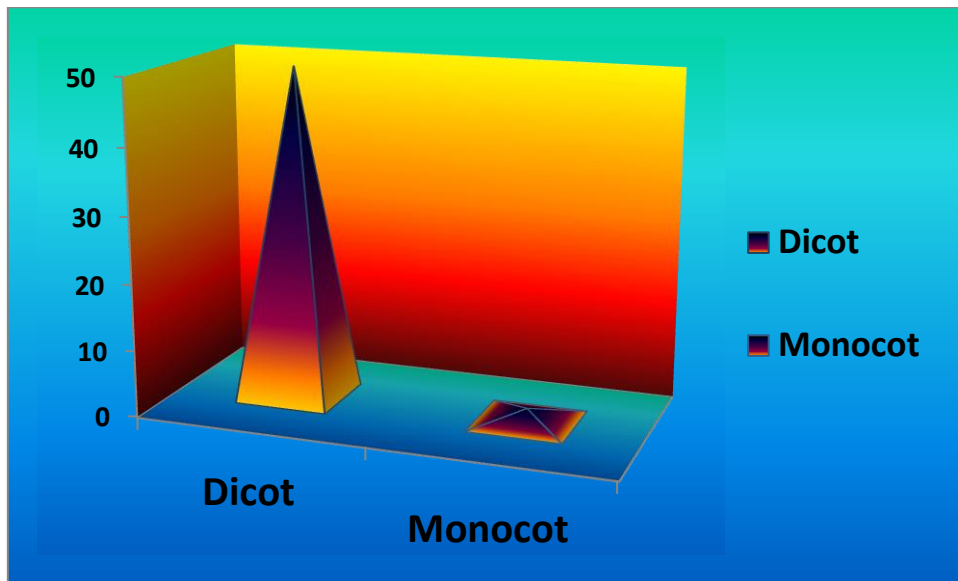


Table: 3 Subclass wise view of the Sacred Plants

Polypetalae	20
Gamopetalae	7
Apetalae	5

Fig:5 Subclass wise view of the Sacred Plants

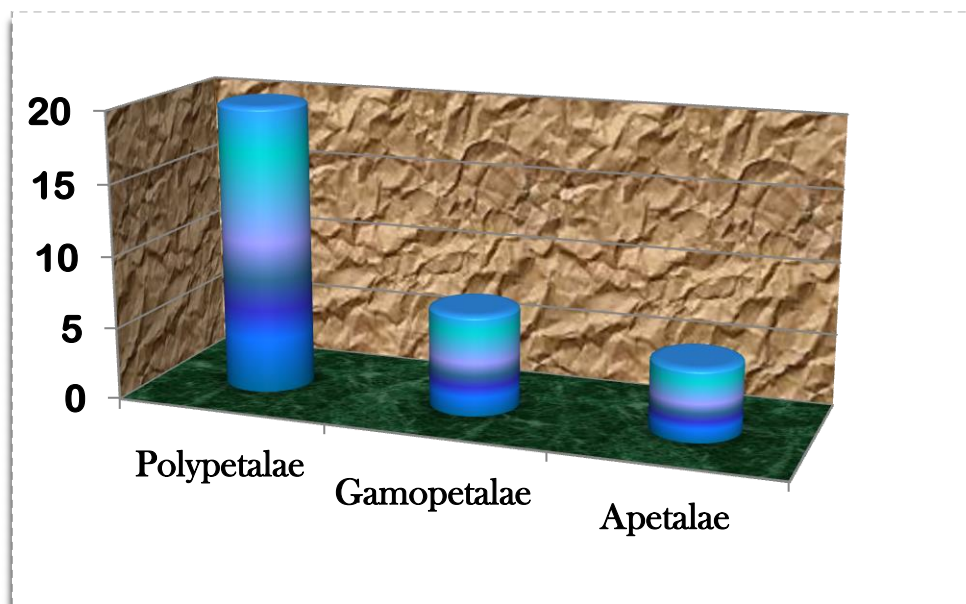
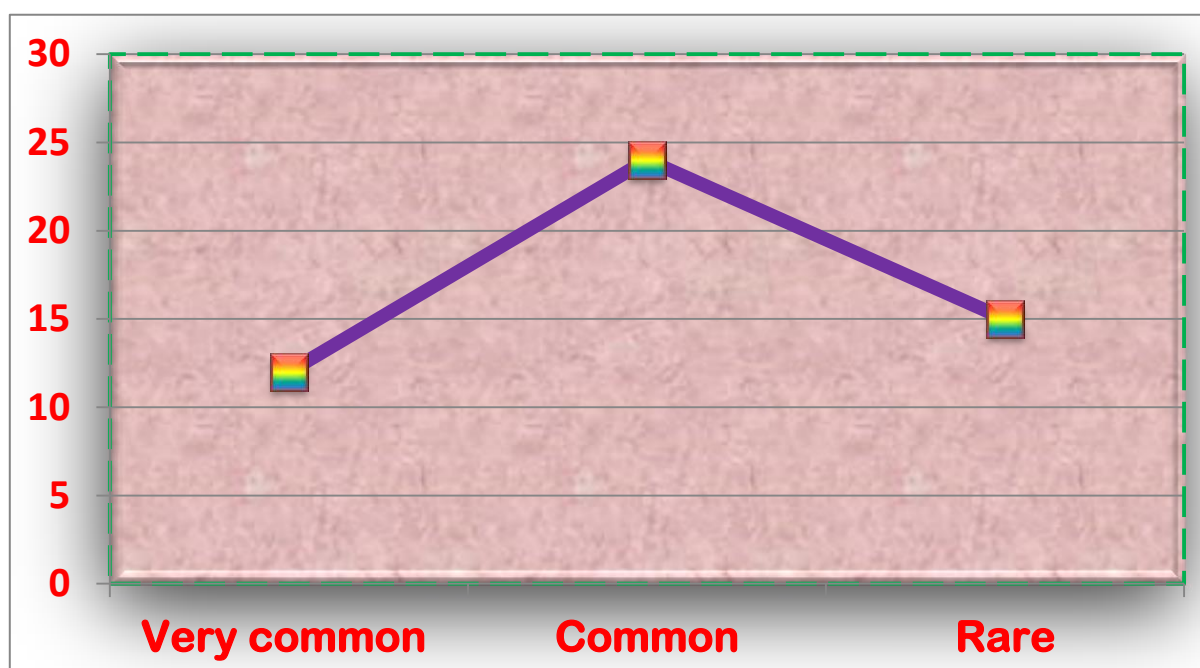


Table: 4 Status of the Vegetation from the Reported Species (Very common, Common and Rare Plant species)

Very Common	13
Common	23
Rare	15

Fig: 6 Status of the Vegetation from the Reported species (Very common, Common, Rare Plant species)



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Sacred groves act as an ideal center for biodiversity conservation. Several plants and animals that are threatened in the forest are still well conserved in some of the sacred groves. It has been observed that several medicinal plants that are not to be found in the forest are abundant in the sacred groves. Further, rare, endangered, threatened and endemic species are often concentrated in sacred groves. The sacredness, religious beliefs and taboos play a significant role in promoting sustainable utilization and conservation of flora and fauna of the region. However, with the passage of time, considerable changes have taken place in the extent of the sacred groves, in their vegetation structure, peoples' perception towards them and the religious beliefs and taboos. Therefore, a holistic understanding of the current status, structure and function of sacred grove is essential for assessing their ecological role and formulating strategies for their conservation. Reported different sacred groves of the Ambaji forest areas having valuable importance regarding fillings of the tribals, way of the conservation of the plants diversity. We are collecting more data and about the particular study and will do something valuable information which will definitely helpful to the society as well as forest department of government of Gujarat.

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