



Folklore Herbal Medicinal System In The Perspective Of IKS

Prof. Leena Sakkarwal

School of Education

Central Sanskrit University, New Delhi

Associate Dean (Student-Welfare) & I/c of Research & Development Cell

Abstract: India is known for its rich biodiversity with several endangered and endemic conditional plants in its hotspot. Among the 400 flowering plants worldwide, 315 families are presented in India. It is a vast repository of traditional knowledge and provide source for several medicines. Even now rural communities and households practice folklore medicines to cure common ailments. These medicines combine traditional healing practices, spirituality and therapies to diagnose and prevent elements. NEP2020 (4.27)¹ clearly mention that Knowledge of India will include knowledge from ancient India and its contribution to modern India and its successes and challenges and clear sense of India's future aspirations about education, health, environment. Indian knowledge system including tribal knowledge, indigenous and traditional way of learning of many subjects including tribal ethno-medicinal practices, forest management, yoga, medicine etc. This research paper attempts to review the role of folklore herbal medicinal system regarding holistic approach to health and healing in the perspective of Indian knowledge system. The study solely based on secondary data. The research found that from Vedic period to later time folklore herbal medicinal system played pivotal role in curing the health and healing of people. Reviving ancient folklore herbal medicinal system is need for today's world. The more we are reaching the highest in technology. The better we need to take care of health. Hence, there will be a probability of huge demand for herbal practices as they have no side effects and people want to cure themselves without taking allopathic remedies. Moreover, we need to understand the true meaning of IKS where we share and care people. Since we need to live our life meaningful, instead of overthinking about materialistic life. Eventually, we can conclude that from Vedic period to later our ancient Indian renowned sages always been taking care of entire Gyan Parampara including various subjects. So, the Knowledge and understanding of these traditional practices can makes us feel rooted to our nation and sense of pride in our Bhartiya Gyan Parampara.

Keywords: folklore herbal, ancient medicinal system, IKS (Bhartiya Gyan Parampara).

¹ NEP 2020, pg 24, MHRD document.

Introduction

General Background of the Study:

India has always been recognised globally as a prosperous and culturally rich nation with a long history of knowledge, systems and intellectual achievements. However, for the last two centuries, the Western perception has been leading, influencing factor in our education. The British rule and their policies even had a detrimental impact on India's education system and led to a decline in its prosperity. Due to this colonial thought process the Indian origin knowledge is either been rejected or ignored in mainstream education for many decades. The Bhartiya world view is entirely lacking in the society. Living with all kinds of materialistic things or having all those, has become the lone objective of current education.² Whereas, living life for meaningful purpose always been the aim of Indian education system, so that, one can change his perspectives towards life and think innovatively and impactful to make the society better place to live in. Nowadays, IKS or Indian knowledge system become the flavour of the season as this euphoria begin with the mention of IKS in National Education Policy 2020, where it is mandated to have IKS based education in schools, colleges and higher education institutes and have been largely discussed in the academic and administrative circles. This paper aims to understand how Indigenous cultures and their knowledge systems can contribute to global challenges. To do so, this paper will attempt first to understand the concept of IKS; then to explore the ancient folklore medicinal system in India, also their significance in the perspective of IKS.

Conceptual Understanding of IKS:

IKS is a short acronym of Indian Knowledge System which means indigenous source of knowledge generated by the ancient Indian society from the wisdom and insights arising out of deep experiences, observations, experimentations and analysis of various concepts. It is a legacy, woven from Jyan, Vigyan and Jeevan darshan. These are not just abstract concepts; Indeed, they have evolved from centuries of experience and rigorous analysis. IKS has a very long history that has continued unbroken like the Ganges River. From the Vedas to the country's native and tribal folklore knowledge has been the focus of all research. Since In Ancient Indian Education, knowledge has always been prominent. **As Lord Krishna guides Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita. 4.38 that knowledge is the greatest means of self-purification and liberation.'Na hi gyanen sadrisham pavitramih vidyatevidyate'**³. There is a vast repository of knowledge available not only in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, but also in all native Indian languages. However, one of the key pillars of India's ancient knowledge system is the Vedic literature. These texts contain a vast repository of knowledge encompassing various disciplines such as philosophy, science, mathematics, language & linguistic, astronomy. Moreover, Ayurveda, Yoga Metallurgy, Rasashastra, Public administration, War Technology management, Science Technology and many more. Today, this insightful knowledge is much needed for Knowledge diplomacy which is going to rule the international relations in future world, Since India has such a literary repository that will enrich the Indian civilization for millennia.

