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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic Value of Herbal Medicine Practitioners in Jharkhand's Rural Economy

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ABSTRACT

The informal sector and rural health care systems in India's tribally populated regions rely heavily on herbal medicine practitioners. In this study, using secondary sources, we look at how herbal medicine practitioners in rural Jharkhand contribute financially to the community. This study built on prior empirical research on medicinal plants, indigenous knowledge systems, and forest-based livelihoods as well as scholarly journal articles, books, and reports. According to the findings, herbalists may help fill a critical need in rural areas without access to modern medical treatment, such as tribal and outlying areas. Collecting, preparing, and selling medicinal plants and non-timber forest products also helps them generate livelihoods. Herbal medicinal techniques also provide credence to the preservation of traditional knowledge and the responsible use of forest resources. However, factors such as inadequate institutional recognition, diminished transfer of traditional knowledge, restricted market access, and environmental degradation hinder their full potential from being achieved. The research found that rural livelihoods in Jharkhand may be improved by policy support and sustainable resource management for developing herbal medicine systems. This, in turn, can promote inclusive rural development.

KEYWORDS :

Herbal medicine practitioners, Rural economy, Indigenous knowledge, Medicinal plants, Non-timber forest products, Informal healthcare system, Tribal livelihoods, Cost-saving healthcare, Sustainable development, Jharkhand

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Introduction

In India, herbal medicine has been part of the indigenous medical systems of rural areas for centuries, particularly where tribal groups dominate the population, with the traditional medicine making an important socio-economic contribution in these areas. Vaidyas, ojhas, and tribal healers are examples of herbal medicine practitioners (HMPs). They not only treat locals' health issues, but they also generate substantial income for rural areas through the sale of medicinal plants, the production of herbal remedies, and the maintenance of traditional medical practices. Traditional medicine has been linked with livelihood generation in the region with its importance among tribal and rural communities and the dependence on the forest resources (Kumar, R., & Saikia, 2020). Jharkhand with its rich biodiversity has a diversity of medicinal plants which are used in the traditional way for treating common diseases for maintaining community health (Kumar, 2022).

Herbal medicine practitioners are not just important in the healthcare delivery system themselves; they are important to the economy as well. They are intrinsically related to the sustainable use of resources and the employment opportunities provided by the collection and sale of aromatic and medicinal plants. Value chains that include medicinal plant businesses and non-timber forest products benefit rural families and tribal economies, according to research.(Chandra, P., & Kumar, 2021). Tribal communities also have a rich heritage of medicinal knowledge which is an economic asset that promotes economic resilience and self-reliance in remote regions with limited availability of modern healthcare facilities (Magry, M. A., Cahill, D., Rookes, J., & Narula, 2022).

The value of India's informal health care system and indigenous health traditions has been more acknowledged in recent years. During public health crises and pandemics, herbal practitioners deliver accessible and affordable health care for the marginalized groups, especially the poor, in developing countries (KUMAR, 2022). The informal healthcare system has persisted in shaping the interaction between medicine, economy and society in rural India, where the access to healthcare is not uniform (Sujatha, 2023). Tribal beliefs and biodiversity conservation practices in Jharkhand also show a strong linkage to traditional healing system, which further contributes in sustaining ecological balance and rural livelihoods (Singhal, V., Ghosh, J., & Bhat, 2021).

1.1 Traditional Herbal Practices and Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is deeply ingrained in Jharkhand's traditional medical system, which is passed down through the generations. Tribespeople have extensive expertise in the diagnosis, treatment, and administration of many ailments via the use of medicinal herbs. For the sake of the community's well-being and cultural preservation, this information is crucial. (Kumar, A., Kumar, A., & Kumar, 2021). Additionally, plants that grow in the central region of India also serve as edible and medicinal plants in human nutrition and socio-economic aspects of the rural people, making the traditional system of plant based healthcare system important in practice (Sharma, P. K., Singh, A., & Sharma, 2022). The informal health care workers in tribal areas still are an integral part of providing healthcare services, especially for the vulnerable population who has lesser access to institutional health care services (Gupta, 2023).

