Ethnobotany of the Himalayas - A Book Review

Zubair A. Malik

Correspondence

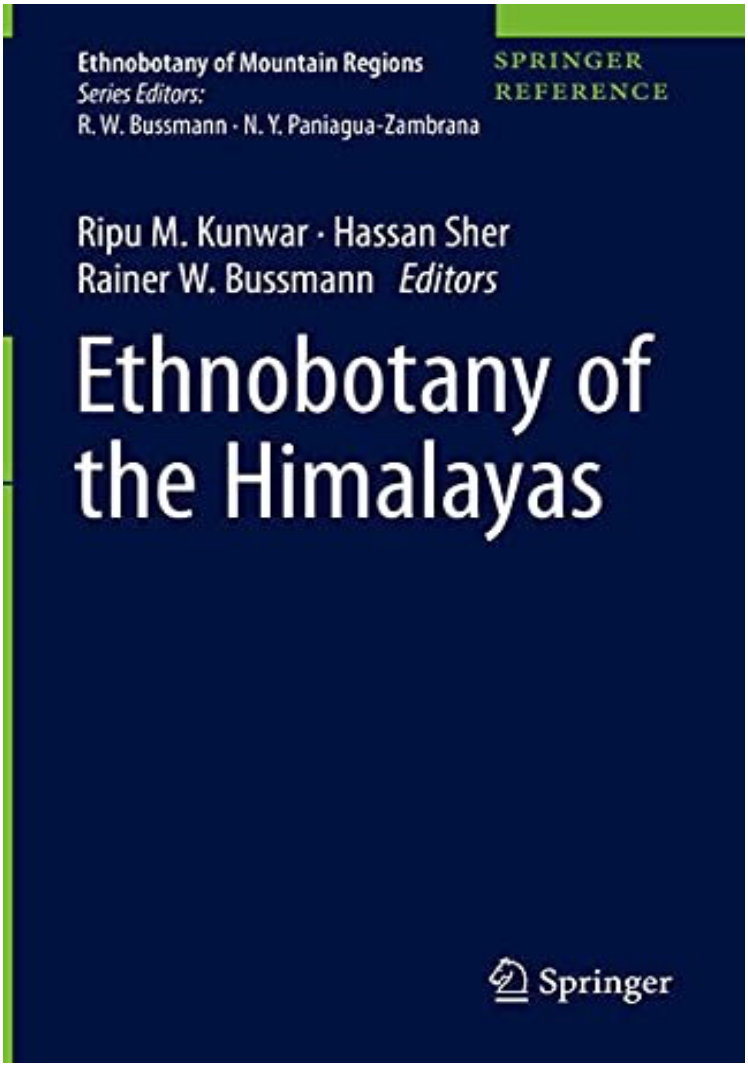
Zubair A. Malik[1,2]

[1]Department of Botany and Microbiology, HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal Uttarakhand (India)-246174
[2] *Presently at* Department of Biology, Govt. HSS Harduturoo Anantnag (J&K) – 192201

*Corresponding Author: malikmzubair081@gmail.com

Ethnobotany Research and Applications 23:23 (2022)

Book Review



Ethnobotany of the Himalayas. Ripu M. Kunwar, Hassan Sher and Rainer W. Bussmann (Eds). Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021. xliv + 2185 pp. Price: € 899.99, Print ISBN 978-3-030-57407-9; Online ISBN 978-3-030-57408-6; doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57408-6

A lot of efforts are required to *keep a cultural identity alive* and to *document and make the traditional knowledge of a particular region and/or ethnic group available to the wider audience* (Malik, 2020). Similar efforts by a few distinguished ethnobotanists have resulted in the publication of ***Ethnobotany of the Himalayas***, the book under review. The book (*Ethnobotany of the Himalayas*) is a part of book series *Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions* (*ETMORE*, https://link.springer.com/bookseries/15885).

Being a student of ethnobotany and an inhabitant of Himalayan region, the title of this book i.e. ***Ethnobotany of the Himalayas*** easily attracted my attention. The **Himalaya** or **Himalayas** (derived from Sanskrit words *Hima- "snow"* and *alaya- "abode"* meaning "*the abode of snow*") are a mountain range in Asia separating the plains of the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau. The Himalayas stretch across the northeastern portion of India. They cover

Manuscript received: 18/03/2022 – Revised manuscript received: 19/03/2022 - Published: 19/03/2022
http://dx.doi.org/10.32859/era.23.23.1-3

approximately 2,500 km and pass through the nations of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Bhutan and Nepal. The Himalaya is considered as one of the richest and most unusual ecosystems on Earth (Kala et al., 2002; Malik, 2014). These are the world's youngest and highest mountains, possessing diverse vegetation and hence are important locations for research into ecology and biodiversity conservation (Malik, 2014). These form a complex geological structure; snow-capped peaks, large valley glaciers, deep river gorges and rich vegetation, which make it unique on the globe.

