1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient time, human beings have always been mostly depended on plant resources for their basic needs like food, medicine, fiber, fodder, shelter, etc. Formerly, they were directly dependent on plants, but due to modernization and with advancement of science and technology this dependence on plants as a direct source has been slightly reduced. All the same, the tribal’s and other aboriginal people, who have traditionally lived in the forest’s continue to remain fully dependent on plants for their survival.

Living close to the nature, the people residing in and nearby forests have assimilated unique knowledge about plant utilization for different purposes through the course of their centuries old experience. Therefore, ethnobotanical studies of different tribal localities may lead to find new information on unexploited natural resources and new uses of existing resources as sources of medicine, food, etc. But at some places recent changes in tribal attitude due to habitat displacement, deforestation, modernization, etc. have led to decline and even disappearance of this rich knowledge system. Therefore, it is essential to gather their entire knowledge on plant use before losing it forever.

It is well understood now that in one or more ways man’s life has always been intimately connected with the plants. There is practically no human activity in which plants do not play a role. Therefore, in widest sense, ethnobotany has a linkage with almost every other faculty of science and field of knowledge. Today ethnobotany has become an important and crucial area of research and development in medicine research, conservation of biodiversity at genetic, specific and ecosystem level and well considered in socio-economic development of the region. In the recent past there has been a global trend towards revival of interest in the indigenous system of medicine. Even the developed countries equipped with modern allopathic medicines, have started realizing the potentialities of traditional system of
Furthermore, the searches for new herbal drugs have been strengthened by the widespread rejection of chemicals and the growing attraction for herbal remedies. There is an increasing awareness among the people about the use of herbal drugs, which are believed to be safe and do not produce undesirable side effects like most of the modern synthetic drugs and this awareness is one of the reasons, which created enormous worldwide demand for herbal drugs.

Presently, the importance of ethnobotanical research mainly for medicine and food is keenly felt, as it represents one of the best avenues for searching new economic plants for food and medicine. In recent years several workers became attracted in ethnobotanical studies and a lot of information about different uses of plants prevalent among the various tribes has been gathered.

The recent rediscoveries of certain remarkable uses of plants gave new life to this ancient science of ethnobotany. Several plants (eg. cocoa, maize, rubber, etc.) used today, were originally identified and developed through indigenous knowledge, the chemical constituents like tranquilizers, rescinnamine and reserpine have been obtained from the roots of *Rauvolfia serpentina*, used in India for more than a thousand years in folk medicine for snake bite (Maheshwari, 1996). A recent drug, ‘Jeevani’ is being produced from the plant *Trichopus zeylanicus ssp. travancoricus*, which is having strong energy enhancing properties. The drug is seen as a rival to the South Korean root ginseng (*Pinax ginseng*). Other examples where ethnomedicines have provided lead in the development of drugs used in modern system of medicine are cocaine, morphine, quinine, colchicines, atropine, ephedrine, codeine, emetin, caffeine, reserpine, vinblastine, gugulin and taxol, etc. (Mehrotra Shanta, *et al.*, 1996).
The importance of primitive attempts in ethnobotany for medicinal uses of plants were based on speculations only but in present age such medicinal plants have great importance due to the fact that many alkaloids and other important chemicals are being isolated from plants by using better techniques of chemical analysis and isolation methods, however, much work has still to be done, as new medicinal uses of plants are being reported continuously by several workers from different localities.

1.1 Weeds
The simplest and most common definition of weed is ‘any plant growing where it is not wanted’. The weeds are always been considered as the unwanted plants and hence, the control of weeds naturally becomes an extremely important subject in its own right. The usefulness of weed for mankind is never given much importance.

The particular purpose of this work is to document utilities of weeds and prove them as a group of plants with a fascinating potential and worthy of study for their own sakes. The present work gives a details about the weed plants and some of their utilities for mankind. Because there is no doubt about their importance to man and because nearly everybody is familiar with at least some examples it is in one way fairly easy to write about weeds. Amongst the problems of approaching such a large subject, however, is the sheer number of plants amounting to no more than a few hundred species is composed of weeds.