1.2 Economic Contribution to Jharkhand's Rural Economy

Herbalists in Jharkhand help the economy in many ways, including by creating jobs, trading medicinal plants, making a living in the forest, and funding health care systems in rural areas. The forest and its non-timber products provide a significant amount of income for indigenous tribes. Through its links to sustainable resource utilization, the medicinal plant value chain has improved the economic prospects of rural communities.(Neupane, N. P., Yadav, E., & Verma, 2022). Rural development efforts and livelihood programs in Jharkhand have also brought attention to the centrality of community involvement and indigenous knowledge systems to the state's socioeconomic growth.(Mandi, 2022).

The growing worldwide demand for herbal and integrative medicine offers potential to grow the market for traditional medicinal products. Herbal health care practices have become more popular because of their cost effectiveness, availability, and effectiveness, especially in times of health crises like COVID-19 (Datta, 2021). Recognizing the economic value of herbal medicine practitioners is vital because of the contributions they make to sustainable rural development, health care access, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems in Jharkhand.

2. Literature Review

(Akomaning, Y. O., Darkwah, S. A., Živčlová, I., & Hlaváčková, 2023) investigated the importance of non-timber forest products to economic growth and their relevance in sustainable development in Ghana. It was found that forest resources like medicinal plants play a tremendous role in generating employment, poverty alleviation and improving the livelihoods of rural communities. By focusing on sustainable development of non-wood forest products, the authors want to boost local economies and

enhance people's lives. The study was conducted in Ghana, but its results could be applicable to Jharkhand as well, as the indigenous population there depends significantly on forest resources.

(Singh, 2020) discovered the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on the rural economy in India. High unemployment rates, insufficient access to healthcare, and a lack of work prospects were among the most critical economic concerns in rural areas. In this time, traditional healthcare and herbal remedies became significant as they were economically accessible and culturally accepted by the rural masses. The author proposed that indigenous healthcare practices complemented the rural households' healthcare amidst a health crisis.

(Patra, S., & Saikia, 2024) studied the botanical riches located in the Palamau Tiger Reserve in eastern India and their potential practical applications. Researchers discovered that indigenous communities used a wide range of medicinal herbs for both personal health and commercial purposes. The specialists agree that the diverse wildlife found in the area's woodlands helps with both traditional medicine and the economic security of rural residents. There was an emphasis on the need of protecting medicinal plant resources and using them sustainably in the study.

(Kerketta, A., & AN, 2022) done some digging on a community support worker for a rural Jharkhand healthcare provider. The study highlighted the significance of extant local health care support networks for indigenous people in distant areas without easy access to medical institutions. The authors state that there is still more to be done by community health workers and traditional healers to guaranty that those living in remote regions may easily obtain healthcare. The study found that local trust and cultural acceptance were the most important factors in rural healthcare delivery.

(Kumar, J. S., & Shobana, 2024) examined the rural healthcare system in India and analyzed the different healthcare schemes with regard to the consequences. The research revealed that infrastructure of health centers in rural areas was still deficient in many areas particularly the tribal areas and economically backward areas. The authors noted that informal health care providers and traditional medicine practitioners (TMPs) provide healthcare services in villages where they are lacking. Better support for local health systems and greater integration of traditional health care practices may enhance the health and well-being of rural populations, according to the study's authors.

(Hansda, N. M., Singh, U., Kapse, P. P., & Kiran, 2021) have investigated the attitude towards supernaturalism and mental health practices among tribal communities in Jharkhand. The study observed and reported that tribal communities have a strong link between healthcare and healing with their traditional beliefs and culture. The study identified that traditional healers and traditional medicine have impact on mental and social care in tribal society. Within the framework of tribal identity and communal support structures, the writers emphasized the importance of these behaviors.

