

Sacred Trees and Plants Across Religious Traditions: Symbolism, Spirituality, and Environmental Responsibility

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Abstract

Trees, plants, and flowers occupy significant positions in the religious narratives, ritual practices, and cultural traditions of societies around the world. Their meanings range from representations of spiritual awakening and purity to symbols of divine presence, life, renewal, and communal identity. This article examines the significance of sacred plants across selected religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shinto, and Celtic and Norse traditions. It compares selected plants, trees, and flowers, together with their associations in religious narratives, offerings, festivals, and other practices. The study also considers the relationship between sacred plant traditions and contemporary discussions of environmental responsibility. A focused discussion of the Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith and the mulberry tree associated with the foundation of Dayalbagh, Agra, introduces an Indian community-based perspective on the relationship between trees, religious history, and spiritual life. Using a comparative, interpretive approach based on religious texts, historical documentation, and relevant scholarly literature, the article seeks to identify both recurring themes and important differences in religious understandings of plant life. It aims to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship on religion, nature, and culture by examining how sacred meanings shape human relationships with the natural world.

Keywords: sacred plants; sacred trees; religion and ecology; religious symbolism; ritual; environmental ethics

1. Introduction

Trees, plants and flowers have held a special place in the mythology, religious beliefs and cultural traditions of civilizations around the world. They symbolize life, wisdom, purity, immortality, fertility, peace and spiritual growth. They occupy important positions in religious narratives, rituals, and cultural traditions worldwide. Associated with divinity, spiritual awakening, purity, renewal, and sustenance, they also connect religious beliefs with agricultural practices, community identity, and human relationships with nature. Examining these associations provides insights into how religious traditions understand the natural world.



Figure 1

Flora has played a central role in human spiritual life since antiquity. Across major world religions, trees, plants, and flowers serve as sacred symbols, ritual offerings, spiritual teachers, and representations of the divine order. This report explores the ecological, symbolic, and theological significance of plant life across Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and indigenous spiritual traditions.

Different religions attribute distinct meanings to plant life. Hindu traditions associate Tulsi, Peepal, Banyan, and lotus with deities and devotional practices. Buddhism connects the Bodhi tree with the Buddha's enlightenment, while Jainism emphasizes the ethical significance of plant life through *ahimsā*, or non-violence. Christianity incorporates botanical imagery into biblical narratives, while Judaism and Islam connect plants with scripture, ritual observances, agriculture, and sustenance. Shinto traditions associate sacred trees with religious presence and space, while Celtic and Norse traditions offer examples of trees representing sacred power and cosmological relationships.



Figure 2

Despite these shared themes, the meanings attributed to plants vary across religious and cultural contexts. Similar botanical species may carry different religious meanings, depending on their associated narratives,

rituals, and historical settings. A comparative study must therefore examine not only plant symbolism but also the practices and interpretations through which plants acquire religious significance.

Research on sacred trees and natural sites provides a foundation for this inquiry. Dafni (2007) examines sacred-tree traditions in the Holy Land, while Bhagwat (2009) explores relationships between sacred natural sites and ecological values. Research on sacred groves in India has also investigated connections among religious beliefs, community practices, and biodiversity conservation (Singh et al., 2017). However, sacred status alone does not establish environmental protection; the relationship between religious beliefs and ecological outcomes requires evidence from documented practices and relevant historical or ecological studies.

Against this background, the present article comparatively examines sacred plants across Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shinto, and Celtic and Norse traditions.

The article contributes a comparative framework for examining religious representation, ritual practice, cultural meaning, and environmental implications. By distinguishing documented evidence from religious interpretation and ecological outcomes, it seeks to advance interdisciplinary understanding of the relationships among religion, nature, and culture.

1.1 Objectives:

To examine, compare, and document the sacred, symbolic, and ritual significance of trees, plants, and flowers across major world religions and cultural traditions:

- Identify key botanical symbols: Catalog the specific flora (such as the lotus, Bodhi tree, Tulsi, olive, date palm, and sacred fig) associated with major global faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and indigenous beliefs.
- Analyze theological & cultural contexts: Explore how different religions integrate plant life into their sacred texts, parables, mythologies, and daily ritual practices.
- Examine universal themes: Identify common cross-cultural motifs, such as the Tree of Life, divine purity, cosmic structure (axis mundi), and spiritual rebirth represented through nature.
- Highlight sacred ecology: Understand how ancient religious veneration of plant life serves as a foundation for environmental stewardship, biodiversity conservation, and modern ecological awareness.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Scholarship on sacred plants highlights their significance within religious narratives, rituals, cultural identities, and sacred landscapes. Dafni (2007) examines sacred-tree beliefs among Muslim and Druze communities in the Holy Land, emphasizing the importance of local religious and cultural contexts. Kent (2010) explores the contested meanings of trees and forests in Indian Hinduism, while Tatay and Merino (2023) examine sacred natural sites from a conservation perspective, highlighting their interconnected religious, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions. Bhagwat (2009) considers the relationship between the spiritual significance of sacred natural sites and their ecological values, and Singh et al. (2017) investigate connections among religious beliefs, community practices, and biodiversity conservation in sacred groves of the Western Himalaya. Building on these studies, the present article adopts a comparative and interpretive framework examining four dimensions: religious representation, ritual practices, cultural and communal meaning, and environmental implications. It investigates sacred plants across selected religious traditions, including the Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith and the mulberry tree associated with the establishment of Dayalbagh. The study distinguishes documented religious beliefs and practices from

