

USE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS BY TRADITIONAL HERBAL HEALERS IN CENTRAL INDIA

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Introduction

Traditional Herbal Medicine (THM) is practiced in several parts of the world, specially in Australia, Africa, Bangladesh, Brazil, China Caribbean States, Europe, Spain, North and South America, Russia, Pacific islands where large ethnic communities still live. History reveals that most of the people of the world have been using plants, animals, micro-organisms and minerals for treating illness. In the last decade, THM has gained importance in various developed countries. A third of the American adults, 74 per cent population of United Kingdom, 60 per cent of the population of the Netherlands and Belgium are now utilizing alternative medicinal therapies (WHO, 1996).

India is blessed with rich and diverse heritage of cultural traditions. These traditions are associated with use of wild plants as medicinal herbs. The use of medicinal herbs is still a tradition continued by ethnic communities who are living in undulating plains and at foothills of dense forests. Shanker (1998) has reported about traditional folk healers in India (Table 1).

Central India comprises of Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Maharashtra,

Orissa and Jharkhand states. The ethnic people of this region are Bagia, Bhariya, Bhil, Gond, Hill Korwa, Birhor, Khairwar, Rawat and Sahariyas. They use a wide range of wild plants for their health care.

Results and Discussion

The traditional herbal healing therapies contain many medicines for a single ailment. Out of the various medicines, one is selected by the herbal healer for curing a particular disease according to symptoms and secondary effects. Several plants are used in case of one disease according to their availability in the region. Some of the plants commonly used by tribals in Central India for prominent diseases have been recorded during the present survey. The remedial measures have been recorded from Bagia, Bhariya, Bhil, Gond, Hill Korwa, Birhor, tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh states in Central India.

Different formulations of plant parts are prepared and used by traditional medicinal men to cure a particular disease. The same is described as follows :

Fever

In tribal communities whenever the patient is suffering from fever, the first

Table 1

Traditional Folk Healers in India

Traditional Folk Healers and Medicine-men	Art of healing	Approximate No. of Traditional healers/ medicine men
Housewives and village healers	Home remedies	Several million
Traditional birth attendants (Midwives)	Normal Delivery	7 lakh*
Herbal healers	Common ailments	3 lakh*
Ojhhas & Amchis	Common ailments	11 lakh*
Bone settlers	Orthopaedics and bone fracture	60,000*
Hakims & Vaid	Common ailments	4 lakh*
Vish Vaidya (snakebite, scorpion-sting, dog bite, fish poison)		60,000*
Special healers Vaidyas	Eye, Skin, Dental, Arthritis, Liver, Wounds, Piles, Kidney, Bowel	Several thousand
Ayurvedic practioners	Ayurvedic herbal drugs	3,60,740
Unnani practioners	Unani herbal drugs	29,701
Siddha specialists	Common ailments	11,644
Homeopathic practioners	Common ailments	1000 in each district in prominent localities of North India.
Accupressure therapists	Common ailments	Several thousand
Yoga practioners	Common ailments	Several thousand
Reiki masters	Common ailments	Several thousand

Source : Shankar (1998)

step taken is to avoid intake of solid food. The patient is given only liquid diet for 1-2 days. The root and tuber decoction of *Asparagus racemosus* Willd. (Shatavri) is prepared by the tribal medicine-men and given to patients twice a day for a period of five to six days. In case of high fever pods of *Cassia tora* Linn. (Charota) are collected and seeds are crushed. The seed extract is boiled and filtered with a piece of cloth and given to patients twice a day for about a week. The stem and bark decoction is prepared of *Bauhinia purpurea*

Linn. (Kelor bhaji) and given twice a day to patients for control of intermittent fever with acute body pain. The leaves and stem of *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. (Akashbeal) is boiled with water and vapours are inhaled to cure body pain and swellings.

Headache

The tribals prepare paste of several herbal plants and apply them on forehead for obtaining quick relief from severe pain. The paste of *Zingiber officinale* Ross. (Dry

Ginger) is applied on the forehead for 2-3 days for relief in headache. The mucilage of leaves *Aloe barbadensis* Mill. (Ghrita Kanwar) is applied on forehead for a week to cure severe headaches. The paste prepared of *Santalum album* Linn. (Sandalwood) is also applied to cure headache. A bandage is tied with leaves of *Vitex negundo* Linn. for obtaining relief in pain in the scalp region of forehead.

