

## Brahma Kamal: A Source of Livelihood in the Life of Locals of Kedarnath Shrine

**Abstract :** Brahma Kamal plays an important role in the life of local community of Kedarnath shrine. It is considered as extremely sacred flower in the Kedarnath valley. The Kedar Sabha has developed its own rules and regulations for the collection and picking of the sacred flowers from their natural habitat. In this regards, the socio-economic assessment of the species in Kedarnath valley was investigated. The total income of authorized shopkeepers was recorded as more than Rs. 45,000 in 2016. The income earned by the shopkeepers through the sale of Brahma Kamal inflorescences is an add-on to their personal annual income.

**Keywords:** Brahma Kamal, Kedarnath shrine, sacred flower, Kedar Sabha, socio-economic.

There are various stories behind the history of Kedarnath temple and the local community (Tirth Purohit Samaaj) of Kedarnath shrine<sup>1</sup>. Some stories say that the temple of Kedarnath was made by the Pandvas after the war of Kurukshetra while they were on a Yatra in search of Moksha<sup>2-4</sup>. The modern view of historians/ writers says that the Kedarnath temple was made in Katyuri style (Shaily), and Rahul Sankritayan wrote in his book that the temple was made sometimes in 900 A.D<sup>1, 5</sup>. Tirth Purohiths, also known as Brahmin of Kedarnath, are native to the region and performing all religious activities in Kedarnath temple since several generations<sup>1</sup>. Initially, the Brahmins of

Kedarnath shrine belonged to 360 families (360 Tirth Purohit Samaaj), but presently they are distributed in 34 villages and have grown to 1800 families of Purohit Samaaj according to Kedar Sabha (one of the oldest registered organisations of the Brahmins of Kedarnath shrine, Uttarakhand). Brahma Kamal (*Saussurea obvallata*) is extensively used to perform all religious activities in the Kedarnath temple including decoration of the deity/ Shivalingam. It is also offered as Prasad in the temple<sup>6-8</sup>. Due to these reasons, Brahma Kamal is considered as extremely sacred flower in the region<sup>9</sup>. Kedar Sabha has developed its own rules and regulations for the collection and picking of the sacred flowers from their natural habitat. Kedar Sabha routinely proposes a tender every year for the flower collection for sale to the pilgrims. The full information on Brahma Kamal tenders and the price realized for the period 1990-2016 in Kedarnath valley have been presented in Table 1.

Technically, Brahma Kamal is an endemic herb of the Himalaya and distributed between an altitude of 3,000-4,800 m above mean sea level. Traditionally, it is used by the locals of China, Tibet, and Indian Himalaya for the treatment of various diseases and disorders<sup>6-8</sup>. The local inhabitants of the valley also offer the garlands and flowers of this species at the time of worship at temples other than Kedarnath Shrine (Fig. 1). Brahma Kamal plays an important role in the life of local community of Kedarnath

**TABLE 1: Sale details of Brahma Kamal in Kedarnath from 1990-2016.**

SN	Year	Price/ Year (Rs.)	Name of the Village	Name of the Tender owner	Price of a single inflorescence (Rs.)
1	1990-92	500/-	Dungar	Mr. Bharoshi Trivedi	2/-
2	1993-94	500/-	Naura	Mr. Bhagwati Prasad	2/-
3	1995-96	2,500/-	Prakandi	Mr. Raja Ram Tangwan	5/-
4	1997-99	5,000/-	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	10/-
5	2000-02	8,000/-	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	10/-
6	2003-05	10,000/-	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	10/-
7	2006-08	12,000/-	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	10-15/-
8	2009-12	15,000/-	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	10-15/-
9	2013-15	Suspended due to natural disaster in 2013			
10	2016	18,000/	Rudrapur	Mr. Srawan Kumar Sharma	15/-

The journal is in the UGC approved list on broad subject category of Multidisciplinary, Science and Social Sciences.

shrine. Till date, no detailed account of socio-economic assessment of the species is available. The present communication is an attempt towards that assessment.

