



Mythology and Medicine: A Comparative Study of Native American's Sweet Grass and Indian's *Durva* Grass

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Abstract

Indigenous people depend on nature for their livelihood. They are reliant on nearby forest flora and animals for food, medicines, and building materials for their homes. The first tribes had their own in-depth knowledge and answers for all elements of existence. Tribal wisdom has always been transmitted orally from one generation to the next. This tribal wisdom includes knowledge about the plants and herbs and their medicinal values and uses. Myths and legends play a major role in carrying that information with them from generation to generation. Native American and Indian tribal communities have always had a variety of medical procedures and supplies having a long history of usage are referred to as traditional medicine. Out of the different herbs and plants, sweet grass from Native Americans and *Durva* or *Doob* grass from Indians has a noteworthy importance and connection to their respective cultures. To highlight the parallels in the two grasses' purpose and significance, this article attempts to create a comparison analysis between them. While bringing out their similarities, the native American and Indian tribal likeness in culture and practices is also studied.

Keywords: *Durva* Grass, Native American, Sweet Grass, Traditional Knowledge, Tribal Knowledge

1. Introduction

Mythology and medicine have long gone hand in hand. For generations, people have looked to the ancient wisdom contained within religious texts, folktales, and myths to understand and explain the physical and mental illnesses that may affect mankind. In this essay, we will explore the roles of two traditional plants: Sweet grass (used by the Native Americans) and *Durva* grass (used by native Indians). Additionally, we will analyze how these two plants play an integral part in the healing practices of those cultures, specifically examining their use of these plants in mythology, as well as in the medical field. Lastly, we will discuss the implications of this linked relationship between the stories of the past and modern treatments. By the end of this essay, it is our hope that the reader can better appreciate the impact that mythology and plant-based medicine can

have on the health and well-being of a community¹. We will look at how these plants have acted as a shared symbol between these two cultures, allowing them to connect their ancient religious beliefs to the healing practices of their ancestors. Subsequently, we will ask how these native nations believe the mythology of these plants are intertwined with their traditional knowledge of medical treatment². We will examine how mythology and mysticism have been used as a tool to explain the physical and mental health of a people, as well as explore how these stories are still relevant in today's world. Furthermore, we will contrast the use of these traditional plants between these two cultures by attempting to analyze patterns in the stories and determine the common threads that may exist. This research can help to not only better understand the past, but also further bridge the gap between religion and science. With this information in mind, we will explore

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the mythologies and healing practices associated with both sweet grass and *Durva* grass (Figures 1 and 2), specifically looking into which medical conditions they are used to treat and any spiritual symbolism associated with their usage. After delving into the traditional belief systems of both cultures, we will then venture into the world of science, interpreting current studies about these medicinal plants and assessing their efficacy as a form of alternative care. In this way, we can gain valuable insight into the complex and interconnected relationship between faith and medicine. In conclusion, we will discuss the impact that these medicinal plants and their associated stories have had on the health and wellbeing of not only Native Americans and Native Indians, but all of us globally^{3,4}.

The original method of administering medical care that considers a patient's unique circumstances and



Figure 1. Sweetgrass and Sweetgrass braid⁶.



Figure 2. *Durva* grass.

surroundings is oral tradition. Numerous official and informal systems of medicine are based on this history, but tribal medicine is where it is most evident. Only in respect to African tribal remedies and a few specific Indian contexts have the fundamental components of traditional healing systems been recorded. Oral traditions, on the other hand, have been well-recorded with regard to tribal activities, songs, myths, tales, and art forms. Due in part to the intense secrecy surrounding the various treatment modalities, there is little record of medicine. The information is frequently regarded as being extremely holy, which inhibits its diffusion or recording. The procedure is extensively used, not only for the treatment of illnesses but also for childbirth and childcare. Storytellers and healers in certain ancient civilizations were considered to be one and the same due to the long-standing mythical connection between storytelling and healing skills. Many indigenous societies regard stories not just for their entertainment value but also as a way to impart cultural lessons, such as practices meant to avoid imbalance and sickness (both physical and mental), as well as to aid in overcoming trials brought on by illness, tragedy, or trauma. Magical stories are sometimes delivered in ritualized ways in shamanic cultures to enable certain healing activities. Therefore culture, myths, legends, etc., have played the major role carrying the traditional medicine knowledge to the people through generations and keeping them alive^{2,3}.

