



Ethnobotanical study on certain unique traditional fairs of *shravan* month in Udaipur city, Rajasthan, India

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Abstract

India is a land of fairs and festivals which depicts rich cultural legacy of the country. As per Hindu calendar, '*Shravan*' is a very auspicious month for observing fasts and doing religious worship of Lord Shiva. In this month, some unique traditional social fairs are organized in Udaipur city where people come from various states of India to sell their products. On all Mondays of *Shravan* month, a fair called as '*Sakhiya Somvar*' is organized in Sajjan Niwas garden and a two days fair is held on new moon day of *Shravan* month locally known as '*Hariyali Amavasya*' in Fatehsagar lakeside and nearby areas. Ethnobotanical surveys were carried out to these two prominent fairs of *Shravan* for the first time to explore plant based art and craft items and items of miscellaneous uses. Information obtained from 19 sellers revealed information about 23 plant species belonging to 14 angiosperm families which were being used to make many creative items of domestic, decorative, dietary, and/or personal uses. Besides, some interesting aspects of urban botanical knowledge were also visible in these traditional fairs. This paper highlights the association and significance of various plant and their products in human life. It further indicates importance of such fairs for maintaining cultural heritage, demonstrating traditional skills as well as for generating additional income.

Keywords: *Gulabghar*, *Hariyali amavasya*, *Sakhiya somvar*, Spices, Urban ethnobotany

1. Introduction

Udaipur, also known as City of Lakes; is one of the most beautiful tourist place of India. Udaipur district encloses an area of 11,724 square kilometers at an altitude of 589 m above the sea level with a population of 4,74,531 (<https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/92-udaipur.html>). A vibrant folk life; enriched with rituals, traditions and culture could be observed in festivals and fairs (Jain, 2016; Jain, 2021). Many festivals are celebrated with high energy and enthusiasm in Udaipur city in Rajasthan and sometimes fairs are also organized on these occasions. Such fairs have great importance for rural and urban people as an additional source of income. Moreover, these fairs showcase traditional culture and heritage of a particular region as craftsmen display their skills through various

masterpieces and handicraft items (Jain, 2017). Fairs are also important means of demonstrating traditional skills and products for example Jain (2016) observed candies prepared from the plant *Cannabis sativa* L. as a traditional edible item in *Jawar Mata* fair, near Udaipur in Rajasthan.

Fairs and festivals are not only considered useful for economic benefits of local people but also possess various non-economic positive effects such as social cohesion, celebrations, entertainment and communal harmony (<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=nerr>). For example, Bhardwaj *et al.* (2017) have observed similarity among cultural practices during fairs and festivals between Hatti and Jaunsari communities in Sirmaur district, Himachal

Pradesh and found that fairs and festivals help in cultural integration and building social harmony.

As per Hindu calendar, '*Shravan*' month is considered auspicious for worshipping Lord Shiva and also for observing fast. In this month, some traditional social fairs are organized in Udaipur city where people come from various states of India to display and sell their products. Two such prominent and highly popular fairs of *Shravan* month are *Hariyali Amavasya* and *Sakhiya Somvar* where people belonging to all caste, creed and religion come and enjoy with family. Both of the fairs are unique and exclusively organized in Udaipur city, in Girwa tehsil of Rajasthan.

Hariyali Amavasya fair was started in Udaipur city to celebrate the completion of a water reservoir near *Dewali* pond to fulfill the need of local people during reign of Maharana Fateh Singh. This water reservoir was named as Fatehsagar Lake. Since then, a fair is organized every year on new moon day (*Amavasya*) of *Shravan* month near Fatehsagar Lake, Sukhadia Circle, *Saheliyon ki Bari* roadsides and surrounding areas. It is a two days celebration in which all family members (both males and females) can enjoy on first day of fair and second day is reserved only for women and kids. Basically, it is to rejoice the greenery (*Hariyali* in Hindi); a natural gift of rainy season in *Shravan* month (<https://www.udaipurblog.com/hariyali-amavasya-mela.html>). This fair is popular for '*Malpua*' – a traditional sweet dish usually prepared in monsoon season.

