

Symbolic Significance of Selected Fruits in the Holy Bible

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Fruits form an integral part of food for all the living beings. Fruits are of various sizes, shapes and colours. Cultivation of a particular fruit depends on the climatic conditions and the soil wealth of that area. The word fruit derives from the Latin word 'fructus', which means 'enjoyment', 'proceeds', 'profits', 'produce', 'income', etc.

This paper tends to present the symbolic significance of some selected fruits referred in the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible is the word of God and it comprises of 66 books in it. It is divided into The Old Testament consisting of 39 books and the New Testament consisting of 27 books. The Old Testament dates from the day of creation of the world to the time before the birth of Jesus Christ. It is about the history of mankind especially of Israelites, songs, lamentations and prophecies. The New Testament consists of the four Gospels about the birth, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the spread of gospel by his disciples, the epistles of St. Paul and other disciples and the book of Revelation about the last days.

The word fruit appears almost 72 times in the Bible. It appears first in the book of Genesis as *"Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so."*(Genesis 1:11). The word 'fruit' appears last in the Bible in the book of Revelation as *"On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations. No longer will there be any curse."* (Revelation 22: 2, 3)

God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden and commanded them not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But satan came in the form of a serpent and deceived them. Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate and gave some to her husband and he too ate. Thus, man disobeyed God, his creator and sin entered the world. Man lost the glory of God and was destined to be cursed forever. *"To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate the fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."* (Genesis 3:17).

God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. That is the most pathetic and

tragic event in the history of mankind. Man can lose anything in this world but not the favour of his Lord. Once he loses the love of God everything is lost.

However, God is all merciful. Though not mentioned in the Bible, it makes me think that when Adam was chased out of the Garden of Eden, maybe he would have turned to God with a pathetic look, asking if there could be any way of redemption for him. And God, the Almighty and the perfect embodiment of mercy, melted for Adam whom He created in his own image; God would have told him that there is a way and the only way for redemption of mankind – that is, He (God) himself will come in flesh in the form of man and will shed His blood and through that is the salvation to mankind. That is the reason, from the time of Adam the ‘Messiah’ was expected to be born of a virgin. As Isaiah, the prophet tells, *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* (Immanuel means God with us). (Isaiah 7:14). And the prophecy comes true by the birth of Jesus to Virgin Mary. When Gabriel, the angel of God appears to Mary, he tells, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High”* (Luke 1: 30-32).

And Jesus when he preaches, says that *“I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.”* (John 14:6). Through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the salvation to mankind. The blood of Jesus cleanses the sins of those who repent and pray to him. Thus, the sin that led to the curse was removed by the blood of Jesus Christ and there is no more curse as in Revelation 22:3.

Other fruits mentioned in the Bible include apples, dates, figs, grapes, almonds, olives and pomegranates. The word apple appears nearly 11 times in the Bible. Apples (Scientific name - *Malus pumila*) are high in protein, vitamins, carbohydrates and fibre. They give energy, stimulate weight loss, balance the blood sugar levels, strengthen one’s immunity power, improve brain function, lower cholesterol and strengthen teeth and gums. In Solomon’s Song of Songs the Beloved wants to be comforted and refreshed with apples as she is sick of love. (Song of Songs 2:5) and the lover compares the fragrance of the breath of his beloved to that of apples. (Song of Songs 7:8). In Proverbs 25: 11, a word aptly spoken is compared to the apples of gold in settings of silver. Apples with their red alluring colour are symbolic of temptation, immortality and knowledge.

Figs (Scientific name -*Ficus carica*) are mentioned in nearly 52 places in the Bible. Figs are rich in calcium and have good content of fibre. They control cholesterol and lower blood sugar. They are symbolic of national wealth, prosperity, well-being and security. God promised the Israelites a land of all wealth. Moses tells his people, *“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.”* (Deuteronomy 8:7-8). Prophet Jeremiah in his vision sees two baskets of figs- one basket of good figs (first ripe) and other basket of bad figs, that could not be eaten. The good figs symbolise those Jews who were

good and obedient and have found favour in the eyes of the Lord and the bad figs symbolise those who disobeyed God and are put to the wrath of God.

Dates (Scientific name - Phoenix dactylifera) have been a staple food from ancient times. Dates can be eaten just like that when ripe or can be made into a syrup or juice. Dates are highly nutritious, and they contain in them energy carbohydrates, sugar, dietary fibre, proteins, vitamins and minerals like calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and zinc. The first reference to the date palm in the Bible is when the children of Israel enter the desert after leaving Egypt. *“Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy (date) palm trees and they camped near the water.”* (Exodus 15:27). Dates symbolise fertility and sweetness in life. Psalm 92:12 considers the righteous people to flourish like a palm tree and in Song of Songs 7:8, the lover tells, *“I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit”*. Here it symbolises uprightness and victory.

