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Traditional Knowledge of some Wild Edible Fruit Plants of Rahuri Tehsil, Ahilyanagar (Maharashtra) India: Pharmacology & Nutritional Importance

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Abstract

The present paper highlights the traditional knowledge and nutritional importance associated with wild edible fruit plants from Rahuri Tehsil, Ahilyanagar district (Maharashtra) India. Wild edible fruit plants have played a significant role in supporting traditional rural and urban human food systems for centuries. They act as food supplementary sources of nutrition, medicine, and livelihood, especially for farming communities and economically weaker populations as well as tribal peoples. This research paper represents ethno-botanical and pharmacological information on commonly available 22 wild edible fruit plant species, their local uses, nutritional value, medicinal importance, and socio-cultural relevance. The present paper emphasizes the need for documentation and conservation of traditional knowledge before it is lost due to lack of importance, modernization and degradation of resources.

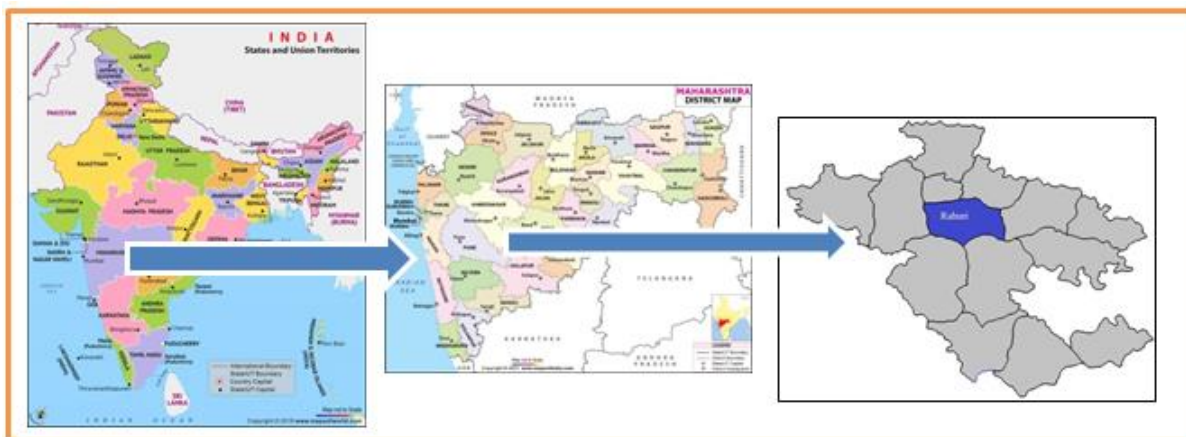
Keywords: Wild edible fruit plants, Food Resources, Traditional knowledge, Nutritional importance, Rahuri Tehsil.

Introduction

Plant and plant products have augmented human culture some time immemorial. But few people realize the importance of plant and plant parts of our environment (Singh 1993). Wild edible plants form an integral component of traditional food systems across the world. In rural India, especially in semi-arid regions like Maharashtra, people have long relied on naturally growing fruits to supplement their diet during lean agricultural seasons. These fruits not only provide essential nutrients but also serve as important medicinal resources. The food habits of the local people are generally developed according to the availability of food and their nutritional value. Rahuri Tehsil, located in Ahilyanagar district, is predominantly an agricultural region with a semi-arid climate. Despite increasing modernization, local communities still possess valuable knowledge regarding the identification, harvesting, and utilization of wild fruits. However, such knowledge is mostly oral and undocumented, making it vulnerable to erosion. This research paper attempts to compile available traditional information on wild edible fruits of Rahuri Tehsil and present their importance in food security, healthcare, and biodiversity conservation.

Study Area – Rahuri tehsil:

The Rahuri Tehsil in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra has been selected for the present investigation work. The tehsil comprises of 95 villages and two urban centers spread over an area of 1, 00,898 hectares. The geographical extension of the study area is form 19°15' N to 19°34' North latitude and 74°23' E to 74°50' East Longitude. The Rahuri tehsil lies in the rain shadow zone of the Western Ghats in Mula and Pravara basin (Map: 1).



Rahuri tehsil is situated in the central part of Ahilyanagar district (Maharashtra state) India, has a **total population of 322,823** as per the Census 2011. Out of which 166,952 are males while 155,871 are females. In 2011, there were a total 64,707 families residing in Rahuri tehsil. The **Average Sex Ratio of Rahuri tehsil is 934**. As per Population Census 2011 data, **Schedule Caste (SC) constitutes 13.5%** while **Schedule Tribe (ST) where 10.5%** of total population in Rahuri Taluka of Maharashtra (Table 1).

