

## Ethnobotany Today

Ghilleen T. Prance

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB, UK.

Corresponding author: siriain01@yahoo.co.uk

I am writing this short note in *Ethnobotany* in remembrance of my good friend and fellow ethnobotanist Dr. S.K. Jain, the father of the discipline in India. I am just one of many people in the ethnobotanical community to mourn his passing away. I feel honoured to have known this great man and just feel the need to express my admiration for all that he has done for both ethnobotany and taxonomy. It was good to see in the editorial of Volume 30 of *Ethnobotany* that Dr. Jain had recently received two well-deserved life-time awards from both the Indian Botanical Society (2018) and the Botanical Survey of India (2020). But this is a scientist who was well-known far beyond the borders of his native India as testified by his being awarded the Distinguished Economic Botanist Award from the Society of Economic Botany in 1999. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Jain for founding both this journal and also the Society of Ethnobotanists. The day before I learned of his death, I was reading his latest article in *Ethnobotany* published in December 2020 (Jain, 2020). He continued to promote his beloved topic right until the last. The good thing is that he has left behind many disciples who will continue the good work that he initiated and encouraged.

I have always found Jain's *Dictionary of Indian Folk Medicine and Ethnobotany* a most useful reference and it was a privilege and honour to be asked by Dr. Jain to write a Foreword to updated version (Vartica Jain & Jain 2016). In his last article (Jain, 2020) he promoted two topics that are important for the future of ethnobotany, the study of the ongoing contemporary production of interesting objects of ethnobotanical interest by tribal groups and the importance of urban ethnobotany. Both topics are truly relevant to the future of ethnobotany. Urban ethnobotany is a most interesting area with much potential for more ethnobotanical research. Some botanists in the UK are studying the vegetable growing allotments of various cultural groups and are finding a real United Nations of experience within the UK linked to the homelands of the gardeners. People from Asian countries and the Caribbean grow plants that are familiar to them and it is interesting to study both the plants and the uses to which they are put which may be either for food or for medicines.

Balick *et al.* (2000) did an interesting study of the medicinal plants used by people of Latin-American origin within New York city. Ceuterick *et al.* (2008) did a similar study about the use of medicinal plants by expatriate Colombians in London. It is estimated that by 2040 seventy percent of the world's population will be living in urban environments and so urban ethnobotany will become increasingly important. Dr. Jain was quite right that there is still a lot to be done within the cities as life today become more urban.

I would add two other areas that we need to consider more for the future of ethnobotany, and I hope that they will be covered more in future issues of *Ethnobotany*. These are quantitative ethnobotany (Prance *et al.* 1987, Phillips & Gentry 1993) and the application of our ethnobotanical studies to conservation of the resources used and studied (Prance, 2000). So many of the rarer plants used by local peoples are threatened today by overuse and so the design of conservation plans for such plants becomes ever more important. One of the best examples I have seen of using and promoting the importance of using ethnobotany for conservation is the study of Albuquerque *et al.* (2009) of the plants of the arid region of Northeast Brazil. They discuss the uses of 166 native and exotic plants species and suggest specific actions and specific groups of species for conservation and sustainable use programmes. A recent example of the use of quantitative ethnobotany is that of Awan *et al.* (2021) who studied the medicinal plants of ethnic communities in Pakistan. They used their ethnobotanical data to produce indices of use value and relative frequency of the medicinal species that they had documented. Quantitative studies often have most useful applications for conservation, so these two disciplines are closely linked.

The challenge for India now is to continue the good work started by Dr. Jain and to keep ethnobotany in the forefront of Indian science. I greet all of Jain's disciples and wish them well for the future of ethnobotany.

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