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# Beverages of Baiga tribe of Amarkantak Region. An Ethnobotanical Approach

**Rupesh Kapale\***

Faculty of Life Sciences,

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, 484886 (M.P.)

Email: [Kapale\\_r@rediffmail.com](mailto:Kapale_r@rediffmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh is known for its unique socio cultured nature. Mahua, a popular distilled beverages has a very important role in the socio-economic and cultural life of baiga tribes of Amarkantak forest region. The paper deals with the ethnobotanical observation on the preparation of liquor distilled beverages of mahua by baiga people and detailed account of beverages "Mahua" consumed by the baiga tribal's of Amarkantak Forest Area.*

**Key words:**-Mahua, Tribal's, Baiga, Beverages

### INTRODUCTION

Baiga is a tribal people which are mainly found in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand states of India. The largest number of baigas found in baiga-chuk in Satpuda-meikal forest range of Amarkantak. Beverages obtained from Mahua, a popular local beverage has a very important role in the socio-cultural life of Baiga tribe of Amarkantak region, Mahua beverages drunk in all their festive occasions of celebrations. The flowers of Mahua or Mahula tree is the main material for preparation of beverages which is available in the Amarkantak forest easily & plenty. The flowers of Mahua flower are fermented to make liquor, the Mahua drink as part of their cultural heritage. Tribal people, men and women, consume this drink regularly. It is an obligatory item during celebrations and evening activities. Baiga tribes is one of the ethnic tribes of India inhabiting the part of M.P.

Consumption of beer and other beverages is a common practice among all tribal communities. Mahua beverages is not only popular drink of the Baiga tribes but is also considered to be pure and used as holy water or elixir by Baiga also by women during various festivals and ceremonies. It was a tradition to offer this beverage to every Baiga guest and relatives to the house by the hosters. Even today, after a whole day hard work, the elderly male Baiga member of family in the Baiga chak villages, relaxes by consuming Mahua drink. The study of Mahua drink preparation is based on Baiga tribes belonging to villages of Amarkantak - Achankmar biosphere region.

### STUDY SITE

Amarkantak – a famous Hindu religious place is situated at the meeting point of Vindhya, Maikal and Satpura mountain ranges between 22°41' N latitude and 81°46' E longitude in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh (India), at an altitude of 1065 m. Amarkantak is a source of two sacred rivers Narmada and Sone which are religiously significant. The river Narmada is about 1,280 km and it flows westwards, while the Sone is about 1,280 km and it flows westwards, while the river Sone flows towards the east [1]. The climate of the Amarkantak is humid, mesothermal and without any water deficiency throughout the year. The hills and forest of Amarkantak are the treasures having valuable herbs and medicinal plants. The temperature and rainfall data of the area are based on district meteorological department. The temperature ranges vary throughout the year. The mean temperature ranges from 21°C to 31°C. May and June are the hottest months and temperature is rising to about 31° to 34°C. December and January are the coldest months. During that month the lower temperature falls to -0°C. Total annual rainfall is over 1000 mm and it comes from the southwest monsoon. Maximum rainfall occurred during July to September.

## METHODOLOGY

Ethnobotanical study was under taken during 2010-11 by conducting survey in the four baiga chak villages of Amarkantak - Achanakmar biosphere forest region. Baiga people, who regularly prepare Mahua drink were interviewed and entire process of preparation were observed and Documented [3].

## MAP OF AMARKANTAK



## RESULT & DISCUSSION

**Botany of Mahua Plant:-** Mahua tree abundantly found in Amarkantak forest area, the Botanical name of Mahua is *Madhuca indica*, which belongs to family Sapotaceae. The flowering and fruiting time of Mahua plant respectively March to April.

The systematic position of Mahua tree in botanical literature as follows:-

Kingdom – Plantae

Family – Sapotaceae

Genus – *Madhuca*

Species – *longifolia* var. *latifolia* (Roxb.)

