

THE IDENTITY AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE BASIS OF
NOMENCLATURE AND ANCIENT SOCIO-CULTURAL
AND GEOGRAPHICO-HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS
EVINCED WITH THE PĀṆINIAN PERFUME-PLANT/
PLANT—PART 'KISARA' (PĀṆINI IV. IV. 53)*

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In the context of critical study on the Ancient Flora of India and the allied lands, in the examination of the basis and philosophy of plant nomenclature, which has always some suggestive background base, it is revealed that amongst others, it was more so adopted on the affiliated ethnogeographical or the trade-polis name connected with the trade or transaction of the material. As such the ancient plant names preserve in them their ancient socio-economic-cultural and geographico-historical antecedental affiliations and reflections, the finds of which not only prove very much helpful in their correct identity, which is awaited in cases of many, and answering queries and questions like their place of origin and original habitat or homeland, economic uses and sequence of propagation, dispersal and diffusion into new lands but also provide evidences and information about various aspects of ancient history, ethnology, culture, trade and international relations of India with the foreign lands in various historical eras. On the other hand, unless and otherwise investigated and examined in this back-ground, the correct perspectiveness and entity of these ancient plant names mostly surviving in the Indian texts and tradition in closer or wider areas and spelt over here and there in the texts are neither correctly and convincingly intelligible nor explicable for their basis and etymology. As an example the case of *Keśara* has been investigated and highlighted in this paper. *Keśar*, synonymous with its other most popular name *Kuṃkum* represented today in the commerce under its English trade-names 'Saffron' derived actually from the Arabic *Zāfrān* has been known and used since many millennium before Christ, and was a commodity of import into India from the very ancient times. It is still popularly known all over India in the markets and common folk under its above two ancient names. But both these epithets show specificity in their currency in the Indian lands, the former being confined to N. India; while the latter in slightly distorted forms in the whole of the south India. The basis and suggestivity of this name-epithet is not intelligible and explicable by Sanskrit etymology in the Indian context. Nor *Keśar* finds clear and direct mention as synonym of Saffron/*Kuṃkum* in the Sanskrit/*Āyurvedic* texts, except the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of, Pāṇini, where it is men-

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tioned under (*Kiśara*) at the first priority in the Pāṇinian Perfume plants enumerated in the *Kiśarādigaṇa* (IV. IV. 53). This provides the ancient intermediary link of the later *Keśara* having its original basis in the ancient Asia Minor/Caucasian region one of the homelands of Saffron till today. The details of the evidences, discussions and findings are highlighted in the text of the paper.

Keśara, is obtained from the dried reddish-brown stigmas and tops of yellowish styles of the herbaceous ornamental flower-plant *Crocus sativus* Linn. (Family: Iridaceae), native of Greece, Asia Minor and Persia and other Mediterranean coastal lands, now cultivated in Kashmir and in China also. It is prepared today on large commercial basis in Spain, France, Macedonia and Persia. *Keśara* has a sweetish aromatic odour and a bitter taste, and it also contains a glycosidal colouring matter 'crocin'.¹⁻³ For its various attributes, *Keśar* is a very popular commodity of trade and domestic use apart from its medicinal uses, and is available everywhere in the markets for sale for everyday use of the common folk. The popular English names of *Keśar* in the trade are 'Saffron' and 'Crocus', and in Indian markets and regional names, in the whole of north India it is commonly known as* *Keśar*, at times as *Kuṃkum* also, whereas in the south Indian regions as *Kuṃkum*† or its slightly distorted forms, at times with the epithet 'puvvu > puv > puṣpa = flower' appended to it, reflecting thereby that *Kuṃkum* was derived from the flower-part of its source plant, whose knowledge might not be known necessarily. The fact that, saffron was widely known in such a vast country like India densely populated by divergent human complexes, speaking various languages and dialects under these two names only since very ancient times, also suggests the exotic source of *Keśar*/*Kuṃkum* as has been enunciated by De Candolle in his *Origin of Cultivated Plants*.⁴

Though, no documentary evidence is met with in the Vedic literature⁵ to show the knowledge and use of saffron by the Vedic Aryans, but it does not exclude the probability of its knowledge and use in the Indian lands even since much earlier than pre-Aryan ages, as has been evinced in cases of many plant-species of ancient Indian Flora.⁶⁻⁸ Saffron has been used since very early times by the Egyptians, Jews, Greeks and Romans as a dye, spice, cosmetic and medicine. By the various finds of the intensive investigations carried out in the fields of archaeology, ancient history and culture, anthropology and linguistics etc., it is now believed that saffron was collected on commercial scale and used as dye by the Cretans⁹ of the Aegean Civilization even in the pre-historic period, which is supported by the saffron pictographs on the Aegean tablets¹⁰ and the saffron-picker, represented as a fresco, reflecting that it was professional. In this context, it is also worth-mentioning that Asia Minor has also been famous from the very ancient times for its production of good quality of saffron and also of its transaction in trade independent of other Mediterranean sources. The saffron of Corycos* in Asia Minor was supposed to be of superior quality which was much

* (Hindi) *Keśara*, *Kuṃkum*; (Beng.) *Keśur*; (Marathi) *Keśar*, (Gujrati) *Keśar*.