theological interpretations and ecological outcomes, avoiding the assumption that sacred status automatically results in environmental conservation.

3. Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive approach based on religious texts, documented rituals, historical sources, and scholarly literature. It examines selected religious traditions through four dimensions: religious representation, ritual practices, cultural significance, and environmental implications. The Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith and the mulberry tree associated with Dayalbagh are included as a specific case study. The analysis distinguishes documented evidence from religious interpretation and ecological claims. As a documentary study, it does not involve original fieldwork or claim to provide an exhaustive account of sacred plant traditions.

4. Comparative Analysis: Sacred Plants Across Religious Traditions

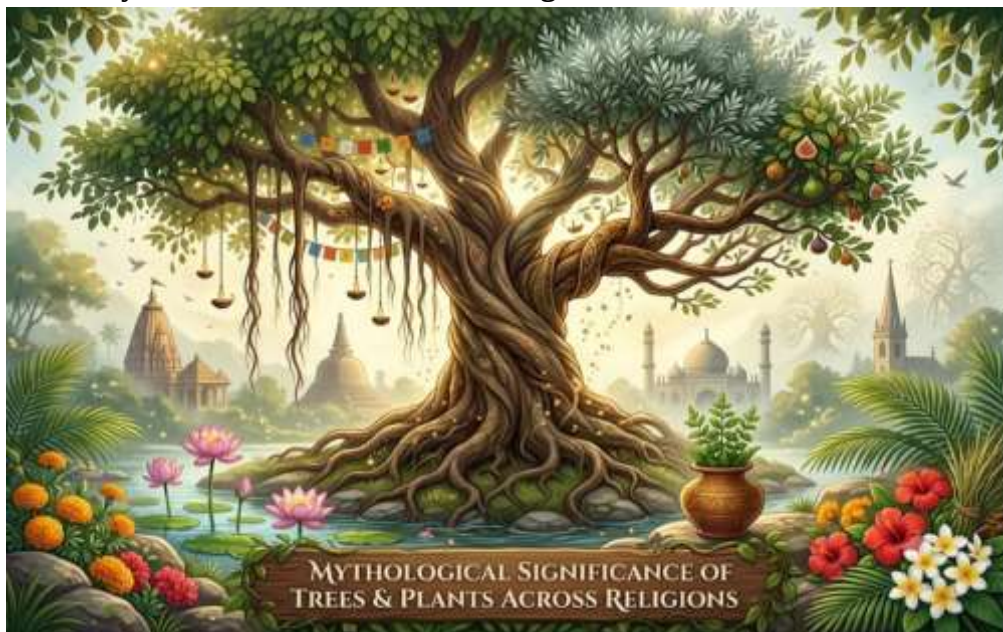


Figure 3

4.1. Hinduism: Plants, Divinity, and Devotional Practice

In Hindu traditions, plants and trees acquire religious significance through associations with deities, scriptural narratives, and devotional practices. Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) is closely associated with Vishnu and Krishna, while the Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) and Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) feature in religious narratives and rituals. The lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is associated with deities such as Lakshmi and Brahma and may represent auspiciousness, beauty, and creation. These plants connect religious belief with everyday practices, particularly domestic worship and ritual offerings. Their significance, however, varies across textual and cultural contexts. Fowler-Smith's (2018) study of sacred trees in India provides a useful perspective on how worship, adornment, and community practices contribute to the recognition of trees as sacred. These traditions offer a basis for examining relationships between religious symbolism and the natural world, although their ecological effects require separate investigation.

TABLE 1

Plant / Flower / Tree	Deities / Context	Religious & Ritual Significance
Peepal / Sacred Fig (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)	Lord Vishnu, Trimurti	Worshipped for longevity and spiritual wisdom; cutting it is traditionally forbidden.
Tulsi / Holy Basil (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)	Goddess Lakshmi / Lord Vishnu	Considered an incarnation of the divine; grown in households for daily prayers and environmental purification.
Lotus (<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i>)	Goddess Lakshmi, Lord Brahma	Symbolizes spiritual enlightenment and detachment—rising unblemished from muddy waters.
Banyan Tree (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>)	Lord Shiva, Vat Savitri	Represents eternal life and immortality due to its expanding aerial roots.

