

Ethno-Botanical Diversity and Conservation Status of Medicinal Flora at High Terrains of Garhwal (Uttarakhand) Himalaya, India: A Case Study in Context to Multifarious Tourism Growth and Peri-Urban Encroachments

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Abstract : The high terrains of Garhwal (Uttarakhand) Himalaya are the niches of a number of rare and endemic plant species of great therapeutic importance. However, the wild flora of the area is still under a constant threat due to rapid upsurge in human interferences, especially through multifarious tourism growth and peri-urban encroachments. After getting the status of a 'Special State' of the country since its inception in the year 2000, this newly borne State led to very rapid infrastructural growth and development. Consequently, its townships started expanding in an unmanaged way grabbing nearby agricultural lands and forest areas into peri-urban landscapes. Simultaneously, a boom in tourism and pilgrimage in the state and the infrastructural facilities raised by the government for tourists/pilgrims are destroying its biodiversity. Field survey revealed 242 plant species of therapeutic significance naturally growing in the area and being utilized by local inhabitants as traditional medicines. On conservation scale, 6 species (2.2%) were identified as critically endangered, 19 species (7.1%) as the endangered ones, 8 species (3.0%) under rare category, 17 species (6.4%) as threatened and 14 species (5.2%) as vulnerable. The Government of India has brought mega-biodiversity hot spots of the state under Biosphere Reserve, National Parks, etc. restricting all kinds of human interferences; however, the two most sacred shrines of Hindus and Sikhs viz. Shri Badrinath and Shri Hemkunt Sahib, and two great touristic attractions viz. Valley of Flowers and Auli-Joshimath Skiing Track oblige the government to maintain equilibrium between entries of visitors and biodiversity conservation in high terrains of Uttarakhand Himalaya.

Keywords : biodiversity conservation, ethno-botany, Garhwal (Uttarakhand) Himalaya, peri-urban encroachment, pilgrimage and tourism

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