Table 1: Social Category wise sex ratio According to Census 2011

Social Category	Total	Male	Female
Schedule Caste	43619	22320	21299
Schedule Tribe	34036	17177	16859

In the Rahuri tehsil Mula Dam and Musalwadi tail tank reservoirs are available for irrigation and water drinking purpose. The region experiences low to moderate rainfall and supports dry deciduous vegetation. The landscape includes agricultural fields with variety crop pattern (Cash crops - sugarcane, cotton, soyabean; Cereals - Wheat, Jawar, Bajra; Vegetables – Cauliflower, Methi, Tomato, Lady's finger; Fruit orchards – pomegranate, Guava, Jamun; Fodder: Maize, Barsim grass etc.), roadside vegetation (Karanj, Cassia siamea, Chinch, Wad etc.), river banks of Mula and Pravara River, grazing lands (Mhaisgaon forest area etc.) and sacred groves (Bubaleshwar area, Ketkai etc.) or we may say temple - associated green patches (eg. Keshav Govind Ban, Ramdara etc.). In the backyard numbers of fruit crops are planted. These habitats support several wild fruit - bearing plant species that are traditionally used by local people.

Methodology:

The present review is based on a comprehensive analysis of multiple sources of information related to wild edible fruit plant species of Rahuri tehsil, Ahilyanagar (Maharashtra). An extensive review of traditional literature was carried out using published research papers, books, theses, reports and journal articles focusing on wild edible plants species and traditional food resources^{10,13,15,19,23,29,31}. Information was compiled from documented traditional knowledge shared by rural and tribal communities, including indigenous practices related to identification, collection, preparation and consumption of wild edible fruit species. Secondary field observations reported in similar agro-climatic regions were considered to understand habitat, seasonal availability and local usage patterns of wild edible fruit plants. All collected information was systematically compiled, compared and analyzed to ensure reliability and to avoid duplication. Emphasis was given to plants that are repeatedly mentioned across the multiple sources and available in the study area.

Enumeration:

Enumeration of traditional knowledge and nutritional importance of human food plant species in the present paper is based on previously recorded information and comparative analysis reported in some research paper publications. Binomials are arranged alphabetically furnishing the botanical name followed by local name, family, edible part, traditional uses, Nutritional importance and pharmacology (Table 2).

Table 2: Observations Table: List of some Wild Edible Fruits of Rahuri Tehsil

Sr. No	Botanical & Local name, family	Traditional Use	Nutritional Importance	Pharmacology
1	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Correa , Bel, Rutaceae	Murabba, Pudding, Juice ¹²⁻¹³ , Chronic diarrhea, laxative, dysentery, aromatic, digestive, cooling,	Vitamine C, A & B6, alkaloids such as aegeline, marmeline, dictamine, fragrine, and aegelenine.	Anti-microbial, Anti-diabetic, anti-cancer ^{3,26}
2	<i>Annona squamosa</i> Linn.,	Hair tonic, Nutritive	Rich in Vit. C & B complex,	Anti-oxidant, Anti-fungal ⁶