2. Study on Native American Traditional Medicine and Indian Traditional Medicine

A variety of medical procedures and supplies having a long history of usage are referred to as traditional medicine. It typically refers to medical knowledge created by indigenous cultures that combines spiritual therapies, manual methods, and medicines derived from plants, animals, and minerals to heal sickness or preserve welfare. Traditional medicine is often performed outside of allopathic medicine, which is the predominant medical system in the industrialised world and is sometimes referred to as biomedicine, conventional medicine, or Western medicine. Traditional medicine is used as a whole healthcare

system in many cultures that has been developed over hundreds or even thousands of years. Traditional medical practices from India (*Ayurveda*), China (Chinese medicine), and Arabic (*Unani*) are some of the most well-known traditional medical systems. Traditional medicine is described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “the totality of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement, or treatment of physical and mental illnesses”. Many of the fundamental principles of traditional medicine are shared by complete medical systems, such as Traditional Chinese medicine. These methods often emphasise prevention and wellness, a holistic and highly tailored approach to therapy, optimising the body’s innate capacity for healing, integrating patients as active partners in their own care, treating the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of an illness⁵. Traditional medical practises, however, show a great deal of variability and can differ greatly from place to region. Traditional medical treatments need various levels of skill and vary in their level of efficacy and evidence-base. Traditional medical practises are further controlled by a diverse range of national and state laws and regulations as well as several underlying cultural precepts. Traditional medicine is not only an essential part of healthcare, but it also provides many communities with a significant source of money. Even said, traditional medicine could be a crucial component of a community’s identity. Most of the medicinal plants still in use today were discovered by pre-industrial societies, and many of these people are actively engaged in the wild gathering, domestication, cultivation, and management of medicinal plant resources. Many indigenous peoples and local communities are supported by this economic activity, which in turn encourages the preservation of Traditional medicine. While some medicinal plants are grown for commercial purposes, the majority are still gathered from the wild. Indigenous peoples and regional groups may be knowledgeable about medical uses of plants as well as how to prepare and gather them. The indigenous peoples and regional groups that have traditionally utilised herbal remedies can benefit greatly from this

knowledge, as can anybody attempting to export and use medicine outside of its natural setting. Traditional Knowledge can offer helpful advice on how to choose and collect plant material that may be useful for medicinal purposes. A lengthy history of clinical usage shows that a herbal treatment may be clinically successful, and bioactive substances produced from presently prescribed herbal medicines are more likely to have little toxicity. Drugs made from plants are often employed in ways that are closely related to their historic roles as plant remedies^{4,5}.

3. Legend on the Origin of Sweet Grass of the Native Americans

A subtribe of the Siksika Indians of North Saskatchewan in Canada, the Piegan tribe was the southernmost near the Missouri River’s headwaters in Montana. Since they possessed horses for raiding and were provided with weapons and ammunition by their Canadian sources, Piegans, who belonged to the Algonquian language family, were warlike toward the majority of their neighbouring tribes.

The Piegans were likewise hostile to traders and adventurers. Numerous smallpox outbreaks wiped off the majority of their people. On both sides of the border, they are now grouped on reserves. Many young, attractive men of the Piegan tribe worshipped the Chief’s daughter, a girl of extraordinary beauty. However, she refused to accept any of them as her husband. One of the young tribesmen was extremely underprivileged and had an unsightly scar on his face. Despite witnessing wealthy and attractive men from his tribe being turned down by the Chief’s daughter, he made the decision to see if she would accept him as her spouse. He fled in humiliation toward the south when she laughed at him for even posing the question. He slumped on the ground, fatigued and hungry, and dozed off after travelling for several days. Knowing the predicament, the young unlucky kid was in, Morning-Star peered down from the skies and felt sympathy for him. Morning-Star informed his parents, Sun and Moon that a helpless young man was lying on the ground unable to get help. He wanted to pursue him with a friend. His parents urged him to go get the man. Scarface, a

