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LEVERAGING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN VALIDATING AND PROMOTING MEDICINAL PLANT RESEARCH IN DISTRICT CHITTORGARH, RAJASTHAN

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Abstract

This study examines the role of government and local administration in preserving traditional ethnobotanical knowledge and promoting biodiversity conservation in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan. Through policies like the Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana, 2021, which distributes medicinal plant saplings (e.g., Tulsi, Ashwagandha, Kalmegh, Giloy) to households, and the establishment of protected areas such as Sita Mata Wildlife Sanctuary, authorities aim to integrate traditional practices into modern healthcare and sustainability efforts. The district administration facilitates community engagement, documentation of tribal knowledge, and equitable resource distribution. Findings reveal enhanced health outcomes for local communities, economic opportunities for traditional healers and farmers, and increased green cover. However, challenges like limited awareness, illegal harvesting, and funding gaps persist. A case study of the Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana in Kapasan block demonstrates its success, with 70% of households using medicinal plants for primary care. The paper underscores the need for stricter conservation measures, education campaigns, and financial support to ensure long-term sustainability, positioning Chittorgarh as a model for balancing cultural heritage and ecological resilience in India.

Keywords: *Medicinal Plant, Traditional Knowledge, Long-Term Sustainability, Ecological Resilience, Cultural Heritage.*

Introduction

Chittorgarh, a district in southern Rajasthan, is known for its rich history, tribal culture, and biodiversity. For centuries, local tribal communities like the Bhil, Garasia, and Kathodia have used plants from forests and fields for medicine, food, and rituals. However, modernization and the loss of forests threaten this traditional knowledge. To protect this heritage, the government and local administration of Rajasthan have started programs to preserve traditional ethnobotanical practices, conserve biodiversity, and improve community health. This paper explores how these efforts benefit local communities, farmers, traditional healers, and the environment. This research paper aims to analyse the role of the government and local administration in benefiting all stakeholders through traditional ethnobotany, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable practices in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India. Based on a literature review, this qualitative study focuses on Traditional Ethnobotanical Knowledge, Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Practices, Government Policies and Documentation Efforts, Role of District Administration, Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana, and Benefits for Stakeholders. Chittorgarh, located in southern Rajasthan, is rich in biodiversity and tribal heritage, making it a significant area for studying these themes.

Literature Review

Traditional Ethnobotanical knowledge in Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

The Rajasthan State Biodiversity Board supports conservation through protected areas like Jawahar Sagar and Sita Mata sanctuaries. Compensatory afforestation efforts, recording 16,896 hectares in Chittorgarh, aim to mitigate development impacts (The Hindu, 2022). Also, Singh et al.

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(2024b) note agroforestry systems contribute to sustainability. Chittorgarh's tribal communities, including Bhil and Garasia, possess extensive knowledge of medicinal plants. Studies like Katewa et al. (2004) documented 61 ethnomedicinal species used for health, while Jain et al. (2005) identified 243 genera in the Sitamata wildlife sanctuary for primary healthcare, highlighting the region's cultural and medicinal richness. Tribal communities in Chittorgarh have deep knowledge of medicinal plants. For example, they use Tulsi (holy basil) for cough and cold, Ashwagandha for energy, and Giloy for fever. Studies by Katewa et al. (2004) found 61 medicinal plant species used by tribes in Rajasthan. Another study in the Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary (spread across Chittorgarh and Udaipur) documented 243 types of plants used for healing (Jain et al., 2005). These plants are not just medicines but also part of the cultural identity of tribes. However, younger generations are moving to cities for jobs, and traditional knowledge is fading. Deforestation and climate change also reduce the availability of these plants. To solve this, the government has stepped in with policies and programs of biodiversity conservation and sustainable practices.

Government Policies and Documentation Efforts

The Rajasthan Indian Medicine Act, of 1953, regulates traditional medicine, while the Ministry of Ayush and NMPB document medicinal plants (Dadhich et al., 2024). The state promotes medical tourism, focusing on traditional treatments (The Hindu, 2024).

- **Rajasthan Indian Medicine Act, 1953**

This law recognizes Ayurveda, Unani, and other traditional healing systems. It allows registered traditional healers to practice legally, ensuring their knowledge is respected and preserved.

