

Chapter 4

Plants used in the rituals of weddings in India

Subodh Kumar Kandari¹, Manoj Kumar Pradhan² Puja Dey³, Saraswati Majhi⁴, Bidhan Chandra Roy⁵ and Nibedita Jena^{6*}

¹Department of Botany, Omkarananda Sarashwati Government Degree College, Devprayag Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India

²Panchayat Samiti Higher Secondary School, Barkote, Deogarh, Odisha, India

³Resonance Senior Secondary School, Dhekiajuli, Assam, India

⁴P.G. Department of Botany, Shailabala Women's Autonomous College, Cuttack (affiliated to Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar), Odisha, India

⁵Department of Botany, Dinabandhu Mahavidyalaya, Bongaon, West Bengal, India

⁶Ambika Prasad Research Foundation, Odisha, India

*Email-id: nibeditajena838@gmail.com



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Abstract: Plants play an important role in Indian wedding rituals, reflecting the rich ethnobotanical traditions of India. Species such as *Curcuma longa*, *Mangifera indica*, *Oryza sativa* and *Areca catechu* are commonly used in ceremonies for purification, blessings, decoration and symbolic offerings. The plants represent values such as prosperity, fertility, protection and the sacred union of the couple. They are used in ceremonies such as garland exchange, ritual purification, blessings, decorative arrangements and offerings to deities. The continued use of these plants highlights the close relationship between cultural traditions and botanical resources in Indian society. This chapter highlights selected plants used in Indian wedding rituals along with their cultural significance, emphasizing the importance of preserving traditional ethnobotanical knowledge.

Keywords: Botanical resources, cultural traditions, sacred union, symbolic offerings

Introduction

Plants have been a vital part of human culture, traditions and religious practices for centuries (Chhetri *et al.*, 2020). In India, where rituals and customs are woven into the fabric of social life, plants hold a special place in various ceremonies and festivals (Abraham, 2015). For instance, marriage; it's one of the most significant social institutions, celebrated with a series of

rituals that symbolize purity, prosperity, fertility and the sacred bond between two individuals and their families (Kartal, 2025). Many of these rituals incorporate specific plant species, chosen not just for their availability but also for their cultural, symbolic and spiritual meanings (Menaka *et al.*, 2025). Throughout different regions and communities in India, there is a rich variety of plants like turmeric, mango, rice, betel leaf, marigold and jasmine being used in wedding ceremonies (Rajanala and Vashi, 2018). These plants play an important role in rituals such as the Haldi ceremony, the exchange of garlands, blessings from elders and the beautiful decorations of the wedding mandap (Gopinath and Karthikeyan, 2018). Beyond their symbolic significance, many of these plants are thought to have purifying, protective and auspicious qualities that help ensure a harmonious and prosperous married life for the couple (Chandra, 2022). The use of plants in weddings beautifully illustrates the deep connection between traditional knowledge and the natural world. The exploration of plants in cultural practices is part of ethnobotany, a field that looks at how people and plants interact in traditional societies (Aziz *et al.*, 2019; Tudu and Kandir, 2020). Documenting these practices is crucial for preserving the indigenous knowledge that has been passed down through generations. This chapter delves into selected plant species commonly found in Indian wedding rituals, showcasing their botanical identity, cultural significance and ceremonial roles across India.

Methodology

A comprehensive survey with thorough literature review and field documentation served as the foundation for the qualitative methodology used in this study. Books, ethnobotanical records, published research articles and reliable internet databases were consulted to gather pertinent data on the plants used in Indian wedding customs. To guarantee the precision and legitimacy of the documented species, botanical identification was verified using standard floras and taxonomic references (Sahu *et al.*, 2026).

Results and discussion

The present study recorded a total of 23 plant species from 18 different families that have been identified for playing a significant role in wedding rituals throughout various regions of India (Table 1; Plate 1). Among these families, Poaceae stands out as the most prominent, featuring species like *Cynodon dactylon*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Eleusine coracana* and *Oryza sativa* (Figure 1). The plants documented range from herbs and trees to grasses and flowering ornamentals, with various parts such as leaves,

flowers, fruits, seeds and rhizomes being used in different wedding ceremonies (Tudu and Kandir, 2020).