Concept of Folklore herbal medicinal system:

The relationship of mankind with plants starts from primeval. However, the entire life of man his culture, and the development of civilizations depends on plant sources. The usage of plants in healing ailments has inveterate history and his documented in Rig and Atharva Veda. In Rigveda plants have been recognised in

² Integration of IKS and ILS in Indian Education through NEP 2020, pg 2. Varkhedi.Prof.Sriniwas, 2022.

³ Bhaktivedanta, Swami Prabhupada ,A.C 2007, Bhagavad Gita as It Is. Pg no. 237,

three groups that is trees (Vriksha) herbs (Osadhi) and creepers(Viruddh)⁴.In Atharvaveda type, shape and morphology of plants is described ,whereas in Yajurveda four groups of medicinal plants has been described. The indigenous practices of medicinal plants are based on values and personal experience developed. In India, folklore traditional medicinal practices primarily revolve around the use of plants and their extract, often categorised under three main system of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani with tribal communities utilising a vast knowledge of local plants to treat various elements including reproductive issues and relying heavily on knowledge passed down through generation for remedies against snake bites and other environmental threats. India boasts a wide variety of medicinal plants which form the foundation of traditional healing practices across different regions and **Ayurveda is considered the most prominent traditional Indian medicine system**⁵ emphasising a holistic approach to health and utilising plant-based remedies. Alongside Ayurveda, **the Siddha system (predominant in South India) and Unani** which is influenced by Greek medicines are also significant parts of Indian traditional medicine system. Indigenous communities, particularly those living in forested areas possess deep knowledge of medicinal plants and their applications often passed down orally through generation.

Most often developing countries are countries use traditional medicine as the first line of therapy the ethnobotanical information is the key to developing many new drugs and helps to protect the intellectual property of the plant of particular reason.

Objectives of the study:

- To understand the concept of IKS.
- To investigate the glimpse of ancient Indian medicinal plants.
- To find out some case studies regarding herbal medicinal practices across the country.
- To review the role of folklore medicinal systems in the perspective of IKS.

Methodology:

Methodology deserves a very careful consideration. Methodology and procedures are the important factors in conducting research. Appropriate methodology used in research helps to collect valid and reliable data and analyse the information purposively to arrive at correct decision. The study was solely based on secondary data. The information was gathered from various related books, journals, Internet, newspapers, articles and personal collection. Data was collected according to the requirement of fulfilment of objectives. There has lot of related data in websites, but the most important data was only incorporated here. Gathered experience and knowledge, also incorporated in this paper.

Findings of the Research paper:

Historical Aspects of Herbal medicines

- The Rigveda 2500 BC to 600 BC recognised 3 groups of plants that is tree, herbs and creepers. These are further classified into flowering, non-flowering, fruit bearing and fruitless plants, Similarly, Atharvaveda also contains description of many medicinal plants. The most celebrated plant that finds frequent mention in the Rigveda and in later Samhita is the Soma plant. The Vedic Indian hail Soma as the Lord of the forest. The botanical identity of a Soma plant, however, has not been decided till today. **Technical literature on medicinal plants** with

⁴ [www.indianscriptures.com/Vedic knowledge/ contribution to the world/](http://www.indianscriptures.com/Vedic%20knowledge/contribution%20to%20the%20world/)

