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Socio-cultural and religious practices plants used by Sugali tribes of Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The sugali tribes of Krishna district worshipped gods and goddesses are numerous. They differ with locality family, customs and time. Closely linked to their taboos, festivals, rites and other cultural traditions is the surrounding vegetation that has been preserved on sacred ground. Many gods and goddesses were revered by the sugali tribes in the Krishna area. Under every holy tree in a sugalis community, a crude picture or fetish representing the local deities was frequently displayed. The three chosen mandals of Krishna district Konduru, Nuzvid and Vissanapet which include 24 Sugali thandas, were the study's locations. 40 plant species are linked to religious significance, local sociocultural practices and holy beliefs, according to the current study. They employ these plants often in their religious and sociocultural practices.

Keywords: Sugali tribes, Krishna district, gods and goddesses

Introduction

There are several uses for plants, including as the worship of gods and goddesses for their protection and enhancement of human existence. Numerous indigenous groups preserve this practice by means of folklore and offer prayers to their gods on special occasions. Many religions in India honor many gods and goddesses. The gods and goddesses are served a variety of plant parts. Magical religious beliefs and taboos abound in tribal mythology. The surrounding flora that has been conserved on holy ground are closely related to their taboos, festivals, ceremonies, and other cultural practices. Unquestionably, knowledge from indigenous people is invaluable in the current context of preserving biological variety and making sustainable use of it (Ravishankar 1996, Smith Eric Alden 2000). In every rural civilization, plants have a unique function in social and religious rites (Manilal KS 1989).

Plants have always been employed in religious celebrations with the goal of preserving and using them as sustainably as possible (Ravishankar 1996, Aizhong Liu, Shengji pei, Chen Sanyang 1999) ^{[2], [3]}. Numerous ethnic groups have a custom of worshiping different trees on different occasions. When they come upon a sacred tree while traveling, they pause, tie a thread around its trunk, and place flags next to it (Dafni A, Levy S, Lev A 2005) ^[5]. Plants have been employed in religious rites and rituals across India (Ghate, 1998) ^[8]. Tribal people hold plants in high regard and incorporate them into their ceremonial practices. (Kumbhojkar *et al.*, 1996, Sharma and Pegu, 2011) ^{[12], [24]}.

Indigenous people have safeguarded biodiversity worldwide, fostering a mutually beneficial connection with nature. (RK Sinha, 1996) ^[26]. Populations have drawn artistic or spiritual nourishment from nature from the dawn of time and have utilized it for creative purposes (Airzpe L1996) ^[2]. In every rural society's religious and social rites, plants play a unique function (Manilal KS 1989) ^[13]. But its beginnings and development remain an incomprehensible mystery (Zhang *et al.*, 1993) ^[28].

Many ethnic groups have a custom of worshiping different trees on different occasions. When they come upon a sacred tree while traveling, they pause and either place flags next to the tree or tie a thread around its trunk (Dafni *et al.*, 2005) ^[5]. One of the first religions in the world is based on plant worship (Devi *et al.*, 2020) ^[7]. According to Hindu mythology, festivals, rituals, and religious events would not be complete without the use of plants and plant parts (Agarwala, 1970) ^[11].

There are numerous reports on the various sacred and ritual plants that are used throughout India (Jadhav, 2012, Kavitha *et al.*, 2019; Mohanty *et al.*, 2011; Nongbri *et al.*, 2017; Pawar and Patil, 2010; Pramod *et al.*, 2003; Rana *et al.*, 2006; Sarkar *et al.*, 2010; Seth and Thakur, 2013; Singh and Chauhan, 2004) [9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25]. The magico, religious and socio culture activity of sugalis tribe has served the purpose of conserving their traditional inheritance with plants since the time immemorial. The sugalis have fallows their own tradition and culture they were worshipped different gods and goddesses.

