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Herbal Cures Practised By Rural Populace In Varanasi Region Of Eastern U.P.(India)

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Abstract : *A survey based study to collect information regarding use of herbs as household treatment of common ailments in rural areas of Varanasi region of eastern U.P. was undertaken .In Varanasi as in other parts of India , the people especially those residing in rural and semi-urban areas still practise herbal cures for many of their ailments. In the present investigation a total of 40 medicinally important plant species belonging to 27 families were recorded which are frequently used by local populace to cure diseases such as cold,cough,fever,snake bite,boils piles etc.As plants are easily available and sometimes the only source of healthcare available to poor therefore there is a great need for preservation of such medicinal plants.*
Keywords: *Ayurvedic, healthcare, herbal cure ,medicinal plants.*

I. Introduction

Medicinal plants and plant derived medicines have long been in-use in traditional cultures all over the world. In modern society too, these herbal remedies are increasingly being commercialized. Natural products and their derivatives (including antibiotics) represent more than 50% of all drugs in clinical use in the world. Higher plants contribution to this is not less than 25% [1].

The value and importance of traditional knowledge are now being increasingly acknowledged all over the world.The pharmaceutical industry through its research and development activities continues to investigate and confirm the efficacy of many medicines and toxins used by traditional communities [2 and 3].

Indians have one of the world's richest medicinal plants' heritage. Around 8,000 species of plants referred to by over 2,00,000 vernacular names , are used by the people of our country in local healthcare cultures for human, veterinary and agriculture (bio-fertilizers, seed treatments and bio-pesticides) related applications in country's 10 bio-geographical zones , 25 biotic provinces and 4635 ethnic communities.

Ayurveda (Indian system of medication) is derived from the Indian words *ayur* (life) and *veda* (knowledge or science) and thus means "the science of life". It is one of oldest system of medication prevailing throughout the globe. The principles of *ayurvedic* medicines and the medicinal uses of herbs are contained in thousands of poetic hymns in the *Rig veda*. Knowledge about herbs is also documented in the *Atharva veda* and in the later works such as the *Charak Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita*.

The knowledge and wisdom regarding these herbal remedies were passed from one generation to the next through songs and poems , which *vidyarthese* (scholars) and local *Vaidyas* (physicians) used to learn by heart and recite regularly. The succeeding generations used to modify and enrich this knowledge by their own experiences. Gradually , herbal cure got woven in the very socio-cultural fabric of the society as a whole . As majority of the populace have bare means of livelihood , herbal cure provides safe and effective alternative for treatment of common ailments at almost no cost.

Varanasi is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world and one of the most important Hindu pilgrimage centres. Incidently , this region of eastern U.P. also has a rich biodiversity of plants. The district lies at 82^o 50' E to 83^o03' and longitude 25^o 10' N to 25^o 25' N at an altitude of approximately 79.1 m above the sea level, with fairly level topography. The climate of the region is humid subtropical type with high variation between summer and winter temperatures. Summers are long , from early April till October , with intervening monsoon season. Cold waves from the Himalayas lower the region's temperature in the winter from December to February. The average temperature is 32^o – 46^oC in summer and 5^o-15^oC in the winter. The average annual rainfall is 1110 mm. Foggy weather is quite common in winter while hot dry winds called loo blow across the region in summers. The soils of the region are generally old alluvial deposits of the middle gangetic plains. As in other parts of India, Varanasi region also has a long history of use of plants for healthcare.

II. Materials And Methods

For the purpose of the present study , several areas of the Varanasi region were surveyed. The areas included several blocks of Varanasi district. Several villages occurring in Phulpur , Sindhora , Cholapur , Babatpur , Baragaon , Kapsethi , Shivpur , Sarnath , Ramnagar and Mirzamurad blocks were surveyed during the course of the study.

Field trips were organized in different rural and semi-urban areas at regular intervals in different seasons . Different floras were used for the identification of plants [4and 5]. The data collected in the field were formatted and preserved. The medicinal plants were enumerated alphabetically , with their botanical names , families , vernacular names followed by parts used , ailment and mode of administration.

Information regarding medicinal uses of plants were collected from the literature available in the college library and also through internet. The data so collected was cross examined through interviews with local inhabitants of the villages. In many villages local practitioners of traditional medicines called *vaidya* or *kaviraj* were convinced to share their knowledge regarding *jadi buti* (dried and preserved plant parts as called in local language). The interviews conducted were fairly random. All the participants shared their information willingly although their prior consent regarding the interview were also taken.

