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A STUDY OF ETHNOMEDICINAL WISDOM FOR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Medicinal herbs have been used by humans since prehistoric times. Plants have been considered to have curative qualities as least as far back as Neanderthal man. Evidence of its usage dates back to ancient Babylonia, around 1770 BC. Ancient Egyptians and those who followed Hammurabi's law both considered therapeutic herbs to have value beyond life and death. The Cairo Museum's Access Excellence Resource Centre has a display case full of Giza pyramid-era plant specimens. The study of plants, or botany, is where ethnobotany got its start. In turn, the search for medicinal plants was a primary inspiration for the development of botany. In reality, there has always been a strong relationship between botany and medicine. Drugs used today, for example, often start off as extracts from plants. Pharmacognosy refers to the research of plant-based medicines and natural toxins. Yet, as science and medicine progressed, natural medications were gradually supplanted by synthetic ones. Most pharmaceuticals used in developed nations come from plant sources. Certain drugs were still developed with plant materials as their starting point, but laboratory research became the primary focus.

KEYWORDS: Ethnomedicinal Wisdom, Tribal Communities, Medicinal herbs, natural medications

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha are just a few of India's many well-known and widely used traditional medical modalities. These methods originated in traditional ethnobotanical practices. Ethnobotany is the scientific study of plants from throughout the world, including those used for medicine, as well as those utilized for food, fiber, color, gum, and other practical and even detrimental purposes, such as in religious rituals.

In a time of great environmental stress, ethno-botanists can get valuable insight into the conservation of tropical forest reserves through the use of a

multidisciplinary approach, such as ethnobotany. As a result of human interference with the delicate natural balance of these ecosystems, we now face the prospect of losing our forests.

Humans are the most successful and powerful organism on Earth because of their capacity to use the planet's natural resources for their own benefit. Ingenuity and technological advancement made it possible for humans to create a material civilisation and a distinct home for him. Several human societies established regular patterns of settlement in the form of hamlets, villages, and eventually cities. Nonetheless, the vast majority of human

populations around the globe, especially in third world nations, continue to live in and around the forest, where their way of life and customs have not changed in generations. Forest-dwelling tribes, and other similarly underdeveloped societies, are sometimes hailed as "living archaeological museums" of old customs and cultural history that enrich and enliven the human race.

As Walter Hough put it in 1898, ethnobotany is the "study of plants in their connection to human civilization" (Ford; 1978), which includes the psychological significance and mythological reference of plants. The discovery of the Barrows in 1900 sparked interest in the cultural and spiritual value of plants. The University of Chicago awarded him the first PhD in ethnobotany.

"The ancient Hindus should be given the credit of producing what is now called ethnobotany," said Kirtikar and Basu (1933), the first Indian authors to adopt the word ethnobotany.

Several plants' healing powers were recorded in the Vedic period's Rigveda. Ethnobotany, as defined by Schulters (1941), is the study of how people interact with the plants in their natural environments. According to Jones (1941), the field of ethnobotany studies the connections between prehistoric humans and plants.

Alcorn (1984) offers a more up-to-date definition of ethnobotany as the "science of direct interaction between humans and plants," which is focused on the plants' whole cultural significance. Research into ethnobotany may now encompass a broader range of topics according to this definition. The book *Glimpses of Indian*

Ethnobotany was published to help advance the field of ethnobotany in India (Jain, 1981). This book broke new ground by providing an overview of the state of ethnobotany research in modern India.

Botanists, anthropologists, phytochemists, pharmacologists, foresters, archaeologists, folklorists, vaidyas, etc., are only few of the disciplines that have recently taken an interest in ethnobotany. The expanding field of study is primarily motivated by the necessity of meeting the demands of the agricultural and pharmaceutical sectors. Traditional healers and plant specialists in native communities provided crucial evidence for determining which plants had the potential to be cultivated for their use in food and medicine. This ancient wisdom may have been the basis for modern medicine. During the past three decades, there has been a surge of interest in ethnobotany research, particularly in developing and industrialized nations with populations who rely on traditional medicines gleaned from the forest interiors.

Traditional healers and plant specialists within a community frequently play a pivotal role in demonstrating which plants have the potential to be cultivated for use as a food or medicinal source. Studies like this are quite informative and helpful in learning more about native flora. Recognizing medicinal plants is a field that is seeing a gradual drop in research. When traditional cultures die out, much of this treasure of information is being lost forever (Hamilton, 1995). Thus, contemporary ethnobotanical studies among indigenous communities are quite important (Maheshwari, 1983).

ETHNOLOGY OF THE TRIBAL GROUPS

India's indigenous communities each follow their own distinct social and cultural norms, which are determined solely by regional factors. In the Government of India Act of 1935, the term "tribes" appeared for the first time. Indian law recognizes "tribes" as "an endogamous group with an ethnic identity; that have retained their traditional, cultural identity; that have a distinct language or dialect of their own; that are economically backward and live in seclusion, governed by their own social norms and largely having a self-contained economy" (Article 342). Originally used by anthropologists to describe "a basic aggregation of people living in primitive or barbaric conditions under a headman or chief," the phrase "primitive tribes" has now come to mean a wide variety of groups. The most vulnerable population in modern India are the savage tribes.

