

ETHNOBOTANICAL SURVEY OF MEDICINAL PLANTS USED BY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE WESTERN GHATS OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the world's eight "hottest hotspots" of biological diversity, is home to numerous indigenous communities whose traditional knowledge plays a crucial role in sustainable resource use. This ethnobotanical study explores the medicinal plant knowledge of tribes such as the Kurichiyas, Paniyas, and Irulas, highlighting species used, methods of preparation, and ailments treated. A combination of field surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participatory observation methods was employed. The findings document 78 medicinal plant species used to treat over 40 different ailments, with a significant focus on leaves, roots, and bark. The study emphasizes the urgent need to preserve traditional knowledge and promote biocultural diversity.

KEYWORDS: *Ethnobotany, Western Ghats, Indigenous Communities, Medicinal Plants, Traditional Knowledge, Biocultural Diversity, Sustainable Use etc.*

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