Floristic study of sacred groves of Poshina forest range of Sabarkantha district, North Gujarat

P.K. MEHTA AND **B.K. JAIN**

SUMMARY

India is well known for worship of nature. From time immoral in India, religion and cultural practices are closely linked with forests, and this helps in conservation of biodiversity. Some patches of forest are left untouched because of religious fencing by local people. These types of forest patches are regarded as sacred groves. The plant species grow near or in sacred grove are considered to be sacred. In this paper, total 28 sacred groves which cover approximately 1.8 hectares area were observed in Poshina forest range. A total 39 plant species belonging to 32 genera of 25 families were recorded.

India is a land of rich biodiversity in which 2 out of the 25 biodiversity hotspots of the world exist. India is on 6th position among 12 mega-diversity centers of the world. It is also a country with the strongest traditions of nature conservation anywhere in the world. In India, conservation of plants by local people through their religious beliefs and spiritual value is very common. Sacred groves provide the best example of conservation of biodiversity. Sacred groves are the groups of trees or patches of vegetation protected by the local people through religious and cultural practices evolved to minimize destruction (Israel *et al.,* 1997; Jeeva and Anasuya, 2005, Jeeva *et al.,* 2005). Their plant wealth and conservation potential were impressive enough to acknowledge them as "mini biosphere reserve" (Gadgil and Vartak, 1975). The plant species grow near the grove are considered to be sacred. The vegetation near the sacred grove is considered as a "God's garden". Any form of cutting or removal of trees or their parts in the grove is prohibited.

The paper records floristic composition of the unreported sacred groves of Poshina forest range of Sabarkantha district of North Gujarat.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Poshina is situated in Khedbrahma taluka (Tehsil) of

Correspondence to:
B.K. JAIN, Department of Botany, M.G. Science Institute, Navrangpura, AHMEDABAD (GUJARAT) INDIA

Authors' affiliations:
P.K. MEHTA, P.S. Science and H.D. Patel Arts College, Kadi, MEHSANA (GUJARAT) INDIA

Sabarkantha district of North Gujarat. It is located 12 kms away from Ambaji-Khedbrama highway. It is divided in to two ranges *i.e.* (1) Poshina forest range and (2).R.D.F. (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) of Poshina range. The Poshina forest range measures an area of 12978 hectares. It's northern and eastern parts lead to Rajasthan state, western part joints the border of Ambaji forest range of Banaskantha district and in southern part there is a R.D.F. of Poshina range.

The minimum and maximum temperatures recorded in the area are 10^0C in winter and 42^0C to 45^0C in summer.15th June to 15th August is a monsoon period. Biogeographically the area belongs to hilly tract of Aravalli Mountain range. It is an "Adivasi Belt", popularly known as "Poshina-Patti". According to Gujarat State Forest Department (GSFD), it is an unclassified forest area (under section-4).Ecologically it comes under semi arid zone, Tropical dry deciduous forest-5A type Champion and Seth (1968).

An extensive floristic survey was carried out at sacred groves of Poshina forest range. Total 28 sacred groves have been reported in the forest area. Number of tree species and shrub species grown in sacred groves were enumerated while herb species were excluded. All specimens of plant species were identified with the help of local flora (Shah, 1978).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taxonomically, a total of 39 plant species belonging to 32 genera and 25 families were recorded in 28 sacred groves, which cover approximately 1.8 hectares of land