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Endangered Plants of India: Forgotten Green Treasures

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India is one of the 17 mega-diverse countries in the world, boasting a rich and unique floral diversity. However, rapid urbanization, deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable harvesting have pushed many plant species to the brink of extinction. Endangered plants are those that are at risk of disappearing from their natural habitats in the near future unless protective measures are taken. This article explores some of India's endangered plant species, the reasons behind their decline, and the urgent need for conservation.

Why Are Plants Becoming Endangered?

- Habitat loss due to agriculture, urbanization, and industrialization
- Over-exploitation for medicinal, ornamental, or commercial purposes
- Invasive alien species displacing native flora
- Climate change affecting sensitive ecosystems
- Pollution and unregulated tourism in biodiversity hotspots

Notable Endangered Plants of India

1. *Rauvolfia serpentina* (Sarpagandha) – Known for its medicinal value in treating hypertension and mental disorders.
2. *Podophyllum hexandrum* (Indian Mayapple) – Used in cancer treatment but critically endangered due to overharvesting.
3. *Saussurea costus* (Kuth) – Found in the Himalayas, valued for its aromatic roots used in medicine and perfumes.
4. *Cycas beddomei* – An ancient gymnosperm endemic to the Eastern Ghats, under threat from habitat destruction.
5. *Nothapodytes nimmoniana* – Source of camptothecin, used in anti-cancer drugs; over-exploited in the Western Ghats.

Conservation Efforts and Legal Protection

- The Wildlife Protection Act (1972) includes several rare plant species under its schedule for protection.
- Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and National Biodiversity Authority are leading research and conservation programs.
- In-situ conservation through national parks, biosphere reserves, and sacred groves.
- Ex-situ conservation via seed banks, botanical gardens, and tissue culture.
- Community involvement and traditional knowledge are crucial for sustainable conservation.



Conclusion

Endangered plants are not just botanical curiosities they are integral to ecosystems, medicine, culture, and even national identity. Protecting them is not only a scientific necessity but a moral responsibility. As stewards of biodiversity, it is our duty to raise awareness, support conservation efforts, and ensure that these green treasures are not lost to history.