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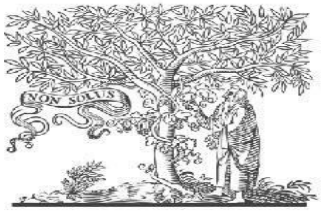

ELSEVIER SSRN

IJIEMR Transactions, online available on 26th Nov 2022. Link :http://www.ijiemr.org/downloads.php?vol=Volume-11&issue=Issue 11

10.48047/IJIEMR/V11/ISSUE 11/50

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Volume 11, ISSUE 11, Pages: 402-408

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AN EVALUATION OF ETHNOPHARMACOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE TOWARDS CANCER-FIGHTING

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ABSTRACT:
Cancer continues to be a significant global health challenge, driving researchers to explore diverse avenues for novel therapeutic interventions. Ethnopharmacology, the study of traditional medicinal practices of different cultures, has gained attention for its potential in identifying new sources of anti-cancer agents. This research paper delves into the ethnopharmacological significance towards cancer-fighting, discussing the utilization of plant-based remedies, indigenous knowledge, and traditional practices as sources of inspiration for developing effective anti-cancer therapies. Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature, this paper examines the mechanisms of action, compounds, and pathways involved in ethnopharmacologically derived cancer-fighting agents. The potential integration of traditional knowledge with modern biomedical research offers a promising approach to address the complex challenges posed by cancer.

KEYWORDS: Ethnopharmacology, cancer-fighting, traditional medicine, indigenous knowledge, anti-cancer agents, mechanisms of action, bioprospecting, integrative medicine.

INTRODUCTION:

Cancer remains one of the most pressing challenges to global public health, exerting a substantial socio-economic burden on individuals, families, and healthcare systems worldwide. Despite significant advancements in medical research and treatment modalities, the complexity and heterogeneity of cancer demand innovative approaches to improve patient outcomes. Ethnopharmacology, a discipline that investigates traditional medicinal practices of diverse cultures, presents a unique avenue for uncovering novel strategies in the fight against cancer.

Throughout history, various cultures have developed intricate knowledge systems rooted in the use of natural resources for healing purposes. These practices, often passed down through generations, hold immense potential for identifying therapeutic agents with anti-cancer properties. Ethnopharmacology bridges the wisdom of traditional practices with the rigor of modern scientific investigation, fostering a holistic approach to cancer research and treatment.

The ethnopharmacological approach recognizes the rich biodiversity of plant species and natural compounds that have been used by indigenous communities to combat illnesses, including cancer. The remedies utilized in traditional medicine systems are often derived from plants, minerals, animals, and even spiritual practices. The cultural context in which these practices thrive adds a layer of

complexity to the exploration of their potential anti-cancer effects.

Indigenous knowledge and practices play a crucial role in the identification of potential therapeutic agents. Traditional healers, deeply connected to their environment and armed with empirical knowledge, have amassed a repository of insights into the healing properties of natural resources. Collaborations between these practitioners and modern researchers enable the discovery of novel compounds and mechanisms that could redefine cancer treatment paradigms.

ETHNOPHARMACOLOGICAL APPROACHES:

1. Traditional Medicinal Practices:

Indigenous communities have long utilized plants, minerals, and animal-derived substances to treat illnesses, including cancer. This section highlights specific examples of plant-based remedies with documented anti-cancer properties, emphasizing their cultural significance and historical use.

2. Indigenous Knowledge and Practices:

Traditional healers possess a wealth of knowledge about medicinal plants and their applications. Collaboration between modern scientists and indigenous practitioners can lead to the discovery of new cancer-fighting compounds. The integration of ethnobotanical surveys and interviews with local communities can provide insights into potential therapeutic leads.

MECHANISMS OF ACTION:

1. Alkaloids and Plant-Derived Compounds:

Numerous alkaloids and secondary metabolites derived from plants have exhibited anti-cancer properties. Examples include vinblastine and vincristine from Catharanthus roseus, and paclitaxel from Taxus brevifolia. This section explores the mechanisms through which these compounds exert their anti-cancer effects.

2. Immunomodulation and Ethnopharmacology:

Some ethnopharmacologically relevant plants have been found to modulate the immune system, enhancing the body's natural defense mechanisms against cancer. Compounds derived from medicinal mushrooms, such as β-glucans, demonstrate potential immunomodulatory effects. The synergy between traditional practices and immunotherapy is discussed.