• ⁵ <https://researchgate.net>

complete detail of morphology and pharmacology is described in the words like the **Charak Samhita** and **Sushrut Samhita** lexicons like *Medin kosha* and *Amar kosha* as well as the Encyclopaedic works like **Arthashastra**, **Brihatsanhita** are also there, In addition there is an exclusive Sanskrit and plants related work under the title of *Vriksayurveda*. **Parashar's Vrikshayurveda** supposed to be the most ancient work in actual botany. it was composed during first century BC and first century AD from the literary evidence even in the first Millennium BC, botany was fully systematised, and taxonomy was well developed in India. Let's say for example there is a description of plant morphology in *Samhita*; **Charak** (1st Century AD) divided the plants into **vanaspati** which means trees with fruits **vanaspatya** trees with flowers and fruits **Aushadhi** herbs that wither after fruiting⁶. Similarly, **Manu** also classified the plants into 8 groups such as **aushadhi**, **vanaspati**, **vriksh**, **guccha**, **Trina**, **Gulma**, **Pratan**, **Valli**. Apart from this, Study of plants are also mentioned in *nighantu* In India such as; in *Rajanighantu* names and synonyms of medicine plants are signed on the basis of traditional usage, effect, habitat, morphological character. In **Dhanvantri Nighantu** one or many names are assigned to the plants according to habitat form, colour, potency taste effects. in *Nighantushesh* *khand* is described on the basis of *vriksha*, *gulma*, *lata shakha*, *trin* and *dhanya*.

Case studies and examples of Folklore herbal medicinal systems:

- **Folklore medicinal knowledge of the people in Pathinettamkottai village, sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu.** The study explored 65 medicinal remedies from plants used to treat 41 different illnesses. the predominant part used to prepare medicines is a leaf the medicines are prepared in the form of powder, paste decoction, and vapour and they are used to cure 31 health problems such as cold, fever, asthma diarrhoea, diabetes, jaundice wound, cuts, stomach pain etc.⁷
- Similarly the **indigenous community of snake charmers** belong to the Nath community in India have played important role of healers in treating snake bite victims, snake charmers also sell herbal remedies for common elements, these snake charmers of village khetawas, located in district Jhajjar of Haryana used 57 medicinal plants species that belong to 51 genera and 35 families for the treatment of various diseases, main diseases treated by this community was snakebite in which 19 different type of medicine plants belong to 13 families were used and the highest numbers of medicinal plants for traditional uses of utilised by this community belonging to family Fabaceae.⁸
- **In the same way traditional healing practices of Mishing community**, which is a tribe in India, primarily practices traditional healing using locally available herbs and plants. With their healers, often called 'Mibu' or 'Miri' prescribing remedies in the form of fresh juices, decoctions, pastes and powdered medicine supplied or taken orally to treat various ailments. their practices also incorporate rituals and prayers to divine forces for healing purposes.⁹

• ⁶ Dutt C. Caraka-samhita Vol. 1.11 Varanasi India Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan 2010.

⁷ T. GaneshMurthy, folklore medical knowledge of the people in. Pathinettam, Kottai village, Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu.