With about 2200 pages, 1274 figures, edited by the three veteran ethnobotanists *viz.,* Ripu M. Kunwar (Nepal); Hassan Sher (Pakistan) and Rainer W. Bussmann (Georgia), the bulky book provides an in-depth introduction to the plant use knowledge of the peoples in the Himalayan range. It is actually conceptualized (like other books of the series, Malik 2022) on the fact that plants provide humankind with most of the basic resources, including food and medicine. Moreover, at present, the increased human populations having access to markets overharvest the commercially important medicinal species. At the same time, other ill anthropogenic activities like habitat loss, climate change, and invasion by non-native species further threaten wild plant populations, while traditional knowledge associated with plant use is being eroded by urbanization. Thus, never before in human history has there been a greater need to discover, understand, conserve, and sustainably use culturally important plant resources.

The contents of this book are divided into two parts *viz.,* Part I (Regions) and Part II (Plants). Part I, containing three chapters, gives a detailed description of different Himalayan regions regarding their location, topography, climate, geology, biodiversity/vegetation and anthropogenic impact. The distinct Himalayan regions described in Part I include: The Hindukush and Karakoram; The Indian Himalaya (Garhwal Himalaya); The Nepal, Bhutanese, and Tibetan Himalayas. These three chapters contain many high-quality scenic photographs of the respective Himalayan regions that help in understanding the area better and add to the beauty of this book. Many photographs depicting the majestic views of Himalayan peaks are quite impressive. Figure 1 (P4), it should be "meeting point" instead of "Meeting pint" of Hindukush, Karakoram and Himalaya, Pakistan.

Part II (*Plants*) with 249 chapters, divided into 2 volumes forms the bulk of this book. Ethnobotany of more than 400 plant species is documented in this section. While the Volume 1 contains 123 chapters (describing 201 plant species), Volume 2 has 126 chapters (describing 225 plant species). Each chapter of *Part II* describes either a particular species of a family (e.g. *Acmella calva* of Asteraceae P 133) or a few species of the same genus of a particular family (*e.g.* seven species of genus *Aconitum* of Asteraceae, P 139). The plant species described are arranged in an alphabetic order, irrespective of the family to which they belong. This feature is useful in quickly locating a particular species in such a vast list of medicinal plants. The chapters present the detailed and comprehensive information on various aspects of plant species including the current overview of taxonomy, synonyms, local names, botanical description, information on the ecology and distribution, phytochemistry, local medicinal, handicraft and other uses. Phytochemistry of most of the described species is also provided. This is essential for correlating the therapeutic effects of medicinal plants with their phytochemicals/bioactive compounds. This, in turn, could highlight and strengthen the link between traditional knowledge and drug discovery.

The description of plants is amazing and impressive wherein very minute details of taxonomically important morphological characters and major events of the life cycle (flowering & fruiting) are given. This along with high-quality photographs makes this book an ideal and reliable pictorial field guide that would help the students/researchers in identifying and locating these plants. The already documented but scattered information on various uses of plants (medicinal, food, handicrafts and others) is amassed nicely in this book. The ethno-botanical information provides both an overview on historic uses as well as data from the most recent scientific studies of plant use in the region and contains the most up-to-date literature sources.

The book as a whole is an invaluable addition to our understanding of Himalayan Ethnobotany and is highly recommended for those interested in this discipline. I hope the book will have a long shelf life as a source of information on ethnobotany of the Himalaya, as it is the comprehensive, up to date and best-edited book on the topic. I also expect that this volume will give both interested laypeople and professionals an opportunity to learn about the fascinating biodiversity and plant-use culture of the Himalayas, and will spark interest in its further documentation, sustainable use, and conservation.

Literature Cited

Kala CP, Mathur VB. 2002. Patterns of plant species distribution in the Trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh, India. Journal of Vegetation Science 13(6):751-754.

Malik ZA. 2014. Phytosociological behaviour. Anthropogenic disturbance and regeneration status an altitudinal gradient in Kedarnath wildlife sanctuary (KWLS) and its adjoining areas (Doctoral dissertation, PhD thesis submitted to HNB Garhwal University Srinagar Garhwal (Uttarakhand).

Malik ZA. 2022. Ethnobiology of Mountain Communities in Asia -A Book Review. Ethnobotany Research and Applications 23:1-2. doi: 10.32859/era.23.14.1-2

Malik ZA. 2020. Review of Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions of Far Eastern Europe / Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions of Central Asia and Altai. Ethnobotany Research and Applications 20:36. doi: 10.32859/era.20.36.1-2