

Book Reviews

Plants Affecting Human Mind: Psychoactive Plants by Dr. S K Jain, Deep Publications, B-1/118, 2nd Floor, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi- 110063, India, 2009, Hardbound, ISBN: 81-85622-19-1, Price: Rs. 700, pp. 209+xi.

Plants which alter the state of mind or influence the functioning of central nervous system (CNS) are called psychoactive plants. They may be employed in many domains of medicine and psychiatry. Such plants occur naturally in the wild and are also grown. The literature on these plants is vast and scattered in the form of research and review papers. The present book is the first consolidated yet brief compilation on plants having biological activities that are grouped under the general term psychoactive. The plants which are used by tribals and other rural folk for various conditions of mind and nervous system have also been included in this book so that further investigation.

The book deals with about three hundred plants, most of which occur in the wild, indigenous or naturalized in India. A brief introductory background is given in Chapter I. Chapter 2 lists the scientific or the botanical Latin name, plant family, some local and English names, habit and habitat and psychoactive property. Chemistry of most of species is briefly described in a separate section. Indices of local and English names and psychoactive properties are appended. The book is illustrated with over 100 line-drawings, halftones and number of colour plates. Important chemicals obtained from different parts of various plants are described in Chapter 3. Plants having specific psychoactive activities like, anesthetic, analgesic, antihallucination or stimulant, etc are listed in Chapter 4. In chapter 5 family wise list of plants has been provided.

Though the author of this book has mentioned that it is a result of more than ten years devotion to the subject and while preparing manuscript plant taxonomists, chemists, medical officers (for discussion over medical terms) and information scientists were consulted to present the information in correct and useful manner, the psychoactive plants are less understood. Hence it is not a book of prescription for attempting treatment of any medical conditions. There has been notable interest in research on psychoactive plants in the last half century. There is still much to be investigated on pharmacological properties of plants reported in ancient literature as well as new additions based on ethnobotanical data.

Dr Jain, being an eminent taxonomist and ethnobotanist has done critical evaluation of literature and prepared the book for researchers in botany, chemistry, psychiatry and other medical scientists who believe in efficacy of natural or herbal medicine in crude form or active constituents extracted from them. The usefulness of this big compilation is beyond doubt as far as identification of the plants shown through good quality coloured pictures and line drawings given in this book. The common names index vs. botanical names appended in Chapter 6 will be highly useful for ethnobotanists and plant taxonomists both. The detailed bibliography provided at the end of the book is a bonus to its readers. Dr Jain and his team deserve appreciation for this error free, handy compilation wrapped in beautiful green cover.

Ethnobiology: Therapeutics and Natural Resources by Dr Ashis Kumar Ghosh, Daya Publishing House, 1123/74, Deva Ram Park, Tri Nagar, Delhi-110 035, Hardbound, ISBN: 81-7035-576-1; ISBN 978-81-7035-576-2, Price: Rs. 595/US\$ 30, 2009, xvi+240p.

Traditional knowledge on usage and conservation of natural resources is one of the most natural capital to human beings from health and livelihood point of view. As far as plant biodiversity is concerned, once it is lost, impossible to recover, same is for traditional knowledge, if it is not documented today nothing will be known tomorrow. Environmental changes, urbanization, non-judicious utilization of natural resources are the prime causes for the loss of biodiversity. Disinterest of younger generation in traditional practices and unavailability of documented records of traditional practices are the possible causes which may lead to disappearance of this

heritage in any part of the globe. So, the researchers, teachers and others who are contributing their knowledge and skill in protecting both, are doing real efforts towards the environment protection, food and health security mission as the plants which are used by tribals and other rural folk for various purposes have tremendous potentialities in new sources of raw materials for development of new drugs, food and feed for both human and veterinary care.

The literature on plants of various regions is vast and scattered in the form of research and review papers. The present book is a mirror of the traditional efforts for the utilization of natural resources. It is a compilation of research work carried out and published by the author and his team in various journals and books. The book is divided in 7 major chapters: Introduction, Beneficial plants (for human and animals), Environmental Awareness, Glossary of Medical Terms, References, List of Publications by Author in East & West and Index of Plants, Animals and Diseases.

The author of the book wish that the information given in this book may go to the farmers, potters, dye makers, sweat makers, beekeepers, herbalists who could know the potential applications of traditional heritage and it would also be useful for researchers for furthering research on preparation of various value added products and preparation of various medicines

The book will be a good companion and a helpful guide to students, research scholars, teachers and pharmaceutics. A handy compilation wrapped in beautiful cover is recommended for general reading, further research and upgradation of traditional knowledge of West Bengal region in particular and India in general.

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