MOST SACRED TREES IN HINDUISM AT A GLANCE				
TREE	ASSOCIATED DEITY	SYMBOLISM	COMMON WORSHIP & PRACTICES	
 PEEPAL (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)	 Lord Vishnu	 • Symbol of life and eternity • Abode of divine presence • Knowledge and spiritual awakening • Represents the three worlds	 • Circumambulate the tree • Offer water and milk • Light a lamp • Pray for health, prosperity and liberation	
 BANYAN (<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>)	 Lord Shiva	 • Symbol of immortality and longevity • Stability and strength • Shelter and protection • Represents creation, preservation and renewal	 • Circumambulate the tree • Tie a sacred thread • Offer water and flowers • Pray for a long and healthy life • Observed especially in Vat Savitri Puja	
 NEEM (<i>Azadirachta indica</i>)	 Goddess Durga	 • Purity and protection • Health, healing and disease removal • Ward off negative energies • Represents divine mother's protective power	 • Offer leaves and flowers • Used in rituals and purification • Worship during Navratri • Keep neem leaves at home for protection and health	
 TULSI (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)	 Lord Vishnu (Krishna)	 • Purity and devotion • Love, compassion and surrender • Brings peace and harmony • Considered very sacred and a form of Goddess Lakshmi	 • Daily worship with water and a lamp • Offer leaves in prayers • Tulsi Vivah (ceremonial marriage) in Kartik month • Keep Tulsi plant at home for prosperity and well-being	
 BILVA (<i>Aegle marmelos</i>)	 Lord Shiva	 • Trifoliate leaves represent the three qualities (sattva, rajas, tamas) • Removal of sins • Auspiciousness and spiritual power • Symbol of purity and devotion	 • Offer Bilva leaves to Shiva • Used in Shiva Puja and Abhisheka • Offer water, flowers and Bilva leaves • Believed to bring blessings, protection and liberation	

Figure 4

4.2. Buddhism: Trees, Awakening, and Religious Memory

Trees and plants are important in Buddhism because of their association with the Buddha's life and teachings. Plant life is intrinsically linked to key milestones in the life of Gautama Buddha and Buddhist philosophy.

- **Bodhi Tree** (*Ficus religiosa*): The tree under which Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. It symbolizes awakening, wisdom, and final liberation.
- **Lotus Flower**: A fundamental symbol across all Buddhist traditions (e.g., the *Lotus Sutra*). Different lotus colors hold distinct spiritual meanings:
 1. White: Purity of mind and spiritual perfection.
 2. Red: Compassion and love (*Avalokiteshvara*).

3. Pink: The supreme lotus, reserved for the Buddha.
- Sal Tree (*Shorea robusta*): Associated with both the birth and *Parinirvana* (death/final liberation) of the Buddha



Figure 5

In Buddhism, the Bodhi tree primarily recalls the Buddha's awakening and provides a material focus for religious remembrance. Its significance connects sacred place, historical memory, and collective identity.

4.3. Jainism: Plant Life and Non-violence

Jainism holds a unique and rigorous perspective on plant life, deeply rooted in its core philosophy of Ahimsa (non-violence) and the classification of living beings.

- **Botanical Life as Sentient Beings (*Vanaspati-kāya*)** - In Jain metaphysics, living souls (*jīva*) are categorized based on their level of sensory development. Plants, trees, and flowers are classified as *Vanaspati-kāya*—one-sensed living beings (*ekendriya*).
- 1. **Touch Consciousness:** Though they cannot move, speak, or express pain visibly, plants possess the sense of touch and experience life, growth, injury, and death.
- 2. **Ethical Treatment:** Because they possess life, Jainism mandates minimizing harm to plants. Uprooting, cutting, or destroying plant life unnecessarily incurs negative karmic consequences (*pāpa*).
- **Fasting, Penance, and Plant-Based Diets** - The principle of non-violence directly shapes how Jains interact with flora in their daily religious practice:
- 1. **Strict Vegetarianism & Veganism:** Jains practice a strict plant-based diet to minimize violence against living creatures.



Figure 6

2. **Avoidance of Root Vegetables:** Consuming root vegetables (like potatoes, onions, garlic, and carrots) is strictly forbidden for devout Jains. Pulling up a root destroys the entire plant (killing a multi-sensed or complex ecosystem of lower life forms) and harms the single-sensed bulb itself, which is believed to house countless microscopic organisms (*anantākāya*).
3. **Green Leafy Fasting Restrictions:** During holy periods like *Paryushan*, monks, nuns, and devout practitioners often restrict the consumption of green leafy vegetables due to the higher concentration of microscopic life they contain and the risk of accidental harm.



