

## Plants used by Bhil tribe of Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh for making folk musical instruments

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### Abstract

Musical folk songs and folk dancing are important part of Bhil tribals inhabiting in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh. Their musical instruments, Dhol, Dholak, Bansuri, Harangi, Khurtal, Tambura, etc., are made from surrounding plants. The present paper provides the information on some plants used by Bhil tribe of Ratlam district (MP) for making folk musical instruments.

**Key words:** Bhil tribe, Musical instruments, Ethnomusicology, Ratlam; Madhya Pradesh

### Introduction

Man has depended on plants from time immemorial. The human life and culture has directly or indirectly been influenced by their surrounding environment. The primitive people were well acquainted with the properties and uses of plants of their surroundings. They have inherited rich traditional knowledge of surrounding plants used as food, fodder, fibres, woods, fuel, medicine, beverage, tannin, dye, gum, resin, cosmetics, crafts and religious ceremonies. Some other plants are also used as narcotic, hallucinogenic and poisonous. Such knowledge of economic and other properties of surrounding plants has been acquired by the tribal communities through experience and has been passed on through the word of mouth from generation to generation as a part of their cultural heritage. Ratlam district lying between 23°05' – 23°55' N latitude and 74°30' – 75°42' E longitude covers an area of 4861 sq. km. The district is situated on Malwa plateau at 493.62 m. above the sea level. Bhils are the main inhabitants of different villages of the district. According to 2001 census the population of Bhil tribe in the district was 2.26 lakh constituting about 23.27% of the total population. Ethnobotany has introduced numerous little-known or unknown uses of plants (Jain 1981; 1991; 2004, Nautiyal and Kaul 2003). But there is no in depth study about the ethnobotanical observation on wild plants used for making musical instruments (Jain 1965, Kaufmann 1961, Parmar 1978). The author is engaged in ethnomedicinal investigations in this district, results of which have been published (Jadhav 2012, 2013, 2014) earlier. Music and dancing are important part of Bhils inhabiting the Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh. Women, however, dance at celebrations of birth of a son, marriage functions and few other festivals in traditional bhil style to the accompaniment of the drum beat. Some of their dances are

'Lathi-dance', 'Dhol-dance', 'Marriage-dance', 'Holi-dance', 'Battle-dance', 'Bhagoria-dance', 'Depawal-dance', 'Hunting-dance', etc. Their musical instruments are Dhol, Dholak, Bansuri, Harangi, Khurtal, Tambura, etc. Among the tribes of Ratlam district, chorus songs are more prevalent in comparison to solo songs and musical instruments and dancing is always necessary. These people make a variety of musical instruments from the natural products available around them. The present paper provides the information on some ethnobotanical plants used by Bhil tribe of Ratlam district (M.P.) for making folk musical instruments.

### Methodology

Extensive field trips were organized for collecting the plant species and data using an integrated approach of botanical collections, interviews and questionnaires. In Bhil tribe or village usually there is one elder person or a local physician familiar with the uses of surrounding plants, who is called "Bhopa". "Bhopa" was contacted and taken to the field for collecting information about the plants used for making musical instruments, their local names, parts used and construction method. Herbarium specimens prepared following the standard method (Jain and Rao 1978) have been deposited in the herbarium of Botany department, Govt. Arts & Science College, Ratlam (MP). Herbarium specimens were identified with the help of standard flora (Verma *et al.* 1993; Mudgal *et al.* 1997).

### Results and discussion

The paper provides some 12 plants used for making folk musical instruments by Bhil tribe of Ratlam district (MP). These surveys were carried out to identify the multipurpose plants in the tribal inhabited villages of the district. Results of these surveys indicated that the tribals of Ratlam district



traditionally used 12 angiosperm plant species of 12 genera under 11 families for making folk musical instruments (Table 1). By understanding the important plants utilized by people traditionally for various products available in the market and the raw material required for it, we can evolve a

system to grow them in farmlands, wastelands, lakes and riverbanks which will reduce the pressure on the natural forests and thereby conserve the biodiversity and improve the socio-economics of the rural people.

