



Review Paper

Ethnobotanical studies of Sikkim: a review

Bishnu K. Sharma^{1*} and Ashok K Jain²

¹Department of Botany, Sikkim Government College, Namchi, India

²Institute of Ethnobiology, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, MP, India
fernofsikkim@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present study was reveal to documentation of ethnobotany included by various ethno botanists in their report prepared by survey of ethnobotanical knowledge of Sikkim. The interest in research based activities in the area of ethnobotany has improved extremely in last ten years. However, the commencement of ethnobotanical knowledge, technical studies in ethnobotany has made a significant input to know the indigenous people, tribal medicine, conservation and agriculture practices. There are 200 research papers in 13 categories were collected in different aspects of ethnobotany for their scientific documentation. Of these, agriculture (3), conservation (25), culture and religions (8), edible plants (18), general ethnobotany (49), ethno-medicine (34), ethno-veterinary (3), Folklore (6), floral diversity (9), sacred grove (8), socio-economic (6), traditional food (9) and tribals (22) were studied.

Keywords: Ethnobotany, Ethno-medicine, Tribal and Sikkim.

Introduction

The botany of any ethnic group comprises ethnobotanical knowledge and application of this knowledge in day to day activities, i.e. ethnobotanical practices¹. The word "Ethnobotany" was coined by Harshberger in 1895. The total natural association of human being with plant associated with ethnobotany. Apparently, the subject looks simple and small. Our understanding of the scope of Ethnobotany has expended at a very fast rate. Ethnobotany would have been the initial information for human to acquire to satisfy their lack of food, heal their injuries and cure his diseases, etc.¹.

The used of medicinal plants for human beings as well as animals in India was early prehistoric time (Vedic age) like ancient Sanskrit literature in Indian like Rigvada (4000-1500 BC), it clams more than 99 medicinal plants listed. Atharvaveda (1500 BC), Upanishads (1000-600 BC), Mahabharata and Puranas (700-400 BC) includes more than 300 plant species use for the medicinal proposes. There are several plants used as in worship, as herbal medicine, food, fuel, agriculture etc. More than 1200 plants are used as medicines along with their accomplishment and specific medicinal practices are mentioned in Sushruta Samhita (500 BC) and Charaka Samhita (100 AD).

Ethnobotanical examination has led to the corroboration or utilization pattern of a large number of feral plants used by ethnic people for meeting their enormous supplies like, medicinal, edible, cultural requirements, fibers, fodders, pesticides, gum, resin and perfumes etc.². Ethnobotanical knowledge was introduced by Dr. Janaki Ammal (Indian Botanist) as in official programme of Economic-botany,

Botanical Survey of India (Kolkata) in 1954. Dr. S. K. Jain (Indian Ethno botanist) was started rigorous field survey among the tribal areas in middle India in 1960³⁻¹². There are several publications were published by Dr. Jain in before sixties prompted ethnobotanical activities in many aspects viz., ethnobotanist, botanists, anthropologists and ayurvedic medical practitioners.

In India, over more than 50% of different communities are used plants species by several aspects like, ethno medicine, ethno pharmacology, etc. More than 7500 species of plants are utilized in primary health care by various tribal communities of rural areas in India. The tribal population, are the primary inhabitants of natural habitats and holds tremendous amount of traditional knowledge on the use of various biotic resources. The tribal have a lot to teach us on environmental sustainability and food security as we battle the services of climate change and reducing food reserves. It is well recognized in many literature that their early practices of using plants to cure several ailment have covered the way to further discovery of many life saving medicines. In the last 50 years, several hundred small and large inventories of ethnobotanical species in any region or among any ethnic group of India have been published on the subject. Although all this literature has been enumerated in the two bibliographies published in 1984 and 2002¹³.

Sikkim, one of the rich Biodiversity states of Eastern Himalayas in India is extensively explored for floristic studies after the initial exploration of Sir J. D. Hooker and British Indian Botanist. It is declared as biodiversity hotspots not only due to rich biodiversity but also its uniqueness in many aspects.

