

“History OF Aloe Vera” – (A Magical Plant)

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Abstract: The Aloe Vera plant has been known and used for centuries. It is a true gift from nature. Ancient records show that the benefits of Aloe Vera have been known for centuries with its therapeutic advantages and healing properties. Many ancient works including the Bible, refer to the use of Aloe. 6000 years old carvings of the Aloe Vera plant were discovered in Egypt. It was considered the “Plant of immortality” and was offered as a burial gift to the deceased pharaohs. 2000 years ago, the Greek scientist regarded Aloe Vera as the Universal panacea. The medicinal use of Aloe was already mentioned more than 4000 years ago in a collection of Sumerian clay tablets dated 2100 B.C. The first detailed discussion of Aloe’s medicinal value is probably that which is found in the Papyrus Ebers, an Egyptian document written around 1550 B.C. Egyptian queen Nefertiti and Cleopatra used it as part of their regular beauty regimens. Alexander the Great and Christopher Columbus used it to treat soldiers’ wounds. Celsus, Dioscorides, Pliny the Elder and many other writers have described the properties of Aloe Vera in their books. Now Aloe Vera grows in many parts of the world with warm climate. It grows mainly in the dry region of Africa, Asia, Europe and America. In India it is found in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The nutrients make up of Aloe Vera is one of a kind and has amazing natural healing properties. Its uses are multiple and undoubtedly the nature’s gift to humanity and it remains for us to introduce it to ourselves and thank the nature for its never ending gift.

Keywords: History, Aloe Vera, Medicinal uses, Cultivation, production, properties.

Date of Submission: 12-08-2017

Date of acceptance: 30-08-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

History has shown us that Aloe Vera is one of the oldest mentioned plants on record due to its medicinal properties and health benefits. Ancient physicians considered it to be a blessing to mankind. Often called the “miracle plant” or the “nature healer”, Aloe Vera is a plant of many surprises. The botanical name of Aloe Vera is *Aloe barbadensis* miller. It belongs to Asphodelaceae (Liliaceae) family. The name ‘Aloe’ is derived from the Arabic word “alloeh” or Hebrew word “halal”, meaning bitter shiny substance; ‘vera’ in Latin means “real”. Due to its cactus like feel, Aloe is often mistakenly called a “Desert Cacti”. There are over 400 species of Aloe grown around the world, but it is the *Aloe barbadensis* miller (Aloe Vera or “True Aloe”) plant which has been of most use to mankind because of the medicinal properties it displays.

II. HISTORY OF ALOE VERA

Aloe Vera is a favorite herb of many nations of the world. It has been found and described in writings in many different cultures and as far back as the Greek, Egyptians and Roman eras. References have also been found in writings from the Indian and Chinese early cultures. It has been one of the most widely utilized and sought after plants throughout history. Many ancient works including the Bible, refer to the use of Aloe Vera. The Bible mentions removing Christ from the cross and wrapping his body in aloes and myrrh (John 19 : 39). We find Aloe Vera appearing in every phase of history with many testimonials to its great medicinal values.

The evolutionary history of the Aloe genus is poorly understood. Aloe Vera itself is particularly mysterious; it has been transplanted so widely across the globe for commercial reasons that the location of its ancestral home is a matter of some debate. Sudan or the Arabian peninsula have been suggested based on similarities to Aloe species native to these regions, but locations much further afield have also been put forward, such as the Canary Islands. An international coalition of scientists from the UK, Denmark, Norway, Australia, Ethiopia and South Africa, led by Olwen Grace of London’s Kew Gardens and Nine Ronsted of the University of Copenhagen, have attempted to resolve this argument.

The researcher assembled the most comprehensive genetic sampling of the Aloe genus yet produced. Utilising both newly sequenced plastid and nuclear DNA and a substantial number of pre-existing sequences stored in GenBank, they interrogated the evolutionary relationship among the aloes. Based on strongly supported evolutionary relationship with morphologically similar species, the new research suggests that Aloe

Vera originated in the Arabian peninsula. The Arabian peninsula where Aloe vera evolved is close to historically important early trade routes between Asia and the Mediterranean. Historical sources suggest Aloe Vera trade routes were well established in the Red Sea and Mediterranean region as far back as the 4th Century B.C. Thus Aloe Vera plant has been known and used for centuries for its health, beauty, medicinal and Skin care properties.

The first note of aloe vera is found on the Sumerian clay tablet that date back to 2100 B.C. and was found in the city of Nippur. Tablets have been created at the time of the King of Akkad and talk about the medicinal properties of this plant. The first detailed discussion of Aloe's medicinal value is probably that which is found in the Papyrus Ebers, an Egyptian document written around 1550 B.C. This document gives twelve formulas for mixing Aloe with other agents to treat both internal and external human disorders. (Samuel and Ria).

