

# **Vetiver – the “Kataraghas” could emerge as a multifarious tool for rural development in flood prone areas of North Bihar, India**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mithila area in north Bihar is known as the land of high floods, perennial rivers and a good no. of natural and man-made water bodies. “*Kataraghas*” (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) growing luxuriantly in these flood plains acts as a major carbon sink on account of its extensive growth through seed propagation.

This grass is intimately associated with the cultural practices in the area. An old practice related with vetiver is its use as point of demarcation of local plots and serves as a tool of arbitration in case of land feuds. The grass is formally revered along with cow dung and mud casts as a sequel to the worship of Sun God and also an ancient land conservation practice. It is also associated with *Sama-Chakeba* festival held during the *Kartik* month.

Fine vetiver stalks form a basis of *Sikki* cottage industry which has since emerged as a tool of women’s empowerment. *Sikki* handicraft symbolizes the folk art in Mithila and women *Sikki* artists have been honored with national awards. A no. of modern gadgets are prepared to suit the present day market demands. *Sikki* art has now transcended to the lower echelons of society. Brides win high accolades from the groom’s side when they carry masticatories and other items beautifully adorned inside the traditional *Sikki* gadgets.

The grass finds a place in the five centuries old poems of the great literary bard Vidyapati. It provides shelter to small birds. Its leaves are transformed into mats & stalks cast into fishery appliances for capture of small fishes. Young leaves are used as fodder. Mature plants are used as thatching material. Roots are used for making hand fans.

The grass could be utilized to fight the menace of arsenic contamination of drinking water, recently reported from certain parts of north Bihar as well. Farmers plant *Katraghas* on the four sides of low lying plot to prevent the fierce flood water from damaging the standing paddy crop. Of late, farmers have started its commercial cultivation as a medicinal/ aromatic plant

This paper takes into account the potentials of vetiver emerging as a tool for rural development in north Bihar.

**Keywords:-** Kataraghas, Sikki handicraft, Land conservation, Rural upliftment