Sakhiya Somvar fair; also known as *Sukhiya Somvar* fair in local dialect is organized on every Monday of *Shravan* month at Sajjan Niwas garden (Gulabbagh) in Udaipur. This huge garden was built by Maharana Sajjan Singh in 1881 on eastern side of Lake *Pichola*. *Sakhiya* refers to female friends and females from all over the city along with their family members go together to enjoy in this fair which is organized every year during monsoon season. Due to COVID-19 pandemic conditions, all the fairs were cancelled consecutively for two years (2020-21) which happened for the first time in history of these fairs (<https://www.patrika.com/udaipur-news/sakhiyan-somvar-mela-cancelled-due-to-covid-19-pandemic-udaipur-6250346/>).

Many stalls having various household items, art and craft products, accessories, personal utility items etc. are part of these fairs (<https://www.udaipurblog.com/hariyali-amavasya-mela.html>). There are no studies which have documented ethnobotanical knowledge scattered in these unique traditional fairs. In view of this, ethnobotanical surveys were carried out to know about the various plant based objects and to document

the associated botanical knowledge available in these two fairs of *Shravan* month.

2. Materials and methods

Ethnobotanical surveys were carried out in *Sakhiya somvar* fair on 22 July 2019 and 12 August 2019 and *Hariyali Amavasya* fair on 2 August 2019 in Udaipur city, Rajasthan. Location maps where these traditional fairs were held have been shown in Plate 1. Every stall related to plant based products such as art and craft items, household items or items of personal utility were inspected carefully and information was gathered from the vendors after prior consent in a questionnaire which was adopted with some modifications as given by Jain 2017 (Table 1).

Table 1. An outline of questionnaire (Jain, 2017)

Sl. No.	Query
1.	Name and place of fair Name of informant Age
2.	Gender Locality Occupation
4.	Items available at stall
5.	Price of the products Man power involved in making products- Gender
10.	Age Approximate remuneration (regular/daily wages) Uses of product (Domestic/Aesthetic/ Personal/Miscellaneous)
11.	Name of Plant raw materials used for making the product
12.	Product based on single raw material or any other material is mixed
13.	Source of raw material
14.	Raw material available on stall - Yes/No
15.	Details of the plant: Local name Habit- Herb/Shrub/Tree/Climber Habitat Wild/cultivated Annual/biennial/perennial Deciduous/evergreen/other
17.	Morphological details of stem, leaf, flower Flowering & fruiting season Flower color Flower odor- present/absent Plant part used Plant part procuring season Any other specifications of plant Other uses of raw material known to informants
18.	(medicine/food/fodder/dye/festival, ceremonies etc.)
19.	Any other information not covered above

Total 19 vendors were interviewed of which ten were interviewed in *Sakhiya somvar* fair and nine in *Hariyali amavasya* fair. Among them, 10 were males and nine were females. One female vendor was present in both

the fairs. Details of the vendors are given in Table 2. Photographs of these stalls/plant products were also taken after obtaining prior informed consent (Plate 2-5)

Table 2. List of plant products available in fairs of *Shravan* month and details of informants

