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A Review on Ethnobotanical Diversity of Traditional Medicinal Plants of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT: Rajasthan, a region characterized by its diverse climatic zones and rich cultural heritage, harbours a wide variety of medicinal plants that have been traditionally used by local communities for healthcare. This review provides a comprehensive account of the ethnobotanical diversity of medicinal plants native to Rajasthan.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, ethnobotanical, medicinal, plants.

I. INTRODUCTION

Floral and faunal diversities are the two facets of biodiversity, including the variety of species. There has been an increasing concern for the protection and sustainable use of plant variety in several nations, including India. The desert region of India encompasses around 320,000 square kilometres, accounting for approximately 12% of the nation's geographical area. The increased population of both humans and livestock in the deserts, together with the shifting climate, negatively impacts the fragile ecology. This leads to the over-exploitation of natural plant resources, threatening plant variety, especially in fuel-scarce dry regions. Recent times have seen heightened awareness of the need to maintain global natural plant resources, since thousands of plant and animal species are threatened; many are severely endangered and a few are already extinct. Approximately 5,000 species are native to India, with several hundred species classified as endangered. To analyze the diminishing plant resources, it is essential to possess a reasonably accurate inventory of these plants. Numerous species of our flora have remained uncollected for numerous years. Numerous species are recognized only by their type collections; in some instances, these types are absent from Indian herbaria. It is essential to identify any such gaps in our collections and expertise to facilitate thorough searches in the field or herbarium. A significant source of information about uncommon plants is personal expertise and field observations.

The extinction of numerous life forms is imminent if the current trend of escalating human population persists, necessitating development across various sectors and leading to abrupt and often profound disruptions in natural ecosystems. The expansion of extensive urban regions, construction endeavors including dams, buildings and roads, encroachment upon extensive forested areas for agricultural development, shifting cultivation, defense operations and mining activities exemplify direct attacks on nature that have progressively diminished our natural resources. Moreover, air and water pollution caused by urbanization, industrialization and the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has significantly contributed to environmental imbalances, jeopardizing the existence of wildlife. Tourist attractions and pilgrimage sites that draw significant people can inflict harm on the natural vegetation. The vegetation of the Indian desert has several commercially valuable and medicinally significant plants, whose effective scientific administration and use may facilitate economic advancement and enhancement of the region. The examination of these desert plants has attracted the interest of several researchers. Singh & Pandey (1983) address 194 species across 131 genera within 53 families of economic and medicinal plants in the Indian desert, which may yield food, fibre, timber, firewood, medicines and various minor forest products such as tannin, dye, gum-resin, mucilage, detergent and soap substitutes, non-edible oil, spirit and raw materials for paper. The prior discussion has addressed the over-exploitation of some plants, which, if unregulated, may exhaust local plant supplies. Other resources should also be used sustainably to preserve the variety of the desert. Furthermore, the phytochemical properties of traditional medicinal herbs are of significant relevance in this context. Phytochemicals are naturally occurring substances in plants that enhance their medical effects, including alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, glycosides and terpenoids. These chemicals are essential to the medicinal properties of plants and have been used in the treatment of several maladies for ages. The identification and study of phytochemicals in traditional medicinal plants of the desert area, particularly those used by

local populations, not only validate traditional knowledge but also facilitate the discovery of possible novel pharmaceuticals and natural medicines. Integrated studies are crucial for preserving indigenous knowledge systems, sustainably using local biodiversity and scientifically validating traditional therapeutic methods.

II. ETHNOBOTANICAL DIVERSITY OF RAJASTHAN (INDIA): A REVIEW

Ethnobotany investigates the intricate natural and cultural relationships among people, plants and domesticated animals. The gathering of jungle fruits or tubers, together with the hunting of animals for nourishment by early people, signified the origin of ethnobotany and ethnozoology. The development of ethnobotany throughout the centuries has been significant. Until recently, it was unacknowledged that sustainable development could only be achieved by an extensive examination and incorporation of the cultural aspects of biodiversity, with the engagement of the indigenous communities in every region. The approaches of ethnobotanical research depend on the desired objective or ultimate result. They are varied but may be categorized into two primary types: empirical study and textual analysis. The majority of research focus on many families and hundreds of species of ethnobotanical significance within a certain area. Numerous traditional methods promote the sustainable use of biological resources.