Sugalis Gods and Goddesses

The sugali tribes of Krishna district worshipped gods and goddesses are numerous. They differ with locality family, customs and time. Each celebration is connected with some deities. Every settlement has a protector gods and goddesses. Every sugalis settlements had its local goddesses regularly a rude image or fetish set up under a sacred tree. At different traditional festivals, along with their tribal pantheon, they also told few deities name of gods like Mariamma, Thulaja Bhavani, Bhavani, Mantralamma, Malchamma, Polermma, Mysamma, Atalamma, Chamundi, Durgamma, Bangaru Bhavani, Setala Bhavani, Matharlal Bhavani, Inglamatha, Satbhavani, Huligyamma Bhavani and Sevabhaya. Beside the these they worship Hindu gods like Sivdu, Vishnu, Krishna, Hanuman, Balaji (God of venkateswra swamy), Lakshmi and Vinayaka. Each god connected with plant, leaves, fruit and flower.

Study Area

Sugalis of Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh

The study was conducted in the three selected mandals (Konduru, Nuzvid and Vissanapet) of Krishna district covering 24 Sugali thandas. Krishna district is one of the 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh state and situated between 15° 43' and 17° 10' North latitude and 80° 00' and 81° 33' Eastern longitudes. It is bounded by Khammam district of Telangana state on the North, the Bay of Bengal on the South, Guntur and Nalgonda districts on the West and west Godavari district and Bay of Bengal on the East. According to 2011 census, the tribal population of Krishna district constitutes about 2.93% of the district population, in Andhra Pradesh. Of the 33 tribes of Andhra Pradesh Sugali tribe represents the largest and moderately advanced tribe locally referred to as Sugali or Lambadi or Banjaras. The dwelling areas of the tribes are generally referred to as 'Thandas'. The forest cover of

Krishna district is about 4.26% of the total geographical area. The major rivers flowing in the district are Krishna, Keesara, Tammilerre and Budameru. The total tribal population in the three selected mandals is about 20,709.

Methodology

In order to document the information about the utility of diverse plant in magico, religious and socio- cultural activities was collected from aged person and religious and cultural head man of sugalis. Using accepted procedures, the study was conducted in 2022–2023 (Jain and Mudgal, 1999; Martin, 2004) [10, 15]. An intensive visit to the sugali thandas.

They have been asked to explain different plant use in religious and socio culture activity. They have also been taken to the local temples and field of gods and goddesses scared places to locate the nearby agriculture field and home. The plants were photographed and collected as herbarium specimen (fig. a-n). The common name of the plant and significance of in religious and socio culture activity was recorded. The use of the plant is verified with the other informants. The plant specimens collected were used to identify them by their botanical name and family name, with the help of key provided in different floras.

Results and Discussion

A total of 48 informants (2 from head man each thanda) from 24 tribal thanda were interviewed through a questionnaire (Table 1). The present study shows that 40 plant species are connected with sacred beliefs, their local socio-culture and religious importance of the plant. These plant species are used frequently by them in various socio-culture and religious activities. The plant species of the present study are arranged in alphabetically with their botanical name, family, local name and their importance of the plant used in different socio-cultural, religious activities (Table 2). They are belonging to 26 families (Table 3). The dominated families of plants are Fabaceae (4 sp), Moraceae, Apocynaceae, and Rutaceae (3 sp), Caesalpiniodeacea, Malvace, Liliaceae, Phyllanthaceae and Sapotaceae (2 sp) and remaining families of Asclepiadeaceae, Meliaceae, Anacardiaceae, Lamiaceae, Solanaceae, Rhamnaceae, Balanitaceae, Myrtaceae, Burseraceae, Loganiaceae, Plumbaginaceae, Faboideace, Annonaceae, Musaceae, Ulamaceae, Oleaceae and Zingiberaceae contributed one species. These plants species worshipped by the sugali tribe people as their local deities and offered to gods and goddess during religious rituals.