(Singh, C., Ojha, D. K., Rath, R. C., & Sukthankar, 2020) had conducted a study on women entrepreneur empowerment and economic sustainability in the city of Ranchi, Jharkhand. Economic autonomy and rural development may be advanced via self-employment and small enterprises, according to the research. The authors emphasized that there is a gap between traditional and local knowledge-based businesses and their ability to provide livelihood opportunities for women and marginalized groups. The results are applicable to herbal medicine practices where rural women frequently are involved in gathering, processing, and selling medicinal plants, and to rural marketing systems.

(Mandal, S. K., & Rahaman, 2022) have inventoried and analysed the ethnoveterinary medicinal knowledge of the local communities of Eastern India. The study revealed the general use of indigenous medicinal systems in livestock health care and agricultural sustainability. The authors said that traditional medicinal knowledge enables the rural households to cut down the expenses for animal treatment and to facilitate livestock management. The study underscored the ethnoveterinary medicinal practices' cultural value, sustenance and economic importance in rural livelihoods.

(Shukla, F. P., Narayan, D. M., & Amity Business School, 2024) researched how SHGs and microfinance played a part in the community's economic growth. The study underscored the role of SHGs and financial support systems among the rural population in terms of job creation, empowerment of women and livelihood development in economically weaker areas. The writers made a point of saying that community-based economic activities are one way in which local institutions might help the

rural economy. The results have important implications for our knowledge of herbal medicine's potential impact on self-employment and community development in Jharkhand.

(Ranjan, A., Sankhala, G., Jha, S. K., Maiti, S., Bhakat, M., & Singh, 2025) did an exploratory study on the breeding and management practice of the local cattle in Jharkhand. The study emphasised the reliance of the rural households on traditional knowledge systems for livestock management and healthcare practices. According to what the researchers discovered, using indigenous treatment methods and herbal remedies were widely practised in the animal healthcare management because treatment is more affordable and easily accessible. The study confirmed that traditional medicine was still relevant in the maintenance of the rural livelihood and agriculture.

(Magry, 2025) investigated the gendered patterns of livelihood in forest-fringe communities in India, with a particular emphasis on the socio-economic dynamics of non-timber forest products. Medicinal plants and other forest-based resources provide substantial revenue to rural families and job prospects, according to the research. The author emphasized how women and underprivileged populations actively participate in the gathering, processing, and trading of forest products. Sustainable use of non-timber forest products has the potential to increase economic resilience and livelihood security in rural communities, according to the study.

(Rani, P., & Kumar, 2024) researched women business owners in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh area and their access to capital. The research found that the most important aspects to improve rural regions' socioeconomic situations were access to capital, chances for self-employment, and local entrepreneurship. The authors stressed that women-led economic activities provide family income and contribute to community development. Businesses engaged in medicinal plant harvesting and preparation and local selling of herbal remedies by rural women are both affected by the outcomes.

3. Research Gap

The present studies on herbal medicine are largely concerned with the forest resources, indigenous knowledge and medicinal plants of rural and tribal people of Jharkhand. The significance of traditional healers in healthcare services and biodiversity conservation has been discussed by many researchers. However, the direct impact of herbal medicine practitioners on rural economies has received little recognition.

In rural areas, the herbal practitioner's role in creating jobs, generating revenue, and engaging in local commerce is sometimes overlooked, despite the fact that most study focuses on traditional healthcare practices and the use of medicinal plants. Similarly, there is less data on the monetary value of traditional healers' contributions to the already cheap cost of health care and their role in times of health crisis or emergency.

Moreover, there is limited research attention on the problems of herbal medicine practitioners, including inadequate institutional acceptance of herbal medicine, a loss of traditional knowledge, and poor governmental support. Hence, the present study is aimed to understand the role of herbal medicine practitioners in sustainable rural development, economic value of herbal medicine practitioners and access to healthcare services in Jharkhand and role in livelihood generation.

4. Research Objectives

Here are the goals of the research. The stated objectives of the research are as follows.