Figure 7

- **Sacred Trees and Tirthankara Associations** - Most of the 24 Tirthankaras (spiritual teachers and ford-makers) attained supreme enlightenment (*Kevala Jnana*) while meditating under specific sacred trees. These trees are revered as symbols of ultimate spiritual awakening and are often protected around Jain temples:
- **Ashoka Tree:** Associated with Lord Mahavira and several other Tirthankaras.
- **Banyan, Sal, and Pipal Trees:** Frequently featured in temple art and iconography as the sites where divine wisdom was realized.

4.4. Christianity: Biblical Narratives and Plant Symbolism



Figure 8

Christian traditions incorporate plants and trees into biblical narratives concerning creation, moral choice, renewal, and eternal life. The Tree of Life and the tree associated with the knowledge of good and evil appear in Genesis 2–3, while the Tree of Life reappears in Revelation 22 in connection with restored life and renewed creation. Plant imagery also communicates theological ideas through parables. In Matthew 13:31–32, the mustard seed illustrates the kingdom of heaven through growth from a small beginning. The olive leaf brought by the dove in Genesis 8:11 has subsequently become associated with peace and reconciliation. These examples demonstrate the importance of plants in biblical storytelling and Christian interpretation. Nevertheless, scriptural symbolism alone does not establish particular environmental practices or conservation outcomes.

Flora features prominently in biblical narratives, parables, and Christian symbolism.

- **Olive Tree & Branch:** Symbolizes peace, reconciliation, and God's covenant with humanity (e.g., the dove returning to Noah's Ark; Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane).
- **The Tree of Life & Tree of Knowledge:** Central to the creation narrative in Genesis, representing eternal life and moral choice/discernment. Appears in the biblical Garden of Eden and in the Book of Revelation, symbolizing eternal life.
- **Rose & Lily:**
 1. **White Lily:** Symbolizes purity, innocence, and the Virgin Mary (often featured in Annunciation artwork).
 2. **Rose (Mystic Rose):** Associated with the Virgin Mary and divine love; the thorns represent the passion and sacrifice of Christ.
- **Mustard Seed:** Used in Jesus' parables to illustrate how immense faith can grow from small beginnings/ power of faith.

4.5. Judaism: Plants, Land, and Religious Obligation

The Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition emphasize environmental stewardship (*Tikkun Olam*—repairing the world) through botanical metaphors and agricultural laws. Jewish traditions connect plants with agriculture, nourishment, land, and religious observance. Deuteronomy 8:8 mentions wheat, barley, grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, and date honey, reflecting the agricultural significance of the land. Tu BiShvat, commonly known as the New Year for Trees, connects trees and fruit with religious and cultural practices. The Four Species used during Sukkot provide another example of plants incorporated into ritual observance. These traditions demonstrate how botanical life connects scriptural representation with material sustenance and seasonal cycles. Their relationship with environmental responsibility requires examination of specific religious teachings, historical developments, and contemporary practices.

- **Seven Species (Shivat HaMinim):** Wheat, barley, grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and date palms—blessed crops intrinsic to the Land of Israel and celebrated during harvest festivals.
- **Etrog (Citron) & Willow/Myrtle/Palm Branch:** Used together in the ritual of the Four Species during the holiday of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles).
- **Tu BiShvat:** The "New Year for Trees," a holiday dedicated to planting trees, environmental protection, and ecological awareness
- **Cedar of Lebanon:** Its strong timber was used in the construction of Solomon's Temple and is associated with strength and majesty



Figure 9

4.6. Islam: Plants as Signs of Creation and Sustenance

In Islam, plants and fruits appear in the Qur'an in discussions of divine creation, provision, and reflection. Qur'an 95:1 refers to the fig and olive, while Qur'an 16:11 mentions crops, olives, date palms, grapes, and other fruits. Qur'an 19:23–26 describes the date palm in the narrative of Maryam. Dates have considerable practical and cultural significance across Muslim communities and are commonly used to break the fast during Ramadan. Qur'anic descriptions of gardens, shade, fruits, and flowing water also contribute to representations of Paradise. These examples demonstrate how plants acquire significance through scripture, nourishment, and religious practice. However, theological representations of nature must be distinguished from evidence of contemporary environmental behaviour.