Sl. No.	Botanical name	Family	Local name	Plant part used	Uses	Name and region of informant#
1	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> (L.) Delile	Leguminosae	<i>Babool</i>	Wood	Wooden key hanger, hand roller, pencil, ruler, toys, bats, spoons, ladle, skimmer, salt box, shaker	Raju Kumawat, Udaipur ²
					Seating stools	Babu bhai Suthar, Rakhiyal, Gandhinagar ¹ and Kapila, Ahmedabad, Gujarat ²
2	<i>Ailanthus excelsa</i> Roxb.	Simaroubaceae	<i>Arduso</i>	Wood	Wooden toys	Raju Kumawat, Udaipur ²
3	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss.	Meliaceae	<i>Neem</i>	Wood	Hand washing bats	Babu bhai Suthar, Rakhiyal, Gandhinagar ¹
4	<i>Bambusa</i> spp.	Poaceae	<i>Baans</i>	Stem	Baskets	Shanti bai, Udaipur ^{1,2}
5	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Leguminosae	<i>Khakhara</i>	Leaves	Leaf bowl	Mohini bai, Udaipur ²
6	<i>Cinnamomum verum</i> J. Presl.	Lauraceae	<i>Dalchini</i>	Stem bark	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
7	<i>Cinnamomum tamala</i> (Buch-Ham.) T. Nees & Eberm.	Lauraceae	<i>Tej patta</i>	Leaves	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
8	<i>Corchorus capsularis</i> L.	Malvaceae	Jute	Fiber	Doormat, folders	Guddu, Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh ¹ Gulwesh, Nainital, Uttarakhand ²
9	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L.	Apiaceae	<i>Dhania</i>	Seed	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
10	<i>Cucumis melo</i> L.	Cucurbitaceae	<i>Kachari</i>	Dried fruit	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
11	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L.	Apiaceae	<i>Zeera</i>	Seed	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
					Wooden key chains, key holders	Mohammad Irshad, Uttar Pradesh ¹
12	<i>Dalbergia sissoo</i> DC.	Leguminosae	<i>Sheesham</i>	Wood	Wooden bangles	Ganesh Choudhary, Ahmedabad ¹
					Wooden ruler, pencil, key holders, bangle holders	Girish Kumawat, Udaipur ¹

13	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> (Roxb.) Nees.	Poaceae	<i>Baans</i>	Stem	Bows and arrows	Sangeeta, Gujarat ¹
14	<i>Dracaena</i> spp.	Asparagaceae	Lucky Bamboo	Young shoot	As a good luck plant/ornamental	Asha Kumari, Uttar Pradesh ²
15	<i>Eucalyptus globulus</i> Labill.	Myrtaceae	<i>Safeda</i>	Wood	Wooden car, train, bullock cart, seating stool, bats	Raju Kumawat, Udaipur ²
16	<i>Gossypium</i> spp.	Malvaceae	<i>Sut</i>	Fibers	Doormat	Guddu, Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh ¹
17	<i>Illicium verum</i> Hook.f.	Schisandraceae	<i>Badian phul</i>	Dried flower	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
18	<i>Piper nigrum</i> L.	Piperaceae	<i>Kali mirch</i>	Dried fruits	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
19	<i>Sorghum halepense</i> (L.) Pers.	Poaceae	<i>Kaani</i>	Stem	Balloon sticks	Hamid, Bihar ²
20	<i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> (L.) Merr. & L. M. Perry	Myrtaceae	<i>Laung</i>	Flower bud	As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
21	<i>Tectona grandis</i> L. f.	Verbenaceae	<i>Sagwan</i>	Wood	Rolling pin, rolling board, wooden masher	Vimla Kumawat, Pratapgarh, Rajasthan ¹
22	<i>Thysanolaena latifolia</i> (Roxb. ex Hornem.) Honda	Poaceae	<i>Phul Jhadu</i>	Inflorescence	Rolling pin	Santosh, Udaipur ¹
23	<i>Wrightia tinctoria</i> R. Br.	Apocynaceae	<i>Khirmi</i>	Wood	Broom	Manohari bai, Udaipur ²
24	-	-	<i>Pathar phul?</i>		Shaker, Spoon	Vimla Kumawat, Pratapgarh, Rajasthan ¹
25	-	-	Talli Mashala?		Toys, guitar, crocodile, carts, ladle	Girish Kumawat, Udaipur ¹
					Puppet and other playing articles	Raju Kumawat, Udaipur ²
					Rolling pin and rolling board	Lakshmi, Udaipur ²
					As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²
					As spice	Tara, Udaipur ²