⁸ <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in>

⁹ <https://asbb.assam.govt.in>

- There are some more examples of **folk healing traditions in Kerala such as poison therapy (Vishchikitsa) Children's diseases (Bala chikitsa) diseases of the mind (mana chikitsa) and bone setting** and women who's specialised in childbirth related therapies were an important part of traditional medical care¹⁰.
- Let us see some case studies: **a Carmelite monk Vaidya has been practicing poison therapy in rural Kerala for 40 years** these monks have a long history of involvement in healthcare in India. people from all over Kerala came for consultation to the clinic located in a small village near Kottayam referred by biomedical physicians unable to cure long term ulceration of the skin resulting from some poison bites. for his medicinal plant work he was honoured with the nagarjuna trophy for the heritage plant preservation.¹¹
- **The mountain ranges of wayanad are rich reserves of biodiversity of ancient lineage** and many plants found there are of medicinal value. For centuries **the tribal people 'adivasis' living in** and around these forested areas have used medicinal herbs as their first line of defence against diseases.
- Similarly, many tribal healers are renowned for an extensive knowledge of Regional Medical plants, especially for the use of single drug remedies known as **"ottamoolis" tribal knowledge has contributed significantly to reasons specific medical knowledge of India for centuries.** However, the culture and knowledge of these traditional healers of Kerala like these are most endanger of becoming absorbed into the changes happening in Kerala in India because much of their knowledge is oral, regional, individually based and closely guarded as in the case of the tribal healers.
- In Kerala, **itself Mannan healers are traditionally known for their ability to cure children's disease** and are consulted by people from all layers of the society even the elite brahmin ashtavaidya physician in some cases consult mannans when their children fall ill.
- Similarly, **vishchikitsa poison therapy specially for snake bites is practiced in Kerala by healers** belonging to different castes and religions. Members of certain namboothiri illams in Kerala are famous for their expertise in healing snake bites most namboothiris and many of the literate healers now base practice on techniques and additional formula mentioned in the ashtangaridyam Sanskrit text in Malayalam text like vishwajyotsnika, prayogsamuchhyam, and kriyakaumudi. characters like maheshwaram namboothiri ,80-year-old healer who practices poison therapy in a village near thrissur. he is also well known as a physician for elephants (gaja vaidya) and treat elephants used for temple festivals in Kerala.¹²
- **Namboothiri healers in Kerala, India, are practitioners of Ayurveda,** a system of medicine that emphasizes holistic healing. Some Namboothiri healers are specialists in specific areas of Ayurveda, such as toxicology, pediatrics, and general medicine.

¹⁰ <https://researchgate.net>

¹¹ <https://www.ncbs.res.in>

¹² [https:// www.nambuthari.com](https://www.nambuthari.com)

Specialties:

- **Vishachikitsa:** A specialty in toxicology, or the treatment of poisoning, snake bites, and insect bites
- **Ashtavaidya:** A specialty in the eight branches of Ayurveda, including general medicine, pediatrics, and psychological disorders
- **Kaya:** A specialty in general medicine, including digestive disorders
- **Bala:** A specialty in pediatrics, including obstetrics
- **Graha:** A specialty in psychological disorders caused by evil spirits
- **Urdhvanga:** A specialty in diseases of the head, including the eyes, ears, nose, throat, and teeth
- **Shalya:** A specialty in surgery and treatment for external injuries
- **Jara:** A specialty in geriatrics and rejuvenation
- **Vrisha:** A specialty in aphrodisiacs and treatment for sterility.

So, we can say, that indigenous knowledge based traditional system of medicine is a wise approach that has proven to be life saving for people in various regions, since 1970, the WHO has been promoting the conservation of national heritage pertaining to ethno medicines and ethnopharmacology.¹³

- According to **The WHO approximately 80% of the global population residing in developing nations predominantly rely on traditional variations as their primary form of healthcare.**
- The ministry of Ayushi is also encouraging global recognition of India's traditional medicine through strategic collaborations, admit initiatives, and international outreach.
- **AIMS also claims that Ayush ministry funded drugs, used by tribals, effective in treating superficial wounds.**¹⁴
- Herbal medicines are used in India in alternative system of health like ayurveda, yoga, Unani, siddha, homeopathy naturopathy acupuncture. WHO says that more research is needed to determine the safety and efficacy of traditional medicine.
- **According to the WHO global report on traditional and complementary medicine 2019 various systems of traditional medicines being used around the world include** acupuncture, herbal medicines, indigenous traditional medicines homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, naturopathy chiropractic, osteopathy Ayurvedic and Unani medicines and 170 WHO member states have reported on the use of traditional medicines by their population.