The earliest record of Aloe Vera use comes from the Egyptians. There are records of the Egyptians drawing pictures of Aloe Vera plants on the walls of the temples. Many cultures such as the Egyptians would have even elevated the plant to a 'god-like' status. The healing properties of the Aloe Vera were utilized for centuries earning the name "Plant of Immortality". (Gertrude Baldwin).

The Aloe Vera plant and its derivative products have played a role in medicine and health care dating as far back as the 4th century B.C. when ancient Greek doctors obtained aloe from the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean. There are also many stories about it – that the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti (1353 B.C.) advertised as "the most beautiful woman who ever lived" and Queen Cleopatra VII (69-30 B.C.) used it as part of their regular beauty regimes and medicines. Supposedly Alexander the Great in 333 B.C. was persuaded by his mentor Aristotle to capture the Island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean for its famed Aloe supplies, needed to treat his wounded soldiers. The ancient Nile Valley civilization of Kemet ("Land of the blacks" now referred to as ancient Egypt which derived from Greek name Aigyptos later Latinized under Roman rule to Aegyptus which derived from the name "Hekaptah" which means "Lands of the temple of Ptah") used Aloe for medical treatments, beauty care and embalming (Manvitha and Bidya, 2014).

King Solomon (971-931 B.C.) highly valued the medicinal properties of this plant, he even grew his own aloe vera. In Psalm 45 : 8 we find the following, "Your clothes smell of myrrh, aloe and cinnamon" (Svetlana Pasaric).

Aloe Vera had traveled to Persia and India by 600 B.C. by Arab traders. The Arabs called Aloe the "Desert Lily" for its internal and external uses. They discovered a way to separate the inner gel and the sap from the outer rind. With their bare feet they crushed the leaves then they put the pulp into the goatskin bags. The bags were then set in the sun to dry and the Aloe would become a powder (Gertrude Baldwin).

In Chinese culture, aloe vera has been an important ingredient in medical treatments since the times of Marco Polo expeditions. The treatment book of Shi Shen described Aloe Vera as the "Method of Harmony" – the plant played a major role in the everyday life of the Chinese. The Japanese culture also greatly values the aloe plant. In Japan it was known as the "royal plant", the juice was consumed as an elixir and the samurai used it for embrocations. The Hindu people thought that Aloe Vera grew in the Garden of Eden and named it the "silent healer". The Russians called Aloe Vera "the Elixir of Longevity". The native American Indians used Aloe for its emollient and rejuvenating powers.

In Sanskrit, Aloe is known as Ghrita Kumari, Kumar means girl and it was believed that this plant supplied the energy of youth to women and had a rejuvenating effect on the female nature. In the Hindu culture, the Aloe Vera plant retains an important place among the sacred plants of the Atharva Veda, where it is named – "the silent healer". Ayurveda (the ancient Indian science of health and life) considered aloe to be 'Vera rasayana' – the rejuvenator of the organism. According to Ayurveda Aloe Vera contains four flavors – sweet, sour, bitter and astringent (Svetlana Pasaric). In the Indian ayurvedic medicine, aloe is also applied in numerous applications such as rejuvenating remedies, for menorrhoea problems and to stabilise the cardiovascular system. Aloe is regarded as the plant of balance between pitta, Kapha and Vata – the Aloe is one of very few plants that hold these qualities. Dioscorides gained most of his knowledge about Aloe Vera from traveling with the Roman armies. He first wrote of it in his "De Medica" in 41-68 A.D. His commentary uses Aloe Vera for boils, healing the foreskin, soothing dry itchy skin, ulcerated genitals, tonsils, gum and throat irritations, bruising and to stop bleeding wounds. Pliny the Elder, a physician from 23-79 A.D., confirmed in his 'Natural History' the discoveries of Dioscorides. The first reference to Aloe Vera in English was a translation by John Goodyew in 1655 A.D. of Dioscorides Medical treatise – 'De Materia Medica' (Davis, RH.).

In the 7th century the Chinese Materia Medica wrote of using the Aloe Vera for sinusitis and other skin conditions. "In the 15th Century, a time which heralded a massive explosion in exploration by the then leading maritime powers, namely – Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and Britain, it was the Jesuit priests of Spain who were instrumental in bringing Aloe Vera back to the New World as they called it." Many give the Spanish credit for bringing Aloe Vera not only to the New World but passing it on to central America, West Indies, California, Florida and Texas.

