

THE JUNGLE AND THE AROMA OF MEATS (AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON HINDU MEDICINE)

BOOK REVIEW

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Introduction

Francis Zimmermann's *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine* is a seminal work originally published in French in 1982 (*La jungle et le fumet des viandes*). While not a new book, its significance remains unparalleled in the study of Indian medical traditions. Following its initial release, an English translation was published by the University of California Press, and in 2011, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers released a reprint in India. The book serves as the fourth volume in the "Indian Medical Tradition" series, edited by Dominik Wujastyk and Kenneth G. Zysk.

About the Author

Francis Zimmermann is a renowned modern researcher who has conducted profound studies into Ayurveda. Originally an anthropologist, his academic journey expanded into philosophy, medical history, and South Asian studies. His commitment to the subject led him to Kerala, where he became a disciple of the late Ashtavaidyan Vayaskara N.S. Mooss. Currently, he serves as a social science expert at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) in Paris.

Linguistic History: The Evolution of "Jungle"

A primary focus of Zimmermann's work is the semantic shift of the word "Jungle".

- He clarifies that the book is not about forests in the sense portrayed by Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.
- Instead, he traces the origin to the Sanskrit term *Jangala*, which referred to arid, dry land with open vegetation.
- He details how this term transitioned through the 18th-century Hindi word *Jangli* and Anglo-Saxon languages to eventually mean the dense tropical forest we recognize today.

Key Ecological and Medical Themes

The book, spanning 266 pages across eight chapters, explores the intersection of environment and health.

- **The Aroma of Meats:** Zimmermann uses this concept to explain the link between ancient dietary habits and medical practices.
- **The Savors of the Soil:** In the section "The Savors of the Soil," he examines the ecological background of the Vedic principle that there is nothing in nature that is not a medicine.
- **Anthropocentric Character:** He argues that traditional knowledge is human-centered, classifying everything in nature as either beneficial or harmful to humanity.
- **Bio-Climatic Polarity:** Zimmermann demonstrates how Ayurveda creates a "bio-climatic polarity" by harmonizing humans, animals, and plants within a specific habitat.

Critical Evaluation

The book has received immense praise from critics like McKim Marriott, Richard Tucker, and Mark Nichter. Marriott, of the University of Chicago, famously stated:

"There is no other work comparable to Zimmermann's book regarding Hindu sciences. I consider it the most important intellectual achievement of the last century". Editors Wujastyk and Zysk also noted that Zimmermann's "interpretative sophistication" reveals deep layers of meaning previously unseen in Ayurvedic studies.

Conclusion

Zimmermann's work is a vital roadmap for those wishing to understand Ayurveda as more than just "herbals and therapies". He presents it as an integral part of Indian culture, providing a sophisticated socio-ecological vision. For interested readers, the book is available in both hardcover and paperback editions on online platforms like Amazon, priced between 320 and 325 Rupees. It remains an unforgettable contribution to modern social science and medical anthropology.