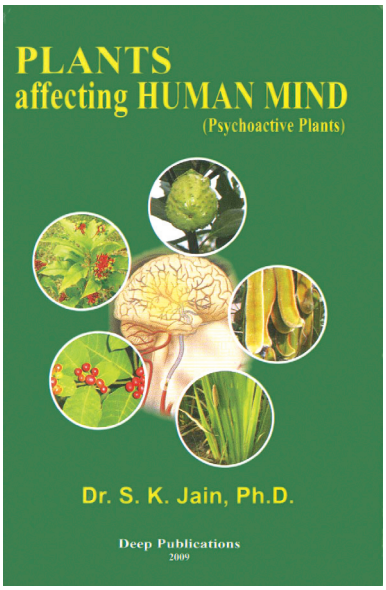
BOOK REVIEW

Plants affecting Human Mind (Psychoactive Plants) by Dr. S.K. Jain, published by Deep Publications, New Delhi, 2009. ISBN : 81-85622-19-1, Price : Rs.700.00 or $ 70.



The book essentially focuses on psychoactive plants and the author, formerly the Director of Botanical Survey of India and founder Director of Institute of Ethnobiology, very aptly explains that the word psychoactive is more a generic term and varied terminology such as analgesic, anesthetic, anodyne, antidepressant, euphoriant, excitant, hallucinogenic, sedative, hypnotic etc. are used for different specific conditions. Also, the terms used for various medical conditions in humans such as apoplexy, delirium, convulsion, epilepsy, hemiplegia, hysteria, insanity, melancholia, neuralgia, neuritis and stupor are given in elaboration for the reader to be conversant and to well relate various medical conditions with curative nature of plants. The chemicals derived from this recognized group of plants are employed in different cited domains of psychiatry. It was realized that there is no special documentation wholly devoted on this important group of plants. The publication is the result of a careful scrutiny of all available literature on psychoactive plants and also based on author's own work. The book contains 8 sections which include introduction (1), botany and psycho activity (2), chemistry (3), psycho activity index (4), family index (5), common names index (6), addendum (7) and literature cited (8). In section 2, about 300 plants were enumerated; species were alphabetically listed by botanical names under each family. Families were again listed alphabetically. Synonymy was avoided and whether it reduces clarity on the name referred to? Local names were given without the language or dialect indication and English names, to distinguish them from others, were given in capital letters. Brief description (drawings help out to a great extent in recognition than limited descriptions!), distribution and psychoactive properties were given. Parts used for the purpose were not specified. Chemistry of selected species with significant chemical constituents was included separately, and in most cases, chemistry related to specific body parts, under section 3. In this enumeration even author names were given in bold by oversight. Several relevant references were linked to the stated subject and claims that have been made earlier and also in the Indian context. While going through these sections, one feels that an integration of qualities attributed with the chemistry of taxon is missing. In fact these two sections (2&3) should have been presented under one with ample notes on realized virtues, indication of knowledge gaps and possibilities for future research. The author has taken great care to facilitate effortless location of desired psychoactive property, the botanical families and the common names in three indexes in the book (4-6). A list of 38 plants was added as they were reported very late but prior to publication under addendum (7) to make it up-to-date and also with the purposes of not to miss out any plants that exhibit psycho activity even at low level. The book is generously illustrated with over 100 line drawings and 16 colour plates. This work facilitates field researchers in ethnobotany to be more objective and critical in their enquiry and to look into promising prospects of these plants. With advances in molecular biology particularly in genetic engineering, gene translocation and drug designing, future researchers may use gene wealth of these taxa for any medical challenges that might crop up with modernization and coupled faster pace of life in the years to come. The book deserves a place in all libraries that are attached to academic / research institutions engaged in botanical research, ethnobotany, forestry, medicinal plants, pharmacognosy, biotechnology / molecular research. More importantly, the author who is a very senior and eminent person in his chosen field of research in ethno/economic botany deserves approbation for his consistent and determined pursuit to see the publication through in spite of his advancing age.

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