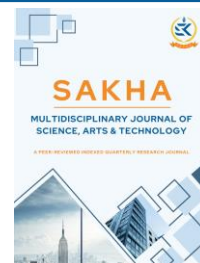




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Preserving Traditional Healing Practices of the Kurumba and Irula in Tamil Nadu- A Study

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Abstract

*The Kurumba and Irula tribes of Tamil Nadu have preserved traditional healing practices passed down through generations, using herbs, plants, and forest resources to treat various ailments. This article explores their ethno medicinal knowledge, highlighting the significance of indigenous medicine in modern healthcare. The Kurumba people, inhabiting the Nilgiri hills, possess extensive knowledge of local flora, using plants like *Sida cordifolia* and *Gymnema sylvestre* to treat diseases. The Irula, found in the eastern plains, employ unique techniques for snakebite treatment and use herbs like *Aristolochia indica* for various remedies. Their traditional practices offer insights into sustainable healthcare and biodiversity conservation. However, these practices face challenges like deforestation, urbanization, and cultural erosion. Documenting and preserving these traditions is crucial for cultural heritage and modern medicine.*

Keywords: Kurumba tribe, Irula tribe, traditional medicine, Tamil Nadu, indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, conservation, herbal remedies, cultural heritage.

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Introduction

The Kurumba and Irula tribes of Tamil Nadu have preserved traditional healing practices passed down through generations, using herbs, plants, and forest resources to treat various ailments. This article explores their ethno medicinal knowledge, highlighting the significance of indigenous medicine in modern healthcare. The Kurumba people, inhabiting the Nilgiri hills, possess extensive knowledge of local flora, using plants like *Sida cordifolia* and *Gymnema sylvestre* to treat diseases. The Irula, found in the eastern plains, employ unique techniques for snakebite treatment and use herbs like *Aristolochia indica* for various remedies.

The Kurumba Tribe: Guardians of Nilgiri's Green Heritage

The Kurumba tribe has lived in harmony with nature for centuries, developing a profound understanding of the region's biodiversity. Their traditional healing practices are deeply rooted in spiritual beliefs and a deep connection with the land. Kurumba healers, known as "vaidyas", diagnose illnesses through observation, pulse diagnosis, and spiritual intuition.

Some commonly used medicinal plants by the Kurumba

Sida cordifolia (Bala) which helps to treat respiratory issues and fever, *Gymnema sylvestre* (Gurmar) which manages diabetes and digestive issues. *Adhatoda vasica* (Adathoda) helps to treat cough and respiratory problems. *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi) used for its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. The Kurumba and Irula tribes in Tamil Nadu have a rich tradition of using medicinal plants to treat various ailments.

Kurumba Tribe's Medicinal Practices

Gastrointestinal disorders the Kurumba tribe uses 21 plant species from 16 families to treat gastrointestinal disorders. Some of the plants used include *Achyranthes aspera* for diverticulosis and *Aloe vera* for skin and hair issues. The Kurumba tribe uses plants like *Phyllanthus virgatus* and *Rubia cordifolia* to treat wounds and skin diseases. Plants like *Ocimum gratissimum* and *Piper brachystachyum* are used to treat fever and cough.

The Irula Tribe: Snake Catchers and Healers

The Irula tribe is renowned for their expertise in snake catching and treating snakebites. Their traditional knowledge of herbal remedies is highly sought after, even by modern medical practitioners. Irula healers use a combination of plant extracts, rituals, and physical treatments to counter snake venom.

Some plants used by the Irula for snakebite treatment include:

Aristolochia indica (Ishwarmool) which has anti-venom properties

Hemidesmus indicus (Ananthamul) widely used as anti-inflammatory and antiseptic

Rachis hypocrateriformis (Snake root) helps to treat snakebites and scorpion stings.

Irula Tribe's Medicinal Practices

The Irula tribe uses plants like Ipomoea staphylina and Barleria mysorensis to treat snake bites. Plants like Malvastrum coromandelianum and Hibiscus ovalifolius are used to treat skin diseases. The Irula tribe uses plants like Glycosmis arborea and Cissus vitifolia to treat respiratory issues. These traditional practices are not only effective but also highlight the importance of preserving biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. The Kurumba and Irula tribes in Tamil Nadu have a rich tradition of using medicinal plants, but modernization and deforestation threaten these practices. Conservation efforts are underway to protect these plants and preserve traditional knowledge.