III. Results (Table)

The data collected through surveys and discussion have been tabulated as follows :

S. No.	Botanical name	Family	Vernacular name	Parts used	Ailments	Mode of administration
1.	*Achyranthes aspera* Linn.	Amarantaceae	Chichidi	Roots and leaves	Snake bite	Paste of parts is applied as antidote. Half teaspoon powdered leaf is given in stomach pain.
2.	*Adhatoda vasica* Nees.	Acanthaceae	Vasak	leaves	Arthiritis	2 teaspoon leaf extract given twice daily.
3.	*Allium sativum* Linn.	Liliaceae	Lahsun	Bulb	Arthiritis	1 teaspoon bulb juice given once daily.
4.	*Aloe barbadensis* Mill.	Liliaceae	Gheekwar /gwarpatha	Leaves	Piles,rectal fissures,rheumatism,conspitation, fever,anthelminthic,menstrual disorders,hepatoprotective	Pulp of leaves given orally.
5.	*Amarantus spinosus* L.	Amarantaceae	Katili chauli	Roots and leaves	Antibillious , antifatigus , inflammation , hemorrhagic disease , diarrhea , lucorrhoea , gonorrhea	Oral administration of leaf and root extract
6.	*Asparagus racemosus* (Willd.)	Liliaceae	Satavar	Roots	Gout	Root extract taken with water
7.	*Boerhaavia diffusa* Linn.	Nyctaginaceae	Purnava	Whole plant	Elephantiasis	Plant extract is applied to effected part of leg
8.	*Cassia fistula* Linn.	Caesalpiniaceae	Amaltas	Seeds , stem and bark	Dysentery	Half tea spoon of seed juice is administered for two days
9.	*Cissus quandrangularis* L.	Vitaceae	Hadjod	Whole plant	Bone fractures	Plant paste is applied on the fracture part
10.	*Curcuma domestica* Linn.	Zingiberaceae	Haldi	Rhizome	Arthritis	Powdered rhizome is taken with cow's milk
11.	*Chenopodium ambrosioides* Linn.	Chenopodiaceae	Bara Bathua	Leaves , stem	Scabies	Leaves together with stem are boiled in water

12.	*Catharanthus roseus* L.	Apocynaceae	Sadabahar	Leaves	Diabetes	Leaves dried and powdered and taken with water
13.	*Cleome viscosa* L.	Capparidaceae	Hurhur	Seeds	Body pain	Dried seed powdered taken with water
14.	*Crinum asiaticum* L.	Amaryllidaceae	Sudarshan	Bulbs	Rheumatism and piles	Crushed and roasted bulbs are eaten
15.	*Calotropis procera* Aiton.	Asclepiadaceae	Madar	Latex	Bodyache	Latex mixed in mustard oil is applied externally on the affected part
16.	*Coccinea indica* Wight & Arn.	Cucurbitaceae	Kundru	Leaves	Diabetes , fever and asthma	Leaf extract mixed in honey and given orally.
17.	*Cyperus rotundus* L.	Cyperaceae	Motha	Whole plant	Malarial fever	2 teaspoon full decoction of whole plant given twice daily.
18.	*Datura innoxia* Mill.	Solanaceae	Dhatura	Leaves	Respiratory problems	Dried leaves smoked in respirator problems.
19.	*Desmodium gangeticum* (L.) DC.	Fabaceae	Shalparni	Leaves	Hair problems	Paste of leaves applied on scalp to prevent hair loss.
20.	*Euphorbia hirta* L.	Euphorbiaceae	Duddhi	Whole plant	Gonorrhoea	3-4 teaspoon of plant juice and one teaspoon sugar in one cup of warm milk taken once a week.
21.	*Eclipta alba* (L.) Hassk.	Asteraceae	Bhangraiya	Leaves	Dandruff treatment	Leaves boiled with seeds of *Foeniculum vulgare* in coconut oil- the oil extract applied on scalp daily.
22.	*Helianthus annuus* L.	Asteraceae	Surajmukhi	Leaves and seeds	Cough and fever	Powdered seeds taken with honey to clear cough and leaf extract given in fever.
23.	*Ipomoea carnea* Jace.	Convolvulaceae	Vilaiti ak	Whole plant	Inducing conception	Powdered plant parts taken along with pulp of leaves of *Aloe vera.*
24	*Jatropha*	Euphorbiacea	Ratanjot	Seed	Rheumatic pain	Seed oil is