Table 1. Plants used for making folk musical instruments by the tribals of Ratlam district.

S.No.	Botanical name & voucher specimen number	Family	Local name	Part used	Name of musical instrument	Construction & Working
1.	<i>Vachellia nilotica</i> subsp. <i>tomentosa</i> (Benth.) Kyal. & Boatwr. DJ-001	Mimosaceae	Bambul	Wood	Khanjri/ Khurtal/ Khajria	Khurtal is prepared from wood. Khurtal comprises two similar shaped wooden pieces and is 8 to 12 inches long and 2 to 3 inches wide. Small round brass pieces are affixed over these wooden pieces. One of the pieces has a space for the thumb and the other to hold four fingers. It is played by the same hand. Khurtal are a pair of wooden blocks or frames with small metal jingles mounted in them. They are simply beaten together to provide a rhythmic support to bhajans, kirtan, folk and other light music.
2.	<i>Ailanthus excelsa</i> Roxb. DJ-004	Simaroubaceae	Aydu Baa	Wood	Drum (Dhol)	A dhol is a musical instrument consisting of a hollowed wooden cylinder. Its parchment (generally Goat skin) is thicker. Being heavier, the dhol is slung by a cord from the neck. It is played by sticks.
3.	<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L. DJ-010	Bombacaceae	Hemlo	Wood	Dholak	A dholak is a barrel shaped instrument consisting of a hollowed wooden cylinder with nearly equal sides over which leather parchment (generally Goat skin) is slightly stretched.
4.	<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L. DJ-010	Bombacaceae	Hemlo	Wood	Tambura	'Tambura' is prepared from wood. It consists of carving of a single wood block. The long stem gracefully culminates in a nearly oval belly. The front of the instrument covered by parchment. A wooden bridge on the front side of the belly is immovable. Strings pass over the bridge and are tightened by pegs. A Tambura is operated by plucking and strings.
5.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Kuntze DJ-013	Fabaceae	Khankhru	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.
6.	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> (Roxb.) Nees DJ-058	Poaceae	Vaans	Bamboo strips and culms	Harangi	The body of harangi is made of bamboo. The Coconut ( <i>Cocos nucifera</i> L., Nariel, Arecaceae) dried fruit shell contributes to the belly, laced with parchment covering it. Three pegs on upper side are for 3 strings (Horse tail hair) passing through the notched wooden bridge. The strings are pressed with

						fingers on the board. The bow made of curved wooden stick is moved over them (nearly 65 cm length).
7.	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> (Roxb.) Nees DJ-058	Poaceae	Vaans	Bamboo strips and culms	Vaansuri or bansuri (Flute)	Bansuri is made of cylindrical bamboo tube with 4 holes at lower end, both ends stopped.
8.	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L. DJ-081	Moraceae	Gulri	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.
9.	<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Roxb. ex Sm. DJ-288	Lamiaceae	Haven	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.
10.	<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Roxb. ex Sm. DJ-288	Verbenaceae	Haven	Wood	Dholak	See serial no. 3.
11.	<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Roxb. ex Sm. DJ-288	Verbenaceae	Haven	Wood	Tambura	See serial no. 4.
12.	<i>Haldina cordifolia</i> (Roxb.) Ridsdale DJ-003	Rubiaceae	Hardu	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.
13.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. DJ-085	Anacardiaceae	Ambo	Wood	Tambura	See serial no. 4.
14.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. DJ-085	Anacardiaceae	Ambo	Wood	Dholak	See serial no. 3.
15.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. DJ-085	Anacardiaceae	Ambo	Wood	Khurtal	See serial no. 1.
16.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. DJ-085	Anacardiaceae	Ambo	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.
17.	<i>Moringa oleifera</i> Lam. DJ-098	Moringaceae	Hurajno	Wood	Tambura	See serial no. 4.
18.	<i>Tectona grandis</i> L.f. DJ-100	Lamiaceae	Sagad	Wood	Khurtal	See serial no. 1.
19.	<i>Tectona grandis</i> L.f. DJ-100	Verbenaceae	Sagad	Wood	Dhol	See serial no. 2.

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