young guy, was taken into the sky by Morning-Star. Sun stated that he smelt bad and requested to not bring him into his cabin until they had constructed four sweat lodges. After finishing, Sun took Scarface inside the first sweat lodge. A hot coal on a forked stick was requested by him from Morning-Star. A piece of sweet grass was then broken off by the Sun and placed on the hot fire. Sun started singing as the incense started to burn. Sun stroked Scarface's face, left arm, and side with his hands as he moved them back and forth through the haze. On the boy's right side, Sun performed the ritual once more to cleanse him and get rid of his worldly odours. Sun performed the same healing ritual in the other three sweat lodges with Scarface. Scarface's body changed colour, and he began to shine like a yellow light. Sun touched a gentle feather to the youth's face and miraculously removed the scar. Sun gave the young guy one last touch, making his long, and golden hair look just like Morning-Star's. Sun took the two young men into his private lodge, where they were given the position of honour side by side. The father cried out to Moon asking her to identify their son. Moon mistakenly pointed at Scarface. Sun chided her for not knowing her own child. He told her that their son was not him. He will be referred to as Mistaken-for-Morning-Star. They all burst out laughing at the error. The two youngsters become good friends as a result of their continuous proximity. They were on an adventure one day when Morning-Star pointed out several huge birds with long, pointed beaks. Morning-Star cautioned his foster-brother to not approach those hazardous beasts. He added that the birds slaughtered his other brothers with their beaks. The two lads were abruptly pursued by birds. Morning-Star ran back toward his house, but Foster-Brother halted, took out a club, and knocked the birds down one by one, killing them all. When Morning-Star got home, he ran to tell his father about what had happened. Sun composed a triumphant song in honour of the little hero. Sun handed Morning-Star a forked staff for raising burning coals and a braid of fragrant grass to use for incense as thanks for saving his life. These holy components, which were essential to creating the sweat lodge ceremony, were a gift of faith. The Sun offered his sweat lodge to

Mistaken-for-Morning-Star. Mistaken-for-Morning-Star meticulously examined its construction while mentally prepared for his eventual return to Earth. All of Scarface's tribesmen flocked to view the attractive young guy in their midst when he finally made it to their tribal town. They first failed to identify him as Scarface. He informed them that he had been in the skies. He asked them to look at him and told them he resembled Morning-Star. He told them he received those items from the Sun, which were utilised in the sweat lodge healing ritual which helped him get rid of his unsightly scar. Scarface described how to utilise the sweet grass and forked stick. He then started working on instructing his people on how to build the sweat lodge. The Piegan tribe constructed the first medicine sweat lodge on Earth in this manner. The Chief's lovely daughter married Scarface because he was so incredibly attractive and had brought his people such a magnificent benefit of healing. The Piegans always include the sweat lodge healing ceremony as a significant component of their yearly Sun Dance Celebration in commemoration of Sun's gift to Scarface and his clan.

4. Characteristics, Nutritional Value and Uses of Sweet Grass as a Medicinal Plant

A native rhizomatous perennial grass is sweetgrass. The semi-erect, up to 30-inch-tall culms or stems grow from thin, spreading rhizomes. The few, rough-edged leaves have exceptionally lustrous undersides that are smooth. Unlike many other grasses, their leaves soon curl when dry. Frequently, it has a reddish-purple hue around the plant's root. The larger leaves, which are quite valuable, can grow up to 18+ inches long on sterile roots. The inflorescence is an open, golden-brown flower cluster with slender branches that has a pyramidal form. Three bristleless florets are present in each spikelet, and the glumes are slender, transparent, and almost equal in length. The fruit is a caryopsis, which is a grain that contains both fruit and seed. It has a purple base that grows to a height of 6 to 20 inches (1.5 - 5 dm). Sheaths can range from being completely hairless to very sparsely haired. The ligule is 1/8 to 3/16 in. (3 - 5 mm) length, blunt to pointed, and has a