For the socio-economic assessment in relation to the use of Brahma Kamal, the survey was conducted during the period of flowering (August-September, 2016) in and around the Kedarnath Shrine. The data and information were collected from the locals as well as shopkeepers and sellers through interviews according to Dhyani<sup>10</sup> (2002) and other available earlier documents<sup>11</sup>. It was observed that the inflorescences of Brahma Kamal were used by the locals in two different forms: (1) collected from the field and sold by the authorized shopkeepers of Kedar Sabha in the form of garlands or single inflorescence and (2) dry bracts of Brahma Kamal in combination with other materials like Bhringeraj (*Eclipta prostrata*), Bel patra (*Aegle marmelos*), Bhasma (Ash), and Chandan (*Santalum album*). These are distributed every Teerth Purohiths of Kedarnath in the form of Prasad to devotees.

Approximately 1800 families of Teerth Purohiths from 34 villages are known to be living in the valley, and out of these, approximately 500 families are involved with Pooja-Paath (Karma-Kand) at the Kedarnath temple. It was found that approximately 200 inflorescences are collected yearly by every Purohit family for the worship of Lord Kedarnath. In 2016, it was observed that more than 3000 inflorescences were collected by the authorized shopkeepers in and around the Kedarnath shrine. Thus, a total of approximately 1,03,000 (200×500+3000) inflorescences were known to be collected by the locals of Kedarnath valley (Fig. 1). In 2015 and 2016, the cost of a single inflorescence of Brahma Kamal was recorded at Rs. 10-15, whereas the cost of a single garland was between Rs. 121-151. Therefore, in 2016 the total income of authorized shopkeepers was recorded as more than Rs. 45,000 and the price of tender was Rs. 18,000. The income earned by the shopkeepers through the sale of Brahma Kamal inflorescences is an add-on to their personal annual income. Selling of Brahma Kamal during the yesteryears has considerably improved their socio-economic status. To ensure the economic well being of the community,

populations of Brahma Kamal in the adjoining areas of Kedarnath Shrine need to be conserved and saved. It will also ensure the safety of the species till posterity.

**Acknowledgements :** We thank Prof. LMS Palni, the Kedar Sabha and the local people of the Kedarnath Shrine for providing the necessary information and encouragement during field visits in the Kedarnath area. □

PRABHAKAR SEMWAL<sup>1\*</sup>,  
SUSHEEL VERMA<sup>2</sup>,  
ASHISH THAPLIYAL<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biotechnology, Graphic Era (Deemed to be University), 566/6, Bell Road, Clement Town, Dehradun-248 002, Uttarakhand, India.

<sup>2</sup>Conservation and Molecular Biology Lab, School of Biosciences and Biotechnology, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri-185 131, J&K, India.

Corresponding Author : semwal.prabhakar@gmail.com

Received : 5 September, 2018

Revised : 16 November, 2018

1. <https://360tp.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/history-of-teerth-purohit-of-kedarnath>.
2. Y. S. Katoch, Madhy Himalaya ki Kala, Winsar Publishing Company, Dehradun, (2003), p. 53.
3. H. Uniyal, Kedarkhand- Garhwal Dharam Sanskriti Vastushlip Evam Paryatan, Takshila Prakashan, (2011), p. 493.
4. R. M. Nautiyal, Pauranik Uttarakhand, Winsar Publishing Company, Dehradun, (2011), p. 219.
5. Y. S. Katoch, Madhy Himalaya ki Kala, Winsar Publishing Company, Dehradun, (2003), p. 55.
6. M. Pant and P. Semwal, *Curr Sci.*, **104**, 685-686, (2013).
7. P. Semwal, P. Anthwal, T. Kapoor and A. Thapliyal, *Int J Pharmacogn.*, **1**, 266-269, (2014).
8. J. S. Butola, S. S. Samant, *Int J Plant Biol.*, **1**, 43-51, (2010).
9. P. Semwal, L. M. S., Palni, S. Verma, P. Sharma and A. Thapliyal, *Journal of Graphic Era University*, **6**, 1-6 (2018).
10. P. P. Dhyani, *Him Paryavaran.*, 2002, **12**, 11-13.
11. P. Semwal, Investigations on reproductive biology, genetic variation and medicinal properties of *Saussurea obvallata* (DC.) Edgew. in Uttarakhand. PhD Thesis submitted to Graphic Era University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. (<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/212319>).