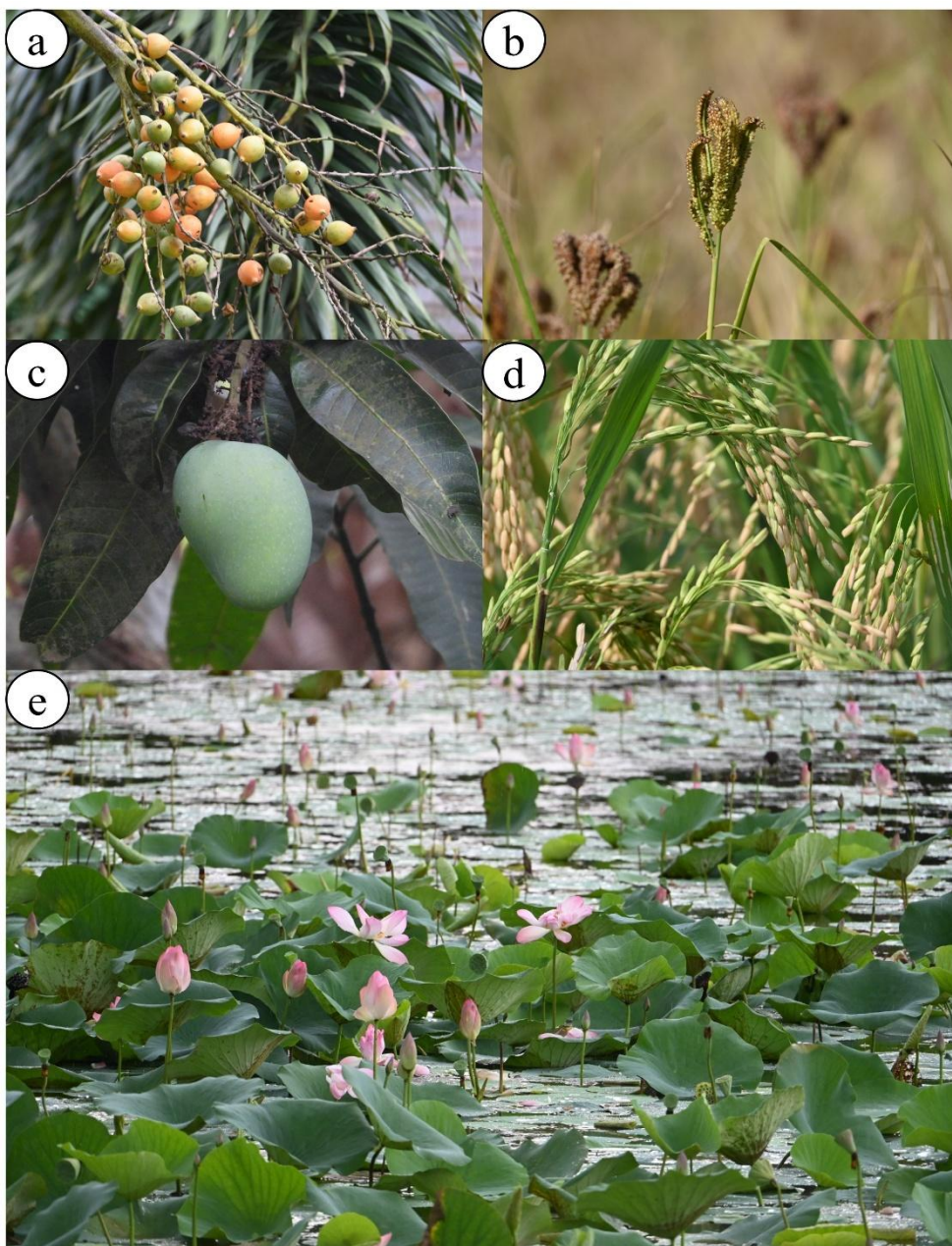


Plate 1: Plants used in wedding rituals; (a) *Areca catechu*, (b) *Eleusine coracana*, (c) *Mangifera indica*, (d) *Oryza sativa* and (e) *Nelumbo nucifera*

The current study revealed that these plants carry deep cultural and symbolic significance in marriage rituals. For instance, *Curcuma longa* and *Lawsonia inermis* are often utilized in purification and beautification ceremonies, while grains of *Oryza sativa* are showered on the couple as blessings for prosperity and abundance. Flowers like *Tagetes erecta*, *Rosa indica* and *Jasminum sambac* are commonly crafted into garlands and decorations, symbolizing joy, love and good fortune. Additionally, sacred plants such as *Ocimum tenuiflorum* and *Ficus religiosa* are linked to divine blessings, while *Mangifera indica* and *Musa × paradisiaca* are used to adorn the wedding venue (Sharma and Sharma, 2025). These traditions beautifully illustrate the strong connection between cultural practices and plant resources in India. The ongoing use of these plants in wedding rituals serves as a testament to the preservation of traditional ethnobotanical knowledge that has been passed down through generations.