	Sitaphal, Annonaceae	(high energy content)	Mg, K, dietary fibers.	
3	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> Lam., Phanas, Moraceae	Astringent, Carminative, Laxative	Rich in Dietary fiber, P, Ca, Mg, Fe, Vit. C, A & B6.	Anti-oxidant, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal ²⁰
4	<i>Canavalia ensiformis</i> (L.) DC., Aabai, Fabaceae	Diarrhea, Vomiting, stomach problems, inflammation & obesity	High protein, Ca, Zn, P, Mg, Cu, and Ni.	Anthelmintic, Anti-tumor, Anti-diabetic ²²
5	<i>Carissa carandas</i> , Karvand, Apocynaceae	Scabies, improve female libido, Pickle, digestive	Rich in vitamins (Vit. C, A, K) and minerals (Fe, Ca, P, Mg & K).	Anti-inflammatory, Anti-neoplastic, Anti-diabetic, Anti-malaria, Anti-diarrhoea ⁸
6	<i>Cordia dichotoma</i> G., Bhokar, Boraginaceae	Used in cough, asthma, sore throat	Source of protein, Ca, Fe, fibers, polysaccharides	Analgesic, anti-inflammatory, anti-ulcer ⁴
7	Cucumis melo L. Kharbuj, Cucurbitaceae	Fever, Jaundice, Constipation, and Bronchitis	Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and K, high water content, linoleic acid	Anti-vitiligo, Anti-oxidant, Anti-fungal ²⁵
8	Cucumis melo subsp. agrestis var. agrestis, Shendad, Cucurbitaceae	cooling, cleansing agent for burns and abrasions for skin	Vit. A, vit. C, Minerals, polyphenols, flavonoids & saponins	Anti-oxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Gastrointestinal ⁹
9	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> Linn., Umbar, Moraceae	Digestive, Diabetes, Astringent, Stomachic, Carminative given in menorrhoea & hemoptysis	Rich source of nutrients like protein, Ca, Fe, K, dietary fibers with soluble fibers, Carotene, Ascorbic acid	Anti-filarial, Anti-oxidant, Radio-Pprotective ³⁰
10	<i>Grewia asiatica</i> Linn., Phalsa, Malvaceae	Consumed to relieve thirst (cooling), treat heatstroke, Joint pain, fever.	High in K, Ca, P, Fe, 18 amino acids, Vit. A and C.	Hepatoprotective, Anti-cancer, anti-oxidant, Analgesic ¹¹
11	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> (L.) Lam., Ratali, Convolvulaceae	Diarrhea	Carbohydrates (80-90% dry matter), sugars, vitamin C, pro-vitamin A (β -carotene), Fe and K.	Anti-oxidant, Anti-ulcer, Anti-diabetic ⁵
12	<i>Lantana camara</i> L., Raymani / Ghaneri, Verbenaceae	Bleeding gums, giddiness, and sometimes as an antidote against poisoning	Fats, moisture, & minerals such as K, P, Na, Zn, Fe & Cu; <i>trans</i> - β -caryophyllene, sabinene, eucalyptol, α -humulene, bicyclogermacrene, germacrene D & <i>trans</i> -nerolidol.	Anti-oxidant, Anti-aging, Anti-diarrheal, sedative, Analgesic, Anti-microbial, Anti-diabetic, Anti-platelet, Anti-inflammatory ¹⁶
13	<i>Limonia acidissima</i> L., Kavath/kauth, Rutaceae	Tonic for the heart and liver, Diarrhea, dysentery, piles, constipation.	Rich in beta carotene, vitamin B, vitamin C, thiamin and riboflavin, pectin.	Anti-oxidant, Anti-diabetic ²
14	<i>Morus alba</i> , Tuti, Moraceae	Blood purifier, improve liver and Kidney function	Fe, Vitamin C, riboflavin, P, anthocyanins.	Immune enhancing, Anti-obesity ¹²
15	<i>Phoenix sylvestris</i> (L.) Roxb., Shindi, Arecaceae	Fevers, inflammation and nervous disorders	source of Vitamin C, B-complex, B ₃ , Vitamin K, Flavonoids, Tannis, Phenolic contents	Anti-obesity, Anti-microbial, Anti-diarrheal, Anti-diabetic ¹
16	<i>Pithecellobium dulce</i> , Vilayti chinch, Fabaceae	Diarrhea, fever, ulcers, and skin diseases. It is used as a remedy for intestinal pain and as a vaginal stimulant	Vitamins like ascorbic acid, thiamine, riboflavin; essential amino acids like lysine, phenylalanine, tryptophan & valine; minerals such as Na, K, P, Fe, and Ca	Anti-oxidant, Nephroprotective Anti-bacterial ^{14,21}
17	<i>Solanum anguivi</i> Lam., Ran-vange, Solanaceae	Blood pressure, Hypertension, Ulcers, Cough, asthma, abdominal pain & intestinal parasites	High protein, crude fiber, Ca, Na, P, K, Vitamin C, Low fat.	Anti-oxidant, Anti-bacterial, Anti-microbial ²⁷
18	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> , Jambhul, Myrtaceae	Dysentery, Diabetes	Source of Vit. C, P, Fe, Ca, protein, fiber, and essential	Anti-diabetic, Anti-bacterial, Anti-cancer ²⁴