The northeastern region of the India is more diverse and luxurious in vegetation and referred as "Cradle of Flowering Plants" (Plant Taxonomist). Many of them also documented the ethnobotanical records. Several Pteridophytes were also mentioned in most of the ethnobotanical literature from Sikkim¹⁴⁻²⁴.

Methods

Study site: The Sikkim is the smallest part north-eastern states of India, lies between 27°43'40"-28°04'53" N latitude and 88°02'61"-88°97'39" E longitudes, covering a the area of 7,096 sq. km. politically, the it comprises four district viz. East, North, South and West. The topography of the state is highly variable with mountains, ridges and valleys with the altitude ranging between 250-8598 m above mean sea level. The natural drainage system of the state consists of two main river viz. Teesta and Rangit which flow in a North-South direction²⁵. The mountains are sloping in East-West direction while the ridges run in North-South direction, separating valleys in between^{25,26}.

Data collection: Literature was collected from various sources like internet and the libraries of several Universities of India viz. Library of SOS Botany, Institute of Ethnobiology Jiwaji University Gwalior and Library North Bengal University and State library Sikkim, Sikkim Central University, etc. All the ethnobotanical papers, journals, published articles, magazines and different scientific bulletins were consulted (till 2017).

Tools of bibliography

Author's name

Date of publication

Title of the publication (title of articles)

Place of publication for book, journal, article, book chapter, etc.

The publication company for book and journals

The volume number of journals, magazine, etc.

Page numbers.

Results and discussion

The ethnobotanical work on different aspect of Sikkim has been done by various workers during last seventy years. On the basis of ethnobotanical literature there are more than 200 research papers on 13 categories of ethnobotany were published till the year 2017.

Agriculture: The tribal and other communities of Sikkim are farmer in occupation; agriculture is the main components in their life. They generate half of the income from agriculture for their livelihood²⁷⁻²⁹.

Conservation: The Tribals communities play an important role for conservation of plants through religions, traditions, belief, faith, healing practices, etc. The study of relationship between this indigenous knowledge of use of plant species and their conservation status can be protected by avenue like biosphere reserve, sanctuaries, etc.³⁰⁻⁵³.

Culture and Religions: In Sikkim, traditions, customs, culture and religion of different ethnic communities intermingle freely to give uniform flavour. There are various spirits and divinity to be worshiped in different religions or community in the state, for which they use plants and its various part such as flowers, fruits, bark, twigs, leaves, seeds, roots, etc. to offer to their deity. There are numerous sacred plant species which are grown by the ethnic community of Sikkim viz., Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali in an around religious places⁵⁴⁻⁶¹.

Edible Plant: Edible plants as a food source are an essential part of the culture of aboriginal people that inhabit in the Himalayan region (Sikkim). Tribal people were used plants as for food values has been workout by several workers⁶²⁻⁷⁹.

General Ethnobotany: Work on ethnobotany has been carried out by the state are more than thirty papers were published on the aspect of ethnobotany⁸⁰⁻¹¹⁶.

Ethnomedicine: The study and the practices of traditional medicines related with the diseases, health or ailment and addresses the same by the process of traditional healing practices with the understanding of the culture, can be denoted as Ethnomedicine. In this process, various parts of plants like flowers, fruits, bark, twigs, leaves, seeds, roots, etc. can be used traditionally¹¹⁷⁻¹⁴⁵.

Ethno-veterinary: A large number of populations in Sikkim live in remote rural areas. Therefore, agriculture and animal husbandry are the primary occupation of majority of occupation. Thus, animal rearing has been an integral part of subsistence economy in Sikkim¹⁴⁶⁻¹⁴⁸.

Folklore: Folklores are treasure to the people of himalayan region and are very much connected to the surrounding resources and accordingly they maintain the perfect settings of the site through which taboos concern to the human interference developed. Songs, dances and some traditional musical instrument refer to as also conservational aspects of folklore. The state of Sikkim draws the attention of tourists than the other places as this place has diverse in culture, religious beliefs and other traditional practices to conserve the environment¹⁴⁹⁻¹⁵².

Floral diversity: In the field of floral diversity of Sikkim has been work done by several Ethno-botanist¹⁵³⁻¹⁶².