Faith and traditional practices mitigate damage and promote the conservation of particular species and habitats, hence bolstering complete biodiversity. The opportunity for socioeconomic progress among indigenous populations lies in the establishment of cottage industries focused on their unique traditional tools, devices, arts and crafts. A significant population of tribal individuals residing in the secluded, dense forest regions of the Aravalli hills in the Mewar district relies on nature for their fundamental existence demands. Individuals from primitive or aboriginal cultures possess extensive knowledge of the qualities and use of plants. Katewa et al. (2003) endeavoured to chronicle the invaluable traditional knowledge of the applications and qualities of wild plants possessed by the indigenous people of the Aravalli hills in the Mewar area. The study examines the contemporary function of plants in the production of traditional commodities and delineates certain specialized skills required for the manufacturing of these things.

Jain et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive ethnomedicinal study to record the valuable traditional healthcare practices among various ethnic groups in Rajasthan. Individuals from primitive or aboriginal cultures possess extensive knowledge of the medical applications of biodiversity. The investigation revealed that tribal communities often use plant components, animals and animal-derived chemicals to treat a range of ailments and problems. Indigenous healthcare traditions provide cost-effective alternatives in regions where Western healthcare services are inaccessible or too costly. Analysis of data from 72 remedies reveals that 57 remedies derive from 45 distinct plant species across 29 families, while 15 remedies are composed of various animal-derived chemicals. A compilation of plant and animal species, including the specific parts used and the methods of administration for efficient treatment of various illnesses, is provided.

Singh et al. (2008) examine the research conducted to far in the ethnobotany of Rajasthan. Plants have been used in the prevention and treatment of several ailments in people and their pets. With the emergence of human civilization, several therapeutic systems have been established, mostly derived from plants. Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Siddha, Unani and similar practices constitute our traditional medicinal systems. Plant-based conventional medical systems remain the principal healthcare providers for almost three-quarters of the global population. The use of plants for therapeutic purposes in India stretches back 5,000 years. It has been officially acknowledged that 2,500 plant species possess therapeutic properties, while more than 6,000 plants are projected to be investigated in traditional, folk and herbal medicine. The woodlands and desert areas of Rajasthan provide significant promise from both economic and biological perspectives.

Bama et al. (2009) investigated ethnobotany among the ethnic communities in the Villupuram area of the Western Ghats in India. This study included 46 plant species across 31 families. This research used data obtained from traditional healers to contrast with the current literature on India's ethnobotany. Conventional ethnomedicinal plants were mostly used for the management of fever, diarrhea, dermatological ailments, poisonous bites, wounds, hemorrhoids and rheumatism.

Jain et al. (2009) cataloged the flora used by the indigenous populations of the Sariska and Siliserh areas in the Alwar district of Rajasthan, India. A total of 110 plant species, including 88 genera and 43 families, used in traditional

medicinal practices, have been documented from the examined locations. The residents of this region are oblivious to the richness of this heritage due to insufficient knowledge and study on these plant groupings. The study offers a reliable source of information for traditional medical practitioners and researchers of medicinal plants, aiding in the formulation of plans for future conservation efforts.

The state of Rajasthan has a substantial tribal population residing in the remaining deciduous forests of the Aravalli and Vindhyan mountains. Despite experiencing varied degrees of transformation, a significant population continues to thrive in primitive circumstances while maintaining their customs. The Bhils are the biggest group, followed by the Garasias and Damors. The Kathodias and Sahariyas remain sociologically obscure. The indigenous people, living near natural environments, possess specialized knowledge on the characteristics and applications of wild flora, most of which remains unfamiliar to other societies. Until a decade ago, the ethnobotany of the tribes of Rajasthan remained mostly unexplored. Comprehensive fieldwork in tribal settlements, seen from a macro-level viewpoint, yielded intriguing insights into their lifestyles. Katewa (2009) emphasized valuable ethnobotanical insights about the use of wild plants by the tribal communities of Rajasthan for purposes such as food and medicine. This traditional knowledge, when exposed to scientific examination, might provide several advantages to humanity.