Early Spanish missions had padres that would dispense the healing aids. Some padres would carry an Aloe Vera plant up to 50 miles to comfort the sick. Aloes were always found in the mission’s yards. During Christopher Columbus second voyage to America in 1494, a letter was written by his doctor, Dr. Diego Alverez Chanca, said, “A species of Aloes we doctors use are growing in Hispaniola” Christopher Columbus once said, “Four vegetables are indispensable for the well being of man : wheat, the grape, the olive and Aloe. The first nourishes him, the second raises his spirit, the third brings him harmony and the fourth cures him.”

Aloe Vera lost its potency for healing when it started being imported. The pulp worked best when fresh. This hindered Aloe Vera’s reputation in the medical community. Europe and North America’s Medical profession quit using Aloe Vera and replaced it with drugs. The scientists determined that the oxidation process hindered the healing properties of Aloe Vera. It caused the plant to lose quality and effectiveness, gradually leading to its loss of popularity in areas where it is not grown. In the 1950’s many processing techniques were tried but they failed because of overheating the Aloe can cause it to lose its medicinal value.

In 1964 however, Dr. Bill C. Coates a practicing pharmacist in Dallas, Texas, USA, became a man with a dream – to make the complete benefits of Aloe Vera available to the world and the millions of people who need it. Convinced the plant’s ‘Gel’ could be extracted and used without losing its potency, Dr. Coates dedicated himself to learning the secrets of the plant’s chemistry and to do what no one had ever been able to do in the plant’s 4100 years plus known history – to extract and naturally stabilize the ‘Gel’ while preserving its natural healing potency, and in 1968 he succeeded (Manvitha and Bidya, 2014). By the 1970’s there was breakthrough in processing techniques and they successfully; stabilized the leaf gel by using natural ingredients and cold pressing. They also found a way to separate the rind and aloin. These new found processing techniques have created a new market for Aloe Vera. Since, then new frontiers have opened for the use of the stabilized Aloe Vera gel in medical, athletics, health and beauty, cosmetics and animal care.

Now Aloe Vera is grown in many parts of the world with warm climate. Aloe Vera is widely used in products for personal care products, cosmetics, detergents and is popular as a dietary supplement. Aloe Vera sales currently support a multi-billion business world wide. For thousands years Aloe Vera was part of myth and legends but today it plays a role to help improve health and nutrition. The nutrient make up of Aloe Vera is one of a kind and has amazing natural healing properties. Today in Japan Aloe Vera is commonly used as an ingredient in commercially available yogurt. There are also many companies which produce Aloe Vera beverages. People in Tamil Nadu, a state of India often prepare a curry using Aloe Vera which is taken along with Indian bread (Nan bread) or rice.

Thus Aloe Vera acted as an old natural remedy that is definitely superior to many synthetic drugs and could be called a ‘Modern Miracle Plants’.

III. CONCLUSION

Aloe Vera is a favorite herb of many nation of the world. The Aloe Vera plant and its derivative products have played a role in medicine and health care dating as far back as the 4th Century B.C. Through human trade and migration, this plant came to be known throughout the world. Aloe Vera is the most efficacious natural plant used both externally and internally and there are numerous benefits that are derived from this wonderful plant. The health benefits of Aloe Vera have been propagated throughout the world. From the 250 species existing, Aloe Vera is best known for its medicinal properties. It is used for healing different diseases. Today Aloe Vera is grown commercially in different parts of the world to meet the great demand for Aloe Vera gel, juice and latex that have varied applications and uses in the cosmetic, food and alternative medicine industries.

The Aloe Vera plant is grown in warm tropical areas and cannot survive freezing temperature. Farmers in India regularly faces problem like lack of rain, low ground water level, soil degradation etc therefore cultivation of Aloe Vera would be beneficial as it requires minimum usage of water and the returns from it would be more than 50,000 yearly per acre. According to market demand, many processing units have established in the country cultivation of Aloe Vera is expanding day by day in the area as it provides quick and regular income to the farmers. Better management can results in much higher income and net profit.

Thus though Aloe Vera has wide spectrum of the properties and uses, but some of them could be myths and some of them could be real magic. In future, controlled studies are required to prove the effectiveness of Aloe Vera under various conditions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

History of all great works into witness that no great work was ever done without either active or passive support of a person ‘surrounding and one’s close quarters. I humbly extend my thanks to all close concerned persons who co-operated with me in this regard. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

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IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

DR. INDU MEHTA. ““HISTORY OF ALOE VERA” – (A MAGICAL PLANT).” IOSR JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE (IOSR-JHSS) , VOL. 22, NO. 8, 2017, PP. 21–24.