Sacred Grove: Traditionally people of this place believe that forests, rivers, lakes, peaks of mountains and caves are their deity and they used to conserve these areas for the spiritual belief and faith. In India, there are more than 100,000 sacred groves and about more than 100 protected areas around the world that are important to one or more faiths. These groves comprises with various rare and endemic species of plants. This tradition of preservation of resources represents the sustainable development and the management of this area¹⁶³⁻¹⁶⁹.

Socio-Economic: Some papers have been published on Socio-Economic in Sikkim¹⁷⁰⁻¹⁷⁶.

Traditional Food: Consumption of indigenous or the preserved food and beverages symbolized the culture and traditions of the ethnic communities of this state. This reveals the earning source of ethnic groups by their ability to indigenous practice of food and beverages¹⁷⁷⁻¹⁸⁵.

Tribal: Tribal was part of the worldwide trend to dichotomize the aboriginal peoples and colonizers, the savage and the civilized, the tribals and non-tribals. Several anthropologists however hold the view that a tribe is no different from a caste. There are twenty papers have been published on the aspects of tribal peoples of Sikkim¹⁸⁶⁻²¹¹.

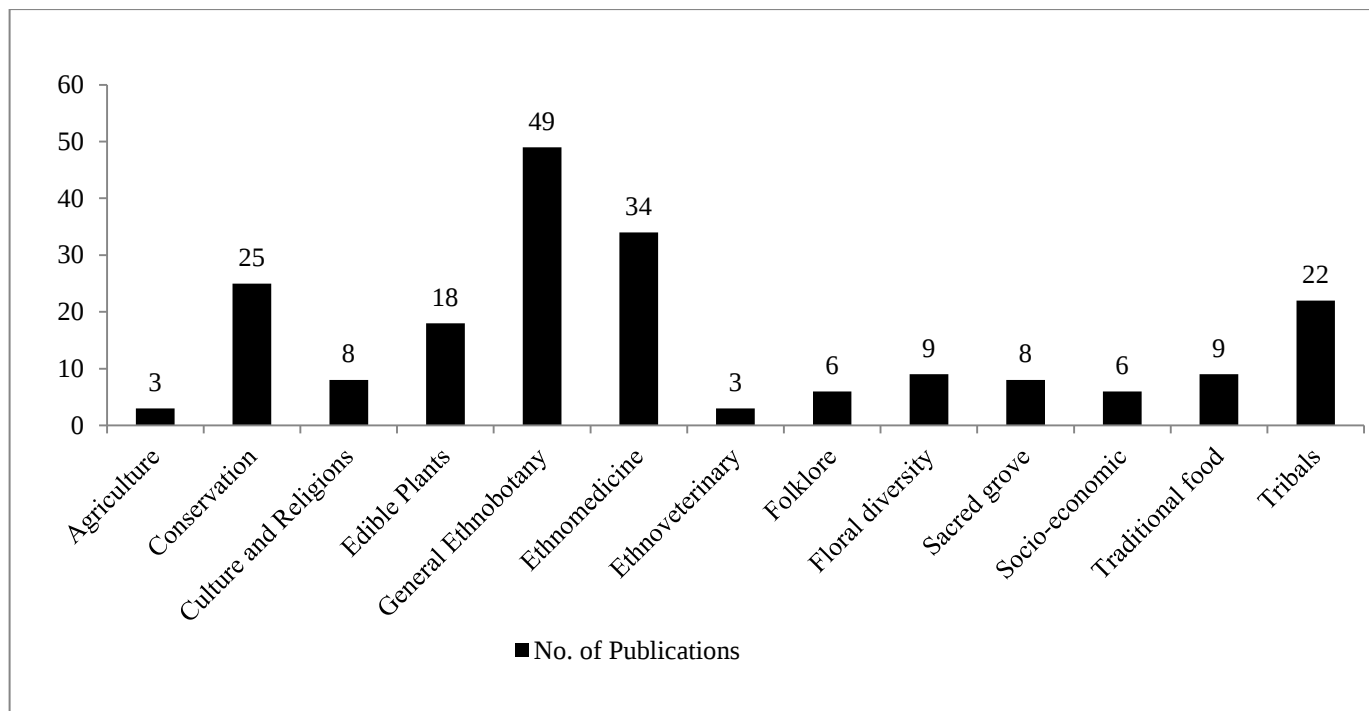


Figure-1: Categories wise papers publication.