Toothache, Earache, Bodyache

The gum of *Pterocarpus marsupium* Roxb. (Bija Sal) is applied in gums to cure toothache. The root extract of *Phoenix sylvestris* (Linn.) Roxb. (Chhind) is also useful in toothache. The seeds extract of *Terminalia chebula* (Gaertn.) Retz. (Harad) is used to cure wound of gums and bleeding. The twigs of *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss. (Neem) are used as brush to cure toothache. The leaf extract of *Cardiospermum halicacabum* Linn. (Kapal phodi) is applied on ears to cure earache. The leaf paste prepared from *Sida acuta* Burm. f. (Banmethi) is applied on body to cure body pain.

Liver disorders

Liver ailments are very common in different tribal pockets. The infection in liver is caused due to contaminated water and food. There is always lack of wells and tubewells in tribal localities. They have to drink water from ponds, river and streams. Viral hepatitis is also common in tribal localities.

To cure liver ailments, tribals collect rhizomes of *Acorus calamus* Linn (Buch) which is dried and powdered and consumed with water, when patients are suffering from jaundice, the leaves of beetle vine

and of *Andrographis paniculata* (Burm. f.) Nees. (Kiryat) are given to the patients to chew for few days. In case of acute jaundice, patients are asked to chew daily 4-5 fresh leaves of *Phyllanthus niruri* Linn. (Jar amla) for 20-25 days. The same has been found to be very useful in case of severe jaundice but the patient are asked to chew 4-5 leaves twice a day i.e. once in morning and second time in evening for 40-45 days. The seeds of *Cassia tora* Linn. (Charota) and leaves of *Azadirachta indica* A. Juss. (Neem) are also shewed to cure liver ailments. Paste of *Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. (Amarbeal) is prepared and applied on stomach to get relief from liver disorder.

Cold, Cough, Bronchitis

Tribals use many plants for cure of cold, cough and bronchitis. Fruits of *Amaranthus tricolor* Linn. (Arak gandhiri) and *Tamarindus indica* Linn. (Imli) and rhizomes of *Acorus calamus* Linn. (Safed Buch) are chewed by tribals for cure of cold and cough. The decoction of *A. calamus* rhizome is prepared which is filtered with cloth and half cup of it is given to drink for atleast a fortnight to patients suffering from acute case of bronchitis. The bark decoction of *Acacia catechu* Willd. (Khair) half a cup thrice a day for at least one week is also given to patients suffering from bronchitis.

Asthma

When cold, cough and bronchitis persists for longer period, patients suffer from asthma. The paste prepared from rhizome of *Curcuma longa* Linn. (Kali haldi) is applied externally on lungs and affected parts to cure asthma. The flowers of *Calotropis procera* (Willd.) ex. W. Ait (Maddar) and *Calotropis gigantea* (Linn.)

R.Br.ex.W.Ait. (Aak) are dried, powdered and decoction is prepared. The filtered decoction liquid is given 50 ml thrice a day for atleast fortnight to patient suffering from acute case of asthma. Rhizome of *A. calamus* is also chewed for obtaining relief in asthma. The bark decoction of *Ailanthus excelsa* (Mill.) Swingle (Mahaneem) is also given to patients suffering from chronic stage of asthma.

Bone fracture

The root, stem, tuber and leaves of plants are powdered and paste is prepared by traditional bone setters of tribal communities. The same is applied on broken bone portion. For this purpose, the roots of *Bauhinia purpurea* Linn. (stem), *Solanum torvum* Swartz (Ringi) and tubers of *Curcuma angustifolia* Roxb. (Tikhur) are powdered and paste is prepared and applied by the tribals.

Snakebite and Scorpion sting

The tribals roam in dense forests which are the habitat of various poisonous snakes and scorpions. They are prone to snakebite and scorpion sting. In case of snakebite, the traditional herbal healers first tie with a knot a piece of cloth just above the wound so that poison does not move into the entire body with flow of blood. The wound is properly cut from all the sides and infected blood is made to ooze out from the body. Then the paste prepared from the herbal plant material is applied for a week for cure of wounds due to snakebite. Such pastes are prepared from rhizomes, stem, leaves, etc. of plant species as per availability in the locality. The paste prepared from rhizome of *A. calamus* Linn. (Safed buch) is applied on wounds in case of snakebite. The stem and

bark of *Buchnanina lanzan* Spr. (Achar) is pounced and applied on the inflammation as such antidote of snake-bite. Shoot and leaves of *Bombax ceiba* Linn. (Semul) and *Moringa oleifera* Lamk. (Munga) are crushed and paste is prepared. This paste is applied on wounds caused by snakebite. The roots of *Cieba pentandra* (Linn.) Gratean (Kapok) are crushed and paste is prepared which is applied for 4-5 days for cure of wounds due to scorpion-sting. Similarly paste is prepared from shoot and leaves of *Achyranthus aspera* Linn. (Chirchita) and *Clemone gynandra* Linn. (Hurhar) and applied at places of scorpion sting for instant healing of wounds. The seed oil of *Madhuca indica* Gmel. (Maui) is applied on wounds due to snakebite and scorpion sting for instant healing.