Figure 10

Nature in Islamic theology is viewed as a collection of signs (Ayat) pointing to the Creator

- Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*): Highly revered in Islamic tradition, mentioned numerous times in the Quran. Symbolizes sustenance, resilience, and righteousness. Dates are traditionally eaten to break the fast during Ramadan following the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Olive & Fig: Explicitly sworn upon in the Quran (Surah At-Tin), signifying their immense sacred, nutritional, and medicinal value.
- Pomegranate: Mentioned as one of the fruits found in the gardens of Paradise (Jannah), representing abundance and divine blessing.
- Gardens of Paradise (Jannat): Lush greenery, shade, and flowing water represent the ultimate spiritual reward and divine harmony

4.7. Significance of trees & plants in Shintoism

In Shinto traditions, sacred trees, known as *shinboku*, may be associated with *kami* and sacred territory. Some are marked by a *shimenawa*, a sacred rope that distinguishes the tree or its surroundings as a special place. The *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, published by Kokugakuin University, documents the role of sacred trees and groves within shrine settings. The significance of these trees depends on their location, historical associations, and recognition within the religious community. Sacred trees may also be relevant to conservation when their religious status contributes to their protection. Nevertheless, ecological benefits must be established through documented evidence rather than assumed from sacred status alone. In Shintoism, Japan's indigenous spiritual tradition, plants and trees hold a supreme religious position. Shinto is fundamentally an animistic faith centered on the veneration of Kami—divine spirits or forces of nature that inhabit both physical landscapes and natural objects,

- **Sacred Trees (Shinboku) as Homes for the Divine - In Shinto belief, ancient and magnificent trees are not merely symbolic; they are physical residences (yorishiro) or conduits for Kami.**
1. Shinboku (神木): Trees designated as sacred are known as Shinboku. They are often centuries old, extremely large, or uniquely shaped.

2. Shimenawa Identification: These trees are wrapped with a Shimenawa—a sacred woven rice-straw rope adorned with zig-zag white paper streamers called Shide. This marks the tree as a consecrated space inhabited by a deity and warns visitors to approach with respect.
3. Kodama: Spirits believed to dwell inside old trees. Harm done to a sacred tree is thought to bring bad fortune or anger the spirit.

• **Key Plants and Trees in Shinto Rituals -**

1. Sakaki (Cleyera japonica): The single most sacred plant in Shintoism. As an evergreen, it symbolizes eternity, life force, and spiritual purity. Branches of Sakaki (Tamagushi) decorated with shide streamers are presented as formal offerings to the Kami during ceremonies, weddings, and shrine visits. Planted around shrine borders to create a sacred boundary (ketsu-kai) separating the human realm from the divine realm.
2. Cedar (Sugi) and Cypress (Hinoki): Revered for their impressive height, longevity, and straight growth, reaching toward the heavens. Ancient Sugi trees frequently surround inner shrine sanctums. Hinoki wood is considered spiritually pure and is traditionally used to construct sacred Shinto structures, including the grand Ise Jingu shrine.
3. Cherry Blossom (Sakura): Associated with Konohanasakuya-hime, the Shinto goddess of Mount Fuji and all blossom life. Symbolizes the beauty and impermanence (mono no aware) of life, renewal, and the fleeting nature of divine blessings.
4. Pine (Matsu): Symbolizes longevity, endurance, and good fortune because it remains green throughout harsh winters. During the Japanese New Year, pine and bamboo arrangements (Kadomatsu) are placed outside homes to welcome the Toshigami (New Year Kami).
5. Bamboo (Take): Celebrated for its rapid growth, flexibility, and strength. Used in Shinto purification rituals (Harae) and to outline sacred boundaries during groundbreaking ceremonies (Jichinsai).

• **Sacred Groves (Chinju no Mori)**

- Shinto shrines are traditionally built within or surrounded by dense forest groves called Chinju no Mori (guardian shrine forests).
- These forests act as a natural buffer between the sacred realm of the shrine and the secular outside world.
- They are protected against logging and development, serving as ancient ecological preserves that maintain local biodiversity and preserve virgin forests across Japan.



Figure 11

- Purification and Environmental Stewardship - Shinto philosophy views nature as inherently clean and divine, while human pollution or destruction of natural life causes spiritual impurity (Kegare).

Respecting trees and plants is directly tied to maintaining harmony (Wa) between humanity, nature, and the divine realm.



Figure 12

4.8. Celtic and Norse Traditions: Trees and Cosmology

In discussions of Celtic traditions, the oak is frequently associated with sacred power and druids. However, evidence concerning ancient Celtic religious practices is uneven, requiring careful interpretation of historical accounts and later scholarship. Norse mythology provides a prominent cosmological example in Yggdrasil, the world tree associated with the gods, fate, and interconnected realms of existence. Murphy's (2013) study examines Yggdrasil in Norse and Germanic mythology and explores its later relationship with Christian imagery in northern Europe. These traditions demonstrate how trees can represent sacred authority and cosmological relationships. Celtic and Norse traditions should nevertheless be examined within their distinct historical and religious contexts rather than treated as a unified system.

