

THE SACRED GROVES OF HINDOLI AND NAINWAN TEHSILS OF BUNDI DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

Ramlaxman Saini*
Dr. Vandana Sharma**

ABSTRACT

Nature worship has been an ancient Indian tradition. Sacred groves are tracts of virgin forest with rich Bio-diversity, which have been protected by the local people for centuries for their cultural, religious beliefs and taboos that the deities reside in groves and protect the villagers. Numerous sacred grove areas are found in Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils of Bundi district. Sacred groves are considered ideal centre for biodiversity conservation. Biodiversity of the region need to be conserved as a genetic reservoir. Sacred groves also help in preserving the religious and cultural heritage of Meitei culture. The present study focusses on the main sacred groves of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils known for their spiritual, religious, and cultural significance.

Keywords: Sacred Groves, Biodiversity Conservation, Tribals.

Introduction

Sacred groves are repositories of forest diversities. It plays a great role in maintaining the micro-climate of the region. The sacred groves shelter medicinal plants of great significance for the primary health care of the tribals, nomadic communities and rural peoples, and also for the modern pharmacopoeia. The contribution of local knowledge system in conservation and sustainable use of natural resources is gaining worldwide recognition. Ethnobotanical and phytosociological information about plants and their various uses by tribals is useful for conservation of traditional knowledge and biodiversity. They also promote community health care and conserve potential source of modern drugs. So ethnobotanical studies and conservation strategies are required to preserve the valuable indigenous knowledge.

Besides these, sacred groves play important role in maintaining the micro-climate of the particular region. Conservation of these groves can conserve water and, prevent soil and nutrient loss. There is a strong belief among tribals that local Deity go angry if they cut trees and damage plants. Sacred groves are for in-situ conservation of biodiversity and conserving rare threatened and endangered plant species.

Material and Methods

The sacred groves of Rajasthan are known as *Malvan, Deorai, Bani, Baugh, Thanak, Oranetc.* Most of the sacred groves of Rajasthan are found in the Aravalli Mountain range. Bundi district is a part of Hadoti region. Bundi district is a gift of nature. Numerous area of the Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils are located in Ramgarh Vishdhari Sanctuary forest with many residual hills, rivers, folding, faulting, waterfalls. Many sacred groves are found in this area. The documentation is based on a field survey of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils area during different seasons. Study area has been shown in figure 1 & 2.

* Research Scholar, Department of Botany, Government College Kota, Kota, Rajasthan, India.

** Associate Professor, Department of Botany, Government College Kota, Kota, Rajasthan, India.

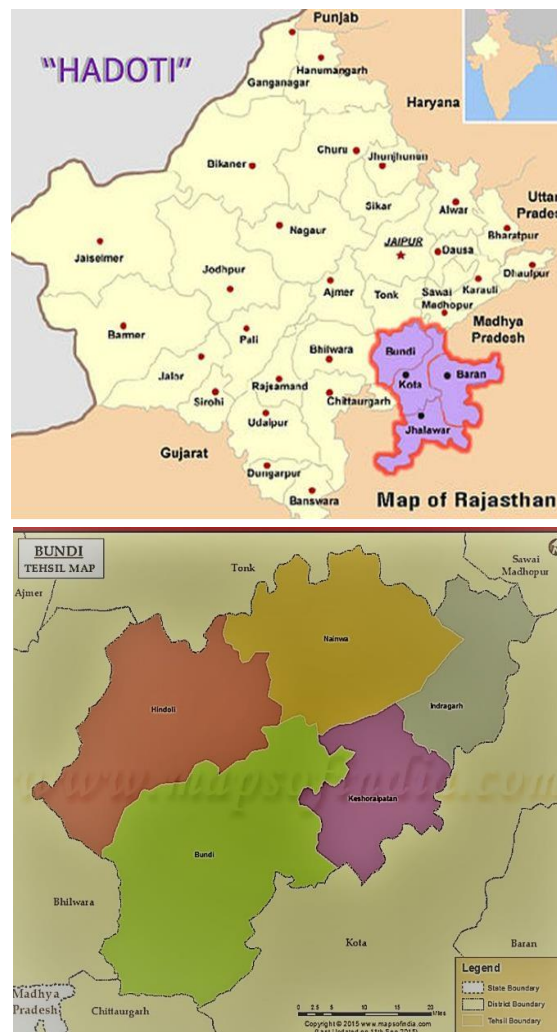


Figure 1 & 2
(Source; Bundi Census 2011)