Tribal peoples make up a sizable portion of India's population. There are more than 550 tribal tribes in India, including 93 Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) and 227 different ethnic groupings, all of whom are considered Scheduled Tribes (ST) by the government. Communities from all over the world use a wide variety of dialects to express themselves in one of the 325 official languages.

With 5.3% of the state's overall population, Andhra Pradesh's 26,31145 tribal people are a sizable minority. There are 23,44,474 people living in the vizianagaram district; 23,55,56 of them are tribal members (10.05). There are 27,03,114 people living in Srikakulam district, with 1,66,118 of them being tribal people (6.1). Andhra

Pradesh is home to 33 distinct tribal communities, with a full list of the state's officially recognized scheduled tribes provided in Table 1. There are a total of 17 different indigenous communities spread over the Northern Andhra Pradesh agency area, including the Bagata, Gadaba, Kammara, Konda Doras, Khonds, Jatapus, Kotia, Kulia, Malis, Manne Dora, Mukha Dora, Porja, Reddi Doras, Nooka Doras, Savaras, Goudus, and Valmiki. The research region is home to eleven different tribal tribes, four of which belong to a very undeveloped ethnic subgroup: the Gadaba, Khond, Porja, and Savara.

SAVARA TRIBE

As a subgroup of Andhra Pradesh's tribal population, savaras make up roughly 5.14 percent. They are located in a continuous band along the state of Orissa's border in the Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts. Table 3 displays the current Savara population throughout the several districts of Andhra Pradesh. Many academics have used puranic, archaeological, and historical evidence to conclude that the Savara are a very old people group. A number of scholars, including Sitapati (1938-43) and Dubey (1964), have analyzed the Savara's appearances throughout the epics and puranas. According to Sahitya Darpana, the Sabaras are a group of people who collect leaves and chop wood, and their language is either Sabari or Ahiri. The Sabara were mentioned in Khasikhand of Skand purana as the forest dwellers who chopped down trees on a nomadic basis.

Some eminent scholars in the field of Indian archaeology and anthropology, including sankalia (1962) and haimendorf (1962), have identified the Savara as an ancient Indian indigenous people.

Sitapathi and Munro speculated that the influx of Aryans who had originally resided near the Vamsadhara River forced these people to abandon their homeland. They had to flee to the hills and woodlands because they were overrun by Hindus from the east. The names of several Srikakulam district village plains, as noted by Hanumantharao et al., are derived from savara terms.

The Vizianagaram District is home to the Savara people, who are concentrated in the G.L.Puram and Kurupam mandals. In terms of tribal populations, the Savaras are among the most at-risk (PVTGs). They account for 3,1290 people (or 13 percent of the district's overall ST population) in total. The Savara make up 6.299% of Srikakulam's overall ST population, or 104652 people.

Health Care and Medicines

Most tribal peoples are uninformed and unconcerned about basic hygiene practices, yet owing to their diet and lifestyle, they are more resilient to common illnesses than their urban counterparts. Malaria, typhoid, and other illnesses, along with accidental injuries like scorpion and snake bites, are common among the local population. Most of these indigenous peoples really reside in rather inaccessible regions, far from the reach of modern medical care. As a result, they frequently see local doctors and herbalists (known as "Vaidhyas" or "Gurus") for help with health issues. The services provided by these "Gurus" and "Vaidya" give them a prominent place in tribal societies. They tend to be men rather than women, and the skills they've acquired are passed down down the generations. Each vaidya

carries the community's religious confidence on his shoulders.

Traditional medicine relies exclusively on plants that grow wild in the area. Due to the availability of certain plants and plant parts during the rainy season, vaidyas spend most of their time in the forests collecting these items and preserving them for the rest of the year, or else preparing remedies right after collecting them. Herbalists treat patients by preparing medicines from a single plant or portions of numerous plants, which they then prescribe along with dosage and dietary guidelines. Folk medicine is used to treat everything from simple injuries like scrapes and burns to serious conditions like diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease, rheumatism, digestive and urinary issues, etc. The natives here have a deep understanding of how to use herbs and other natural remedies to treat a wide range of illnesses.

CONCLUSION

Ethnobotany, the scientific study of the interaction between humans and plants, is most often understood to pertain to research into traditional medicinal practices. It also refers to the primitive people living in the forest areas and the plant species, and plant used for food, medicine, shelter, clothes and other purposes in the interiors of forest areas. In a broad sense, it is the evaluation of the knowledge of all phases of life among the primitive societies and of the effects of the plant environment upon the life, customs, beliefs and history of the tribal people. It also describes the relationship between the plant and traditional societies and their practices in their life in relation to the

plants and their uses. An extensive knowledge regarding the medicinal values of the plant species both wild and normal exist in the interiors of forest area in India and in the world. Tribal people have rich cultural customs and practices. They worship local Gods and Goddesses. They also celebrate festivals in honour of the Gods and Goddesses. They usually celebrate them before harvesting any crop and have a ritual before eating the new crops. These festivals are celebrated with a prescribed ceremonies and sacrifices. They depend up on priest, sorcerers and herbalist for curing them from ailments or diseases. They have special practices in regard to marriage, death, celebration of birthdays and festivals in their regions. Each tribe has a guru or Leader locally called as Kula Pedda who governs the people in the region and whoever does wrong or go against the social customs will be brought to the Kula Pedda for he is the one who punishes them for their mistakes.

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