

# Legacy of Healing:

## Herbal Traditions of Kashmir's Diverse Communities



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In the serene valleys and winding mountains of Kashmir, a quiet yet precious tradition continues to flourish—a legacy of healing affectionately nurtured by the elders who serve as living custodians of traditional herbal wisdom. This knowledge, handed down through generations, is far more than a collection of curative recipes; it is a living heritage, a spiritual and cultural thread that binds the past to the present. It sustains not only bodies but also the identities of communities, weaving together celebration, belonging, and a sacred relationship with the land that nourishes all. Among Kashmir's Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus alike, this shared heritage forms a luminous tapestry where diverse cultures honour nature's bounties, united by the ethics of care and coexistence.

**This article is about the living legacy of Kashmir's herbal traditions and how they unite diverse communities through shared wisdom, faith, and care for nature.**

Imagine walking through Kashmir's lush meadows in springtime, accompanied by a grandmother or grandfather who pauses to pluck a cluster of fragrant wild herbs. In that simple gesture lies an entire philosophy of life. For centuries, such elders have been the repositories of Kashmir's herbal lore—living libraries who transmit, through memory and practice, the healing intelligence of the earth. They teach younger generations to identify plants such as *Allium humile* and *Fritillaria cirrhosa*, herbs long cherished for their power to soothe the common cold or ease chronic

pain. Each plant embodies a story, each remedy a testament to patience and attentiveness—qualities often overshadowed by the haste of modern medicine. The wisdom of these elders is not recorded in books but in gestures, voices, and landscapes. Their teachings are offered not in laboratories, but in the open sanctuaries of meadows and mountains, where nature herself becomes the first teacher.

**Kashmir's herbal traditions are more than remedies; they are a living bridge between cultures, generations, and spiritual worlds. Through stories of healers and elders, this essay uncovers a legacy that heals not only illness but also divisions.**



For Kashmiri Muslims, this herbal wisdom often intertwines with Islamic spirituality. Many Muslim mystics discern Divine presence in the blossoming of a flower or in the scent of a healing leaf, finding in nature a mirror of the Creator's mercy. Among Kashmiri Sikhs, these practices resonate deeply with the Sikh ideal of harmony between body, mind, and spirit, while Kashmiri Hindus perceive them through the lens of Āyurveda and cosmological balance, where health and healing are threads in the vast cycle of existence. In each tradition, nature is not merely an external resource but a living companion, a sacred interlocutor in humanity's dialogue with the Divine. Together, these perspectives form a vibrant spiritual ecology—an interfaith symphony of healing that celebrates diversity through shared reverence for life.

The stories of Kashmir's herbalists and healers offer a glimpse into this ethos of harmony. They remind us that Kashmir's diversity is not a mosaic of separation but a woven fabric of connection, strengthened by mutual trust and respect. The elders, as carriers of herbal wisdom, hold in their memory the delicate threads that bind communities together. When people gather to listen to their stories or to learn the art of healing from them, these threads are renewed, transforming tradition into a living bridge between generations and faiths.

### **Two stories from local memory illuminate this spirit vividly.**

The first concerns Hakīm Maqbūl of Urdu Bazaar, Srinagar—a healer admired across religious boundaries. Oral accounts recall that people of every faith sought his remedies. Among his closest friends was an elderly Hindu from Habba Kadal, who visited him daily after performing prayers on a nearby hill. One morning, when the man returned as usual, Hakīm Maqbūl greeted him but soon said gently, "Your family members were looking for you. You should go home quickly." The Hindu left at once, only to pass away later that evening. When those present asked the Hakīm how he had become aware of his friend's approaching death, he replied softly, "Each day when he returned, the tilak on his forehead had dried. But today, it was still wet. Seeing that, I perceived that his soul was being prepared to return to its Creator." Such stories reveal that for these traditional healers, insight was not merely medical but spiritual—rooted in empathy,

observation, and an intuitive grasp of life's sacred rhythms.



Another tale comes from the verdant district of Anantnag, where Karan Singh, a Sikh herbalist from Nambal area, is celebrated for his skill in traditional medicine. People from all faiths visit him, seeking remedies for ailments and counsel on maintaining good health. His practice continues to draw together Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, who see in his healing art a reaffirmation of Kashmir's enduring message: that service to others transcends all sectarian boundaries. In these stories, we find living embodiments of interreligious harmony—traditional healers who healed not only the body but also the communal spirit.

Yet this centuries-old legacy now faces subtle but growing challenges. Modernity, with its urban migrations and pharmaceutical quick fixes, often leaves little room for the slow, patient learning that herbal traditions demand. The younger generation, in their pursuit of education and employment, seldom accompany elders on their walks through the forests or listen to their fireside tales of healing. Environmental degradation and political unrest further erode the delicate ecology in which these plants—and the wisdom they symbolize—once thrived. In losing touch with this knowledge, communities risk losing an essential dimension of their own identity: their intimacy with the land of Kashmir.

Still, amidst these challenges, hope persists. In several spaces nestled within the folds of the Himalayas, efforts are being made to revive and preserve this precious heritage. Elders and youth gather to hold storytelling sessions, conduct herbal workshops, and prepare traditional meals infused with medicinal herbs. Through these acts, they reaffirm not only the practical benefits of herbal medicine but also the moral and spiritual wisdom it embodies.

a wisdom that teaches humility before nature and compassion toward all beings. The legacy of herbal healing in Kashmir, therefore, is not a relic of the past but a living philosophy—one that unites ecology, faith, and ethics in a single act of care. It invites us to reconsider our understanding of health, not merely as the absence of disease, but as the harmony of body, mind, community, and environment. In a world increasingly fragmented by differences and driven by haste, Kashmir's herbal traditions remind us that healing begins with listening—to the earth, to our elders, and to one another.

To walk beside a Kashmiri elder through those meadows is to step into a living classroom of wisdom, where every plant is a verse in a sacred scripture of life. The stories they share are not just tales of herbs and cures; they are meditations on coexistence, gratitude, and the Divine mystery of being alive. In preserving these traditions, we do more than safeguard knowledge—we reaffirm the profound truth that the healing of the earth and the healing of humanity are, ultimately, one and the same.