Healing of wounds and skin infections

The skin of small children and women of tribal community is normally delicate and sensitive. In case if the skin is exposed due to cuts, it gradually fills with mucous and the pain persists on wounds. Traditional medicine man of tribals apply latex extracted from leaves, stem of *Argemone mexicana* Linn. (Pilli-Katai) on infected skin for cure and healing of wounds. The root paste of *Argyria nervosa* (Burm.f.) Boj (Ghabel) is also applied on wounds developed as eruption on skin.

Problems of tribal women in urinary infection, menstrual disorders and bowel infection

The tribal women are mostly suffering from urinary infection with white discharge in urine. Tribals use root decoction prepared from *Bombax ceiba* Linn. (Semul) and *Curculigo orchoides*

Gaertn. (Kali musli). This root decoction is filtered by a piece of cloth and 50 ml of this preparation is given to the patient twice a day for a period of 10-15 days for cure of infection. The other problem very common in tribal women is of excessive discharge in menstruation, a disorder which continues for more than 15-20 days. The stem decoction is prepared of *Bambusa vulgaris* Schard. ex. J.C. Well and *Butea monosperma* (Lamb.) Taub. (Palas) and mixed with gum extract of *Acacia nilotica* (Linn.) Del. ssp. *indica* (Babul) (100 gm of gum extracted from *Acacia nilotica* is mixed in 1 litre of water, this gum extract is mixed with stem decoction prepared of *B. vulgaris* or *B. monosperma*). This preparation is given to women half-cup twice a day which controls excessive menstrual pain as well as menstruation.

To cure bowel infections in women, stem and bark decoction of *Butea parviflora* Roxb. (Plashi - villa) is prepared and given to patient which gives relief in bowel pain and infestation. The flowers of *Dendrophthoe falcate* (Linn. f.) are boiled with water, cooled and filtered with cloth piece. This water is recommended to drink

early in the morning with empty stomach which regulates menstruation cycle and also cures problems in bowel.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in 1996 has advised the various nations to take up major initiatives on ethnobiological studies on plants being used by tribals for medicinal uses. The traditional healers from India, Asia, Australia, Pacific, South and North America, Africa are being consulted by ethnobotanical team of WWF and IUCN to collect information on uses of plants by them.

Conclusion

It has been realized that medicinal herbs are going to play an important role in future Materia Medica. These herbal drugs provide strength to the body organs and stimulate normal functioning. The herbal drugs act selectively and gently without disturbing other sub-systems, whereas, modern medicine affects several metabolic activities in the human system and has side effects which makes the body more susceptible to other diseases.

SUMMARY

It has been realized in the modern world that herbal drugs strengthen the body system specifically and selectively without side effects. Traditional herbal medicine system has now gained importance in developed countries. The herbal medicinal practices adopted by traditional healers in Central India for cure of various diseases occurring in tribal pockets are presented in this paper.

मध्यवर्ती भारत में पारम्परिक औषधि रोगोपचारकों द्वारा औषधीय पेड़ पौधों का व्यवहार

राजीव राय व विजेन्द्र नाथ

सारांश

आधुनिक संसार में यह स्वीकार कर लिया गया है कि जड़ी बूटियों से बनी औषधियाँ शरीर को विशेषतया और प्रवरणतया पुष्ट बनाती हैं और उनका कहीं अन्यत्र प्रतिकूल प्रभाव नहीं पड़ता। पारम्परिक जड़ी-बूटी आधारित चिकित्सा प्रणाली का महत्व अब विकसित देशों में बहुत बढ़ गया है जिसका संक्षेप में वर्णन दिया गया है। पारम्परिक औषधियों वाली मध्यवर्ती

भारत में अपनाई गई चिकित्सा प्रणाली वहां के आदिवासी-बहुल इलाकों में अनेक रोगों के उपचार में चिकित्सकों द्वारा अपनाई जाती है जिसे प्रस्तुत अभिपत्र में प्रस्तुत किया गया है ।

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