- Oak tree: Associated with strength, wisdom and sacred power in Celtic traditions.
- Yggdrasil: The immense cosmic tree in Norse mythology connects different realms of existence.
- Mistletoe: Appears in the Norse myth of Baldr and became an important symbol in later European folklore.
- Sacred Tobacco & Sage (Native American Traditions): Used in smudging rituals for spiritual purification, prayers, and carrying intentions to the Great Spirit.

4.9. The Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith: The Mulberry Tree and Dayalbagh

The Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith provides an Indian example connecting trees with religious history and community identity. The establishment of Dayalbagh in Agra is associated with the planting of a mulberry tree by 5th revered Guru Huzur Sahabji Maharaj on Basant Day in 1915. The Dayalbagh mulberry tree is associated with the historical foundation of a religious settlement. It consequently offers a perspective on the relationship between plant life, collective memory, religious identity, and place. The event may also be interpreted in relation to growth, continuity, and collective endeavour, provided these meanings are identified as interpretations unless explicitly documented in Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi teachings. Dayalbagh's agricultural and land-development activities could further illuminate the relationship between spiritual

ideals and environmental engagement, but their ecological implications require evidence of specific practices and outcomes.

Spiritual Significance of Trees and Plants:

- Nature as Divine Creation: Trees and plants reflect the diversity, harmony, and renewal of creation, inspiring reverence for life and spiritual awareness
- Love and Compassion: Plants sustain humans, birds, insects, and other living beings. Protecting them expresses compassion and responsibility towards nature
- Humility and Selfless Service (Seva): Trees provide shade, fruits, flowers, and shelter without expectation of reward, symbolising selfless service and generosity
- Inner Growth and Spiritual Development: The growth of a plant from seed to a mature tree symbolises patience, discipline, and the gradual development of human consciousness

The Dayalbagh example therefore contributes to the article as a specific case of a tree associated with religious history and place. Its broader environmental significance should remain an open question for documentary or empirical investigation rather than a conclusion assumed in advance.

4.10 Comparative Perspective

Across these traditions, plants acquire religious significance through different relationships: devotion in Hinduism, awakening in Buddhism, non-violence in Jainism, biblical narratives in Christianity, agricultural obligations in Judaism, divine provision in Islam, sacred space in Shinto, cosmology in Celtic and Norse traditions, and historical memory in the Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith. These differences demonstrate that sacred plants cannot be understood through a single universal symbolism. Their potential contribution to environmental conservation must be assessed separately through documented religious practices and measurable ecological outcomes.

Table 2: Important Plants And Their Mythological Meanings		
Tree, plant or flower	Religious or mythological association	Symbolism
Lotus	Hinduism and Buddhism	Purity and enlightenment
Peepal	Hinduism and Buddhism	Wisdom and sacredness
Tulsi	Hinduism	Devotion and purity
Bodhi tree	Buddhism	Enlightenment
Olive tree	Judaism, Christianity and Islam	Peace and blessings
Date palm	Islamic tradition	Nourishment and divine blessings
Cedar	Jewish tradition and biblical history	Strength and majesty
Banyan	Hindu traditions	Longevity and immortality
Lily	Christianity	Purity
Yggdrasil	Norse mythology	Cosmic connection and life
Oak	Celtic traditions	Strength and wisdom
Pomegranate	Greek mythology and other traditions	Fertility, life and renewal

5. Plants In Religious Rituals, Offerings, And Festivals

Plants, flowers, leaves, and trees participate in religious life through offerings, festivals, sacred-site practices, and religious remembrance. Their significance emerges from scriptural narratives, ritual custo-

ms, and the traditions of particular communities.

5.1. Flowers, Leaves, and Offerings in Hindu Traditions

Hindu traditions associate specific plants with deities and devotional practices. Durva grass is offered to Ganesha, Bilva leaves to Shiva, Tulsi leaves to Vishnu and Krishna, and lotus flowers to Lakshmi and Brahma. Flowers such as hibiscus, jasmine, and marigold are also used in worship. Festivals and observances, including Vat Savitri Puja and Tulsi Vivah, demonstrate the importance of plants in religious life. Practices associated with the Peepal, Amla, Shami, and Bilva trees may include offering water and flowers, prayers, and circumambulation. These examples illustrate how plants connect devotion with every day and communal practices. However, ritual offerings and the veneration of trees represent distinct forms of religious engagement, and their meanings vary across communities.