1- Haryali amavasya fair; 2 - Sakhiya somvar fair; ? Unidentified plant

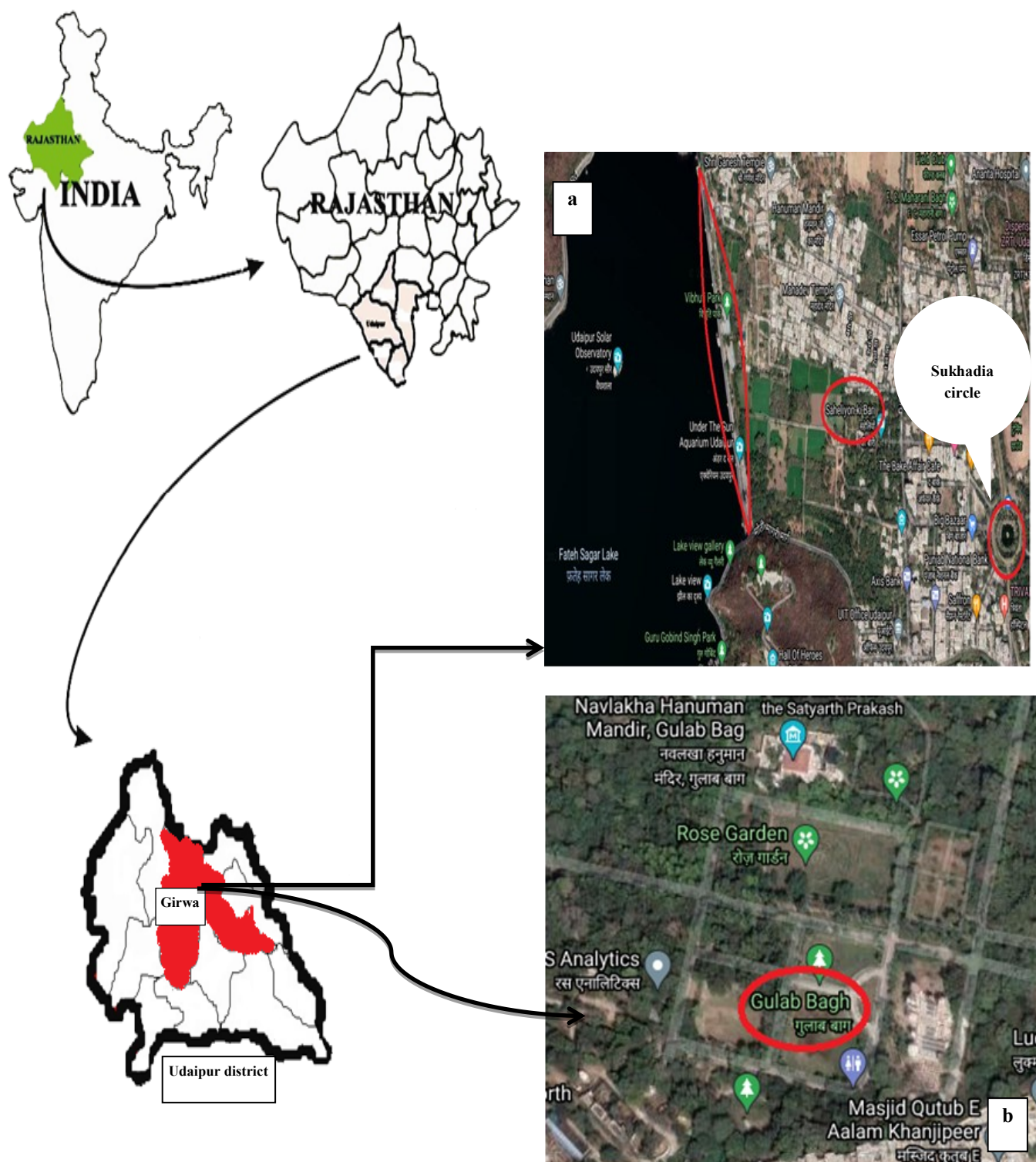


Plate 1. a. Location map of *Hariyali amavasya* fair held near Fatehsagar Lake, Sukhadia Circle, *Saheliyon ki Bari* area in Udaipur city ; b. Location map of *Sakhiya somvar* fair held in Gulab Bagh, Udaipur