Sacred Groves of Hindoli Tehsils

- Gangrawal ji ki Bani (Sacred Grove):** Gangrawal ji ki Bani grove area is located in village Chatarganj 18 km. away from Bundi district headquarter. It is situated in the middle of the Aravalli hills. Gangrawal ji Maharaj temple is situated on top of the hill. It is a beautiful 'Dhokara' forest. According to Sh. Gopal Maharaj of Gangrawal ji Maharaj, the Gujar community and villagers come daily for worshipping and they feed birds and cattle in Gaushala. Phalgun Shukla Triyodashi 'Jagran' is performed there every year and next day culmination programme that is 'Purnahuti' & Prasad (sweets) are distributed to people as blessings of god. The folk believes that the area is protected and conserved due to the presence of the deity. The surrounding hills are predominantly covered by *Anogeissus pendula* (*Dhokara*), which turn into a green canopy in the rainy season, so it can be called **Dhokra forest**. The area is mostly compact with the trees of *Butea monosperma* (Dhak, Chhura), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Churel), *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Balanites aegyptiaca* (Hingot), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Kadam), *Bauhinia spp.* (Kachnar), etc and shrubs like; *Datura meatl* (kala Datura), *Datura stramonium* (Datura), *Casia tora*, *Calotropis procera* (Aakra) *Adhatoda vasica* (Aduasa). There is a strong belief among local people that the Gods and Goddesses will get angry on cutting down trees or damage the plants grown around. It is said trees are not used for personal use in this area. (Picture-1)

- Saint Durvasa Sacred Grove:** Saint Durvasa sacred grove area is considered to be one of the most ancient site of the Bundi district. Saint Durvasa grove area is located 33 km. away from Bundi district headquarter. It is situated in the middle of the Aravalli hills. The main attraction of this area is the ancient **Shiv temple, Durvasha Rishi Samadhi** and the beautiful '**Dhokara**' forest. Inside the Shiv temple a continuous flow of water falls into a small pond. The small pond is the main source of water there. The shore area of waterfall is well dominated by *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajur) trees. Khajur trees indicate the presence of water. The surrounding hills are predominantly covered by *Anogeissus pendula* (*Dhokara*), which turn into a green canopy in the rainy season, adding to the charm and beauty to the Saint Durvasa sacred forest. The area is mostly compact with the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (*Dhokara*), *Butea monosperma* (*Dhak*, *Chhura*), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (*Churel*), *Dalbergia sissoo* (*Shisham*), *Aegle marmelos* (*Bilpatra*), *Prosopis juliflora* (*Vilayati babool*), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (*Kadam*), etc and shrubs like; *Datura metel* (*kala Datura*), *Datura stramonium* (*Datura*), *Casia tora*, *Calotropis procera* (*Aakra*), *Adhatoda vasica* (*Adusa*) like Gangrawal ji bani forest. Local residents have immense devotion towards the *Saint Durvasa* sacred grove. According to **Sh. Kailash Puri ji** (Priest of Saint Durvasa Mahadev), the villagers have deep belief and come daily for worshipping especially, on **Shivaratri**, "**Aamli-gyarus**" and every Monday of the week.