1. To study the contribution of herbal medicine practitioner in the rural economy of Jharkhand.
2. To identify the contribution of traditional medicine in rural and tribal communities towards access to healthcare.
3. To gain knowledge of the economic significance of medicinal plants and forest resources for livelihoods.
4. To gain insight into the importance of traditional medicine in sustainable rural development.
5. To know the predominant problems of the users of herbal medicine in Jharkhand.

5. Research Methodology

The study methodology is the method by which the data for a certain topic is methodically collected, analysed, and interpreted. The study's approach may be better understood and the research process can be maintained with more clarity and reliability with its support. To find out how much money herbal medicine practitioners in rural Jharkhand make, the researchers in this study looked at secondary data.

5.1 Research Design

This investigation made use of a secondary research strategy. Through a review of relevant literature and analysis of published articles, this research has focused on the financial impacts of herbal medicine practitioners on rural Jharkhand economies.

5.2 Sources of Data

The research is of secondary nature, which consists of research articles, books, journals, dissertations, government reports and online academic databases of traditional healthcare systems, medicinal plants, indigenous knowledge, and rural development.

5.3 Data Collection Method

The publications and literature search were conducted to explore socio-economic contribution of herbal medicine practitioners from relevant national and international sources. The data gathered covers various aspects of medicinal plant utilization, livelihoods based on forests, access to healthcare services, and traditional healing in rural and tribal communities.

5.4 Method of Analysis

After data collection, it was collated, evaluated, and interpreted analytically and descriptively. In order to comprehend the connection between traditional herbal medicine and environmentally responsible rural development, the various research results were examined.

5.5 Scope of the Study

The study emphasizes the livelihood generation activities, health-related supportive activities and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems by herbal medicine practitioners in the rural economy of Jharkhand. Primary survey and field investigation were not done as the research originated from sources that are not primary.

6. Economic Value of Herbal Medicine Practitioners in Jharkhand's Rural Economy

The herbal practitioner network in Jharkhand is an important cog in the wheel of social and economic progress for the state's rural and tribal inhabitants. The traditional healers offer low-cost health care services; they help sustain indigenous medical knowledge and are involved in livelihood activities such as medicinal plants and forest resources. Herbalists are the main health-care providers in many remote villages where the availability of modern health-care services is restricted.

6.1 Contribution to Rural Healthcare

People in rural areas often have easy and affordable access to traditional healers for medical care. Herbal treatments play an important role in traditional tribal medicine for the treatment of a wide range of common medical conditions, including infections, gastrointestinal issues, fever, skin ailments, and more. The accessibility of medicinal plants in nearby forests and locations makes herbal therapy more cost-effective than conventional medicine. In times of health crises or pandemics, there were also traditional healthcare systems that assisted the rural population with herbal remedies and methods of prevention and treatment that were

available in the local area.

6.2 Employment and Livelihood Generation

People who work in the herbal medicine sector do everything from gathering herbs to processing them and selling them in local markets. As a supplement to their main income, many rural people depend on forest resources. She is also involved in herbal medicine preparation and selling and getting livelihood through the traditional medicine and oil, powders etc. preparation. Medicinal and aromatic plants are traded which helps to enhance the local economy and small businesses in rural areas.

6.3 Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge

Herbal medicine practitioners aid in the maintenance of traditional medicinal knowledge that is passed on from one generation to the next. Indigenous people have valuable information on identifying, collecting and using medicinal plants for health care. The rural legacy and tribal culture are incomplete without this traditional wisdom. In tribal areas, keeping to traditional healing methods also helps with community and cultural identity.

6.4 Role in Sustainable Resource Utilization

Medicinal plants are harvested from the natural resources and traditional healers are well linked to the forests and natural resources. The responsible use of medicinal herbs contributes to the preservation of biodiversity and the preservation of ecological equilibrium. Herbalists advocate for the preservation of medicinal plant species and the responsible use of forest resources. Therefore, both rural residents' livelihoods and environmental sustainability are aided by conventional healthcare systems.

