CHAPTER I

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Medico-botany deals with studies undertaken amongst the tribal and rural people for recording their unexplored knowledge about the plant wealth. People living in remote areas still depend on plant resources for their daily needs like food, shelter, fodder, fuel and also medicines. A rich plant lore has been passed on from generation to generation by tradition.

In India, the first record of medicinal plants dates back to 2000 to 1000 BC i.e. Rigveda and Atharvaveda which are the old vedic resources. There are number of hymns narrating various plants with their medicinal virtues. However it is extremely difficult to decipher the exact meaning of these words used in the composition. It was reported by Chopra et al. (1933) that many of the remedies mentioned in the old books baffle and deficit recognition and identification; one cannot be certain from the description whether the specimens obtained are of particular drug. Hence it is a challenge for the student of Botany. Confirmation of botanical identity of folk medicinal plants from literature and recording of folk-lore are essential on the background of impending extinction of such knowledge.
For the systematic study of plants from Western India, Garcia-de-Orda (1779), a physician of the Governor of Goa, must be recognised as a pioneer botanist of the area. Many uses of local plants from Konkan known for their medicinal and nutritive values were referred to in his book "Colloquies on the simples and drugs of India".

In recent years medicinal plants in India have been studied by different authors viz., Watt (1889-1893); Dymock et al. (1890); Chopra et al. (1956, 1969); Kirtikar and Basu (1933); Nadkarni (1954), and treasures like Wealth of India (1948-76) bring much of this information together. A series of articles on medicinal and poisonous plants have been published by Caius (1935-45). Jain has written number of articles on ethnobotanical studies of tribal communities from central and eastern India. A monumental memoir edited by Jain (1981) entitled "Glimpses of Ethnobotany of India" includes number of articles on ethnobotanical studies. Many scattered papers on medico-botanical survey are included by Jain and his associates in "Bibliography of ethnobotany" (1984). One more bibliographic work is that published by Roma Mitra (1985) viz. "Bibliography on Pharmacognosy of Medicinal Plants". Though it is related to pharmacognostic studies, it covers many ethnobotanical research papers and other related aspects of medicinal plants. A good compilation on medicinal plants has been done by I.C.M.R. in the
Though voluminous work on medicinal plants is reported, studies with ethno-medico botanical point of view are very meagre. Literature survey reports that tribal areas from India have been explored by a few authors with ethno-medico-botanical aspect. During last three decades, research papers are published on parts and tribals of Nainital-Kumaon Himalaya (Gupta, 1961); tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Bastar (Jain, 1963, 1965); Saranpur (Ahuja, 1965); Puroalia (Jain and De, 1967); Tripura (Deb, 1968); Santhals (Jain and Tarafdar 1970); Kumaon (Shah and Joshi, 1971); Certain Adibasis in India (Maheshwari et al., 1973); Ratan-Mahal hills - Gujarat (Bedi, 1978); Nagarhaveli forests (Bennet, 1978); Kamrup-Assam (Battachtarjee et al., 1980); Mayurbhanj-Orissa (Mudgal and Pal, 1980); Eastern Rajasthan (Singh and Pandey, 1980); Irulars - Tamilnadu (Ramchandran and Nair, 1981); Khasi and Garo Tribes (Rao, 1981); Gujarat (Shah et al., 1981); Santhal - Bihar (Srivastava and Varma, 1981); Sagar district (Bhalla et al., 1982); Rudranth Bugyal (U.P.) (Joshi et al., 1982); Nagaland (Rao and Tiwari, 1982); Nagas (Rao and Jamir, 1982); Madhya Pradesh (Sahu, 1982); Lahul-Spiti forest - Himachal Pradesh (Uniyal et al., 1982); Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Bhargava, 1983); Kashmir (Dar et al., 1984); Mayadis - Kerala (Prasad et al., 1984);
Srikakulam - Andhra Pradesh (Prakash Rao, 1985) and many others from all corners of India. However, very few references are available as far as medico-botanical studies in Maharashtra are concerned.

Some of the research papers published from tribal areas in Maharashtra include - Janardhanan from Khed taluka (1963); Malhotra and Mitra from Chandrapur district (1973); Kamble and Pradhan on Korkus (1980); Vartak and Mandavgane from Karnala tribal area (1981); Shah et al., from Dahanu forest division (1983); Upadhye et al., from Kolhapur district (1987); Sharma and Laxminarsimhan from Nasik district (1986). A special volume of Gazetteer of Bombay State, Part I (1953) deals with medicinal plants.

Although above mentioned literature is available, a great deal of unexplored plant wealth is still remaining neglected from medico-botanical point of view. Large number of such plants are growing wild and only tribals utilize them for curing certain diseases. The data on such wealth are not documented. This situation justifies the undertaking of medico-botanical studies in areas of Western Maharashtra.

The Indian subcontinent is inhabited by nearly 53.8 million tribal people of different ethnic groups, distributed in different states. The total number of the tribes in the country is 427. The Maharashtra State's tribal
population is 29.54 lakhs (1971) which constitute about 6% of State's population. There are six tribes viz., Mahadeo Koli, Malhar Koli, Thakar, Katkari, Kokam, and Warli. One often wonders about the huge tribal population existing and sustaining itself in the remote hilly regions of Indian subcontinent. Even after so many foreign invasions, wars, rise and fall of dynasties - Aryans, Mughal, Maratha, British, etc. and even after 41 years of political independence of our Country, the tribal communities living in inaccessible parts of the country still continue their undisturbed existence in the forests (Kosambi, 1974). Before the dawn of Modern civilization the entire area was full of wild life. Aborigines dwelling in the dense forests used to get their basic requirements from forest produces. They were not only familiar with forest species but also knew their interrelationships and utilization. Even today, they identify herbs, shrubs and trees with local plant names and utilize plant wealth very carefully. They have their own traditional health care system. However, due to advent of Modern civilization the valuable data based on the personal experience of tribals are likely to be obliterated. Only few persons are left who have a good knowledge and if it is not recorded this valuable treasure will vanish rapidly.

These facts prompted immediate documentation of the medico-botanical information in the area of Pune and neighbouring districts. Under this project the area was explored
systematically and data on floristic composition and medico-botanical utilizations were recorded. The observations of the study are presented in a set pattern.

The introductory chapter is followed by Area, Topography and Climate. It gives the delimitations of the area and climatological data from area under study. In the third chapter Observations on floristic composition and the information of tribals living in these forests are presented. The fourth chapter deals with Methodology. This is followed by Systematic enumeration of medicinal plants. It contains the artificial keys to genera and species. Each species is described in a set manner, with special emphasis on medico-botanical data collected from the field. The sixth chapter highlights unexplored facets of medicinal plants. It is followed by discussion and conclusion chapter.

The study has been initiated with a hope to add to the existing knowledge about medicinal plants of the hilly regions of the Western ghats of Sahysdries as detailed in the thesis.