Almonds (Scientific name - Prunus dulcis) are referred nearly 8 times in the Bible. Almonds are considered to be a delicacy and are eaten all over the world. Almonds contain proteins, vitamins, calcium, magnesium, potassium, riboflavin and fibre. It is a low glycemic index food. In Genesis 43: 11, the almond is described as ‘one of the best fruits’ and Israel asks his sons to carry with them some of the best products of their land to Egypt to be given to Joseph. Almonds are symbolic of resurrection as we see in the blossoming of Aaron’s dry staff. *“The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds”* (Numbers 17:8). God uses almond as a symbol of his watchfulness in Jeremiah 1:11,12. *“The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree, “I replied. The Lord said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.”* The Hebrew name for almond is ‘Shakeid’ which means to wake or watch and it is symbolic of new beginnings and God’s watchfulness. Almond blossoming is also an apt symbol of old age, with its silvery hair and its barren and unfruitful condition.

Grape (Scientific name – Vitis vinifera) is mentioned nearly 43 times in the Bible. Grapes are highly nutritious, and they contain in them potassium, vitamins C, A and K, pyridoxine, riboflavin, thiamine, carotenes and B-Complex. Noah is the first recorded human being to grow grapes in the Bible. *“Noah, man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.”* (Genesis 9:20-21). In Genesis 19: 30, Lot’s two daughters make him drink wine and lay with him so that they can become pregnant and have children; Lot was completely unaware of what happened because of the effect of drinking wine. Here wine, that is got from grapes, is symbolic of a seductive element. It seduces and makes people lose their consciousness. However, it has been consumed with great love and applause from ancient times. In Judges 9:13, wine is considered to cheer both Gods and men. Genesis 14:18 tells that Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine to Abraham. The lover in Solomon’s Song of Songs compares his beloved’s breasts to clusters of grapes. (Song of Songs 7:7). Raisins, (dried grapes) are also widely used either stored or as pressed cakes.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri

Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019

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In the New Testament, wine was used during the Passover and Jesus Christ used it with unleavened bread in the last supper with his disciples. He used the bread as a symbol of his body and wine as the symbol of his blood, thus foretelling his death by crucifixion the next day. Christianity believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God and if a person repents for his sins, and prays to Jesus, his sins are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and this leads to the salvation of his soul. Jesus' first miracle of changing water into wine in the wedding at Cana in Galilee is symbolic of an ordinary life being made precious by God's power. Wine has symbolic connection with victory, wealth, abundance, transformation and fertility. Finally, the harvest of grapes in Revelation chapters 16 and 17 is understood as symbolic of God's judgment against the wicked and the people of disobedience.

Olive (Scientific name – *Olea europaea*) is mentioned nearly 56 times in the Holy Bible. Olives are highly nutritious, and they contain in them vitamins, amino acids, oleic acid, polyphenols and minerals like sodium, potassium, magnesium, iron, phosphorous and iodine. Olives balance the blood pressure and cholesterol in human body, improve the immune system, and enhance the reproductive system. Olive can be eaten raw when it is ripe as fruit or it can be stored for many days submerged in liquid or refrigerated. Olive oil is also used for many purposes. In the Bible, Olive oil is used widely for the anointing of kings and priests. King David in his Psalms refers to this as “*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” (Psalms 23: 5,6). Olive oil here is symbolic of the Holy Spirit who leads the children of God. When a person is anointed with Holy Spirit, goodness and love will follow him all the days of his life and will take him to his eternal abode, that is, the Heaven. In Exodus 27: 20, God tells Moses, “*Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning.*” Olive oil symbolically forms an offering to God here. In Genesis 8, Noah sends a dove to find out if the water in the land has dried up. “*When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!*” (Genesis 8: 11). Olive is a symbol of peace and victory. It also signifies the goodness of love and charity.

Pomegranate (Scientific name -*Punica granatum*) is mentioned nearly 33 times in the Bible. Pomegranates contain in them ample amounts of vitamins (A, B, C, D, E), proteins, carbohydrates, dietary fibre, sugar, minerals like calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and zinc. Pomegranates are good for the prevention of cancer, arthritis, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, etc. It improves sexual performance and fertility. It lowers blood pressure and fights off infection. Pomegranate has a rounded shape with a thick and reddish husk. The fruit is full of seed, each seed surrounded by a little pulp. There is a structure of a royal crown in the top of the fruit. God commands Moses to make pomegranate shaped structures in the robe of Aaron and also in the tent of Testimony. King Solomon also used the structure in the construction of the temple for the Lord. In Song of Songs, the lover goes to see if the pomegranates were in bloom. (Song of Songs 6:11). Pomegranates are symbolic of fruitfulness, fertility, blessing and prosperity. It symbolizes royalty with its crown like structure and royal colour.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

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Finally, Galatians 5: 22 says, “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” If only the world is adorned with these fruits of the spirit, the world will become a paradise in itself.

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