† (Tamil) *Kuṃkum*, *Kuṅgum-pu*; (Telugu) *Kuṅkum-puvu*; (Malayalam) *Kuṃ-kuma-puvva*; (Canarese) *Kuṃ-kuma*; *Kesari*; (Simhalese) *Kuṃkumpuva*.

*The generic name 'Crocus' seems to have been adopted from the same 'Corycos', the saffron producing centre of Asia Minor (Corycos—Korycos > Krokus (GK.) > Crocus (L.).

honoured by the perfumers of Cilicia in their perfumery (perfume industry). In the same continuation, mention may also be made of another geographical area and name of Asia Minor 'Caesarea' (=modern Kaisariayah) at the foot of Argaeus in Asia Minor^{12,13} which was an old area famous for producing the best saffron. Analogous with Pāṇinian aphorisms bearing four-fold senses (*cāturarthik sūtra*), this saffron-area also gave the same name to the place 'Caesarea' also in that region, which was famous for dyeing industry, where saffron might have naturally been the main dye-material, and probably this would also have been the main transaction centre of *keśara* (saffron). Attention of scholars may also be drawn in this context to the fact that, the name-epithet 'Keśer' is also used for the Zagros Mountains¹⁵. * These historical facts and evidences apart from establishing Asia Minor as one of the important home-lands of saffron and area of its trade transaction, the second saffron area of Asia Minor "Caesarea" reflects four-fold senses in its ancient antecedents which might show significant bearing with the Pāṇinian perfume-plant *Kisara/Kisara* and the later diffusion of this epithet in the northern India. As has already been informed in the beginning that, though saffron (*kumkum/keśara*) is not indigenous to India, and its cultivation in Kashmir is of much later time, its knowledge, use and import from its home lands is of very ancient times, even since pre-Vedic period, as can be inferred from the interrelation, trade and exchanges of India with the Central and Western Asia and the Mediterranean World since human origin on these lands. Out of the two all-pervading and still surviving names *Kumkum* and *Keśar* in India, the basis, historical antecedents of *kumkum* and its various affiliations and reflections have been discussed and highlighted in details elsewhere.* The present study is confined to and focussed at the other more popular name 'keśara' which has been examined by the authors and resolved to be the later reminiscent link of the Pāṇinian *kisara*, having its origin in the Caesarea of Asia Minor, one of the original home-lands of saffron. The evidences are presented and discussed as follows:

'*Kisara (kiśara)* has been mentioned as the first component in the *Kisarādi Gaṇapāṭha* of the Pāṇinian aphorism IV. IV. 53 (*Kisarādibhyaṣṭhan*)†, enunciated for deriving the respective word for dealer of the saleable perfume commodities enumerated in the above *Gaṇapāṭha (Kisarādigāṇa)*. Thus from the commodity name '*Kisara|Kisara*', by adding the affix 'ṣṭhan' the epithet *Kisariki (Kisarāh panyamasya =Kisariki)* means he, whose saleable commodity is *Kisara*¹⁶. Another very important notice of '*Kisara*', we come across under '*Kisarā|Kisara*?'* in the *Gaṇapāṭha* of the *Mudhvādigāṇa*

*In the *Mahābhārata* also, we see this name-epithet representing a mountain of this name lying in the Sākadvīpa, extoled to impart the sweet aroma of saffron to the breeze passing through this mountain. Dr. Buddha Prakash in his scholarly book *India and the World*, chapter 12, pp. 212 ff., has identified this Sākadvīpa with the Caspian region: The findings and antecedents of *Keśara* in our study also lead to the inclination of supporting the view of Dr. Buddha Prakash.

*A Critical Study of the Flora of *Kauṣṭhīya Arthaśāstra* monograph on *Kumkum*'.

†*Kisara* with palatal fricative and *Kisara* with dental fricative are variant readings of the same word in *Gaṇapāṭha*. (See, Basu, *Astādhyāyī*, Vol I, p. 823. Pāṇinian aphorism IV. IV 53 maintains only palatal form.

*'Kisara', 'Kiśara', 'Kīśarā' and the later 'Kesara' etc. all seem to be the slightly distorted forms of one and the same epithet and in the opinion of the authors all these epithets represent one and the same plant-entity in this context.