Table 1: The details of Sugali informants (name, status, age and residence) that provided information on plants of magico-religious importance from 24 tribal villages of Krishna district (A.P)

S. No.	Name of the informant	Mandal Name	Thanda/Village Name	Status	Age in years
1	Jarapal Babla Naik	Konduru	Kesya thanda	Head man	75
2	Bharoth Paringiya Naik	Konduru	Kesya thanda	Assistant Head man	73
3	Bharoth Samala Naik	Konduru	Bharoth Thanda	Head man	70
4	Eslavath Uchaiya Naik	Konduru	Bharoth Thanda	Assistant head man	60
5	Esalvath Megaya Naik	Konduru	Mansingh Thanda	Head man	76
6	Esalavath Thaveriya Naik	Konduru	Mansingh Thanda	Assistant head man	70
7	Jarapala vasaram Naik	Konduru	Pedda thanda	Head man	65
8	Popavath Mangiya Naik	Konduru	Pedda thanda	Assistant head man	62
9	Nenavath Bhima Naik	Konduru	Gopalpuram Thanda	Head man	72
10	Nenavath Baloji Naik	Konduru	Gopalapuram Thanda	Assistant head man	68
11	Mudavth Kotiya Naik	Konduru	Kumarrikunta Thanda	Head man	70
12	Badavath Thaveriah Naik	Konduru	Kumarrikunta Thanda	Assistant head man	62
13	Eslavath Pakriya Naik	Konduru	Repudi Thanda	Head man	72
14	Banoth Chandriya Naik	Konduru	Repudi Thanda	Assistant head man	70
15	Jarapala Munaiya Naik	Konduru	Gyama Thanda	Head man	65

16	Kethavath Sakirya Naik	Konduru	Gyama Thanda	Assistant head man	60
17	Rupavath Kasan Naik	Konduru	Golamandal Thanda	Head man	75
18	Bhukya Vsaram Naik	Konduru	Golamadal Thanda	Assistant head man	70
19	Mudvath Devala Naik	Nuzvid	Kothuru thanda	Head man	78
20	Badavath Bhima Naik	Nuzvid	Kothuru thanda	Assistant head man	62
21	Dhravath Laksmudu Naik	Nuzvid	Lion Thanda	Head man	73
22	Mudavath Hanuma Naik	Nuzvid	Lion Thanda	Assistant head man	62
23	Pupavath Haziram Naik	Nuzvid	Hatiya Thanda	Head man	69
24	Bhukaya Megiya Naik	Nuzvid	Hatiya Thanda	Assistant head man	60
25	Korra thaviriah Naik	Nuzvid	Siddhartha Nagar Thanda	Head man	78
26	Sapavth Kasan Naik	Nuzvid	Siddhartha Nagar Thanda	Assistant head man	72
27	Bhukaya Harilal Naik	Nuzvid	Harichandra Thanda	Head man	80
28	Mudavath Singriah Naik	Nuzvid	Harichandra Thanda	Assistant head man	65
29	Bharoth Govinda Naik	Nuzvid	Kukala Thanda	Head man	77
30	Banoth Krishna Naik	Nuzvid	Kukala Thanda	Assistant head man	60
31	Rupavath Muniya Naik	Nuzvid	Hemala Thanda	Head man	78
32	Nenavath Harilal Naik	Nuzvid	Hemala Thanda	Assistant head man	60
33	Lavidya Harilal Naik	Vissanapet	Banoth thanda	Head man	79
34	Nenavath Bhika Naik	Vissanapet	Banoth thanda	Assistant head man	75
35	Esalvath Bodaka Naik	Vissanapet	Korra Thanda	Head man	68
36	Mudavth Hazmera Naik	Vissanapet	Korra Thanda	Assistant head man	61
37	Nenavath Thaveriah Naik	Vissanapet	Pedda Thanda	Head man	70
38	Popavath Harichand Naik	Vissanapet	Pedda Thanda	Assistant head man	65
39	Sapavath Hari Naik	Vissanapet	Kalgara Thanda	Head man	68
40	Mudavath Ramulu Naik	Vissanapet	Kalgara Thanda	Assistant head man	62
41	Katroth Lacha Naik	Vissanapet	Telladevarapalli Thanda	Head man	75
42	Dharavath Lavidiya Naik	Vissanapet	Telladevarapalli Thanda	Assistant head man	72
43	Kethavath Somala Naik	Vissanapet	Vemireddi palli Thanda	Head man	76
44	Popavath Badiya Naik	Vissanapet	Vemireddi palli Thanda	Assistant head man	70
45	Ramavath Lalu Naik	Vissanapet	Narasapuram Thanda	Head man	78
46	Korra Bhiku Naik	Vissanapet	Narasapuram Thanda	Assistant head man	72
47	Malavath Bhiku Naik	Vissanapet	Maryamanda Thanda	Head man	67
48	Sapavath sakeriya Naik	Vissanapet	Maryamanda Thanda	Assistant head man	64