Meena and Yadav (2010) conducted a comprehensive study in the southern region of Rajasthan, encompassing the districts of Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Banswara and Dungarpur, to chronicle the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants used by tribal groups. Tribal groups such as Bhil, Damor, Garasia, Kalbelia, Kathodia and Meena inhabit this region. These people and their healers possess significant knowledge of the characteristics and therapeutic applications of flora. An effort has been undertaken to catalog the ethnomedicinal plants used historically by the tribal communities, including their native nomenclature, administration techniques and precautions. A total of 31 species from 31 genera and 22 families has been presented.

Ethnobotany is a specialized field of natural science that encompasses anthropology, archaeology, botany, ecology, economics, medicine, religion, culture and other fields. There is a growing global interest in the aforementioned studies of herbal medicines and traditional cures, accompanied by an increase in scientific research in this domain. Sharma and Kumar (2011) emphasized valuable ethnobotanical insights about the use of plants by the tribal communities of Rajasthan for food, fodder, medicine, lumber, firewood, tannin, dye, oil, fiber, alcohol, gum and resin. This traditional knowledge, when analyzed via scientific inquiry, might provide several advantages for humanity. This analysis emphasizes valuable ethnobotanical insights about the use of plants by the tribal communities of Rajasthan. Conservation of ethnomedicinal plants is essential.

Singh and Singh (2011) mentioned that holy groves, or sacred forests, are assemblages of trees that possess considerable traditional, religious and cultural significance. In Rajasthan, India, these regions are designated for the veneration of local deities and ancestral spirits, often situated inside woods as separate zones. These holy woods demonstrate in-situ conservation and are distributed over the region, including towns, cities, plains and hilly places. They possess essential genetic variety, significantly contributing to environmental protection via several mechanisms. These unspoiled woodland fragments have safeguarded countless species that may have otherwise faced extinction. In addition to safeguarding biological variety, holy groves facilitate the protection of water and soil. In Rajasthan, holy trees act as custodians of priceless historical religious practices and cultural ideas. These hallowed forests provide vital ecological services to mankind. Recent worldwide developments have profoundly affected both religious practices and biological integrity. The decline of these historic assets may be ascribed to several sources, including changes in social perspectives, the impact of modernity and the progressive disintegration of cultural traditions. Promoting understanding and conservation of the many ecological services offered by holy groves is essential. Formulating management and conservation plans is essential to guarantee the long-term sustainability of these forests next to human populations.

Meena et al. (2013) conducted a comprehensive investigation of the Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan to describe the ethnobotanical plants used for the construction of huts and hamlets. Thirty-one angiosperm species have been documented, together with their respective plant components used in the construction of different kinds of huts and hamlets inside the sanctuary.

The Thar Desert is one of the habitats with the greatest biodiversity among the world's desert ecosystems. The floristic study of the Thar Desert was conducted by Charan and Sharma (2016) between 2013 and 2015. The analysis of

vegetation habits revealed that herbaceous plants constituted the majority at 60.10%, followed by shrubs at 16.26%, trees at 14.29% and climbers at 9.36% in the Thar Desert. The study's findings may aid in the conservation and sustainable management of plant resources in the Thar Desert in western Rajasthan.

Ethnobotany examines the interactions and linkages between plants and humans across temporal and spatial dimensions. Human existence would be untenable without the presence of plants. Sain et al. (2017) endeavored to investigate the traditional indigenous knowledge of the local rural populace in the Banasthali area of Tonk district, Rajasthan. The research investigated 44 plant species from 29 families and 41 genera used for the creation of different treatments, using methods such as decoction, juice extraction and powder formulation. The research indicates that 16 plant species exhibit a high degree of faithfulness. These discoveries will facilitate the preparation of more advanced research in pharmaceuticals.

Sharma and Pareek (2021) conducted an ethnobotanical study on the therapeutic use of plants in District Dausa (Rajasthan), India, using a standardized oral questionnaire from January 2018 to December 2019. The purpose of the study was to gather information on these important plants used for treating various diseases and other applications by indigenous populations, as well as to identify traditional healers throughout diverse rural communities in the region. Interviews were systematically performed with local individuals with knowledge of the ethnobotanical use of different plant sections. A variety of plant species were documented as being used by the rural populations of various villages in the research region. The study offered a substantial amount of knowledge on the ethnomedicinal use of plants in the examined region.

