

Healing Traditions: Ethnobotanical Survey of Medicinal Plants Used by Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

For millennia, indigenous communities around the world have relied on plants not only for food and shelter but also for healing. These traditions, rooted in deep ecological knowledge and cultural practices, form the foundation of ethnobotany—the study of the relationships between people and plants. Medicinal plants are central to these healing traditions, offering remedies for a wide range of ailments and serving as a vital component of primary healthcare in many rural and remote regions.

Keywords: *Pharmacognosy; Bioprospecting; Chemoinformatics*

Introduction

The article explores the findings of ethnobotanical surveys conducted among indigenous communities, highlighting the diversity of medicinal plants used, their cultural significance, and the urgent need for conservation and scientific validation. Such studies not only preserve traditional knowledge but also provide leads for pharmacological research and drug development. Ethnobotanical surveys typically involve fieldwork in indigenous territories, where researchers collaborate with traditional healers, elders, and community members. Data is collected through interviews, participant observation, and guided plant walks [1].

Indigenous communities often use a wide array of plant species for medicinal purposes. For example, a survey in Arugankulam Village, Tamil Nadu, India, documented 105 plant species from 44 families used to treat 125 ailments, with leaves being the most commonly used part. Similarly, in Uganda's Mabira Forest region, 190 species were recorded, with *Vernonia amygdalina* and

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Erythrina abyssinica showing high fidelity for treating malaria and vomiting respectively [2].

These plants are used to treat conditions ranging from colds and fevers to digestive disorders, skin infections, and reproductive health issues. This cultural context is essential for understanding the full scope of ethnobotanical knowledge and its transmission across generations. Medicinal plants are deeply embedded in indigenous cosmologies and rituals. Healing is often viewed as a holistic process involving physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Plants may be used in ceremonies, offerings, and purification rites [3].

In many communities, elder women serve as custodians of medicinal plant knowledge, preparing remedies and teaching younger generations. Preserving this gendered knowledge is crucial for maintaining cultural continuity and ecological stewardship. Ethnobotanical knowledge is typically passed down orally through generations. Gender plays a significant role in shaping this knowledge. Women often specialize in plants related to childbirth, childcare, and household remedies, while men may focus on plants used in hunting, construction, or ritual healing [4].

Despite their importance, many medicinal plants face threats from deforestation, overharvesting, climate change, and loss of traditional knowledge. As indigenous lands are encroached upon, access to healing plants becomes limited, and younger generations may turn away from traditional practices. Many plants used in traditional medicine contain bioactive compounds with therapeutic potential. Ethnobotanical surveys provide a starting point for laboratory studies that isolate, characterize, and test these compounds [5].

Conclusion

Healing traditions rooted in ethnobotanical knowledge are a testament to the ingenuity and resilience of indigenous communities. These practices offer not only remedies for physical ailments but also pathways to cultural identity, ecological harmony, and spiritual well-being. Ethnobotanical surveys serve as bridges between traditional wisdom and modern science, illuminating the vast potential of medicinal plants. Preserving and respecting this knowledge is essential—not just for the communities who hold it, but for the health and sustainability of our shared planet.

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