Conservation Efforts

Documentation by researchers in documenting traditional medicinal practices and plant species used by the Kurumba and Irula tribes. Community Engagement by organizations like the Tamil Nadu Forest Department and NGOs are working with local communities to promote sustainable harvesting and conservation of medicinal plants. Efforts are being made to cultivate medicinal plants in controlled environments, reducing pressure on wild populations.

Impacts of Modernization

Loss of traditional knowledge is one of major reason as younger generations are less interested in traditional practices, leading to a decline in knowledge transmission. Deforestation aids habitat destruction and urbanization threaten medicinal plant populations. Commercialization of forest land through over-harvesting for commercial purposes can deplete plant populations and undermine traditional practices.

Conservation Practices

Integration with modern healthcare by combining traditional knowledge with modern medicine can improve healthcare outcomes. Community-led conservation through empowering local communities to manage and conserve medicinal plants can ensure their sustainability. Government policies play a crucial role in protecting traditional medicinal practices in India. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has initiated documentation of tribal medicinal practices, recognizing their importance in preserving biodiversity and promoting healthcare. The Tamil Nadu Government has formulated a Tribal Livelihood Policy to preserve traditional tribal knowledge and promote entrepreneurship among tribal communities.

Key Initiatives

Documentation would be first step where the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is documenting traditional medicinal practices, including plant species and their uses. Policy Support by the Tamil Nadu Government's Tribal Livelihood Policy aims to preserve traditional knowledge and promote entrepreneurship. Research and Development can be initiated through Institutions like the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Research in Tribal Health are conducting research on traditional medicine.

Limited awareness about traditional medicinal practices and their benefits. Deforestation or habitat destruction threatens medicinal plant populations. Over-harvesting for commercial purposes can deplete plant populations. To address these challenges, government policies should focus on community engagement, sustainable harvesting, and research collaborations. Community-led conservation efforts are crucial for protecting traditional medicinal practices and preserving biodiversity. In Tamil Nadu, community-led initiatives are empowering local communities to manage and conserve medicinal plants.

Community-led programmes

Community-managed Herbal Gardens by Local communities help establishing herbal gardens, promoting sustainable harvesting and conservation of medicinal plants. Tribal-led Conservation by where Tribal communities are forming groups to protect and manage forest resources including medicinal plants. Traditional Healers' Associations can be set up where associations of traditional healers are working together to preserve traditional knowledge and promote sustainable practices.

Benefits

Community empowerment is the key where community-led initiatives empower local communities to take ownership of conservation efforts. Sustainable practices can be propagated which enables community-led conservation promotes sustainable harvesting and use of medicinal plants. Cultural preservation on community-led efforts helps preserve traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

Limitation for community led programmes

Community-led initiatives often face limited funding and resources. External pressures like deforestation, urbanization, and commercialization threaten community-led conservation efforts. To address these challenges, community-led conservation efforts need support from government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders. NGOs play a vital role in supporting community-led conservation efforts in Tamil Nadu. They provide resources, expertise, and advocacy to empower local communities. Capacity Building enables NGOs train local communities in sustainable conservation practices and resource management. Funding support managed by NGOs provide financial assistance for community-led conservation projects. NGOs advocate for policy changes and community rights, supporting conservation efforts. Research and documentation ensure NGOs document traditional knowledge and conduct research on medicinal plants.

Examples of NGOs working in Tamil Nadu:

Tamil Nadu Association for the Advancement of Tribal Research and Training (TAATTRT): Works with tribal communities to preserve traditional knowledge and promote sustainable livelihoods. Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning (FERAL) supports community-led conservation and sustainable development initiatives. People's Action for

Development (PAD) empowers local communities to manage natural resources and promote sustainable practices. NGOs bridge gaps in government services and provide critical support to community-led conservation efforts.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Kurumba and Irula tribes face numerous challenges in preserving their traditional practices, which includes deforestation and habitat loss, urbanization and cultural erosion, lack of documentation and recognition, limited access to modern healthcare facilities. However, there are opportunities for collaboration between traditional healers and modern medical practitioners, promoting mutual understanding and preservation of indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion

The Kurumba and Irula tribes of Tamil Nadu possess invaluable traditional knowledge, offering insights into sustainable healthcare and biodiversity conservation. Preserving these traditions is crucial for cultural heritage and modern medicine. Efforts to document and promote indigenous knowledge can benefit both the tribes and the broader community.

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