Bairwa et al. (2022) undertook a floristic survey of ethnomedicinal plants in the research region from January 2019 to December 2021. This investigation seeks to identify and catalog the ethnomedicinal plants used by the indigenous population of the Alwar area in Rajasthan, India. Seventy-five ethnomedicinal plant species from thirty-six families have been documented in the study area, utilized by the tribal and rural populations of Alwar district to treat various ailments, including cough, cold, fever, diarrhea, dysentery, asthma, rheumatism, skin conditions, wounds, boils, ulcers, inflammation, gastric disorders, urinary issues, sexual impotence, gonorrhea, leucorrhea and anemia. Among 75 plant species, 26 are trees, 12 are shrubs, 36 are herbs and 1 is a climber. The Fabaceae family (13 species) was the predominant family, succeeded by Euphorbiaceae (5 species), Asteraceae, Malvaceae, Moraceae and Solanaceae (4 species each). The most utilized plant part for medicinal purposes was the leaves (26.83%), followed by the root (15.45%), whole plant (14.63%) and fruit and bark (12.20%). This document presents a compilation of ethnomedicinal plant species, including their local nomenclature, used plant parts and therapeutic applications for the appropriate management of many ailments.

Kumar and Khan (2022) noted that the Thar Desert in India has unique significance and distinct traits concerning indigenous and medicinal flora. Forty-five plant species are classified as uncommon and/or endangered. The desert has several plants of commercial significance and medical value. The Thar Desert is densely inhabited relative to other arid deserts globally. The area is documented to have 17.44 million inhabitants and 23.33 million cattle. These populations impose strain on the ecological resources of the Thar Desert, resulting in unsustainability and necessitating biodiversity conservation efforts. A floristic study of the Thar Desert was conducted. A total of 62 families, 157 genera and 206 species were recorded from the region. The three most prevalent plant families in the study area were Fabaceae (29 species), followed by Poaceae (26 species) and Asteraceae (15 species). The analysis of vegetation types revealed that herbaceous plants constituted the majority at 60.10%, followed by shrubs at 16.26%, trees at 14.29% and climbers at 9.36% in the Thar Desert. The study's findings may aid in the protection and sustainable management of the Thar desert's plant resources.

Somani (2022) noted that medicinal plants are very abundant in the Barmer area of the Thar Desert. The use of herbal plants in the therapeutic and pharmaceutical sectors has significant promise. These medicinal plants have historically been used for various maladies by local populations, indigenous communities, vendors, traditional healers such as Bhopas and practitioners in the Ayurvedic discipline. In the dry expanse of the Thar Desert, members of the Mimosaceae family of plants are more abundant. This study focuses on ethnomedicinal plants including *Acacia leucophloea* (Roxb.) Willd., *Acacia nilotica* (Linn), *Acacia senegal* (L.) Willd., *Acacia tortilis* (Forssk.) Hayne, *Albizia lebbek* (L.) Benth., *Dichrostachys cinerea* (L.) Wight & Arn., *Leucaena leucocephala* (Lam.) de Wit, *Prosopis cineraria* (L.) Druce and *Prosopis juliflora* (Swartz) DC. The investigation seeks to enhance the understanding of the

ethnomedicinal significance of these plants and their applications to engage pharmacologists, phytologists and pharmaceutical companies.

Alam et al. (2023) noted that among angiosperms, the Fabaceae (Leguminosae) family is renowned for its contributions to traditional or ethnic cuisine and medicine. In this context, India's arid region may be considered a very valuable area; thus, an examination of the scientific literature about their phytochemical properties and ethnomedicinal applications is anticipated to enhance the exploration and usage of members of this extensive plant family. Choudhary et al. (2023) examined therapeutic wild plants in the Hadoti area of Rajasthan and its use by indigenous tribal communities. While wild plants are often seen as undesirable, the tribal and traditional communities in the Hadoti area have used them for medicinal purposes, culinary applications and other uses. Certain plants are used for producing string, crafting home products, dental hygiene and repelling insects. This information encompasses the botanical name, common name, family, used plant portion and its therapeutic application.