Recommendations:

- It is **necessary to collect information** about the knowledge of traditional medicines preserved in tribal and rural communities of various parts of the world before it is permanently lost.
- **Documentation of indigenous knowledge through folklore studies is important** for the conversation of biological resources as well as their sustainable utilization.
- Encourage global recognition of India's traditional medicine through **strategic collaborations, admit initiatives, and international outreach.**

¹³ [https:// www.who.int](https://www.who.int)

¹⁴ Ministry of Ayush

- It was expected that **global marketing of medicinal plants may reach \$5 trillion by 2050**. There was an increasing interest in using herbal products and remedies globally, so the values of traditional knowledge and worthy information are cherished.
- **More research should be encouraged in the preservation** and the validation of tribal herbal medicinal system. As WHO says that more research is needed to determine the safety and efficacy of traditional medicine.
- **Strong policies should recommend by government** to preserve and proliferate traditional medicinal system.
- Also, **funding should be promoted by Govt.** So that people might have maximum benefits of traditional medicinal system. **AIMS also claims that** Ayush ministry funded drugs, used by tribals, effective in treating superficial wounds.

Conclusion:

Eventually, we can conclude that there is always an in-depth and matchless association between the indigenous people and their living environments, which has been established over decades or we can say from the periods of Rigveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Charak Samhita, Sushruta Samhita in which our renowned botanist sages like Agastya, Sushrut, Charak and later on tribal communities had vast knowledge of plants with their botanical characteristics and medicinal value. They better understand natural sources and from that evolve novel system of practices they benefit. So now, this is the time to secure our knowledge of natural resources to conserve them, and they provide roots to identify promising drugs and products without side effects. This present study also stands to prove the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants are the most important part of Indian knowledge system which should be revitalise, recognised and promoted by govt & people.

References:

- Altekar, A.S. 2014. Education in Ancient India, Isha books, Delhi.
- Bhaktivedanta, Swami Prabhupada, A.C 2007, Bhagavad Gita as It Is. Pg no. 237, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Juhu, Mumbai.
- Chidambaram, Subramanian, 2024. IKS in Indian Education System: Possibilities and Challenge.
- Manjusha A. Shinde, A Literature review of the integration of Ancient Indian Mythology in clinical medicine: A holistic approach to health and healing. Cureus part of Springer nature. DO:10.7759/cureus.63779.
- T. GaneshMurthy, folklore medical knowledge of the people in. Pathinettam, Kottai village, Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu, India. IJPSR 2022, volume 13, issue 12.
- Acharya Balakrishna, Ancient Indian Rishi (Sages) knowledge of Botany and medical plants since Vedic much older than the period of Theophrastus, A case study- who was the actual father of botany? International Journal of Unani and Integrative 2019,3(3)40-44.
- Indian Scriptures: The Science of life in the Vedic Age. Retrieved from [http://www.indianscriptures.com/Vedic knowledge/ contribution to the world/ biology/the Science of life in the vedic age](http://www.indianscriptures.com/Vedic%20knowledge/contribution%20to%20the%20world/biology/the%20Science%20of%20life%20in%20the%20vedic%20age), 2017.
- Wikipedia: Flora of the India epic period. Retrieval from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flora of the Indian_epic_period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flora_of_the_Indian_epic_period).

- Chuneekar KC, Pandey, GS. Bhavprakash, Nighantu, Varanasi(India). Chaukhambha Bharati Academy Publishers and Distributors.
- Dutt C. Caraka-samhita Vol. 1.II Varanasi India Chaukhambha Surbharati Prakashan 2010.
- Murthy KRS Sushrut Samhita, 3rd Edition. Varanasi, India. Chaukhambha Prakashan, 2010.
- Ojha J, Mishra U. Dhanvantari Nighantu. Second Edition. Varanasi, (India) Chowkhamba Sura Bharati, Prakashan Publishers and Distributors, 2004.
- Rao GP. Sushrut Samhita. 3rd Edition. Varanasi, (India). Chaukhambha, Prakashan, 2011.
- Shastr G. Bhava Prakasha Nighantu, Second Edition. Mumbai, (India). Khemraj Sri. Krishnadas Prakashan.
- <https://nopr.niscpr.res.in>
- <https://idl-bnc-idrc-dspacedirect.org>.
- <https://www.fao.org>.
- <https://researchgate.net>
- <https://jaims.in>
- <https://www.who.int>
- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>
- <https://asbb.assam.govt.in>
- <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in>
- <https://www.nambuthari.com>
- <https://www.ncbs.res.in>