			amino acids.	
19	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> Linn., Chinch, Fabaceae	Digestive system, Abdominal pain, Rheumatism.	Significant amounts of Vit. B3,C, K, Mg, and Ca, Tartaric Acid	Hypolipidemic & weight reducing activity, Anti- oxidant, Anti-diabetic ¹⁷
20	<i>Terminalia catappa</i> Linn., Badam, Combretaceae	Sexual dysfunction, mild laxative, treats diabetes, leprosy, and headaches.	Vitamin C, beta-carotene, vitamin E, P, K, Fe, Ca, Zn, Protein, Fiber & Ash	Anti-diabetic, Anti- inflammatory, Anti-oxidant ²⁸
21	<i>Vigna trilobata</i> (L.) Verdc. ,Raanmath, Fabaceae	Anthelmintic, aphrodisiac, astringent, stypitic, biliousness, burning sensation, cough, dysentery, fever, gout, thirst inflammation, pile,	Rich source of essential minerals, particularly Mg , followed by K, S, Na, and Ca.	Anti-oxidant, anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory ³²
22	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> , Bor, Rhamnaceae	Digestive aid, blood purifier	Rich in K, P, Fe, Ca, Vit. C and also A and B complex	Anti-oxidant, Anti-diabetic, anti-cancer, Hepato- protective activity ¹⁴

Discussion:

- A) **Nutritional Importance:** Wild edible fruits are natural foods from forests, grassland and uncultivated areas. They play a very important role in the nutrition and health of rural and urban communities. These fruits acts as multivitamins for people who have limited access to commercial foods. Wild fruits are excellent source of Vitamin A – supports eyesight, skin and immunity power; Vitamin C – Boosts immunity and helps in wound healing; Vitamins B Complex – important for energy production and nervous system function. These also provide minerals such as Iron (Fe) – prevents anemia; Calcium (Ca) – strengths bones and teeth; Potassium (K) – helps regulate heart function and blood pressures. For rural and tribal populations, these fruits are a low – cost and highly effective mineral source. It contains large amount of dietary fibers so called functional food, which improves digestion, prevents constipation, and helps control blood sugar and cholesterol. A fruit contains anti-oxidant that neutralizes harmful free radicals; reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and aging related disorders. Wild edible fruits play a vital role in preventing malnutrition in children, weakness and nutrient deficiency in elderly people. They play a vital role in preventing micronutrient deficiencies in rural populations, especially among children and elderly people.
- B) **Medicinal Significance:** Many wild edible fruits are not only nutritious but also have important medicinal properties. They are traditionally used by the tribal and rural communities as natural remedies for common health problems (Table 1).
- C) **Socio-Economic Role:** wild edible fruits also play an important role in rural and tribal livelihoods. They contribute Seasonal income – people collect and sell these fruits in local markets, providing them with extra income during fruiting season; Nutrition during drought or food shortage wild fruits serve as an important emergency food source, preventing hunger and malnutrition; and traditional food products like pickles, juices and beverages. These products have cultural as well as economic value.
- D) **Threats to Traditional Knowledge:** Expansion of cities, roads, industries and housing reduces natural ecosystems. Traditional communities lose access to forests, farms and biodiversity where their knowledge is practiced. Traditional diverse farming (millets, wild plants, and local varieties) is replaced by cash crops like sugarcane, cotton, and soyabean. This reduces use of indigenous seeds and practices. Deforestation and fragmentation of forests reduce availability of medicinal plants, wild foods and sacred groves – directly affecting traditional knowledge. Youth prefer modern education and urban jobs, so they not learn traditional skills, herbal knowledge or farming practices from elders. These factors are the main reasons for erosion of traditional knowledge.
- E) **Conservation and Future Prospects:** Wild edible fruits represent an important biological and cultural resource that requires urgent conservation and sustainable utilization. Community awareness programs play a crucial role in educating local and tribal populations about the nutritional, medicinal and economic value of these species, thereby encouraging their protection and sustainable harvesting. School-level ethno-botany projects further contribute to the documentation and preservation of traditional knowledge while fostering environmental responsibility among younger generations. The promotion of wild fruit gardens in home, school and community settings can reduce pressure on natural forests and enhance food and nutritional security. Integration of wild edible fruits into government-supported nutrition schemes such as mid-day meals and Anganwadi Programmes can help address micronutrient deficiencies, particularly among children and the elderly. Moreover, scientific evaluation of the nutraceutical potential of these fruits, including their antioxidant and therapeutic properties, can lead to the development of value-added products, providing new livelihood opportunities while strengthening conservation efforts through economic incentives.

Conclusion:

Wild edible fruits of Rahuri Tehsil represent a valuable yet underutilized natural resource. This combined approach ensured a reliable and holistic understanding of wild edible fruit plant resources and their traditional importance in Rahuri tehsil. They contribute significantly to food security, traditional healthcare, and biodiversity

conservation. Proper documentation, awareness, and sustainable utilization can help preserve this traditional knowledge for future generations.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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