thin hair fringe at the border that is somewhat frayed. The mature plants have glabrous leaves. Offshoots are up to 10 inches long, 1/8 to 3/16 (3 - 5 mm) wide, and have flat blades (25 cm long). An inflorescence is a 2 to 4 in. (5 - 10 cm) long open pyramidal structure. Three-flowered spikelets measure between 3/16 and 1/4 in (5 and 6 mm) in length. The terminal floret is bisexual, whereas the first two florets are male. The glumes are equal to, or just a little larger than, the florets in size and are wide. Unawed, pointy, and heavily haired, the lemma. Anthers are 1.7 mm length, or 1/16 in. Being a wetland plant, it typically lives near riverbanks, in damp meadows, and in coastal locations. From Alaska to Newfoundland, the hardy scented perennial grass often thrives in rich, wet soil with full sun. Additional popular names for it include sweet grass, sweet grass, and vanilla grass. Due to the high concentration of coumarin present, sweet grass has a distinctive scent. The fragrant plant is used to make distilled drinks. It is a flavouring ingredient in alcoholic beverages, particularly vodka. Numerous regions of North America, including Nova Scotia, Southern Canada, the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains, Colorado, Alaska, California, New Jersey, and New Mexico, are where it is cultivated. It may be found in the European British Isles, Switzerland, and other regions of northern Eurasia⁷.

Both the common cold and the flu can be effectively treated with the herb. The herbal tea made from sweet grass is effective in treating fever and colds. The tea effectively relieves a cough and soothes a sore throat. Native Americans burn sweet grass and breathe in the smoke to treat colds and its symptoms, such as congestion in the nose. Native Americans of North America use sweet grass to reduce uterine bleeding and evacuate the placenta following childbirth. This herb's infusion is beneficial for people who have miscarriage. Native Americans use infusion as an eye wash to treat eye infections. The sweet scent is due to the chemical coumarin, which is present in sweet grass. It thins the blood and is used to treat some forms of swelling and oedema. Burning sweet grass produces a delicious scent that is advantageous to people. The plant is thought to be dried, bundled, and burned at the start of rituals to summon benevolent spirits, seek their protection, and request their cleansing.

The scent of sweet grass will ward off evil spirits and negative energies⁷.

Sweet grass had many other commercial purposes. Use of the sweet grass essential oil as a massage oil will help you unwind while leaving your skin nourished and fragrantly sweet. To induce quiet, focus, attention, tranquilly, and self-awareness, it is used as a perfume. It is applied to treat small cuts and scrapes to stop the spread of infection. Deodorizers for automobiles and rooms are made from the oil. It is used topically together with a carrier oil to calm or treat dry, chapped skin. To combat scalp infections and dandruff, it is added to hair conditioners or shampoos. For a calming bath, a few drops of essential oil is added. Aromatherapy employs the usage of this herb. This plant is used as incense because of its pleasant scent. Hair wash is made from the plant. Additionally, it is utilised for aesthetic purposes including body and hair ornamentation. This plant's leaves were used to make baskets. The factory is employed in the production of fragrances. The Kiowa people fill beds and pillows with this plant's aromatic leaves. This plant's smoke is often used to promote meditation.

5. Legend on the Origin of *Durva* Grass of the Indians

The history of Lord Ganesha and *Durva* (*Cynodon dactylon*), as well as the rationale for worshipping the Lord with *Bermuda* grass or *Durva* grass, are mentioned in the Mahapuranas and the Upapuranas. According to folklore, Anasur was a demon or asura in the past. He upset the saints and sages and wreaked devastation on the planet. The gods, goddesses, and sages then pleaded to Lord Ganesha for rescue. Ganesha was attacked by Anasur as the god and demon engaged in combat. To preserve the planet and the people, the Lord in turn ate the asura. But His stomach began to burn as a result of this⁹.

The Lord was unable to withstand the anguish since the sensation was so strong that there was no way to stop the burning. All of the gods and deities sought to ease the suffering, but their efforts were ineffective. The respected Sage Kashyapa then approached him and commanded him to ingest 21 stacks of *Durva* grass

that had been imbued with holy mantras. The stinging sensation subsided as Lord Ganesha ate the holy grass⁹.