Now a days Intellectual Property Rights of Tribals have been given a prime importance. It includes system of rewarding or providing economic benefits to tribals or indigenous people, who have provided information. The patent system as it exists today does not recognize community-based knowledge; it does not accept the folk use as scientific use. On the other hand the products developed from traditional practical skills, which are modified and verified through modern scientific process can become the property of a company or an individual,
even though they are based on indigenous knowledge. To avoid the tribals or indigenous people losing their knowledge to commercial interests, encouragement through economic benefits should be given. So, they will learn to extract a price, however, small or inadequate for what is taken from them. In this connection, the Convention of Biodiversity signed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil) in 1992, seeks to protect the rights of indigenous people and directs Governments to enact laws for documenting traditional knowledge and prevent its unregulated use. In Kenya, petty patents have been allowed for traditional knowledge of herbal medicine as well as nutritional formulations which give new effects. An Indian example of attempt to reward a community is ‘Kani ’ tribals in Kerala, Who are supposed to get Rs. 5 Lakh plus two percent of profits and payments on a regular basis, for the plant *Trichopus zeylanicus* ssp. *travancoricus* from which drug ‘Jeevani’ is produced. Like this, if communities will get suitable price, the ownership of biological resources can be transferred from the common heritage of mankind to national property.

1.2 Objectives of Present Work:

- Survey of the different areas within district for collection, identification and documentation, information of weed plants used for food, medicine, fodder, etc.
- To study the impact of weeds.
- Collection of weed plants used by tribals with special reference to wild relatives of cultivated plants.
- Literature survey of screening for phytochemical and pharmacological aspects of plants for investigation of active principles of the plant parts or plants used in medicine, pesticide and fish poison, etc.
- Inventorisation of the wild edibles like fruits, roots tubers, seeds, etc.
To document the ethnobotanical data from existing literature and from actual field work and a comparison to be made to find the uses less known and plant parts used for similar uses reported earlier.

1.3 Reasons for undertaking the present work.

The indigenous knowledge of plants used in medicine and food purposes is based and built on many years of experience. Tribal people use enormous range of plants for their livelihood. Their understanding and perfections in using forest resources is unique and which is passed on by their traditions, taboos, totems, folklore, etc., by means of oral communication from one generation to another. They have developed strong belief in their own recipes. The plant knowledge gathered by trial and error, in the course of centuries is being preserved in the tribal communities since ages. But due to intrusion of modern civilization and the activities like deforestation, resettlement projects, industrialization and changing subsistence economies, the living standard of tribals in affected areas is changing very fast, even the idea of herbal remedies is being abandoned by most of the people belonging to young generation. The old people and the people who practice herbal drugs are the only remaining sources.

Though a few regional Floras like Cooke’s Flora of Presidency of Bombay (1901-1908), Talbot’s Forest Flora of Bombay Presidency and Sind (1909-1911) and few other earlier works had been published, these publications are not directly connected with the Flora of Ahmednagar district as they deal with Flora of the Bombay Presidency or Western India of which Ahmednagar district happens to be a part. Billore and Hemadri (1969) published a stray paper entitled the Flora of Harishchandragad which is a part of Akola taluka of Ahmednagar district. Pradhan and Singh, 1999 published Flora of Ahmednagar district. The present study of the utilitarian aspect of weed flora of this district has been undertaken to explore this under-explored region with a view to bring about a comprehensive floristic
account of vegetable wealth of the district. This will subsequently, the information of the use of plants which have not been given much attention by earlier workers.

1.4 STUDY AREA

Ahmednagar was first formed as a district in 1818 soon after the downfall of Peshwa empire. In 1822 the Nizam of Hydrabad by treaty ceded 107 villages, when the boundaries of the district extended from Vani in Dindore, a sub-division of Nasik district to Karmala at present in Solapur district. After many administrative changes and readjustments of the boundries from 1820-1956 the district became of part of bilingual Bombay State and in 1960 became the part of Maharashatra when this linguistic state was formed.