Table 2: List of plants associated with Religious and socio-cultural practices of Sugali tribes

S. No	Botanical Name	Family	Local Name	Uses
1	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> Corr.Serr.	Rutaceae	Maredu chettu	1. The plant leaves are very much preferred in siva-pooja during karthikamasam. 2. It is considered as Sacred tree and is planted in temple premises
2	<i>Aloe vera</i> (L) Burm.F.	Liliaceae	Kalabanda	Some families grow these plants in their homes with a belief that it protects the family from evil spirits.
3	<i>Annona reticulata</i> L.	Annonaceae	Rama phalam	Sugalis believe that it is Loved by lord Rama and Sita
4	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> .A.Juss	Meliaceae	Vepa chettu	1. In the pooja of goddess polerama the leaves of this plant are used. 2. The Sugali people believe that this plant represents their goddess 'maremma' that they worship
5	<i>Balanites aegyptia</i> (L.) Del	Balanitaceae	Gara chettu	A piece of rhizome is hung on main entrance door frame to drive evil spirits
6	<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i> Lam.	Fabaceae	Arey chettu	The idol of local deity is usually kept under this tree considering it as sacred tree.
7	<i>Bauhinia variegata</i> L.	Fabaceae	Devakanchanam	Mothers carry with new born children in travelling preventing evil spirits.
8	<i>Boswellia serrata</i> Roxb.	Burseraceae	Andugu chettu	The smoke from this plant is believed to protect children from evil spirits
9	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L) Ait. f.	Asclepiadaceae	Tella jilladu	1. This plant is inside grown house compound with the belief that evil spirits do not enter in to their home. 2. During the pooja, flowers are presented to Lord Shiva. 3. Persons while crossing the villages' premises leave the twig of this plant in the border with the belief that evil spirits do not follow them in their travel to other villages. 4. Children wear necklace made with root bits of this plant and they trust that it keeps away the evil spirits. 5. A bunch of plant use in mantra and tantras
10	<i>Cassia fistula</i> L	Caesalpinioidae	Rela chettu	In the worship of gods and other rituals and religious functions the flowers are use
11	<i>Cathranthus roseus</i> (L) G.Don.	Apocynaceae	Billaganeru	Flowers are used in the religious worship
12	<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>	Rutaceae	Nimma	The fruit are used in performing mantra – pooja to evil spirits
13	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Zingiberaceae	Pasupu	1. Turmeric powder is used in the worship of Gods, other rituals and marriages. 2. Turmeric powder mixed in water is sprinkled in homes with the belief that evil spirits do not enter into homes. 3. The turmeric paste is applied all over the body of bride in marriage and door frames are decorated during festivals.
14	<i>Datura stramonium</i> L.	Solanaceae	Thella vummetha	The flowers are offered to lord siva
15	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L.	Moraceae	Marri chettu	This tree is considering as sacred tree and usually the idols of gods are kept under the trees