6. Characteristics, Nutritional Value and Uses of *Durva* Grass as a Medicinal Plant

India regards *Durva* grass as a holy herb. Hindus worship Lord Ganesha using the sacred plant *Durva* grass. *Cynodon dactylon* is another name for this plant. It has short, rough edges that are grey green in colour and are 2 – 15 cm in length. The upright stems have a height range of 1 to 30 cm. The stems are often purple-tinged and very slightly flattened. It needs strong sunlight and comfortable weather (between 20 and 36 °C) to flourish. The plant will quickly come again even if the grass and roots are taken out. *Durva* grass is renowned for its resistance to drought. It can withstand protracted drought by becoming dormant and reviving when the climate changes. Water, on the other hand, keeps it hydrated and green. Agriculture should supplement rainfall throughout the growth season to provide 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week. If there is an automatic sprinkler system, a rain sensor shall be installed to stop watering during rainy weather. Since more irrigation necessitates more mowing, and to stop watering the grass in the winter when it falls dormant. It favours soil that has a pH between 5.8 and 7.5. per 1000 square feet, it uses around four pounds of ammonia annually. The inherent fertility of each grass varies, though, so even the most generalised guidelines are ineffective. For a lush, healthy lawn, fertiliser applications should be based on a soil test¹⁰.

Many nutrients are present in *Durva* grass, including acetic acid, alkaloids, arundoin, carbohydrate, fat, ferulic acid, coumaric acid, fibre, flavones, glucosides, hydrocarbons, lignin, magnesium, palmitic acid, potassium, protein, selenium, sodium, triterpenoids, vanillic acid, and vitamins A and C¹⁰.

Durva grass is effective for treating acidity. On an empty stomach in the morning, one should consume *Cynodon dactylon* juice and water to alleviate acidity. In addition to helping with acidity, this mixture is also helpful for stomach infections, colitis, and ulcers. Drinking *Doob* grass juice with a small amount of ginger powder first thing in the morning is advised for stomach ache. Since it has an alkaline nature, it raises

the alkalinity and decreases acidity. *Durva* grass can help with digestion, bowel motions, and constipation while also reducing one's chance of developing stomach problems.

Doob grass is utilised to boost the body's defence mechanisms. A biochemical substance found in *Cynodon dactylon* called *Cynodon dactylon* Protein Fractions (CDPF) aids in boosting the body's immunity. It is an inexpensive and easily accessible immune booster and energizer. By assisting the body and enhancing the immune system, CDPF encourages immunological modulation. *Durva* grass has antiviral and antibacterial properties that help strengthen the immune system and fend against many infections. Find out more about the foods that might strengthen your immunity.

It has been demonstrated through several recent studies that *Cynodon dactylon* has a hypoglycaemic impact, which aids in managing blood sugar levels and lessens tiredness. Additionally helpful in preventing diseases and problems linked to diabetes is *Durva* grass. Neem leaf juice and *Doob* grass juice both help to normalise blood sugar levels. *Doob* grass juice consumption maintains control of blood sugar levels even in those with chronic diabetes. Drinking the juice first thing in the morning on an empty stomach helps to normalise blood sugar levels. For urinary tract infections, *Durva* grass is beneficial. When consumed with yoghurt, grass juice has positive results for people who have vaginal discharge and piles. *Doob* grass is an effective natural treatment for PCOS. In the event of longer menstrual durations, *Durva* grass is beneficial. One is advised to consume *Durva* grass and honey juice 3 – 4 times a day to reduce heavy menstrual bleeding. *Doob* grass is useful in treating digestive-related issues. Drinking *Durva* grass juice with water helps the body cleanse by allowing toxins to leave the body. It is advantageous for constipation because it reduces acidity and promotes regular bowel movements. It encourages normal bowel movements. *Durva* grass promotes weight reduction and is effective in reducing obesity. *Durva* grass helps to keep blood alkaline and functions as a natural blood cleanser. It works wonders to stop bleeding after an accident, a nosebleed, or an excessive menstrual flow. It raises the number of red blood cells produced, which raises the body's haemoglobin levels and shields against anaemia. *Durva* grass is successful in treating oral

health issues. It has a sufficient number of flavonoids, an alkaloid that prevents ulcers. *Doob* grass use decreases phlegm production and guards against gum-related issues. The teeth are strengthened with *Durva* grass. It works well to freshen the breath and strengthen the teeth (halitosis). To treat eye infections, rub Bermuda grass juice over the afflicted area of the eye. *Cynodon dactylon* is excellent in preventing nose bleeding for anyone suffering it. One must apply two drops of *Durva* grass juice to the bleeding nose to do this¹¹.