Table 1: Traditional plants used in various rituals of weddings in India

Botanical name	Common name	Family	Significance or uses	Source(s)
<i>Areca catechu</i> L.	Betel palm (E)	Arecaceae	The exchange of nuts and leaves between the families symbolizes the finalization of the marriage, a commitment and a pledge of loyalty.	Ahuja and Ahuja, (2011)
<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> Lam.	Jackfruit (E)	Moraceae	The timber of the jackfruit plant is used for making khasi musical drums, which are used in a marriage ceremony. On the wedding day, the groom comes to the bride's house together with his uncles and other male	Nongbri et al., (2017)

			relatives, accompanied by the beating of drums and blowing of 'Tangmuri'- a Khasi traditional flute.	
<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A.Juss.	Neem (H)	Meliaceae	The bride's sister sprinkles water on the groom with a neem twig to ward off the evil eye and spirits. In some cases, a girl is married to a neem tree first to transfer any potential bad luck to the tree.	Raikwar <i>et al.</i> , (2025)
<i>Bambusa balcooa</i> Roxb.	Balka bans (H)	Poaceae	The culm is used for making winnowing trays known as 'Prah', which is used during naming and marriage ceremonies.	Nongbri <i>et al.</i> , (2017)
<i>Brassica rapa</i> L.	Turnip (E)	Brassicaceae	Mustard oil is used during a marriage ceremony. The mother of the bride blesses the couple by applying mustard oil on the head.	Nongbri <i>et al.</i> , (2017)
<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Turmeric (E)	Zingiberaceae	In Indian culture, applying turmeric paste	Verma <i>et al.</i> , (2016)

			in the haldi ceremony is a ritualistic cleansing of the bride and groom's mind, body and soul before they enter holy matrimony.	
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	Durba (H)	Poaceae	It is a mandatory component of the worship of Lord Ganesha, often in a set of 21 tender shoots, to remove obstacles from the couple's new life.	Sarma and Devi, (2015)
<i>Desmostachya bipinnata</i> (L.) Stapf	Kush (H)	Poaceae	Blades of this grass are used for making pavitram (rings) worn by the bride and groom for sprinkling holy water. It is laid on the ground where the couple sits for the 'homa', ensuring steadiness and purity, as noted in the Bhagavad Gita for meditation.	Prasad, (2022); Murugan <i>et al.</i> , (2025)
<i>Eleusine coracana</i> (L.) Gaertn.	Finger millet (E)	Poaceae	In parts of South India, offering millet grains as a wedding gift to the groom	Yadav <i>et al.</i> , (2024); Ankita and Seth, (2025)

			is a traditional custom. In certain tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh, ragi flour is mixed with turmeric to create a ceremonial paste, which is applied to the bodies of the bride and groom as part of the pre-wedding purification rituals.	
<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Peepal (S)	Moraceae	Traditionally, couples or women circle the tree seven times to invoke blessings for a long, healthy and fruitful married life.	Venkatesan, (2021)
<i>Jasminum multiflorum</i> (Burm.f.) Andrews	Star jasmine (E)	Oleaceae	The flowers are used in wedding garlands, specifically in the northeastern part of India, like Manipur, considering them for unconditional love and purity.	Lakshmi and Ganga, (2017)
<i>Jasminum sambac</i> (L.) Aiton	Arabian jasmine (E)	Oleaceae	Jasmine, often paired with roses or tuberose, is used in the	Shah <i>et al.</i> , (2024).