Plate 2. a. One entrance gate of *Hariyali amavasya* fair; b. One entrance gate of *Sakhiya somvar* fair; c. Traditional sweet ‘*Malpua*’ on a stall; d. Selling of *Dahi-Bada* snack in leaf bowls of *Butea monosperma* tree; e. Selling of Pineapple cubes; f. Selling of boiled American Corn

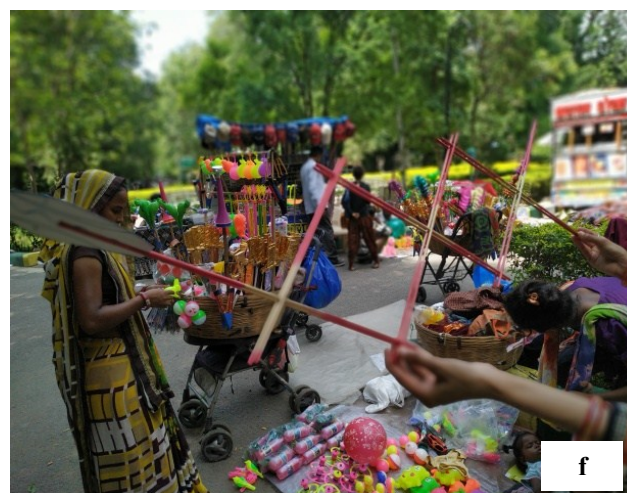
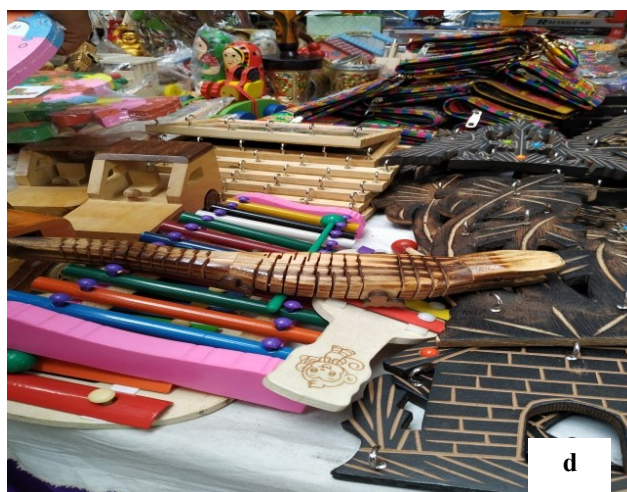


Plate 3. a-b. Selling of seating stools and bats; c-e. Different wooden articles: rolling board, ladle, key holders, hand rollers, various toys, etc. kept for selling in both the fairs; f. Selling of wooden snake as toy in *Sakhiya somvar* fair



Plate 4. a-b. Various wooden toys like catapults, swords, bows & arrows; c. Women selling Bamboo baskets; d-e. Doormats prepared from Jute fibers; f. Jute folders on a stall



a



b



c



d



e



f

Plate 5. a-c. Selling of various spices in *Sakhiya somvar* fair; d. Selling of brooms; e-f. Selling of *Dracaena* spp. as Lucky Bamboo and decorative item in *Sakhiya somvar* fair held in Gulabbagh premises, Udaipur (Rajasthan)

Plants were identified by getting clues from their local / regional names, morphology and also through details of their occurrence. Taxonomic identification of plants was done with the help of standard literature and currently accepted botanical names of plants, their families along with local names (as described by sellers), part used as well as uses/products is given in Table 2 (Anonymous 1948-76; Jain and Jain, 2018; Shetty and Singh, 1987-93; www.theplantlist.org; Tiagi and Aery, 2007). However, botanical identity of two plants could not be ascertained yet.

3. Results and discussion

Ethnobotanical surveys to these fairs revealed many kinds of plant based products being sold such as wooden articles of domestic and aesthetic utility (seating stools, bat, kitchen articles, rolling pen, rolling board, spoons, masher, salt box, toys, bullock cart, puppet, spinning top, wooden key hanger, ruler, pencil, bangles, bangle stand, hand roller, flute, key chains), doormats made from Jute and Cotton fibers, Bamboo baskets, bows and arrows, decorative lucky bamboo plants and various spices (Plates 2-5; Table 2).