6.5 Challenges Faced by Herbal Medicine Practitioners

Herbal medicine practitioners, while playing their part in the rural society, are confronted with many challenges. Traditional healing systems face threats to their continuity due to lack of institutional recognition, financial support, scientific documentation and a diminishing interest among the younger generation. The use of modern healthcare facilities and deforestation is also a factor that impacts the medicinal plant resources. Besides, the market opportunity is not good and there is lack of government support in rural areas, which limits the economic potential of herbal medicine practice.

6.6 Importance in Rural Development

Herbal medicine practitioners make more than just health care contributions. By safeguarding forests, producing jobs, selling medicinal plants, and maintaining cultural heritage, they help to rural sustainable development. One way to help preserve Jharkhand's priceless indigenous knowledge systems and boost rural livelihoods is to support traditional healthcare systems via conservation, education, and legislation.

6.7 Types of Economic Value of Herbal Medicine Practitioners

The herbal medicine professionals in Jharkhand fill in the rural economy in various aspects of economic value creation. They can be divided into four types of value: direct, indirect, environmental, and social economic.

- **Direct Economic Value:** Herbalists earn direct income from herbal medicine preparation and sale, medicinal plant trade and herbal medicine consultation fees. This provides an opportunity for rural and tribal households to become self-employed.
- **Indirect Economic Value:** Consequently, they help rural people save more money by lowering healthcare costs and offering more affordable therapies. It improves the financial problems of rural communities in a roundabout manner.

- **Environmental Economic Value:** They use forest resources for medicinal plants, promoting sustainable use of the resources and the conservation of biodiversity, leading to the balance of ecological and economic equilibrium.
- **Social Economic Value:** Herbal practitioners enhance the strength of community-based healthcare systems and enhance accessibility of treatment in remote areas, thus indirectly contributing to social development in rural areas; strengthen cultural traditions.

Table 1: Economic Contributions of Herbal Medicine Practitioners in Jharkhand's Rural Economy

Economic Dimension	Description	Impact on Rural Economy
Direct Income Generation	Earnings from herbal consultation, preparation of medicines, and sale of medicinal plants	Provides self-employment opportunities for herbal practitioners and tribal households
Employment Creation	Activities like collection, cultivation, processing, and trading of medicinal plants	Generates rural employment and supports informal sector livelihoods
Cost Reduction in Healthcare	Use of locally available herbal remedies instead of expensive modern treatments	Reduces household healthcare expenditure and increases savings
Forest-Based Livelihood Support	Utilization of medicinal plants and non-timber forest products	Strengthens income sources for forest-dependent tribal communities
Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge	Transfer of traditional healing knowledge across generations	Maintains cultural identity and supports sustainable traditional systems
Environmental Sustainability	Maintaining a sustainable harvest and using therapeutic herbs	Promotes biodiversity conservation and ecological balance
Community Healthcare Support	Provision of accessible and affordable healthcare services in rural areas	Improves healthcare accessibility in remote regions

7. Findings of the Study

It has been concluded that herbal medicine practitioners have had a tremendous contribution in the rural economy of the State of Jharkhand in terms of providing health care, generating livelihood and maintaining indigenous knowledge. Traditional healers are still relevant healthcare providers in tribal and remote rural regions where access to modern health care is scarce or cost prohibitive.

The study also indicates that forest resources and medicinal plants are also an important source of economic stability to rural households. Medicinal plants are harvested, processed & sold which generate jobs for the local community and small-scale economy. The herbal medicine practices then become an important economic avenue of additional income for many tribal families.

The research also found that indigenous peoples' medical expertise is very important to their social and cultural identities. Traditional healers are passing on their invaluable knowledge of herbal cures and their preparation and usage from one generation to the next. Caregiving and biodiversity protection in rural areas may benefit from this data.