16	<i>Ficus carica L.</i>	Moraceae	Anjura	Idol of gods are kept under the tree and fruits of the plant are offered to God
17	<i>Ficus religiosa L.</i>	Moraceae	Ravi chettu	1. Women worship it seeking longevity of their husbands 2. The branch is tied to the agricultural implements to begin season for agricultural works. 3. Tribes worship this plant at the time of laying foundation stone to a house
18	<i>Hibiscus-rosa sinensis L</i>	Malvaceae	Mandhra	Flowers are used in all local religious and culture festivals
19	<i>Holoptelea intergrifolia (Roxb) Planchon</i>	Ulmaceae	Nemali chettu	Idol stones of dities are kept under the tree
20	<i>Lilium longiflorum</i>	Liliaceae	Lillies	1. The flower are used in siva pooja. 2. People believe that it is a sacred plant and tree they believe that tree grow in houses as symbol of peace
21	<i>Limonia acidissima L.</i>	Rutaceae	Velega chettu	1. Idol stones of local dities are kept under the tree. 2. The fruits are offered in the worship of lord Vinayaka
22	<i>Madhuca indica (Roxb). J. Gmelin</i>	Sapotaceae	Ippa chettu	1. The smoke of leaves is drive away evil spirits. The leaves are used in religious rituals. 2. The local drink (Ippa Sara) made with the flowers of this plant is served in rituals
23	<i>Mangifera indica L.</i>	Anacardiaceae	Mamidi	1. The tree is regarded as sacred tree and used in all types of rituals and socio-cultural activities. 2. Tribes believe it as symbol of prosperity. The leaves tied with twine thread as chains (Thoranam) are used to decorate doors of houses and temples during festivals and other rituals
24	<i>Manikara hexandra (Roxb.) Dubard.</i>	Sapotaceae	Pala chettu	This plant is used in the worship during foundation stone laying of houses. It is believed that it provides wealth
25	<i>Musa sapientum L.</i>	Musaceae	Arati	The plants are posted on either side of entrance gate of houses and temples with the belief that they mark auspicious occasions such as marriages, festivals and other cultural ceremonies
26	<i>Nerium oleander L.</i>	Apocynaceae	Ganneru chettu	Flowers are used in siva pooja
27	<i>Nyctanthes arbortristis L.</i>	Oleaceae	Parijatham chettu	The plant is considered as sacred and worshiped by women's during different festivals. They believe it as symbol of peace
28	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum L.</i>	Lamiaceae	Tulasi	1. People grow this inside house and perform worship to the plant with the belief that it is preferred by vishnumurthy 2. Some people considered as god of vishnumurthy.
29	<i>Phyllanthus emblica L.</i>	Phyllanthaceae	Usiri chettu	Women worship this plant and believe it provides peace and good health to their family members
30	<i>Phyllanthus reticulatus Poiret.</i>	Phyllanthaceae	Pulcherra chettu	It is believed to keep away evil spirits
31	<i>Plumbago indica L.</i>	Plumbaginaceae	Erra chitramula chettu	Flowers are offered to deities during all type of religious rituals
32	<i>Prosopis cineraria (L.) Druce</i>	Fabaceae	Jammi chettu	The tree is considered as sacred tree and is worshiped in every religious and cultural ritual.
33	<i>Senna auriculata (L.) Roxb.</i>	Caesalpinoideaceae	Tangedu	Flowers are offered to their local dities during festivals
34	<i>Sesbania grandiflora (L) Poiret</i>	Faboideaceae	Avisha chettu	Flowers are offered to siva pooja
35	<i>Sida rhombifolia</i>	Malvaceae	Sandi chettu	Ward of devil (Kept in amulet). It is believed to drive evil spirit
36	<i>Strychnos nux-vomica L.</i>	Loganiaceae	Musti chettu	It is kept in house roofs to protect from evil spirits
37	<i>Syzygium cumini (L.) Skeels.</i>	Myrtaceae	Neredu	The tree is considered as sacred one and the idols of local deities are kept under this tree. The temple door entries are decorated with leaves of this plant
38	<i>Tabernaemontana divaricata (L.)</i>	Apocynaceae	Nandhivardhanam	This tree is also treated as sacred tree and flowers are offered to worship lord siva and also other goddesses
39	<i>Tumurindus indica L.</i>	Fabaceae	Chinta chettu	The idol stones of local deity are kept under this tree considering it as a scared tree
40	<i>Zizyphus mauritiana Lam.</i>	Rhamnaceae	Regu chettu	The tribal people leave a branch of this plant in the outskirts of village, while returning home after the burial of dead, with the belief that evil spirits do not follow them

