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Medicinal Plants: Green Gold of Indian Agriculture

*Kommana Sai Sirisha

M.Sc. Agricultural Entomology, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

*Corresponding Author's email: skkommana98@gmail.com

India has a rich tradition of using medicinal plants through systems like Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, making it one of the largest producers of medicinal herbs globally. With growing consumer demand for natural remedies, herbal cosmetics, and organic wellness, cultivating medicinal plants is now a profitable venture, especially for small and marginal farmers.

Major Medicinal Plants and Their Uses

Below are some economically and therapeutically important medicinal plants widely cultivated in India:

Plant Name	Scientific Name	Major Uses
Ashwagandha	Withania somnifera	Stress relief, boosts immunity, enhances stamina.
Tulsi	Ocimum sanctum	Treats cold, fever, cough; immunity booster.
Aloe Vera	Aloe barbadensis	Skin treatment, digestion aid, wound healing.
Sarpagandha	Rauvolfia serpentina	Anti-hypertensive, used for insomnia.
Kalmegh	Andrographis paniculata	Liver detox, cold, fever, and immunity booster.
Neem	Azadirachta indica	Natural pesticide, antiseptic, blood purifier.
Isabgol	Plantago ovata	Used as dietary fiber; regulates digestion.
Senna	Cassia angustifolia	Common herbal laxative.
Amla	Phyllanthus emblica	Rich in Vitamin C; rejuvenates body and improves digestion.

Cultivation Scope and Farmer Benefits

Grown in low-fertility, drylands, requiring minimal inputs. High demand from AYUSH industries, cosmetics, and wellness markets. Export potential to USA, Germany, China, etc. Opportunities for contract farming and buy-back from herbal companies. Income can go up to ₹1–2 lakh/acre depending on the species and market tie-up.

Government Support and Schemes

National AYUSH Mission (NAM) (2014)

Financial assistance for cultivation, nurseries, storage, and post-harvest processing. Subsidies up to 30–75% depending on species and area.

National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) (2000)

Apex body for conservation, sustainable use, and trade of medicinal plants. Maintains a list of priority species eligible for government support.

Mission on Medicinal Plants (MoMP) (Under NMPB)

Supports cluster-based cultivation, processing, and quality certification. Farmers trained through KVKs and State Medicinal Boards.

Van Dhan Yojana (2018)

Empowers tribal groups and SHGs for value-addition of forest-based medicinal products. Implemented by TRIFED under Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) (2015)

Encourages organic cultivation of medicinal herbs. Support for certification and marketing of naturally grown produce.

Challenges Faced by Growers

Lack of awareness about market demand and cultivation practices. Exploitation by middlemen due to unorganized markets. Poor access to quality planting material and processing units. Minimal insurance or credit support compared to food crops.

Way Forward: Solutions

Establish Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) for bulk marketing. Set up value chain infrastructure — dryers, graders, and primary processors. Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to ensure buy-back at fixed rates. Digitize marketing through eNAM or state-specific herbal marketplaces. Integrate AYUSH promotion with agricultural extension at village level.

Conclusion

Medicinal plants not only hold health benefits but also offer financial empowerment for farmers. With the right support and awareness, they can become a pillar of sustainable rural income and make India a global leader in herbal products. Encouraging more youth and women into this sector through skill-based training can further strengthen the rural economy.

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