

## PREFACE

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Humans are dependent on plants for their food, most medicines, most clothes, fuel and several other needs. Although the bond between plants and humans is very intense in several 'primitive' cultures throughout the world, one should not come to the sudden and wrong conclusion that post-industrial modern societies have broken this intimate bond and interrelationship between plants and people. Rather than, plants being dominant as in the 'primitive' societies, man has become more and more dominant over plants, leading to over-exploitation of the latter, and resulting in a maladapted ecological relationship between the two. Hence a study of the relationships between plants and people-ethnobotany and, thus, between plant sciences and social sciences, is central to correctly place humanity in the earth's environment. Because ethnobotany rightly bridges both of these perspectives, it is always held as a synthetic discipline.

Most people tend to think that ethnobotany, a word introduced by Harshberger in 1896, is a study of plants used by 'primitive' cultures in 'exotic' locations of the world, far removed from the mainstream people. People also think wrongly that ethnobotany deals only with non-industrialized, non-urbanized and 'non-cultured' societies of the world. Ethnobotany, in fact, studies plant-human interrelationships among all peoples and among all. However, since indigenous non-western societies form the vast majority of people now as well as in the past, a study of their interrelationships with people becomes important. More than 10,000 human cultures have existed in the past and a number of them persist even today. They contain the knowledge system and wisdom about the adaptations with diverse nature, particularly with plants, for their successful sustenance. Thus, ethnobotanical information is vital for the successful continuance of human life on this planet.

Ethnobotany is of instant use in two very important respects: (i) indigenous ecological knowledge, and (ii) source for economically useful plants. The first will help us to find solutions to the increasing environmental degradation and the consequent threat to our biodiversity. In indigenous societies biodiversity is related to cultural diversity and hence any threat to biodiversity would lead to erosion in cultural diversity. Indigenous cultures are not only repositories of past experiences and knowledge but also form the frameworks for future adaptations. Ethnic sources of economically useful

plants have resulted in serious studies on bioprospection for newer sources of food, nutraceuticals, medicines and other novel materials of human use. Bioprospecting has resulted in intense research on reverse pharmacology and pharmacognosy. This has resulted in attendant problems relating to intellectual property rights, patenting and the sharing of the benefits with the traditional societies who owned the knowledge. This has also resulted in serious documentation of traditional knowledge of the different cultures of the world and to formalize the methods and terms of sharing this traditional knowledge. It has also made us to know not only *what* plants people in different cultures use and *how* they use them, but also *why* they use them. In addition it helps us to know the biological, sociological, cultural roles of plants important in human adaptations to particular environmental conditions in the past, present and future.

This series of the five edited volumes on ethnobotany of different regions of India tries to bring together all the available ethnobotanical knowledge in one place. India is one of the most important regions of the old world and has some of the very ancient and culturally rich diverse knowledge systems in the world. Competent authors have been selected to summarize information on the various aspects of ethnobotany of India, such as ethnoecology, traditional agriculture, cognitive ethnobotany, material sources, traditional pharmacognosy, ethnoconservation strategies, bioprospection of ethno-directed knowledge, and documentation and protection of ethnobotanical knowledge.

The present series of five volumes is a humble attempt to summarize the ethnobotanical knowledge of the aborigines of India. The first volume is on Eastern Ghats and adjacent Deccan region of Peninsular India. Published information is summarized on different aspects. Our intention is that this may lead to discovery of many new drugs, nutraceuticals, and other useful products for the benefit of mankind.

Since it is a voluminous subject we might have not covered the entire gamut; however, we have tried to put together as much information as possible. Readers are requested to give their suggestions for improvement of the coming volumes.