Picture 1: Gangarawal ji Maharaj Ki Bani/ sacred grove



Picture 2: Saint Durvasa Mahadev sacred grove

"**Shravan mas**" villagers come for worshipping, and the deity is represented by milk. The folk always try to please local diety for seeking blessings and believe that the area is protected and conserved due to the presence of the deity. **Kaldeh Mata ji** and **Bijhasan mata ji** is just 6km. Away from this area. (Picture-2)

- Rameshwar Mahadev Sacred Grove:** Rameshwar Mahadev sacred grove is just about 20 km from Bundi district headquarter. This area is one of the most ancient places of Bundi district. Attractions of this area are ancient Shiv temple, dense forest area, water fall and Rameshwar nala. This sacred grove is rich in biodiversity. This place is full of natural and geographical beauty. Water fall on Mahadev ji is picturesque. According to Priest of Rameshwar Mahadev, tourists, tribals, local residents, nomadic groups of the area visit this place for blessings. Maha shivratri is the major festival of this region which is celebrated on **Phalgun**. This grove is surrounded by the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajur), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Churel), *Butea monosperma* (Dhak), *Dalbergiasissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Elaeocarpus ganitrus* (Rudraksha), *Acacia nilotica* (Desi babool), *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), *Syzizium cuminum* (Jamun), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) and shrubs like; *Datura metl* (kala Datura), *Datura stramonium* (Datura), *Casia tora*, *Calotropis procera* (Aakra) *Adhatoda vasica* (Adusa), *Euphorbia nerifolia* etc. (Picture-3)
- Sanghmeshwar (Samela) Mahadev Sacred Grove:** Samela Mahadev sacred grove is situated near at **Nimod** village in Hindoli tehsil, about 35 km from Hindoli tehsil headquarter. This area is one of the most ancient places in Hindoli tehsil, which is situated at Mez and Ranipura rivers 'sangham'. According **Heera Lal ji Kevat** (local person), the tribals and local communities come daily for prayers. Mahashivratri is the major festival that is celebrated on Phalgun. People fear damaging trees or plants of this area. This grove is surrounded by Mez and Ranipura rivers. There are *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra),



Picture 3: Rameshwar Mahadev sacred grove



Picture 4: Shri Devjhar mahadev (Sathoor-Hindoli)



(A) Temple

(B) *Crateva adansonii* (sacred Barna)

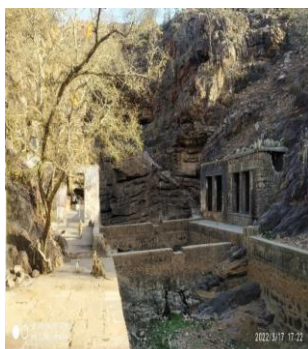
Picture 5: Sanghmeshwar (Samela) Mahadev sacred grove

Prosopis juliflora (Vilayati babool), *Capparis decidua* (Kair), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Acacia nilotica* (Deshi babool), *Butea monosperma* (Dhak), *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri), *Ficus bengalensis* (Bargad), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal), ***Crateva adansonii*** (sacred Barna), *Capparis decidua* (Kair), *Thevetia peruviana* (Pili kaner) and shrubs like; *Datura metl* (kala Datura), *Datura stramonium* (Datura), *Casia tora* (Chakvad), *Ipomoea carnea* (Vilayati aak), *Typha spp.* (Ariya), *Calotropis procera* (Aakra), *Adhatoda vasica* (Adusa), *Oscimum sanctum* (Tulsi) etc. (Picture-5)

- **Other Sacred Groves:** Apart from all above sacred groves, many minor sacred grove areas are also found in this area. The care and protection of this area is done by the local people. The following are few minor sacred groves e.g. *Lakdeshwar Mahadev sacred grove-Kalamaal*, *Kalda mataji sacred groves –Datunda village*, *Shri Dundhleshwar Mahadev sacred grove -Narayan pura village Bijashan mata sacred groves-Datund village*, *Shri Devjhar Mahadev sacred grove-Sathoor village* (Picture-4), *Shri Sindhkeshwar Mahadev sacred grove-Sathoor village* etc.