It is the largest district of Maharashatra occupying more or less the central position in the state and with an area of 17,035 sq km. It is located between 18° 2’ and 19° 9’ North latitude and 73° 9’ and 75° 5’ East longitude and is situated partly in the upper Godavari basin and partly in the Bhima river basin. The district is very irregular in shape with north-south length of ca. 200 Km and east-west breadth of ca 240 km. It is bounded in the north by Igatpuri, Sinnar, Yevala talukas of Nasik district, on the north-east by Vijapur, Gangapur and Paithan talukas of Aurangabad district of Marathwada division on the east by Georai, Beed, and Ashati taluka of Beed district, Bhum and Paranda taluka of Osmanabad district and on the south by Karmala taluka of Solapur district. The major part on the west is surrounded by the talukas of Pune district namely Junnar, Shirur and Daund. On the north-west it is surrounded by Murbad and Shahapur talukas of Thane district.

The name of the district has been derived by Malik Ahmed (1496) the founder of the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmednagar who named the town after his own name. The district at present is divided into 14 revenue talukas viz. Ahmednagar, Akola.
Jamkhed, Karjat, Kopergaon, Nevasa, Parner, Pathardi, Rahuri, Sangamner, Shevgaon, Shrigonda, Shrirampur, and Rahata.

It ranks 5th in the state in its total population which is 27,08,309 according to 1981 census. Thus the density of population is 16 per sq km. The north-west part of the district is rugged by Sahyadri ranges which from continuous natural boundaries between Ahmednagar, Thane and Nasik districts. It is in the region where thick forests are sheltered and hill forts like Harischanragad (1425 m), Kullang hill fort (1470 m), Ajoba dongar near Ratangad (1372 m) and Kalsubai hill (1646 m) the highest peak of sahyadri ranges in Maharashtra are situated. The average elevation of the crestline within the limits of the district is about 1300 m, general level is 500-600 above sea level. The main rivers are Godavari, Pravara, Mula, Bhima and Ghod which bring about the vast area of the district under cultivation. The main forests of the district are divided into protected forest and reserved forests, while the rest are unclassified forests.

1.5 Historical Significance.

The earliest habitations of the people in the district may be traced back to as early as the early Palolithic period (ca 1,50,000 B.C.) along the Pravara and Godavari rivers from Vite and Akole in the west to Nevasa in the east. Archaeological excavations carried out at Nevasa in Ahmednagar district also enlighten the habitations of the people in middle Palolithic Period (ca 25,000 B.C.) and Chalcolithic period (ca 1500 B.C. to 500 B.C.).

Ahmednagar district has an interesting historical background. According to the records in the literature, in the ancient period when the Aryans invaded Deccan the whole region was covered with thick forest which extended southward from Central India. Agastya was the first Aryan who crossed the mountain Vindhya and settled his residence on the banks of river Godavari. These heritages were known as ‘Janasthana’. The region south of Godavari was
inhabited by the aborigines called Rakshasas in Ramayana who harassed and killed the sages of Janasthama. Rama his brother Lakshmana and wife Seeta met Agastya near Godavari, a place by tradition located at Akole in Ahmednagar district, but from the Uttar-ramcharita of Bhavabhuti it seems that it was situated on the Murala (Modern Mula) which was then a direct tributary of Godavari. Rama and Lakshmana protected those sages in Janasthana from Rakshasas by killing them. Agastya presented Rama with a bow and two quivers and advised him to settle at Panchavati which was situated on the fringes of great forest called Dandkaranya now in Nasik district.

This district was ruled by various dynasties at different historical periods. To mention a few such dynasties who ruled this area are Maurya in Circa 184 B.C., Shatavahanas from 2nd century B.C. 3rd centuary A.D.Chalukyas,7 th centuary A.D., Yadavas 11th century A.D., Bhahamanis 15 century A.D., Nizamshahi from 15th to 17th century and Moghals 17th century. And later from 17th century onwards it came under the British rule till 1947 when India got freedom.