It was observed that 23 angiosperm plants belonging to 14 families were used to make these items. Out of 23, 18 were dicotyledonous species and rest five was monocotyledonous. Plants belonging to Poaceae family top the list having four plants followed by Leguminosae with three, Malvaceae, Myrtaceae, Lauraceae and Apiaceae with two plants in each family.

Wooden articles made from wood of *Acacia nilotica* Delile and *Wrightia tinctoria* R.Br. and doormats made from Jute (*Corchorus capsularis* L.) fibers were observed in both the fairs. Similarly, wooden articles prepared from wood of *Acacia nilotica* Delile, *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss., *Dalbergia sissoo* DC., *Eucalyptus globulus* Labill., *Tectona grandis* L.f. and *Wrightia tinctoria* R.Br. were also observed in *Shilpgram* fair held in Udaipur by Jain (2017). Soft wood of *Ailanthus excelsa* Roxb. has been employed for making toys, musical instruments, door frames, boats, packing cases, cheap quality cricket bats etc. (<http://www.frienvis.nic.in/WriteReadData/UserFiles/file/pdfs/Ardu.pdf>; Jain and Jain, 2016). Use of its

wood for making toys is also observed in the present study (Table 2). Wood of *W. tinctoria* is maximally used for making toys in Udaipur city which are famous as '*Khirni ke Khilone*' but this has jeopardized its population in nearby areas as informed by a seller of Udaipur whose family business is based on wooden articles. One vendor from Ahmedabad who was selling wooden bangles informed that wood of *Dalbergia sissoo* was procured from Assam for this purpose. Similarly, vendor from Udaipur informed that Bamboo material for making baskets was also procured from Assam. In the *Hariyali Amavasya* fair, pictures of Hindu God and Goddesses made up on MDF boards were being sold but the raw material of MDF could not be described by seller, hence not included in the observations.

Popularity of these fairs is so much that not only local sellers but sellers from other states such as Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Bihar also came to exhibit and sell their products in these fairs (Table 2). Selling of various spices was observed only in *Sakhiya Somvar* fair by one local vendor who informed that these spices were being procured from Gujarat. Botanical identity of two spices *Pathar Phul* which seems to be a mixture of different Lichens (Plate 5 c) and *Talli masala* (a dark brown coarse material) which were being sold in *Sakhiya Somvar* fair could not yet ascertained. Many of these spices are naturally not grown in Rajasthan such as *Illicium verum* Hook.f., *Cinnamomum verum* G. Presl., *Cinnamomum tamala* T. Nees & Eberm., *Elettaria cardamomum* Maton, *Piper nigrum* L. and *Syzygium aromaticum* Merr. & L.M. Perry including *Pathar Phul* and *Talli masala* and imported from other states. This indicates role of fairs in generating additional income by providing vendors a platform to exhibit and sell their products and co-existence of both traditional and non-traditional botanical knowledge in the same pluricultural context. Diaspora and urbanization are the main causes behind this adaptive hybridization of botanical knowledge which is visible in these traditional fairs of Udaipur as also depicted by Hurell and Pochettino (2014).

People also visit fairs to enjoy various food dishes for example, *Jagal*; prepared from various plant species, is a popular health food of *Khadi* fair in Udaipur city (Jain, 2021). Similarly, a traditional sweet *Malpua* is

part of food tradition of *Shravan* month in Udaipur. It is prepared from *Triticum aestivum* L. (wheat flour), *Elettaria cardamomum* Maton (small cardamom) and *Saccharum officinarum* L. (sugar syrup). *Malpua* is one of the major attractions of both the fairs and it is the first sweet which comes in mind when recalling *Shravan* month (Plate 2c). One stall in *Hariyali amavasya* fair was having a famous sweet of Uttar Pradesh called as *Agre ka Petha* which is prepared from fruits of *Benincasa hispida* Cogn. (Cucurbitaceae).

