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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in Goa, India

ISABEL MADALENO

Portuguese Tropical Research Institute, Portugal

Abstract

India possesses great biodiversity. In addition to the abundant native species, plants drifted from other parts of the world carried by the winds and the ocean currents. In the beginning of 2014, the Portuguese Tropical Research Institute (IICT) conducted research in the state of Goa, a former Portuguese colony. The main objective was to explore the level of reliance on traditional medicinal plants. Previous archival research provided a rich supply of spices and medicinal plants required from Goa from the 16th century onwards. Using that secondary information the IICT prepared another scientific mission to India. The survey included three types of informants: 1) the urban gardeners; 2) the spice, herb and fruit traders; 3) the Ayurvedic medicine healers. Results display a vast array of plants with medicinal applications totalling 150 different taxa. The sacred Hindu species Krishna tulsi is preferred, followed by the mango tree bark and fruit, the papaya, the aloe, the coconut, the curry tree, and ginger root. This study also confirms the results obtained in Kochi, as to the significance of urban agriculture (UA) in coastal cities of tropical countries favouring resilience to climate change. The research hypothesis is that gardening contributes to generate environmentally sustainable agglomerations, and provides income and health for the poor, meaning, UA promotes the socio-economic sustainability of cities. Urban gardens are spaces able to regulate water cycles and to produce oxygen. When they offer medicinal plant species they become landscapes of health. The paper argues that traditional medicinal knowledge is vital in India and hopes to cross-examine the cultural, religious and historical aspects of Portuguese colonisation.

Keywords: Fruits, Goa, India, medicinal, spices