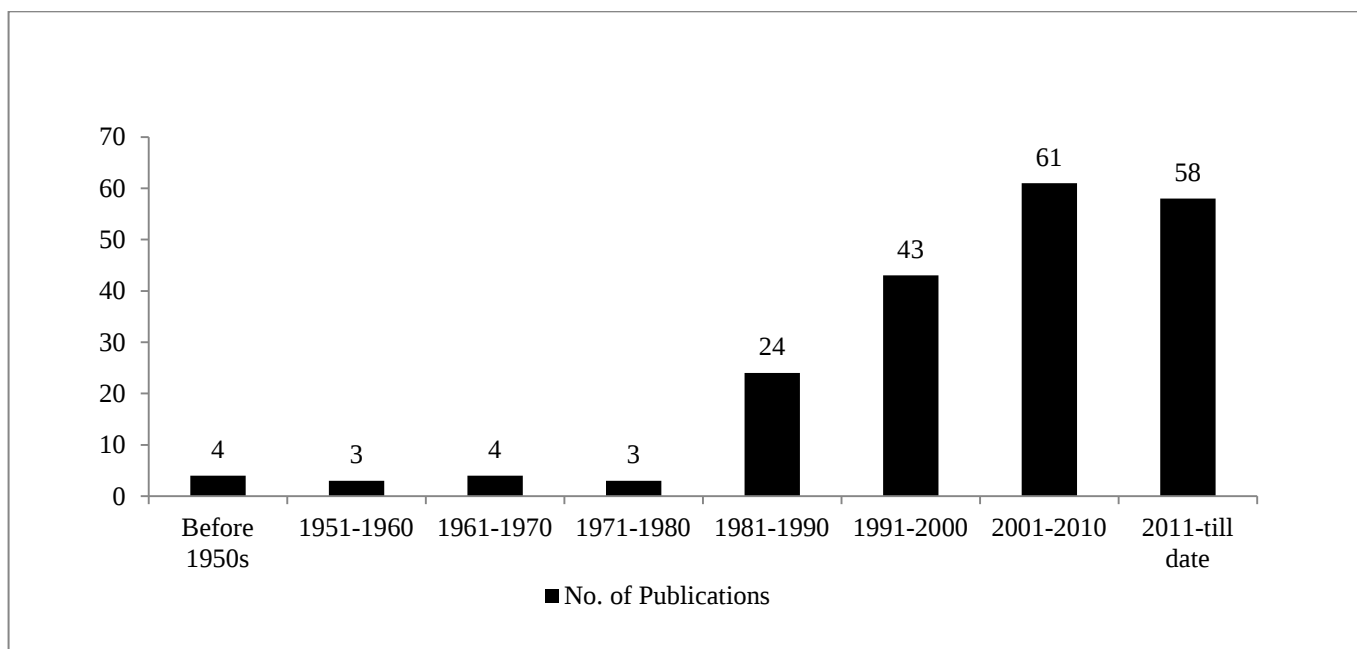


Figure-2: Year wise paper publication.

Conclusion

The present study is aim to document of ethnobotany included by various ethno botanists in their report prepared by survey of ethnobotanical knowledge of Sikkim. There are more than 200 research papers in 13 categories were collected in different aspects of ethnobotany of Sikkim has been consulted. Of these, agriculture (3), conservation (25), culture and religions (8), edible plants (18), general ethnobotany (49), ethno-medicine (34), ethno-veterinary (3), Folklore (6), floral diversity (9), sacred grove (8), socio-economic (6), traditional food (9) and tribals (22) were studied.

From the beginning of the discipline and scientific research in ethnobotany has made important contribution to understand the indigenous people, traditional medicines, conservation and agricultural practices. Research interest and activities can be seen enormous increase in these areas of ethnobotany within the decades.

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