Sacred Groves of Nainwan Tehsils

- **Shri Barda ke Balaji Sacred Grove:** Shri Barda ke Balaji sacred grove is situated near Nainwan tehsil headquarters above 4km. This area is one of the most ancient places Nainwan tehsil. It is conducted by **Shri Barda ke Balaji Van Pariyavaran avm Vikash Samiti**. According to Sh. Vishnu Sharma (Priest of Shri Barda ke Balaji), the people believe that the Gods and Goddesses will get angry on cutting down trees and on damage to the plants grown in these places. In that area, use of trees are prohibited for personal. This grove is surrounded by the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokara), *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Churel), *Dalbergiasissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Saraca indica* (Ashok), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Acacia nilotica* (Deshi babool), *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) and shrubs like; *Datura metl* (kala Datura), *Datura stramonium* (Datura), *Lawsonia inermis* (Mehndi), *Casia tora* (Chakvad), *Calotropis procera* (Aakra), *Adhatoda vasica* (Adusa) and herbs like; *Aloe vera* (Ghikanwar), *Tricholepis glaberrima* (Brhamdandi), *Sphaeranthus indicus* (Gorakh mundi), *Oscimum basilicum* (Tulsi) etc. (Picture-6),
- **Dhundleshwar Mahadev Sacred Grove:** Dhundleshwar Mahadev sacred grove is situated near at **Talvas** village in Nainwan tehsil. It is situated about 25 km from Nainwan tehsil headquarters. This area is one of the most ancient places Nainwan tehsil. It is surrounded by *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokra) forest and part of Ramgarh Vishdhari Sanctuary Bundi. There is a strong belief among tribals that God or Deity go angry if they cut trees and damage plants. This grove is surrounded by the trees of *Anogeissus pendula* (Dhokra), *Dalbergiasissoo* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilpatra), *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati babool), *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajur), *Capparis decidua* (Kair), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Acacia nilotica* (Deshi babool), *Butea monosperma* (Dhak), *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri), *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) and shrubs like; *Datura metl* (kala Datura), *Datura stramonium* (Datura), *Casia tora* (Chakvad, Puadia), *Calotropis procera* (Aakra), *Adhatoda vasica* (Adusa), *Oscimum sanctum* (Tulsi) etc. (Picture-7)



Picture 6: Shri Dhundelshwer Mahadev Sacred Grove



Picture 7: Shri Barda ke Balaji Sacred grove (Nainwan)

Results and Discussion

The present study is an attempt to explore the different sacred groves and its flora protected by the tribal, nomadic, and local residents of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils. The information collected during this survey of sacred grove has been enumerated below with Spiritual and religious significance (Table-1).

Table 1: Sacred Plants and Spiritual and Cultural believes of Hindoli & Nainwan Tehsils Sacred Areas

S.No.	Botanical & Local Name of Plant	Family	Plant Parts Used	Usage Religious
1.	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> (L.) Willd. Deshi Babool	Fabaceae	All plant parts	Used in holy fire (Havans) to purify surrounding air.
2.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Corr. Belpatra	Rutaceae	Leaves	Offered to Lord Shiva on holy month of Shravan and Mahashivratri festival.
3.	<i>Annona squamosa</i> L. Sitaphal	Annonaceae	Fruits	Used in Diwali Mahalaxmi puja.
4.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss. Neem	Meliaceae	Leaves	Used for <i>Neem jhuwari</i> in marriage ceremony and 'Kalash Yatra'
5.	<i>Calotropis procera</i> R. Br. Aak, Aakra	Apocynaceae	Flowers	Offered to Lord Shiva.
6.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R.Br. Aak, Aakra	Apocynaceae	Flowers	Offered to Lord Shiva.
7.	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L. Bhang	<i>Cannabinaceae</i>	Fruits	Offered to Lord Shiva on 'Mahashivratri' and festivals.
8.	<i>Crateva adansonii</i> Sacred-Barna	<i>Capparaceae</i>	Fruits and Leaves	Offered to Lord Shiva on 'Mahashivratri' and festivals.
9.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers. Dhoob Grass	<i>Poaceae</i>	All plant parts	It is used in most of religious rituals especially to please lord Ganesha.
10.	<i>Datura metel</i> L. Kala Dhatura	<i>Solanaceae</i>	All plant parts	Offered to Lord Shiva.
11.	<i>Datura stramonium</i> L. Dhatura	<i>Solanaceae</i>	All plant parts	Offered to Lord Shiva.
12.	<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (L.) Stapf. Dabh	<i>Poaceae</i>	All plant parts	Used in Sacred fires (Havans).
13.	<i>Emblica officinalis</i> Gaertn. Anwla	<i>Phyllanthaceae</i>	All plant parts	The plant is considered a holy tree and ladies worships on Anwala Navami .
14.	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L. Bargad, Vat vriksh	Moraceae	All plant parts	Holy tree and worshiped by women folk on 'Vat Savitri Varat' on Jayeshth Amavashya (in month of June)
15.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L. Peepal	Moraceae	Flowers Leaves	Sacred tree associated with planet Saturn and Jupiter and worshiped to seek blessings on all rituals.