TABLE 3

Sr. No.	God/Goddess	Sacred Flowers Offered	Sacred Leaves/Plants Offered	Religious or Mythological Significance
1	Lord Ganesha	Red Hibiscus, Marigold	Durva grass	Durva is considered especially sacred to Ganesha and symbolizes auspiciousness and devotion.
2	Lord Shiva	Dhatura, Aak flowers, White flowers	Bilva (Bel) leaves	Bilva leaves are among the most important offerings to Shiva. Dhatura is associated with Shiva in Hindu mythology.
3	Lord Vishnu	Lotus, Jasmine, Yellow flowers	Tulsi (Holy Basil)	Tulsi is sacred to Vishnu and symbolizes devotion and purity.
4	Goddess Lakshmi	Pink Lotus, Red Lotus, Marigold	Lotus plant	The lotus symbolizes wealth, beauty, purity and prosperity.
5	Goddess Saraswati	White Lotus, Jasmine, White flowers	White-flowering plants in some traditions	White flowers represent knowledge, peace, wisdom and purity.
6	Goddess Durga	Red Hibiscus, Red Roses, Marigold	Bel leaves in certain traditions	Red flowers symbolize Shakti, courage and divine feminine power.
7	Goddess Kali	Red Hibiscus	Offerings vary by regional tradition	The red hibiscus symbolizes power, energy and the fierce protective aspect of the goddess.
8	Lord Krishna	Kadamba flowers, Jasmine	Tulsi leaves	Tulsi is closely associated with Krishna worship. The Kadamba tree features in stories of Krishna's childhood and divine pastimes.

TABLE 3

Sr. No.	God/Goddess	Sacred Flowers Offered	Sacred Leaves/Plants Offered	Religious or Mythological Significance
9	Lord Rama	Jasmine, Lotus	Tulsi leaves	Tulsi and flowers are offered as expressions of love, faith and devotion to Lord Rama.
10	Lord Hanuman	Jasmine, Marigold	Aak leaves in some regional traditions	Flowers and leaves are offered to express strength, courage, loyalty and devotion.
11	Lord Surya (Sun God)	Red Lotus, Red flowers	Arka (Aak) leaves in certain rituals	The lotus symbolizes vitality, light and the life-giving power of the Sun.
12	Lord Brahma	Lotus	Lotus plant	According to Hindu mythology, Brahma emerged from a lotus growing from Lord Vishnu's navel. The lotus symbolizes creation.
13	Lord Kartikeya (Murugan)	Red flowers, Kadamba flowers in some traditions	Regional offerings vary	The Kadamba tree and flowers are associated with Murugan in some Tamil traditions.
14	Lord Dattatreya	Flowers such as Jasmine and Marigold	Audumbar (Cluster Fig) tree	The Audumbar tree is considered sacred in Dattatreya traditions and symbolizes spiritual blessings.

Note: These are common traditional associations, not universal rules. Offerings may differ according to regional customs, temples, festivals and family traditions.

Interesting Mythological Beliefs About Flowers-

- **Lotus and creation:** The lotus emerging from Vishnu's navel is associated with the birth of Brahma and the creation of the universe.
- **Tulsi and Vishnu:** Hindu tradition identifies Tulsi with the sacred figure of Vrinda and establishes a special devotional relationship between Tulsi and Vishnu.
- **Bilva and Shiva:** The three leaflets of Bilvapatra are especially important in Shiva worship and are interpreted symbolically in different traditions.
- **Ketaki and Shiva:** A well-known story explains why the Ketaki flower is traditionally excluded from Shiva worship in many communities.

These stories illustrate how plants became important symbols in religious mythology and ritual practice. Trees and plants hold great religious and mythological significance across different cultures. Many religious festivals and rituals involve worshipping sacred trees, offering flowers and leaves, lighting

lamps, tying sacred threads and performing circumambulation. These practices express devotion, gratitude, respect for nature and faith in divine blessings.

TABLE 4

Sr. No.	Tree/Plant	Religion	Ritual/Festival	Rituals and Practices	Religious or Mythological Significance
1	Banyan Tree (Vat Vriksha)	Hinduism	Vat Savitri Puja / Vat Purnima	Married women offer water, flowers and prayers, tie sacred threads around the tree and perform circumambulation.	Associated with Savitri and Satyavan; symbolizes marital devotion, longevity and the long life of one's husband.
2	Peepal Tree	Hinduism	Peepal Tree Worship	Devotees offer water, light lamps and circumambulate the tree on auspicious days.	Considered sacred and associated with divine presence, wisdom and spiritual growth.
3	Tulsi (Holy Basil)	Hinduism	Tulsi Vivah	The Tulsi plant is decorated and ceremonially married to Lord Vishnu or his form Shaligram. Flowers, lamps and prayers are offered.	Symbolizes devotion, purity and auspiciousness; associated with Tulsi or Vrinda in Hindu mythology.
4	Amla Tree (Indian Gooseberry)	Hinduism	Amla Navami / Akshaya Navami	Devotees worship the tree, offer water and flowers, and in some regions perform circumambulation and eat meals beneath it.	Associated with health, prosperity and blessings in regional religious traditions.
5	Shami Tree	Hinduism	Dussehra / Vijayadashami	Devotees worship the tree and, in some regions, exchange Shami leaves as symbolic gold.	Associated with the Pandavas' hidden weapons in popular traditions; symbolizes victory, courage and prosperity.
6	Bilva Tree	Hinduism	Maha Shivaratri and Shravan Puja	Devotees offer Bilva leaves to Lord Shiva and may worship the tree itself.	The sacred three-leaf cluster is especially important in Shiva worship and symbolizes devotion and divine grace.

