



# Ethnobotany of India-A book review

Zubair A. Malik, Sushma Singh

## Correspondence

Zubair A. Malik<sup>1,\*</sup>, Sushma Singh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Govt. Higher Secondary School, Devalgam, Anantnag J&K India-192202

<sup>2</sup>College of Agriculture Sciences, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad Uttar Pradesh India-244102

\*Corresponding Author: malikzubair081@gmail.com

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## Book Review

**Ethnobotany of India. Volume I (2025)**: Edited by: Emdad Hossain, Anjali Jaiswal, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Sanjeet Kumar; APRF Publishers, Odisha, India, pp x +126; ISBN: 978-81-984754-7-3. Price: ₹1250

**Ethnobotany of India. Volume II (2025)**: Edited by: Bidhan Chandra Roy, Emdad Hossain and Sanjeet Kumar; APRF Publishers, Odisha, India, pp x +130; ISBN: 978-81-985655-6-3. Price: ₹1450

**Ethnobotany of India (Volumes I and II)**, edited by Emdad Hossain, Anjali Jaiswal, Bidhan Chandra Roy, and Sanjeet Kumar, represents a coordinated effort by the Ambika Prasad Research Foundation (APRF) to document India's diverse ethnobotanical knowledge. Drawing on contributions from researchers working across varied ecological regions and cultural settings, the two volumes aim to present a contemporary picture of ethnobotanical research in India while underscoring the urgency of recording indigenous plant knowledge that is increasingly threatened by socio-economic change, habitat loss, and cultural transitions.

Given India's exceptional biological and cultural diversity, ethnobotanical documentation remains both complex and essential. In this context, the present work seeks to capture traditional plant-based knowledge across regions and communities, while also exploring its relevance to healthcare, conservation, and applied research.

## Content and Scope

Volume I focuses largely on community-based ethnobotanical documentation and review-style chapters dealing with medicinal plants used to treat common ailments such as fever, toothache, diabetes, hypertension, and digestive disorders. Several chapters document the traditional knowledge of specific ethnic and tribal communities, including the Meitei, Gujjar, and Meena groups. These contributions highlight locally embedded healthcare practices and the close relationship between communities and their surrounding plant resources.

The volume also includes chapters on wild edible flowers and conceptual discussions on ethnobotany as a link between traditional knowledge and pharmaceutical research. These chapters broaden the scope beyond descriptive inventories and introduce applied and interdisciplinary perspectives, making the volume relevant to students and researchers in botany, pharmacy, and allied life sciences.

Volume II adopts a more health-oriented and analytical approach. It includes chapters on medicinal plants used for skin diseases, reproductive and kidney disorders, and lifestyle-related conditions. Additional contributions examine nutraceutical plants and economically important genera such as *Dioscorea*. Some chapters attempt laboratory validation, nutritional analysis, or predictive assessments of medicinal potential, and a few incorporate plant-based studies conducted during the COVID-19 period.

Compared to Volume I, the second volume shows a clearer attempt to link ethnobotanical documentation with applied and experimental research. However, the depth and quality of such integration vary considerably among chapters.

Both volumes follow the standard edited-book format, with independently authored chapters. While this allows broad regional and thematic coverage, the absence of a concluding editorial synthesis limits overall coherence. A final chapter identifying common patterns, regional overlaps, and national research priorities would have strengthened the work.

## Critical Assessment

A major strength of *Ethnobotany of India* lies in its wide geographical and thematic coverage. Contributions from across the country collectively reflect the richness of India's ethnobotanical traditions. Tables listing plant species, local names, parts used, and modes of application enhance the utility of the volumes as reference sources.

At the same time, scientific depth and presentation are uneven. Several chapters rely heavily on secondary sources, with limited clarity regarding original fieldwork. In some cases, methodological details such as informant selection, sample size, and duration of surveys are insufficiently described. Greater transparency in survey design, data validation, and ethical considerations would improve scientific rigor.

There is also variation in the level of detail provided for individual plant species. While some chapters include well-referenced ethnomedicinal uses, others remain largely descriptive and lack discussion of pharmacological relevance. A more consistent editorial framework, including standardized reporting of taxonomy, ethnomedicinal uses, preparation methods, and references, would improve consistency and comparability across chapters.

Overlap in plant species and disease categories, particularly in Volume II, leads to some redundancy. Although this reflects widespread traditional use, improved cross-referencing or consolidation could enhance readability.

## Comparison with Other Ethnobotany Literature

Compared with classical Indian works such as those by *S.K. Jain* and region-specific monographs of the Botanical Survey of India, *Ethnobotany of India* is less exhaustive in taxonomic coverage but more contemporary in outlook. Earlier works emphasized floristic completeness, whereas the present volumes place greater emphasis on applied relevance and healthcare connections.

In an international context, comparison with Springer Nature's *Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions* series highlights clear differences in scope and editorial approach. The Springer volumes are encyclopedic, highly standardized, and include detailed species monographs covering taxonomy, ecology, phytochemistry, pharmacology, and extensive indexing (Malik 2020, 2021, 2022a–c; Malik et al., 2025; Singh et al. 2025).

In contrast, *Ethnobotany of India* adopts a flexible, chapter-based format that foregrounds regional case studies and community-specific knowledge. This is a notable strength, as it emphasizes socio-cultural context. However, limited standardization, weaker integration of modern validation approaches, and the absence of comprehensive indexing reduce its utility as a global reference work. Closer alignment with international editorial standards, while retaining regional focus, would enhance future editions.

## Currency, Design, and Usability

The books are reasonably up to date, with references extending to 2024–2025. Inclusion of recent health-related studies, including COVID-19-era research, reflects contemporary relevance. However, rapidly advancing areas such as molecular validation, metabolomics, and bioinformatics receive limited attention.

The design of both volumes is functional but visually modest. Tables are informative, though some figures and photographs would benefit from improved resolution and formatting. The absence of a comprehensive subject and botanical index is a significant limitation. Detailed thematic and botanical indexing, along with a consolidated glossary of local plant names, would greatly improve usability.

### Readership and Value for Money

The volumes are best suited for academic libraries, research institutions, and postgraduate students in ethnobotany, botany, pharmacy, Ayurveda, and environmental sciences. Policymakers and practitioners may find selected chapters useful. Considering the pricing, the books offer reasonable value compared with expensive international references, though individual purchase may be limited to specialists.

### Overall Assessment

*Ethnobotany of India* (Volumes I and II) makes a meaningful contribution to documenting India's traditional plant knowledge and reflects growing interest in applied ethnobotany. Despite limitations related to editorial synthesis, standardization, indexing, and methodological consistency, the volumes succeed in highlighting the relevance of ethnobotanical research in contemporary healthcare and conservation.

With refinement in future editions, particularly through standardized reporting, stronger integration with modern analytical approaches, and improved usability, this series has the potential to become a key reference for Indian ethnobotanical studies. The volumes merit inclusion in academic and research libraries concerned with ethnobotany and related disciplines.

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