

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The human society and its dynamic structure have changed many folds from the time of its origin. The momentum of the change accelerated with the development of technology and its advancement modifying their original culture and tradition, and they designed the so-called modern society of the present time where status and economic hierarchy took its birth. The people falling backward in the race of civilization but with rich natural resources around them carried their culture and tradition along with them. They lived in natural habitats and forests and were known as tribal. The tribal are closely associated with the vast resources of their environment and successful utilization and management of its products. During the course of time they carried long ventures to unveil the importance of forest products through lifelong practices of trial and error. Some of these knowledges are imparted from the ancestors to us through various folklore and mythological stories along with the religious practices of worship and ceremonies.

The rapid growth and subsequent migration of human population increased the people's interactions and hence the gradual acculturation led to depletion of the traditional knowledge and practices. During the last few centuries, particularly in 19th and 20th, the knowledge has been threatened and is gradually becoming extinct (Maheshwari 1996).

The gravity of situation was realized when the history of origin of modern science was traced back to the areas from where the first human civilization took birth and evolved tremendously for human welfare. Having lost their original culture and tradition the modern societies are now making attempts to understand these aspects with the help of tribal and forest dwellers who have maintained their centuries old cultures (Rao 1996).

Therefore, attempts are being made to trap the existing heritable knowledge of their surroundings before they vanish and to study the importance of these valuable tribal knowledges a new branch of science the ethnobotany came into being. It deals with the study of entire range of relationship between anthropocentric population and their desirable environment, which enable them to thrive successfully. Ethnobotany thus, is a significant branch of science.

1.2. BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTE AND INTERPRETATION OF ETHNOBOTANY

Stephan Power (1873-1874) used the term 'Aboriginal botany' in his description of plants used by Neeshenan Indians of the Bear river, California for fabrics, food, medicines, ornaments and textiles.

John Harshberger (1896) in his address to University Archaeological Association, University of Pennsylvania on 4.12.1895 used the term 'ethnobotany' for the first time to describe the study of plants used by the population of primitive society but he did not define it. However, the term immediately became popular and was widely accepted.

Walter Hough (1898) defined ethnobotany as study of plant in their relation to human culture.

Robbins et al (1916) defined the term as a 'study and evaluation of knowledge of all phases of plant life amongst primitive societies and of the effect of the vegetal environment upon the life'.

Jones, V.H (1941) defined it as 'the study of the interrelations of the primitive man and plants'.

Faulks, P.J (1958) stated that 'ethnobotany as an entire realm of economic botany i.e. the relationship of plant kingdom with the man of past, present and future'.

Schultes, R.E (1962) defined ethnobotany as the study of the relationship, which exist between people of a primitive society and their environment.

Vartak & Gadgil (1980) described that ethnobotany is a branch of economic botany, a section of which deals with the role of plants in the life and culture of aborigines and tribal people.

Alcorn, J.B (1984) defined ethnobotany as the study of contextualized plant use.

Jain, S.K (1987) described ethnobotany as a study of total natural and traditional relationship and the interrelations between man and his surrounding plant wealth.

Manilal, K.S (1989) described ethnobotany as a study of the entire realm of direct relationship between plants and man.

Wickens, G.E. (1990) described ethnobotany as the study of useful plants prior to their commercial exploitation and eventual domestication. It includes the use of plants both by tribal and non-tribal communities without and implication of primitive or developed societies.

Arora, R.K (1997) described ethnobotany in wider context denotes the entire realm of useful relationship between plants and man.

Pushpangadan, P (2002) described ethnobotany as the study on the

relationship, interaction and association of the traditional communities with the ambient vegetation and the associated knowledge system and wisdom.

1.3. ETHNOBOTANY IN INDIA

India harbours diverse vegetational wealth and multiethnic communities which made the nation an ethnobotanic emporium with a figure of 7500 ethnomedicinal plants. During the early centuries Indian ethnomedicine attracted serious attention from all over the world. The *Ayurveda* and *Siddha* system of medicine originated from the ethnomedicine of India. The earliest records of use of biological products primarily herbs in prevention and cure of diseases in India are found in the vedic literature, the *Rigveda* (ca 3500-1800 BC). A more comprehensive account of plant based drugs is found in later scripture *Atharvaveda* (1500 BC), *Charak Samhita* (1000-800 BC) and *Sushruta Samhita* (800-700BC) primarily on surgical practices (Jain 2000). The history of ethnobotanical study in India is about four centuries old when *Garcia da Orta* (1563) published his '*Os Coloquis*' giving an account of indigenous medicinal plants of India without using the term ethnobotany (Rao 1996). In fact many more references to plants are seen but their identity have not been established (Maheshwari 1996).

The publication of Watt's dictionary of economic products of India (1896) was the land mark in modern ethnobotany in India. The series publications on cultivation and utilization of medicinal and aromatic plants (1977-1982) by Council of Scientific and Industrial Research have become the source of inspiration and reference to the researchers. After receiving the worldwide response and interest for the documentation and preservation of traditional uses of plant wealth, it generated an ample scope in modern science. 30 books and more than 500 research papers have been published on ethnobotany in last four to five decades (Jain 2000). Several symposia, seminars and workshops were organized under the guidance of leading ethnobotanists to highlight its role in prosperity of mankind and the nation in general. During the 1980s, the department of Environment and Forest, Govt. of India has initiated –all India co-ordinated research project on ethnobiology to highlight the ethnobotanical studies from various parts of the country under about a dozen of institutes and universities.

A society of ethnobotanists was established in 1980 at Lucknow which has been publishing a journal on ethnobotany since 1989 with an international editorial board. Besides this, the society regularly conducts well designed training programmes on ethnobotany. The society organized the IVth international congress of ethnobiology during november 1994 at Lucknow where over 100 selected papers of authors from 20 countries were presented. This congress also observed the international decade for the world's indigenous people.

The institute of ethnobotany (IOE) was established in 1995 under the

directorship of Dr. S.K Jain at Lucknow as substantial milestone in the ethnobotanical research in India. By establishing this institute India has shown her deep concern, for the indigenous people and their knowledge system and on how these knowledges could be developed for the welfare of mankind (Rao 1996). The study activities are on progress at different parts of India and many institutions, universities and colleges have taken ethnobotany as a subject of study and research.