(IV. II. 86 at the serial no. 9),¹⁷ which enumerates a group of epithets conveying four-fold senses like other Pāṇinian *cāturarthik/sūtras*. As such, this epithet 'Kīśara' in its affiliated four-fold senses reflects its application to some region, its people and also some mountain/river or some important economic plant of the area, all being given the same name. This also gives the significant reflection of the actual entities of the four-fold senses of *keśara* in the Asia-Minor/Caucasia as discussed in the earlier paragraphs.

In the context of the antecedents and whereabouts of the epithet *keśara* in the later Sanskrit texts and tradition in the meaning of saffron is, surprisingly enough, rather nil; and if at all, it is very far-fetched and indistinct. Instead in the Medieval Sanskrit lexicons and Āyurvedic *Nighaṅṭus* the epithet *Keśara* is applicable to the famous fragrant *Bakula* of the Sanskrit poets and classics, gold, the (Lotus) filaments, the lion's mane and etc. In the Āyurvedic *samhitās* and the following literature¹⁸ *keśara* is synonymous with '*Bakula* = *maulisrī* > *maulisī*'/ '*Nāgakeśara* (Ironwood tree), *bijapurnaḥ* (Citrus spp.)', and when prefixed with the *Kamala* and its other synonyms (lotus plant) it suggests 'lotus-filaments'. In the Sanskrit *kāvya*s '*keśara*' finds frequent mention representing *Bakula* amongst the favourite flower-trees of the Sanskrit poets.¹⁹ But this name-epithet could not gain popularity and sustain its existence in the common folk, which needs special mention at this juncture in the context of *Bakula tree* in the Indian tradition. *Bakula* has been mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* of *Kauṭilya* in the context of silk-rearing plants, as adapted for the rearing of *Patronā** yielding worm and this economic aspect of this tree is particular to *Arthaśāstra*. The basis and origin of this plant name *Bakula* is also not suggestively intelligible nor explicable by Sanskrit etymology or any other Indian basis and this name is also not popular in colloquial usage, reflecting its import or transmission into this land from foreign origin in far ancient time. This issue has been investigated and discussed in detail elsewhere and resolved that this name-epithet has its origin in the Caucasian/Caspian region being based on and affiliated to place name and its people.²⁰ Based on the findings and evidences revealed and highlighted in this study the plant name *keśara* applicable to both *Bakula* and saffron shows parallel analogy in its genesis, propagation, and diffusion to the Indian lands through the Iranian land by the pre-Aryan Asianics and other tribes inhabiting these areas. *Keśara* as synonym of *Bakula* preserved its reminiscence in the written language, whereas *Keśara* representing 'saffron' though shifted to mean and represent other entities in later texts yet pervaded and sustained its existence in the spoken language probably due to its much wider and staple use in dyeing technology, perfume industry, medicine and culinary sophistication etc., which made it a trade commodity of great economic importance through all the ages. The origin of the name-epithet '*keśara*' synonymous with *kunḅum*, though independent of each other in their origin and transmission, is based on the name of its home area of production in ancient Asia Minor and shows similarity and parallelism as evinced in the nomenclature of many other members of the ancient Indian Flora.²¹

*कौटि० अर्थ०, अघि०२, प्रकरण २६, अध्याय ११

In the light of the evidences discussed in the foregoing paragraphs the findings of this study lead to the following conclusions:

Kisara, kišara, kišarā and *kešara* all represent one and the same name-epithet. The perfume plant-part *Kisara/Kišara* of the Pāṇinian *Kisarādigaṇa* is represented by the later *kešara* of the Indian markets and identified with the famous 'saffron'. Though the name-epithet *kešara* is commonly applied to, both, *Kumkum* and *Bakula* in the later Sanskrit texts and tradition, the Pāṇinian reference shows its exclusive application to 'saffron' only. The name-epithet *Kisara* has its origin and basis in the ancient Caesareia, a region and place and also a mountain of the same name, one of the home-lands of saffron-production and transaction, the name still surviving in its modern name 'Kaisariyah'. The ancient 'Caesareia' reflects four-fold senses, the subsequent analogy of which is also evinced in the Pāṇinian *Kiśarā* of the *Madhvādigaṇa*. The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* serves as the bacon-light intermediary link in the antecedental whereabouts of *Kisar* in the sense of saffron. In the later period to Pāṇini, the Pāṇinian *Kešara* becomes its market and colloquial name and in the written and literary purposes it is used in generalised meaning of flower-filaments. The other ancient ethno-geographical affiliations are however, retained in the *Bakula* and other plant names. The subsequent impact of the other saffron producing areas of Asia Minor 'Korykos' has also been highlighted which shows its impact westwards on the Graeco-Roman world importing this name to the generic name of the saffron plant 'Crocus' and also to its another English name 'Crocus'.

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