



From Sacred Plant to Commercial Crop: Value Addition and Utilization of Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.) in India

*Suvangjyoti Sahani

M. Sc. Scholar, Department of Floriculture and Landscaping, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar, Odisha-751003, India

*Corresponding Author's email: suvangjyotisahani@gmail.com

Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.) is an ancient aquatic plant deeply embedded in Indian culture, religion, and traditional medicine, where it symbolizes purity, divinity, and spiritual enlightenment. Beyond its sacred significance, lotus has recently emerged as a commercially important crop due to its diverse and expanding applications in food, nutraceutical, medicinal, cosmetic, and handicraft industries. Almost all plant parts—flowers, seeds, rhizomes, leaves, and stems—are rich in valuable nutritional and bioactive compounds such as antioxidants, dietary fiber, flavonoids, and essential minerals, making lotus highly suitable for value addition and product diversification. This review highlights the botanical characteristics, traditional and cultural importance, cultivation requirements, medicinal and culinary uses, economic potential, and scope for value addition of lotus in India. Special emphasis is placed on the role of processing and development of value-added products in improving shelf life, marketability, and profitability of lotus-based produce. The integration of lotus cultivation with wetland ecosystems offers a sustainable, low-input, and climate-resilient agricultural option, contributing to enhanced farmers' income, reduced post-harvest losses, rural livelihood generation, and conservation of aquatic resources. Overall, lotus holds significant potential as a multifunctional crop supporting agricultural diversification and sustainable development in India.

Keywords: *Nelumbo nucifera*, sacred lotus, value addition, aquatic crops, rural livelihood, India

Introduction

Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.), commonly known as sacred lotus or Indian lotus, belongs to the family Nelumbonaceae and is widely distributed across tropical and subtropical regions of Asia. Traditionally revered for its spiritual symbolism, lotus is now gaining recognition as a high-value commercial crop due to its multifaceted uses in food, medicine, cosmetics, and allied industries (Mukherjee et al., 2009). Increasing demand for natural, health-promoting, and eco-friendly products has further strengthened the commercial relevance of lotus cultivation in India. The plant thrives in wetlands, ponds, and waterlogged ecosystems, making it suitable for climate-resilient agriculture. With appropriate value addition strategies, lotus can contribute significantly to farmers' income, employment generation, and sustainable use of aquatic resources (De, 2011).

Cultural and Religious Significance

The lotus symbolizes purity, divinity, beauty, and spiritual enlightenment in Indian culture. It is closely associated with Hindu deities such as Lakshmi, Vishnu, Saraswati, and Brahma, and is widely used in religious rituals, temple offerings, and festivals (Mukherjee et al., 2009). In Buddhism and Jainism, the lotus represents inner awakening and detachment from worldly impurities. Its unique ability to bloom pristine above muddy water has made it a

universal symbol of purity and resilience, reinforcing its sacred status across civilizations (Bose & Yadav, 2019).

Botanical Description and Growth Requirements

Botanically, *N. nucifera* is an aquatic perennial with large peltate leaves exhibiting the ‘lotus effect,’ showy fragrant flowers, elongated starch rhizomes, and hard-coated seeds with remarkable longevity (Bhattacharjee, 2010). The crop prefers tropical to subtropical climates with optimum temperatures of 20–30 °C and requires full sunlight for proper flowering. Ideal water depth ranges from 30–60 cm, and clay loam soil rich in organic matter is most suitable (Singh, 2018). Lotus responds well to integrated nutrient management and organic manures, making it an environmentally friendly crop with minimal chemical input requirements.

Traditional, Medicinal, and Culinary Uses

In Ayurveda, lotus is considered cooling, calming, detoxifying, and rejuvenating. Various plant parts are used as cardiac tonics, anti-inflammatory agents, blood purifiers, and stress-relieving remedies (Mukherjee et al., 2009; Singhal & Neetu, 2025). Lotus flowers are used for cooling and treating bleeding disorders, while rhizomes are consumed for digestive and respiratory health. Seeds possess anti-aging, anti-diabetic, and strengthening properties, whereas leaves are used for fever, liver support, and lipid regulation (Paudel et al., 2018). Culinarily, lotus seeds (*kamal gatta*) are used in snacks, curries, sweets, and bakery products. Rhizomes (*kamal kakdi* or *nadru*) are popular vegetables in Indian and Asian cuisines, while petals are occasionally used in herbal teas, garnishing, and food wrapping.

Lotus as a Commercial Crop in India

Lotus is cultivated commercially in several Indian states including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Jammu & Kashmir, and Manipur (Singh, 2018; Bose & Yadav, 2019). The crop offers multiple economic advantages such as high market value, diversified income sources, year-round employment, and suitability for small water bodies. Its tolerance to flooding and waterlogging, combined with export demand for seeds, rhizomes, and processed products, makes lotus an economically viable and climate-resilient crop (De, 2011).

Scope for Value Addition

Value addition in lotus involves converting raw plant parts into processed products to enhance shelf life, marketability, and profitability. Lotus flowers can be processed into teas, syrups, essential oils, cosmetics, and handicrafts. Seeds are widely used in popped snacks, flours, sweets, nutraceuticals, and herbal beverages (Paudel et al., 2018). Rhizomes offer scope for fresh-cut vegetables, chips, pickles, flours, frozen products, and functional foods, while leaves and stems are utilized in herbal teas, eco-friendly packaging, plates, and fiber-based handicrafts (De, 2011).

Conclusion

Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) has successfully transitioned from a sacred plant of cultural and religious importance to a commercially valuable crop in India. Its wide range of applications across food, medicinal, cosmetic, and industrial sectors, combined with strong value addition potential, makes it a promising option for agricultural diversification. With appropriate processing technologies, organized marketing, and policy support, lotus cultivation can enhance farmers’ income, promote rural employment, and contribute to sustainable wetland-based agriculture.

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