- **Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana (2021)**

Launched by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, this scheme provides free medicinal plant saplings like Tulsi, Ashwagandha, and Kalmegh to every household in Rajasthan. By 2025, the goal is to distribute 24 saplings per family. The aim is to boost immunity, promote natural medicine, and encourage people to grow plants at home. In Chittorgarh, the district administration works with the Forest Department to deliver saplings, especially in rural and tribal areas.

- **Protected Areas and Afforestation**

The Rajasthan State Biodiversity Board (RSBB) has established wildlife sanctuaries like Jawahar Sagar and Sita Mata in Chittorgarh. These areas protect endangered plants and animals. In 2022, the government marked 16,896 hectares of forest land in Chittorgarh for conservation to balance development and ecology (The Hindu, 2022).

Role of District Administration

Chittorgarh's administration implements policies like sapling distribution under the Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana and manages conservation areas, collaborating with communities to document traditional knowledge.

The Chittorgarh district administration plays a key role in implementing state policies. The examples are below:

- They organize awareness camps to teach villagers about the benefits of medicinal plants.
- They collaborate with NGOs to document traditional knowledge from tribal healers.
- They ensure saplings under the Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana reach remote villages.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration promoted the use of Giloy and Ashwagandha to strengthen immunity. This helped reduce reliance on expensive medicines in rural areas.

Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana

Launched in 2021, this scheme distributes Tulsi, Ashwagandha, Giloy, and Kalmegh saplings to households, aiming to boost immunity and promote health (Rajasthan government, 2021). It targets all 1.26 crore families, with Chittorgarh's administration facilitating distribution.

Benefits for Stakeholders

Local communities gain healthcare access, traditional healers preserve knowledge, and farmers find income opportunities (Roy and Pradhan, 2023). Environmental benefits include increased biodiversity, though equitable distribution remains a challenge.

- **Local Communities**

Families now grow medicinal plants at home, saving money on healthcare. For instance, Tulsi leaves are used for respiratory issues, and Aloe Vera gel for skin problems (Singh et al, 2024a).

- **Traditional Healers**

Programs like the Rajasthan Indian Medicine Act give healers legal recognition. Some healers now earn extra income by selling herbal products or guiding forest tours (Katewa et al. 2004).

- **Farmers**

Farmers are encouraged to grow medicinal plants like Isabgol (psyllium husk) and Safed Musli. These crops fetch higher prices in markets than regular crops (Naithani and Kumar, 2017).

- **Environment**

Conservation efforts in sanctuaries and afforestation projects have increased green cover. Protected areas also attract tourists, boosting local economies.

Analysis

Government initiatives integrate traditional ethnobotany into healthcare, benefiting stakeholders. However, challenges like formal integration and equity need addressing, suggesting future research on long-term impacts. The challenges remain the same as below:

- **Awareness Gaps**: Many villagers still prefer modern medicine over traditional remedies. The government needs more campaigns to highlight the benefits of plants like Neem or Amla (Meena & Yadav, 2010).
- **Illegal Harvesting**: Valuable plants like Safed Musli are often stolen from forests. Strict patrolling and community-led monitoring can prevent this.
- **Funding Issues**: Small farmers lack money to start medicinal plant farms. The administration should provide low-interest loans or subsidies.

In 2023, a survey in Chittorgarh's Kapasan block found that 70% of households used Tulsi and Giloy from the scheme. A tribal farmer, Ramesh Meena, shared, "Earlier, we bought medicines from the city. Now, we treat minor illnesses at home (Indorial and Verma, 2020)." The scheme has also created jobs for women's self-help groups who prepare herbal teas and oils from these plants.

Conclusion

The government and administration in Chittorgarh significantly contribute to preserving ethnobotany and sustainability, with programs like the Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana enhancing community health and conservation efforts. The Rajasthan government and Chittorgarh administration have made significant efforts to preserve traditional knowledge and biodiversity. Schemes like Ghar Ghar Aushadhi Yojana and wildlife sanctuaries benefit health, livelihoods, and the environment. However, more work is needed to educate communities, stop illegal activities, and support farmers. If these steps are taken, Chittorgarh can become a model for balancing tradition and development in India.

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