



# Traditional Health Care and Traditional Medicine in India



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## Introduction

“There is no plant in the world which is non -medicinal or which cannot be used as medicine be used as medicine”. India has 16 Agro climatic zones, 45000 different plant species out of which 15000 are medicinal plants, of which 500 species are mostly used in the preparation of drugs. The Indian Systems of Medicine, particularly Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy medicine largely use plant base ancient texts had documented medicinal uses of large number of plants. These plants are being used for preparation of medicines for centuries [1].

A new trend has, however, been noticed that foreign countries have evinced interest in medicinal plants available in India and well documented in the present article, indicating the formulation in which they are used. A number of medicinal plants and their uses have been patented by foreign countries. There has been criticism by the people and in the press on this growing trend of patenting of our medicinal Plants and their uses. Some of the well known plants like kala zeera, Amaltas, Indian Mustared, Kareal, Brinjal, Neem and Gudmar etc. have patents. Some of the patents have been successfully contested by India [2]. India has century’s old heritage of medicinal plants and herbal medicines for curing human illness and promotion of health in tribal and rural areas. Medicinal plants are often, the only easily accessible health care alternative for the most of our population and traditional medicines remained a part of our integral health system. Indigenous people have shown evidences of historical continuity of resource use and possess a broad base knowledge of the complex ecological system existing in the vicinity of their habitat [3]. Thus there exists an intensive relationship between the two entities i.e. forest and tribals.

This relationship has been more static. It is always in flux of change. The life, tradition, culture of tribals has remained almost static since last several hundreds of years. The Knowledge accumulated by them through a long series of observations from one generation to another is transmitted through oral communication for power possessed by medicinal plants in cure of various diseases and ailment. It is a well-known fact that Traditional Systems of medicines always played important role in meeting the global

health care needs. They are continuing to do so at present and shall play major role in future also. The system of medicines which are considered to be Indian in origin or the systems of medicine, which have come to India from outside and got assimilated in to Indian culture are known as Indian Systems of Medicine. India has the unique distinction of having six recognized systems of medicine in this category. They are - Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Yoga, Naturopathy and Homoeopathy. Though Homoeopathy came to India in 18th Century, it completely assimilated in to the Indian culture and got enriched like any other traditional system hence it is considered as part of Indian Systems of Medicine. Apart from these systems, there are large numbers of healers in the folklore stream who have not been organized under any category.

According to Sharma [4], who shed some light on “contextualizing” both the use of traditional medicine and the vast gaps between western and indigenous approaches to medicine? To understand the role of the “Shaman” and to know anything of his genius in using plants, one must be prepared to accept the possibility that when he tells of moving into realms of the spirit, he is not speaking in metaphor. With the dexterity of a modern chemist. They recognized that the different compounds in relatively small concentrations might effectively potentiate one another. The geographic location of a healer is the defining characteristic. Tribal and non- tribal peoples agree on this point. The question of transporting Healers from nation to nation is at the heart of the traditional medicine contemporary issues. Limited exemption for traditional healers exists in some jurisdictions.

Healer is a term used to describe traditional healing practitioners, shamans or “doctors” in the literature. This is in contrast to descriptions of western biomedicine which rarely self defines “physicians, doctors or surgeons” as “healers”. Most reference to western biomedicine do not refer to curing as healing since, as one author states “both terms have a somewhat unscientific aura about (them). Conjuring up a vague notion of quackery”. Indigenous literature suggests they are not looking for validation by biomedical models. The healer is central to the process

of symbolic healing, and in this sense tribal elders are central to tribal spirituality. However, the status of “healer” or “Elder” is ambiguous and never clearly defined. Indeed it must be negotiated in each therapeutic or spiritual encounter. The question of who is an “Elder” is a thorny one. The general standard is acceptance by the community as an “Elder” [5]. Healing is almost an omnipotent entity within aboriginal society. As the modern era has ended formal assimilation policies and introduced multicultural policies that support indigenous traditionalism, an interesting challenge is now faced by indigenous peoples, the institutionalization of tradition [5]. The fact that Government agencies “support” the revitalization of Aboriginal “culture and heritage” creates the need to analyze what kind of impact these new policies will have on specific areas, most critically, traditional medicine. The regulated Health Professions Act. 1991 defines “aboriginal healer” as an aboriginal person who provides aboriginal healing services. This open ended definition can become a double edged sword, since the vague definition of healer is both a protection of indigenous autonomy and a potential danger that could allow the opportunist to pose as authentic healer and re-victimize tribal people.

**Medicinal Plants Used in Alternative/Traditional Medicines:** Alternative medicines are being used by about 60 percent of the world’s population. These medicines are not only used by the rural masses for their primary health care in developing countries but are also used in developed countries where modern medicines dominate [6]. The Indian subcontinent is a vast repository of medicinal plants that are used in traditional medical treatments. The alternative medicines in the traditional systems are derived from herbs, minerals, and organic matter, while for the preparation of herbal drugs only medicinal plants are used. Use of plants as a source of medicine has been an ancient practice and is an important component of the health care system in India. In India, about 70 percent of rural population depends on the traditional Ayurveda system of medicine. Most healers/practitioners of the traditional systems of medicine prepare formulations by their own recipes and dispense to the patients. In the Western countries, approximately 40 per cent of people are using the herbal medicine for the treatment of various diseases. This interest in traditional medicines is growing rapidly due to the attention being given to it by the governmental agencies and different NGO comprises of general public and researchers as well as the increased side effects, adverse drug reactions, and cost factor of the modern medicines.

## Conclusion

India is the largest producer of medicinal plants. There are currently about 250,000 registered medical practitioners of the Ayurvedic system, as compared to about 700,000 of the modern medicine. In India, around 20,000 medicinal plants have been recorded; however, traditional practitioners use only 7,000–7,500 plants for curing different diseases. The proportion of use of plants in the different Indian systems of medicine is Ayurveda 2000, Siddha 1300, Unani 1000, Homeopathy 800, Tibetan 500, Modern 200, and folk 4500. In India, around 25,000 effective plant-based formulations are used in traditional and folk medicine. More than 1.5 million practitioners are using the traditional medicinal system for health care in India. It is estimated that more than 7800 manufacturing units are involved in the production of natural health products and traditional plant-based formulations in India, which requires more than 2000 tons of medicinal plant raw material annually [7]. More than 1500 herbals are sold as dietary supplements or ethnic traditional medicines [8]. Alternative medicines are being used by those people who do not use or cannot be helped by conventional medicinal system.

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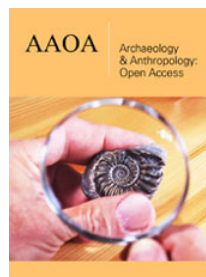
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