The research also reveals that herbal medicine practitioners play a part in providing affordable and accessible health care. Traditional treatments are usually the preferred choice among the rural population because they are readily accessible, acceptable, and cost-effective alternatives to modern medical treatment. In times of health crises and public health threats, herbal healthcare systems also offered assistance to local communities.

The study, however, points to certain problems confronting those who use herbal medicines, such as a lack of institutional recognition, low levels of interest among the younger generation, lack of government backing, poor market opportunities and dwindling availability of medicinal plant resources caused by environmental degradation. All these factors pose a threat to the sustainability of traditional healing systems in Jharkhand.

Herbal medicine practitioners in rural Jharkhand contribute to the region's economy, cultural heritage, people's capacity to

earn a livelihood, and access to healthcare, according to the results.

As the research has shown, the financial value of the herbal medicine practitioners is not only in income generating but also the cost-saving value of herbal medicine practitioners that provide affordable health care services to the rural people, which has reduced the dependency on the expensive modern healthcare services.

8. Discussion

This study has identified a number of contributions of the herbal medicine practitioners in rural Jharkhand to the economy. They serve a variety of purposes, such as subsistence, cultural practices, and informal trade. Their role is particularly crucial in remote and indigenous communities where residents may not have access to modern healthcare services and have to depend on the land for food and shelter.

The focus is on the ways in which rural communities' livelihoods rely on forest ecosystems. Traditional healers, as knowledge goalkeepers and service providers, play a key role in forest based economies, without whom herbal medicine would not exist. This partnership opens opportunities for eco-economic development and sustainable resource utilization, strengthening the awareness of the potential of biodiversity in rural development.

The study indicates that those who practice herbal medicine are part of a trustworthy informal health care system. They are readily available, low cost, and culturally appropriate, which is why they are a favorite choice in the rural areas. It is assumed that community trust and practices influence on people's health in rural areas of Jharkhand apart from government health service.

It also sheds light on the systemic obstacles that herbal medicine practitioners face while trying to make a living wage. They struggle even more to grow their businesses that generate income because of issues pertaining to official recognition, access to the market, and institutional integration. Another long-term threat to the industry's sustainability is the erosion of traditional knowledge as a result of technology.

The traditional healers in the rural areas are essential to the economy and to the health of the rural people, as they are seen to have contributed to health in a major way. The measures to boost this sector in rural development of Jharkhand could be of great significance, including indigenous know-how documentation and sustainable forest management.

In rural areas, herbal medicine practitioners prove to be of great value since they are directly involved in the treatment of patients, and also indirectly in generating savings for people financially. These affordable services help the tribal communities save more and face economic hardships better, and provide further support to rural communities.

9. Conclusion

The present study reveals that herbal health workers have an important and multi-dimensional contribution to the rural economy in Jharkhand. They are not only able to offer medical service but they are also able to help generate income, provide informal jobs, protect cultural practices and provide responsible use of forest resources. Herbalists are found to be very important in community health in remote and indigenous communities where normal medical services are not readily available.

Research shows that medicinal plants and other forest-based resources are vital to rural communities' ability to make a living. Traditional healers have traditional function as a tradition and for their survival they have to utilize herbs for traditional healing and contribute to the local economy. For this reason they play a key role in the informal rural economy, particularly for the indigenous families that rely on forest resources.

The findings also show that, beyond cultural identity and environmental sustainability, indigenous knowledge systems are also intrinsically linked. But it is becoming more common that such traditional know-how is being passed down to younger generations, these systems are being weakened, and there is not institutional recognition of such systems as a result of modernization.

However, there are other problems that are experienced by herbal medicine practitioners including lack of access to markets, policymakers' support and environmental degradation. If they wish to improve their position in improving rural

development, they must tackle these matters.

The study findings suggest that understanding the practices and engagement with the herbal healers is essential to enhance access to healthcare, reduce livelihood problems in rural areas, and drive sustainable development in Jharkhand.

Herbal medicine practitioners deserve the respect that they can be given in Jharkhand through the rural health care system, the informal sector, and the sustainable development framework.

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