Table 3: Family wise distribution species

S. No	Name of the Family	No. of species	Name of the species
1	Anacardiaceae	1	<i>Mangifera indica L.</i>
2	Annonaceae	1	<i>Annona reticulata</i>
3	Apocynaceae	3	<i>Cathranthus roseus</i> <i>Nerium indicum Mill</i> <i>Tabernaemontana</i>
4	Asclepiadaceae	1	<i>Calotropis gigantean (L)</i>
5	Balanitaceae	1	<i>Balanites aegyptica (L) Delile</i>
6	Burseraceae	1	<i>Boswellia serrata</i>
7	Caesalpinoideaceae	2	<i>Cassia fistula (L)</i> <i>Senna auriculata L. (Roxb)</i>
8	Fabaceae	4	<i>Bauhinia racemosa Lam.</i> <i>Bauhinia variegata L.</i> <i>Prosopis cineraria (L.)</i> <i>Tamurindus indica</i>
9	Faboideaceae	1	<i>Sesbania grandiflora (L) Por</i>
10	Lamiaceae	1	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum L</i>
11	Liliaceae	2	<i>Aloevera (L) Burm.F.</i>

			<i>Lilium longiflorum</i>
12	Loganiaceae	1	<i>Strychnos nux-vomica</i>
13	Malvaceae	2	<i>Hibiscus-rosasinensis L</i> <i>Sidarhombifolia</i>
14	Meliaceae	1	<i>Azadirachta indica. A. Juss</i>
15	Moraceae	3	<i>Ficus benghalensis L.</i> <i>Ficus carica</i> <i>Ficus religiosa L.</i>
16	Musaceae	1	<i>Musa paradisiacal L.</i>
17	Myrtaceae	1	<i>Syzygium cumini</i>
18	Oleaceae	1	<i>Nyctanthes arboxtristis</i>
19	Phyllanthaceae	2	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> <i>Phyllanthus reticulates Poir.</i>
20	Plumbaginaceae	1	<i>Plumbago rosea</i>
21	Rhamnaceae	1	<i>Zizyphus mauritiana</i>
22	Rutaceae	3	<i>Aegle marmelos (L)</i> <i>Citrus limon (L.)</i> <i>Limonia acidissima L.</i>
23	Sapotaceae	2	<i>Madhuca indica</i> <i>Limonia acdissima L.</i>
24	Solanaceae	1	<i>Datura stramonium L.</i>
25	Ulmaceae	1	<i>Holoptelea intergrifolia (Roxb) Palanch</i>
26	Zingiberaceae	1	<i>Curcuma longa Linn</i>

Fig (a-n) Worshipped plants in the tribal sugali community of Krishna district



Fig (a). Scared tree



Fig (b). *Prosopis cineraria* (L.)



Fig. (c) Scared tree



Fig. (d) *Phyllanthus emblica*



Fig. (e). *Manikara hexandra*



Fig. (f). *Azadirachta indica. A. Juss*



Fig. (g). *Syzygium cumini*



Fig. (h) *Nyctanthes arboxtristis*

Fig. (i). *Mangifera indica* L. (hang on door)Fig. (j). *Calotropis gigantean* (L)

Fig. (k). Scared hill (God of Hanuman)

Fig. (l). *Ocimum tenuiflorum* LFig. (m). *Limonia acidissima* L.Fig. (n). *Nerium indicum* Mill

Conclusion

The study of the Sugali tribes in Krishna district highlights the intricate relationship between their socio-cultural and religious practices and the use of local plant species. Forty plants, spanning 26 families, play an essential role in their rituals, religious ceremonies, and cultural beliefs. These plants are considered sacred, often linked to deities, and are integral to the tribe's worship, taboos, and traditional customs. The preservation of these plants reflects the tribe's deep respect for nature and its spiritual significance. This study emphasizes the need for further exploration and conservation of these cultural practices for preserving biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

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