**Other regional name of mahua in India:**

Gujarati : MAHUDO

Hindi: MOHUA, Sanskrit: ATAVIMADUKA

Konkani : MOHWA

Malayalam: ILLUPPA,

Marathi : MOHA,

Oriya: MOHUKA,

Kannada: DODDIPPA

Tamil: ILUPPAI,

Telugu: IPPA,

Urdu : MAHUVA

### Flowers of Mahua

This tree begins to flower at the age of 10 years and continues to do so for about 100 years. The flowers are in dense fascicles near ends of branches, many in number and small in size with yellowish-white colour. The musky-scented flowers appear from March to April. The flower stalks are rigid enough to maintain their position. These stalks are green or pink and furry and about 5 cm long. The plum-coloured calyx is also furry and divides into four or five lobes; within them lies the globular corolla, thick, juicy and creamy white. The tree blooms at night and each short-lived flower falls to the ground at dawn. A couple of months after the flowering period the fruit opens. A full grown tree can produce up to 90 kg of flowers in a year. It is believed to be pollinated by bats which feed on the corollas. The gathering of the edible mahua flowers is an important business for rural people [2,3].



**Fig:1-** Flowering of Mahua tree at Jawaleshwar region of Amarkantak

Mohua is one of the most important of Indian forest trees, not because it may possess valuable timber - and it is hardly ever cut for this purpose - but because of its delicious and nutritive flowers. It is a tree of abundant growth and, to the people of Central India, it provides their most important article of food as the flowers can be stored almost indefinitely. It is large and deciduous with a thick, grey bark, vertically cracked and wrinkled. Most of the leaves fall from February to April, and during that time the musky-scented flowers appear. They hang in close bunches of a dozen or so from the end of the gnarled, grey branchlets. Actually the word 'hang' is incorrect because, when a bunch is inverted, the flower stalks are sufficiently rigid to maintain their position. These stalks are green or pink and furry, about 5 cm. long. The plum-coloured calyx is also furry and divides into four or five lobes; within them lies the globular corolla, thick, juicy and creamy white. Through small eyelet holes at the top, the yellow anthers can be seen. The stamens are very short and adhere to the inner surface of the corolla; the pistil is a long, protruding green tongue. It is at night that the tree blooms and at dawn each short-lived flower falls to the ground. A couple of months after the flowering period the fruit opens. They are fleshy, green berries, quite large and containing from one to four shiny, brown seeds. *Madhuca longifolia*, commonly known as *mahwa* or *mahua*, is an Indian tropical tree found largely in the central and north Indian plains and forests. It is a fast-growing tree that grows to approximately 20 meters in height, possesses evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage, and belongs to the family Sapotaceae. It is adapted to arid environments, being a prominent tree in tropical mixed deciduous forests in India in the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat and Orissa. Almost all baiga people both male and female are found of drinks and consume during every ceremony festivals, marriages funerals, feasts, etc. and offer its to their gods and deities.

**Preparation of Mahua:-** Mahua distilled beverages is prepared from dried flower bud (corollas) of *Madhuca indica* plant. For the preparation of Mahua, mainly two popular methods used by baiga tribes. Viz- close method and tube method [4].

**In Close Method:-** The liquor is collected in pot, white, in tube(nala) method, a tube is connected to the pot in which liquor comes out by the help of tube and stored in pot or cane. The dried corollas are kept in pot and some water is added. The pot is closed by the air tight cloth and kept for 4- 6days or till it start odour o smelling then the pot is kept on chullah (stove for distillation. On this pot, another pot is placed and above this another pot is placed in which the cold water is filled,The junctions of these, pots are tied tightly by air tight cloth. The vapour passed through the middle pot strikes the bottom of the upper pot in which is the cold water is kept. The vapour cools and droplets collect in the middle pot.

In closed system, in middle pot (Paina) a small pot called dokli is placed in which the liquor is collected.

**In tube (nala) methods:-** The vapour is passed through the tube, which is connected to middle pot and collects in cane or pot, The water of upper pot is regularly changed to keep it cool.



**Fig.2:** Preparation methods of Mahua Liquor by tribal

The collected Mahua is prepared and drunk as beverages. The potency of preparation of Mahua beverages depends on changes of water in upper pot [5].

Mahua beverages plays a vital role in the socio cultural life of Baiga tribes. There are no festivals such as Devi - Puja, ceremonies,birth, marriage, death are celebrated without Mahua beverages.

Baiga medicine man suggested the used of Mahua beverages as a medicine for curing various disease. Roots of Majitha (*Rubia cordifolia*) local name – pili are Panacia medicine for curing jaundice disease. Baiga medicine man prepared the popular medicine for jaundice and dissolves Majistha Roots fragments into Mahua beverages and gives to jaundice persons for curing jaundice problem. Therefore scientific highlight on that traditional baiga medicine is may be subject of scientific and medical investigation in future [6].

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