16.	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i> L. Gudhal	<i>Malvaceae</i>	Leaves	Offered to goddess <i>Kali Mata</i> .
17.	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L. Mehandi	<i>Lythraceae</i>	Leaves	Paste of leaves is considered auspicious and apply on hands in marriages and other festivals. Besides Mehndi is used in religious ceremony on Ganesh puja and Mahalaxmi puja on Dewali.
18.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. Aam	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>	Leaves	Leaves are used in making called " Banderwar " for entry gate on every auspicious occasion to attract positive power and ward off negative energy.
19.	<i>Nerium indicum</i> L. Kaner	<i>Apocynaceae</i>	All plant part	Used in festivals and flowers are offered to diety.
20.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L. Tulsi	<i>Lamiaceae</i>	All plant part	Sacred plants for hindus associated with Saligram (Lord-Vishnu). Worshipped daily in temples and homes due to a deep belief that it wards off the evil spirit from house.
21.	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce. Khejri	<i>Fabaceae</i>	All plant part	It is worshipped on the occasion of Dushehra in Ashwin month. It is also worshiped on marriage ceremony.
22.	<i>Saraca indica</i> Ashoka	<i>Caesalpiniaceae</i>	Leaves	Used in ' <i>Bandarwal</i> ' (string for door) on the occasion of Grih pravesh and child birth and leaves are also used in many rituals as sacred leaves.
23.	<i>Thevetia peruviana</i> Pili Kaner	<i>Apocynaceae</i>	All plant part	flowers offered to Gods and also used in festivals.
24.	<i>Zizyphus mauritiana</i> Lamk. Ber	<i>Rhamnaceae</i>	Twigs and Fruits	Used in havan and Ahuti. Used in ritual of Hindu marriage ' <i>Toran Puja</i> ' particularly in Rajasthan. Fruits are used in Mahalaxmi puja on Diwali.

Table-01 shows about 24 plant species which are used by tribals and local residents of the Hindoli and Nainwan Tehsils region because of religious and spiritual value so plants are protected by tribal and local communities. By this study, it has been proved that plants have a very important place in religions. Findings are supported by similar research work by Maru & Patel [14], Rawat & Dookia [18], Sharma [19], Rathore et al., [17], Jamir [11], Gold & Gurjar [9], Singh [20], Chandrakanth et al. [3], Kothari et al. [13], Tiwari et al. [21], Hughes & Chandran [10], Gadgil & Guha [5], Gadgil & Chandran [6], Bhandari [1], Prasad, R. & Rathore, D.K. (16). They reported many sacred groves and their spiritual and religious significance which also support present research work.

Conclusion

The religious importance of the sacred groves of Hindoli and Nainwan tehsils have been highlighted in this study. These forests area have been protected by the tribals and the local community considering them as sacred. These ancient forests play an important role in making the environment free from pollution and producing oxygen. Due to modern developmental activities, sacred groves are being reduced considerably. At present, the existence of these forests is being threatened due to increasing encroachment in these areas. At present, there is a need of guidelines for local people to protect these sacred groves. These areas should be recognised by the panchayat level so that these efforts, so that these holy forests can be saved from exploitation.