TABLE 4

Sr. No.	Tree/Plant	Religion	Ritual/Festival	Rituals and Practices	Religious or Mythological Significance
7	Bodhi Tree	Buddhism	Bodhi Tree Veneration	Devotees offer flowers, lamps and water, meditate and pay respects near the tree.	Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment beneath a Bodhi tree; it symbolizes wisdom and spiritual awakening.
8	Ber Trees	Sikhism	Reverence at Historic Sikh Shrines	Historic Ber trees at Sikh shrines are preserved and respected by devotees.	Associated with Sikh history and the lives of the Gurus; represents historical memory and spiritual heritage rather than tree worship.
9	Sakaki Tree	Shintoism (Japan)	Shinto Shrine Rituals	Branches may be offered at shrines during ceremonies and festivals. Sacred trees may be marked with a special rope called <i>shimenawa</i> .	Represents the sacredness of nature and its connection with <i>kami</i> , or sacred spirits and powers.
10	Olive Tree	Judaism and Christianity	Religious and Cultural Observances	Olive branches and leaves appear in religious symbolism, art and certain ceremonial contexts.	Symbolizes peace, hope and reconciliation, especially in the biblical story of Noah.
11	Date Palm	Islam	Ramadan and Islamic Traditions	Dates are commonly eaten to break the fast during Ramadan.	Dates are associated with nourishment and blessings; the Quran also mentions the date palm in the story of Maryam (Mary).
12	Oak Tree	Celtic Traditions	Traditional Sacred-Grove Practices	Oak trees and sacred groves held ceremonial importance in some ancient Celtic communities.	Associated with strength, endurance and sacred power. Details of ancient rituals are not fully documented.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the religious, cultural, and spiritual significance of plants across Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shinto, and Celtic and Norse traditions, with particular reference to the Ra-dha-sva-aa-mi Faith and Dayalbagh. The findings demonstrate that trees, plants, and

flowers acquire meaning through religious narratives, ritual practices, theological beliefs, and community traditions. They represent diverse ideas, including divine presence, spiritual awakening, purity, renewal, wisdom, and the relationship between humanity and the sacred.

Religious rituals and festivals illustrate these relationships in different ways. Hindu observances such as Vat Savitri Puja and the worship of sacred plants connect botanical life with devotion and customary practice. The Bodhi tree in Buddhism recalls the Buddha's enlightenment, while sacred trees in Shinto are associated with religious presence and sacred spaces. Jain **ahimsā** emphasizes ethical consideration of living beings, whereas Jewish and Islamic traditions connect plants with agriculture, nourishment, and religious observances. Celtic and Norse traditions further demonstrate the cosmological significance of trees. Although these traditions share certain themes, their theological interpretations and ritual practices remain distinct.

The study also highlights the relationship between plants, community identity, and religious history. The mulberry tree associated with the establishment of Dayalbagh in 1915 provides a specific example of how a tree can become connected with the history and collective memory of a religious community. Its significance illustrates the importance of examining sacred plants within their particular historical and cultural contexts rather than assuming that their meanings are universal.

In contemporary society, sacred plant traditions offer valuable perspectives for discussions of environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, and respect for living organisms. Sacred groves in India demonstrate how religious beliefs, customary practices, and community participation may contribute to the preservation of vegetation and wildlife. However, religious reverence does not automatically guarantee environmental protection. Ecological outcomes depend on actual practices, community institutions, land-use conditions, and other contextual factors. The relationship between religious symbolism and environmental responsibility must therefore be established through appropriate historical, social, and ecological evidence.

The contribution of this study lies in its comparative framework, which examines religious representation, ritual practice, cultural identity, and environmental implications while recognizing both shared themes and tradition-specific meanings. It demonstrates that studying sacred plants can deepen our understanding of how nature has shaped religious thought and human culture. Further research combining textual analysis, historical documentation, fieldwork, and ecological assessment could clarify how religious beliefs influence environmental practices. Ultimately, sacred plant traditions provide important cultural and spiritual resources for reflecting on humanity's relationship with nature, while reminding us that environmental responsibility requires both meaningful values and demonstrable action.

7. References

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