The Kota district is located in the southeastern part of Rajasthan and is renowned for its floral richness. Malav et al. (2023) conducted research in the Nanta forest region within the Sakatpura forest range of the Kota Forest division. This region remains unexamined for ethnomedicinal plant variety, presenting a novel avenue for study in human well-being and biodiversity protection. This research elucidates ethnomedicinal variety, identity and medicinal applications derived from information obtained from rural inhabitants, indigenous populations and local traditional medicine practitioners (vaid). The acquired data was corroborated by secondary sources. The prevalence of human activities poses a threat to the existing variety of ethnomedicinal plants in the research region. It is essential to maintain the variety of this area. Through active observation and discussions with local residents, 60 species from 26 groups were identified as ethnomedicinal resources used by the community. The research area revealed therapeutic benefits of plants mostly for stomach-related disorders, skin ailments, rheumatism and asthma.

Ethnobotany, the study of the relationships between people and plants, has evolved into a field that integrates culture, science and the natural environment. Ethnobotany extends beyond the simple cataloging of plants and their use; it provides insight into the values, beliefs and customs of societies. It clarifies the mutual impact between people and the plant resources essential for nourishment, therapeutic use, ceremonies, or economic support. Barwant and Shrivastava (2024) examined several topics, including the medicinal properties of plants, their cultural significance and the urgent need to preserve this knowledge in the face of environmental and cultural changes. Ethnobiology is the scientific study of the use and management of plants and animals by diverse traditional communities. Early people sought ideal dietary resources from their environment to guarantee health and lifespan free from sickness. This initiative has resulted in the selection of several food items by human cultures throughout diverse global areas. Primitive humans apparently combined instinct with indulgence to choose their nutritional choices.

Rao (2024) investigated the holy woods of Sawai Madhopur district in Rajasthan, India, emphasizing its ethnobotanical importance, cultural history and contribution to biodiversity protection. Sacred groves are historically safeguarded woodland regions, esteemed by local people for their spiritual and ecological significance. These areas have many plant species, including those that are uncommon and medicinal, enhancing the biological diversity of the region. This project employs ethnobotanical surveys, interviews with local populations and plant species analysis to catalog the flora in these groves and examine the traditional knowledge related to their use in folk medicine, rituals and conservation activities. The results indicate that holy groves in Sawai Madhopur function as vital stores of indigenous botanical knowledge, providing insights into sustainable practices maintained across generations. Nonetheless, modernity, changes in religious rituals and socio-economic pressures jeopardize the existence of these groves. This research underscores the pressing need for policies that promote local stewardship and incorporate ethnobotanical knowledge into conservation frameworks.

Singh and Keer (2024) conducted a survey in Mandal tehsil from 2016 to 2017 to describe the ethnoveterinary plants used by the tribal and local populations. The research is based on comprehensive botanical investigations and conversations with indigenous tribes, local inhabitants, shepherds and nomadic individuals from the Pali area.

Singh and Jain (2024) made a modest effort to identify the elements contributing to the shift among the Bhils, which over time is diminishing the continuity of ethnobotanical knowledge. This research aims to describe the factors contributing to the loss of ethnobotanical knowledge among the Bhils. The reasons stated are: Deforestation, habitat

fragmentation, invasion of non-native species and the intensification of agricultural methods among tribal communities have resulted in biodiversity loss, hence altering the availability of plant species for the Bhils' food, fodder, medicinal and other purposes. This study poses the question of whether the Bhils, in response to significant transformative forces, are erasing their own knowledge. It underscores the necessity of preserving traditional ethnobotanical knowledge for the benefit of humanity and emphasizes that maintaining cultural transformation is crucial for their survival and for aiding mankind.

III. CONCLUSION

The traditional medicinal knowledge of Rajasthan reflects a deep connection between indigenous communities and their natural environment. This review underscores the immense ethnobotanical diversity of the region of its medicinal plants. The documentation and scientific validation of these plants not only reinforce their therapeutic value but also pave the way for future drug discovery and development. However, increasing environmental pressures, urbanization and loss of traditional knowledge pose significant threats to this botanical wealth. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to promote ethnobotanical research, encourage phytochemical investigations and implement conservation strategies. By integrating traditional wisdom with scientific approaches, the medicinal plant heritage of Rajasthan can be preserved and utilized for the benefit of both local communities and global health initiatives.

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