References

1. Bhandari MM. Flora of the Indian Desert. MPS Repros, Jodhpur (Revised Edition), 1990.
2. Census of India (2011). Rajasthan, 'District Census Handbook' Bundi. Series -09, Part XII-A, pp. (101-106 & 597-609).
3. Chandrakanth M.G., Bhat M.G., Accavva M.S. (2004) Socioeconomic changes and sacred groves in South India: protecting a community-based resource management institution. *Natural Resources Forum*. 28:102-111.

4. Chandran, M.D.S. and Gadgil, M. (1998) Sacred groves and Sacred trees of Uttara Kannada. In: B. Saraswati (ed) *Lifestyle and Ecology*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi.
5. Gadgil M, Guha R. Equity and Ecology: The Use and Abuse of nature in Contemporary India (New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1995).
6. Gadgil, M. & Chandran, M.S. (1992) Sacred groves. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 19(1/2):183-187.
7. Gadgil M, Vertak VK. (1994) The sacred uses of nature, In: Social ecology, Guha, R.(ed.), Oxford university press, Delhi, 90-119.
8. Geng, Y., Hu,G., Ranjitkar, S., Shi, Y. and Wang, Y. (2017). The implications of ritual practices and ritual plant uses on nature conservation: a case study among the Naxi in Yunnan Province, Southwest China. *Journal of Ethnobotany and Ethnomedicine* (2017), pp.13:58.
9. Gold, A.G. & Gujar, B.R. (1989) Of gods, trees and boundaries: Divine conservation in Rajasthan. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 211-229.
10. Hughes JD, & Chandran MDS (1998) Sacred groves around the earth: an overview. In: *Conserving the Sacred for Biodiversity Management*, ed. P.S. Ramakrishnan, K.G. Saxena and U.M. Chandrashekara, New Delhi, India: Oxford and India Book House., 69-86.
11. Jamir, S.A. & Pandey, H.N. (2003) Vascular plant diversity in the sacred groves of Jaintia Hills in northeast India, *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 12(7):1497-1510.
12. Kalam, M.A. (1996) Sacred Groves in Kodagu district of Karnataka (South India): A Socio Historical study, Institute Francais de Pondichery, Pondichery.
13. Kothari A, Pathak N, Vania F. (2000) Where Communities Care: Community Based Wildlife and Ecosystem Management in South Asia. International Institute of Environment and Development and Kalpavriksh Pune.
14. Maru R.N. & Patel R.S. (2013) Ethno-Botanical Survey of Sacred Groves and Sacred Plants of Jhalod and Surrounding Areas in Dahod District, Gujarat, India, *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, 2(ISC-2012):130-135.
15. Oviedo G, Jeanrenaud S, Otegui M. (2005) Protecting Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples: an IUCN Perspective. Gland, Switzerland.
16. Prasad, R. & Rathore, D.K. (2021) Sacred Groves of Hadoti Region: A Case Study of Tehsil Hindoli, District Bundi, Rajasthan International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJIRSET), Volume 10, Issue 6, June 2021.
17. Rathore, N.K., Chauhan, P.S. & Yadav, V.K. (2021) Traditional Wisdom and Potential of Community Conserved Areas of Jhalawar District, Rajasthan, India, *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 10 (1):3203-3211
18. Rawat, M. & Dookia, S. (2017) Sacred groves of thar desert: A case study of Kolu Pabuji Oran of western Rajasthan and its biodiversity profiling, *International Journal of Zoology Studies*, 2 (6):201-207.
19. Sharma, O.P. (2018) Conservation of plant species diversity through sacred groves in Bundi District, Rajasthan, *Advances in Plant Sciences*, 31(2):121-122.
20. Singh, G. (2016) *Sacred groves of Rajasthan*. Scientific Publishers.
21. Tiwari, B.K., Barik, S.K. & Tripathi, R.S., (1998) Biodiversity value, status, and strategies for conservation of sacred groves of Meghalaya, India. *Ecosystem Health*, 4(1):20-32.