.	*curcas* Linn.	e		oil		gently applied on affected parts.
25.	*Murraya koenigii* L.	Rutaceae	Meethi neem	Leaves and roots	Skin eruptions and blood disorders	Paste of leaves applied on skin eruptions and bruised skin ; root extract given in blood disorders.
26.	*Moringa pterygosperma* Gaertn.	Moringaceae	Munga	Leaves	Cold and cough	Leaf extract given with honey.
27.	*Mentha piperata* L.	Lamiaceae	Peppermint	Leaves	Stomach disorders	Leaf extract given with water or honey.
28.	*Mimosa pudica* Linn.	Mimosaceae	Lajwanti	Leaves	Wound healing and eczema	Leaf paste applied on the affected parts.
29.	*Ocimum sanctum* Linn.	Lamiaceae	Tulsi	Leaves	Bronchitis , asthma and malarial fever	Decoction of leaves given twice daily.
30.	*Oxalis corniculata* L.	Oxalidaceae	Teenpatia	Leaves	Bloody diarrhoea	2-3 teaspoon full of leaf juice given thrice daily.
31.	*Psoralea corylifolia* L.	Fabaceae	Bakuchi	Seeds	Abcess , boils , carbuncle	Seed paste applied on the affected parts.
32.	*Phyllanthus niruri* L.	Euphorbiaceae	Bhumi amla	Whole plant / Leaves	Liver disorders (hepatitis , cirrhosis)	Leaf or whole plant extract is given.
33.	*Rauvolfia serpentina* (L.)Benth. ex Kurz	Apocynaceae	Sarpagandha	Roots	High blood pressure ,antidote to snakebite	Powdered root is taken with water for three days.
34.	*Sida cordifolia* L.	Malvaceae	Bariyari	Leaves and roots	Boils	Paste of leaves or roots applied externally on boils for three days-twice a day.
35.	*Saraca indica* L.	Caesalpiniaceae (Leguminosae)	Seita asok	Stem bark	Bacterial, fungal infections of skin and tumorous outgrowth	Bark paste applied on affected part.
36.	*Solanum nigrum* L.	Solanaceae	Makoi	Fruits and roots	Liver diseases	Fruits and roots are crushed together and the juice is taken orally for three days.
37.	*Tinospora cordifolia*(Thunb.)Miers	Menispermaceae	Giloy / guruch	Whole plant	Rheumatic fever , heart problem	Decoction of whole plant is taken orally.
38.	*Terminalia arjuna* (Roxb.) Wight and Arn.	Combretaceae	Arjun	Bark	Heart, liver diseases	Powdered bark is taken orally with water or

						honey.
39.	*Vernonia cinerea* L.	Asteraceae	Sahdevi	Whole plant	Breast tumor	Powdered whole plant is heated along with coconut oil and applied on breast.
40.	*Withania somnifera*(L.) Dunal	Solanaceae	Ashwagandha	Roots	Infertility in men	Powdered root with cow's milk taken orally for one week.

IV. Conclusion

The above list includes only those plant species which are of common occurrence and abundantly available in rural , semi-urban or even in urban areas. In our discussions with the *vaidya* or *kaviraj* , the latter emphasized the need for proper preparation and administration of these *ayurvedic* medicines. The specific part of the plant-roots , leaves , fruits or seeds , used in the preparation of drugs has to be taken care off. The various preparations were decoction , concoction , juice or dried and powdered plant parts. The powdered forms are usually recommended to be taken with *madhu* (honey). Honey besides making the preparations palatable also has its own therapeutic value. The practitioners of traditional medicine believe that honey enhances the qualitative properties of the preparations.

With rapid changes in the environment and life conditions it is common that in most of such investigations informants believe that more medicinal plants were in use in the past than now [6]. During the course of our investigations, it was observed that the knowledge regarding medicinal plants was gradually eroding among the rural populace.This was because of the gradual demise of the old generation of practitioners of traditional medicine called *vaidya* or *kaviraj* and unwillingness of the village youth to learn and carry forward this age old wisdom.

Yet another cause of concern is the fast declining species of medicinal plants both in terms of their numbers and diversity. The major factors responsible for this are deforestation , biological invasion, agricultural expansion, overgrazing, drought, flood and fire. Many species are extinct now or are on the verge of extinction before their medicinal values could be known [7].Thus there is an urgent need to conserve these plant species for sustainable use in future.

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