7. Comparative Study between Sweet Grass and *Durva* Grass as a Legend and as a Medicine

Turning the pages of history, one can draw parallels between the customs and practices of Indians and Native Americans. To be more specific, they were much akin when it comes to the usage of herbs and plants as medicines. The knowledge about the medicinal values of herbs and plants were weaved into their religious practices to such an extent that, as generations followed, the practices remained significant. This article intends to comparatively study the usage of Sweet grass, in the case of Native Americans, and *Durva* grass, in the case of Indians for both medicinal purposes and their sacred traditions.

As earlier mentioned, the knowledge has been shared within the cultures since generations. It is through Legends that people were informed of the existence of Sweet grass and *Durva* in the context of divinity.

According to Native American Legends, Morningstar and Sun used sweet grass to cleanse a youth from the Piegan tribe, who was touted the Scarface. Post the cleansing and healing by them, Scarface, devoid of the worldly odours, becomes an attractive young man. Back at this tribe, the youth shares with them the story and the significance of sweet grass. The presence of sweet grass in their offerings became a religious ritual. When it was offered, twenty-one strands of sweet grass was braided into one. The first seven strands represent the seven generations that came before, the second seven strands stand for seven teachings, i.e, love, respect, honesty, courage, wisdom, truth, and humility, and the last seven strands are the seven generations that are the ones in front of us, and those that are yet to be born.

According to Indian legends, twenty-one stacks of *Durva* grass given by Sage Kashyapa to lord Ganesha eased the burning sensation in his stomach.

The striking similarity between the cultures when it comes to sweet grass and *Durva*, is the number of strands and stacks that are used in their religious offerings to their respective Gods.

The legends purport in subtlety the qualities of these herbs, be it the scent of the sweet grass in masking bodily odours and the alkaline nature of *Durva* in combatting acidity. They reflect in our practices and commercial purposes today, as sweet grass is now commonly used in perfumes, and *Durva* continues to be used as a coolant in Indian households. Apart from these, there is more similarity in their medicinal purposes as well. They are known to treat common cold and flus. Their cleansing property is another important trait that they share.

People of the cultures continue to have and use the knowledge from their past. They continue to use sweet grass and *Durva* grass for their rituals and to treat themselves. They prefer these grasses to treat diseases that they are familiar with, rather than opting for allopathic medicines. The respect for their mythologies and histories is something common for both the cultures. That is what, in return, keeps alive the respect for these grasses for their religious and medicinal values, and till date, the values have not faded. Though different in purpose, the grasses are similar in what they mean to people of these distinct and distant lands.

8. Conclusion

Native American Sweet grass and Indian *Durva* grass are both powerful traditional medicines that Native Americans and Indians have used for centuries. Even though the similarities and differences between the two plants have long been studied, more research is needed for a more thorough understanding of their comparative uses in healing. Nonetheless, the study of Mythology and Medicine has furthered our understanding of the different roles that these two plants play when it comes to health restoration and the therapeutic processes. We now know that regardless of their differences, Sweet grass and *Durva* grass have both been regarded as effective remedies in the respective cultures and serve

as important examples of how mythology and medicine intersect and how traditional medicines can effectively promote bodily wellness.

Furthermore, this study has also revealed how both plants have been used in ritualistic and/or religious ceremonies throughout the ages, underscoring the importance of considering the cultural and mythological aspects of traditional medication. By comparing and contrasting the cultural origins and medicinal uses of Sweet grass and *Durva* grass, we can gain a comprehensive insight into the shared knowledge and wellness practices of Native American and Indian indigenous cultures.

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