ROLE OF NATURAL PRODUCTS IN MEDICINE

Even though they are centuries old, Ayurveda and Chinese medicine are the oldest systems of medicine still in use today. Their philosophical, practical, and experimental foundations are solid. Complementary and alternative medicine is seeing a surge in popularity as a result of increased side effects, the expensive cost of new pharmaceuticals, drug resistance, and novel ailments.

Many plant-based medicines have been introduced to the worldwide market as pharmaceutical corporations have shifted their focus to natural product-based medicinal research and discovery. Medical therapy and illness control have been influenced by these innovations. They were extracted from natural sources, many of which have been utilised by different societies throughout history.

Approximately 80 percent of the world's population relied on conventional medicine for health treatment at the beginning of this century. 74% of the most

significant medications now in use include active components from medicinal plants, according to an estimate. Drug development was mostly relied on chance up until the 1970s. Only with the development of molecular biology and computers did rational drug discovery begin.

Natural product screening and isolation is a good option since it delivers compounds for a long time. Combinatorial chemistry, on the other hand, may produce molecular structures that could not have been predicted.

A combinatorial method is unlikely to have uncovered natural compounds' unique bonding and stereochemistry, which are difficult to synthesise. In recent years, several pharmaceutical firms have been adopting both combinatorial and isolation approaches.

Nature may be the finest combinatorial chemist in the world, according to a famous natural products chemist. Only time will tell which technique will prevail.

1. Important Role of Plants for Cancer

For thousands of years, people have relied on plants and other natural remedies to heal a wide range of ailments. Ancient civilizations in Egypt, China, India, and Greece all relied on plants for medicinal purposes, and a number of contemporary medications have been derived from them. The Sumerians were the first civilization to document the therapeutic properties of plants in writing about 2600 BC. The "Ebers Papyrus," the most well-known Egyptian pharmacological record, dates back to 1500 BC and contains more than 700 medications. Documentation of more than 600 medicinal plants from China's Materia Medica dates back to about 1100 BC. About 1000 BC, Susruta and Charaka documented the Ayurvedic system. The Greeks also made a significant contribution to the rationalisation of natural medicines. Dioscorides, the Greek physician (100 A.D.) documented more than 600 medicinal plants in his treatise "De Materia Medica." Approximately 80 percent of the world's population relies on traditional medicine for their main health care, according to the World Health Organization. Medicinal plants have been used for centuries to cure cancer. More than 35,000 plant samples from 20 nations have been evaluated for anticancer potential by the National Cancer Institute. When it comes to the definition of natural origin, the term is used to refer to natural products, their derivatives, or synthetic medicines inspired by the natural product paradigm.

2. Phytomedicine - Herbal Medicine

All across the globe, plants have been utilised to heal a variety of ailments. More than 70% of the world's population still relies on medicinal plants as their major source of medication, even in the contemporary world. When it comes to healing, medicinal plants have long had a prominent position.

• History of Herbal Medicine use in India

More than 80,000 of the world's 2, 50,000 higher plant species are medicinal in nature. Over 45000 distinct plant species may be found in India, making it one of the world's 12 biodiversity hotspots. Due to the existence of 16 agro climatic zones, 10 vegetation zones, 25 biotic provinces, and 426 biomes, India's variety is unparalleled (habitats of specific species).

About 15000-20000 of these plants have considerable therapeutic potential, which is a significant number. Traditional cultures, on the other hand, utilise only 7000-7500 species for medicinal purposes. Ayurvedic and Unani therapies have utilised herbal remedies from the beginning of time in India.

Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Amchi, and contemporary medicine all employ a total of roughly 700 types of plants. Different parts of the plant are used to make the medications, including as leaves, stems and bark, roots and flowers. It is not uncommon for pharmaceuticals to be made with the help of naturally occurring plant excretory materials including gum, resin, and latex. Several plant-derived medications have found their way into the contemporary pharmacopoeia, even under the Allopathic school of medicine. Plants also provide some of the chemical intermediates required to produce today's most advanced pharmaceuticals (Eg. diosgenin, solasodine, bionone). Not only is there a steady market for plant-derived pharmaceuticals, but plants are also a major source of novel medicines.