In *Sakhiya Somvar* fair, serving of a delicious dish 'Dahi-Bada' (prepared from pulse crop *Vigna mungo* Hepper) in a biodegradable bowl which was made up from leaves of *Butea monosperma* Taub. indicates eco-friendly traditional cultural practices (Plate 2 d). *B. monosperma* is revered as a sacred plant and use of its leaf bowls during settlement of marriage for serving liquor is considered to be a sign of successful marriage by *Bhils* of Rajasthan. *Garasia* tribe of South Rajasthan also uses its leaf cups to sprinkle water as a purification process on people after cremation of dead body (Singh and Pandey, 1998; Kora, 2019). Interestingly, impact of urbanization was also visible in these fairs as besides the traditional food items, pastries and bakery products, some other edible items made from fruits of *Ananas comosus* Merr. in form of cubes (Plate 2 e), *Zea mays* L. in form of boiled corn and popcorn (Plate 2 f), *Solanum tuberosum* L. and *Musa paradisiaca* in form of wafers were being sold and relished by people.

Impact of urbanization was not only visible in various food items but it was also observed in lucky bamboo shoots which were being sold by a vendor coming from neighboring state Uttar Pradesh (Plate 5 e-f). Interestingly, vendor informed that she was procuring these plants from Thailand. Lucky Bamboos which are in fact not real Bamboos are told to bring health, happiness, peace and good luck for a person according to Feng Shui and also popular as decorative items in urban areas. Recently, Jain and Jain (2020) and Dutta *et al.* (2021) have shown significance of urban ethnobotanical studies in Udaipur and Kolkata cities respectively. In the present survey, selling of items such as Lucky Bamboo shoots in traditional fairs indicates towards heterogeneous nature of urban

botanical knowledge and further emphasizes the need of initiating urban ethnobotanical studies in cities to know about interactions among traditional and non-traditional botanical knowledge and the corresponding outcomes (Hurell and Pochettino, 2014).

Other than the plant products, many items for example, crockery, decorative plastic flowers, clay articles, readymade garments, artificial jewelry, toys, daily utility items etc. were being sold in the fairs at reasonable price. The beautiful lush green premises, variety of edibles, Ferris wheel and markets with various items attract both rural people from nearby areas and urban folks to visit such fairs. Usually traditional paintings are also displayed in fairs (Jain, 2017) but this element was absent in both the fairs.

Ethnobiological importance of fairs has been shown by Jain (2017) in a study of mega handicraft fair of Rajasthan where people from all over India came to exhibit and sell their products and use of 43 plant species was observed to prepare various products of domestic, aesthetic or personal utility. It not only highlights the utilitarian value of plants but also their cultural significance in human life and also emphasizes on the role of fairs in socio-economic up-liftment and preservation of traditional art and craft.

4. Conclusion

Udaipur is inhabited by a number of socio-culturally heterogeneous communities who are following their traditional practices since long time. Celebration of fairs and festivals in traditional manner is still evident in the city. Ethnobotanical survey to the two prominent and unique fairs of *Shravan* month in Udaipur city revealed the use of 23 plant species for preparing many plant based products for the first time. Large scale commercial cultivation of the plant species observed in this study can help in boosting economic status of communities as well as wide publicity of these fairs could promote tourism industry of Udaipur city further enhancing income of local people. Interestingly, influence of urbanization was also observed in some of the products. Therefore, documentation of ethnobotanical knowledge scattered in the traditional fairs is necessary from various perspectives. Besides, interaction of urban botanical knowledge elements with

traditional botanical knowledge and their impact need to be assessed. However, ethnobotanical surveys to other festivals of *Shravan* month should also be carried out in Udaipur city and it is recommended that similar kind of studies could be conducted in other cities of Rajasthan to obtain detailed picture of traditions associated with fairs and/or festivals of *Shravan* month. Moreover, impact of COVID-19 on such traditional fairs will have to be studied when the pandemic period is over.

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