			exchange of garlands, symbolizing the union of the couple.	
<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.	Henna (E)	Lythraceae	Mehndi is considered a shagun representing the bond of matrimony. It is a core part of the solah shringar mentioned in ancient texts.	Bedaprabha <i>et al.</i> , (2025)
<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Mango (E)	Anacardiaceae	Mango leaves are placed in a water-filled pot with a coconut on top, symbolizing abundance and the presence of Goddess Lakshmi, crucial for wedding ceremonies.	Khandare, (2016)
<i>Musa × paradisiaca</i> L.	Banana (E)	Musaceae	The wedding mandap is decorated with banana plants to create a sacred, auspicious and green environment. In some traditional beliefs, if a person has a “mangalya dosha” in their horoscope, they may be required to	Pushpangad an <i>et al.</i> , (1989)

			marry a banana tree first to neutralize its negative effects.	
<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Indian lotus (E)	Nelumbonaceae	Lotus flowers and petals are used in pre-wedding and wedding-day prayers, particularly in Lakshmi puja, to invoke the goddess of wealth and prosperity for the newlywed couple.	Rao and Sampath, (2025)
<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i> L.	Tulsi (H)	Lamiaceae	In specific regions like Kerala and Karnataka may wear Tulsi garlands, and the leaves are indispensable in the wedding feast offerings.	Bhamra <i>et al.</i> , (2022)
<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	Asian rice (E)	Poaceae	Unbroken rice grains mixed with turmeric or vermilion are showered upon the bride and groom by elders and guests during the wedding ceremony.	Verma <i>et al.</i> , (2025)
<i>Piper betle</i> L.	Paan (H)	Piperaceae	The exchange of betel leaves and Areca nuts is used to finalize	Ahuja and Ahuja, (2011)

			marriage alliances.	
<i>Rosa indica</i> L.	Desi gulab (H)	Rosaceae	Roses are the primary choice for the varmala, pushpa varsha and used in shola shringar during wedding ceremonies. Rose essence is traditionally used to flavour wedding delicacies and beverages like shahi tukda and sherbet.	Chandra, (2022)
<i>Tagetes erecta</i> L.	African marigold (E)	Asteraceae	The flower is a cornerstone of Indian wedding rituals, symbolizing auspiciousness, joy and divine presence.	Raihandhan y and Kurniawan, (2023)
<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> Lam.	Indian jujube (E)	Rhamnaceae	Leaves and wood are sometimes included in the hawan rituals performed during the wedding to purify the surroundings.	Shahid and Shinwari, (2017).

(E: English; H: Hindi; S: Sanskrit)

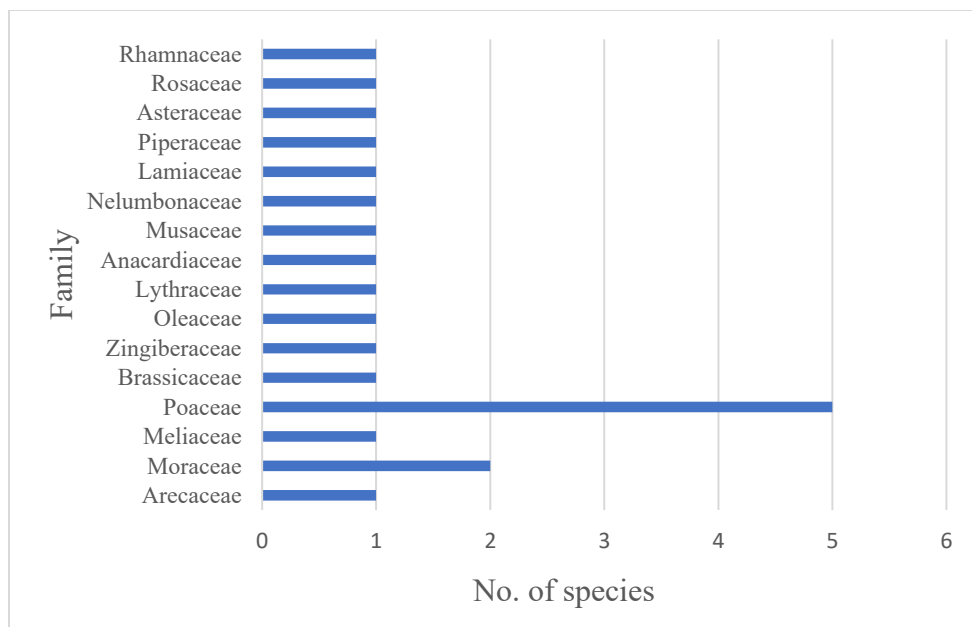


Figure 1: Wedding ritual plants belong to different families

Conclusion

Plants hold a special place in Indian wedding ceremonies, representing purity, prosperity, fertility and new beginnings. The various species used in these rituals highlight the strong bond between cultural traditions and the plant life that surrounds us in Indian society. It is crucial to preserve this ethnobotanical knowledge to keep our traditional practices and cultural heritage alive.

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