Traditional plant ethics and herbal medicine have been deeply ingrained in Indian culture due to the country's people's long-standing curiosity with and reverence for the country's rich natural history. Modern medicine is eradicating the riches of ancient herbal knowledge. However, in India's deep forests and tribal interiors, these beneficial ancient techniques are still practised by the locals. The Western Ghats are one such region, running magnificently along to India's west coast and encompassing an area of around 160.000 square kilometres. As one of the world's 32 biodiversity hot spots, it is home to a wide variety of plants and wildlife. Some 4000 flowering plant species in the Western Ghats are known to have therapeutic properties. There is a declining supply of medicinal plants as well as knowledge about them owing to overexploitation and a lack of interest in herbal medicine.

- **Availability of Herbal Medicinal Plants in India**

The Western Ghats of India occupy an area of 1,60,000 square kilometres and are one of the world's eight "hottest" biodiversity hotspots, according to the 34 biodiversity hotspots that have been discovered so far. 4,000 of the region's 15,000 plant species are unique to the area. The woodlands in the area are a source of herbal medicine for many of the local ethnic groups because of the territory's abundance of plant and animal life. Medicinal plants, a term used to describe the wide variety of plants used in this system of treatment, are essential to its success. Since its inception more than 5,000 years ago, Ayurveda and traditional medicine have become more popular over the world; they are being exiled from their homeland. For the most part, herbal medicines that have been handed down through the years have been left undocumented and hence unknown.

Overexploitation, habitat damage, and habitat loss in the Western Ghats region are threatening the very survival of medicinal plant flora in the area. More than 586 kinds of plants from the area have been included in the 'Red Data' book, which lists the most endangered plants in the world. As a result, the conservation of medicinal plants, which are under severe

threat and are on the point of extinction, should be a top priority. As a result, there is a need to educate the public about the value of herbal medicine and the protection of medicinal plants.

• Regulatory Scenario of Herbal Medicines

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines herbal medicines as a plant-derived substance or preparations having therapeutic or other human health advantages that comprise either raw or processed constituents from one or more plants, as defined by WHO. Goods that include active components of plant parts or other plant materials, or mixtures of these components, are included in the category of herbs, herbal preparations, and finished herbal products. The complexity of herbal medicines used across the globe varies with the technical progress of the nations that make and use them, but it is a common ingredient in all indigenous peoples' traditional medicine, including Ayurvedic, Homeopathic, and Naturopathic. Medicinal tea extracts, crude tablets and extracts, and contemporary tablets all fall within this category.

• Current and Future Status of Herbal Medicine

Various illnesses have been treated using natural compounds derived from plants, animals, and minerals. As time goes on, the popularity of herbal remedies continues to rise. A wide variety of medicinal plants are found across India and are used in traditional medicine. Approximately 20,000 medicinal plant species have recently been documented in India, yet more than 500 people, including tribes, rely on roughly 800 plant species to treat a variety of diseases. Pharmaceutical prescriptions in the United States include at least one component originating from plants, which are a major source of medication.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Scientific Validation:

Translating traditional knowledge into scientifically validated therapies poses challenges related to standardization, quality control, and clinical testing. Incorporating traditional wisdom into modern drug discovery pipelines requires interdisciplinary collaboration.

2. Intellectual Property and Cultural Considerations:

The commercialization of ethnopharmacological discoveries raises ethical concerns about intellectual property rights and cultural appropriation. Respecting indigenous knowledge systems and engaging communities in equitable partnerships is vital.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

1. Bioprospecting and Conservation:

Ethnopharmacology can contribute to sustainable bioprospecting, ensuring the conservation of medicinal plant species while benefiting local communities. Initiatives that promote the responsible and ethical sourcing of natural resources should be encouraged.

2. Integrative Medicine:

The integration of ethnopharmacologically derived compounds with mainstream cancer therapies holds promise for enhancing treatment outcomes and reducing side effects. Research into combination therapies and personalized medicine is an exciting avenue for exploration.

CONCLUSION:

Ethnopharmacology offers a rich source of inspiration for identifying novel cancer-fighting agents. The traditional knowledge embedded in indigenous medicinal practices holds the potential to unlock innovative therapeutic solutions for the complex challenges posed by cancer. Through respectful collaboration, rigorous scientific investigation, and ethical considerations, the integration of ethnopharmacology with modern medicine can pave the way for a more holistic approach to cancer treatment and prevention.

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