



Folk Herbal Medicines Commonly Used by Sahariyas for Curing Various Diseases Due to Malnutrition

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ABSTRACT

Tribals have good knowledge of the floristic wealth of their surroundings using various plants for their daily needs. Surveys have focused on life supports species that provides sources of food, fibres, medicines, nutritive, materials and energy to the tribals. Sahariyas are more backward and primitive in comparison with the other tribes of Rajasthan. As hunters they largely depend on the forest herbs for their healthy sustenance. They utilise many herbs for protecting themselves against various diseases and malnutrition. Having crude knowledge and limited resources the herbs are the only source of cure and nourishment for Sahariyas tribals. But due to modernization and tendency to discard their traditional life style, this knowledge of traditional healing practices using wild herbal plants is rapidly disappearing. Present study is an effort to preserve this precious knowledge of Sahariya tribals.

Keywords: Floristic wealth, Sahariya tribe, malnutrition, nourishment, traditional healing practices.

INTRODUCTION

The special ability of humans in exploiting the natural resources around him to their advantage has indeed made human species the most successful and powerful organism on this planet. Living close to nature the traditional tribal societies in the third world have acquired unique knowledge about the use of wild flora and fauna and most of which are not known to the people who live away from the natural ecosystem (forests). According to WHO(1978), about 80% of the world population depends on the traditional medicine

for their primary health care and this practical knowledge about traditional medicine is deep rooted in the life of tribal people and this knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation. The state of Rajasthan is inhabited by several tribes mainly – Bhil, Bhil- Meena, Damor, Dhanaka, Garasiya, Kathodia, Koli, Meena, Nayaka, Pateliya and Saharia. Besides these there are some nomadic, semi nomadic tribes and denotified communities also. From the population point of view Meena, Bhil, Damor, Garasiya and Sahariya tribes are significant.

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The Sahariya tribe is dominant chiefly in the Kishanganj and Shahabad tehsils of Kota. They are located in the districts of Kota, Baran and Dungarpur. Since Sahariyas are totally dependent on forests for their survival they can rightly be called children of the forest. Most of the Sahariyas are agricultural labourers and they live below the poverty line. Malnutrition is very common due to poverty. There is poor sanitation system which leads to various infectious diseases and this in turn results in debility and disorders. Malnutrition is the chief cause of a wide array of diseases such as tuberculosis, cough, constipation, arthritis, diseases of nervous system etc. Deficiency of proteins, vitamins and minerals also lead to manifold diseases. Protein deficiency causes debility, nutrition dystrophy, respiratory disorders, oedema, pyrexia, diarrhoea etc. Lack of minerals in the diet causes dental problems, anaemia, less body growth, psychiatric disorders and skin diseases. Deficiency of various vitamins is the cause of diseases like beriberi, indigestion diseases, jaundice, low immunity, power infertility and muscular dystrophy etc. The tribals use various herbs for the treatment of manifold diseases which basically are due to malnutrition. Medico botanical natural wealth is used by tribal people to overcome the above mentioned diseases and keep them fit.

Ethnobotanical studies were carried out for some regions and tribes of the state. A systematic ethnobotanical survey with reference to Bhils and tribal population of southern Rajasthan was made by Joshi (1982,1985). Sharma and Asawa (1999) have worked on ethnomedicinal plants of Central Aravallis of Rajasthan. Lot of work has also been done by Katewa *et al.* (2004) on folk herbal medicines from tribal area of Mewar region of Rajasthan. Meena and Rao (2010) worked on folk herbal medicines used by the Meena community of Rajasthan. In the present paper an effort is attempted to explore the traditional knowledge about folk herbal medicines reared by Sahariya tribal community of Rajasthan.

Based on the investigations of plants used by Sahariyas, some species have been enumerated along with their local names, family, plant drug therapy etc.

ENUMERATION

1. *Acacia catechu* (Mimosaceae)

Local Name – Khair, Khadira

Medicinal use – Plant is used in dental problems. The juice of bark and flower tops along with asafoetida are also used for general diseases and also in some gynaecic problems. Plant also helps in acidity of stomach.

2. *Acacia nilotica* (Mimosaceae)

Local Name – Babool, Kikar

Medicinal use – Comparatively younger and softer twigs of the tree are used for massage of gums and cleansing of teeth. It is said to be useful for strengthening of gums as well as care of toothache which is the result of malnutrition. The paste of stem bark is applied locally for abdominal pains.

3. *Actinopterys radiata* (Polypodiaceae)

Local Name – Morpankhi, Mayur shikha

Medicinal use – The leaves of this plant are entelmantic and expectorant. Due to low nutritional level many respiratory disorders arise. The leaves are taken overleaf or ash of the leaves is taken to remove bronchitis and tuberculosis.

4. *Albizia procera* (Mimosaceae)

Local Name – Dholi phuli, Safed Siris

Medicinal use - The stem and bark of this plant are crushed and the paste is applied by the people of Sahariya tribe in the case of snake bite.

5. *Azadirachta indica* (Meliaceae)

Local name – Neem, Nimboda

Medicinal use – The tree has got widespread value by the Sahariyas. Fresh leaves are used as blood purifier by chewing them. Paste of leaves is utilised for the treatment of skin diseases. Fruits are employed in making nutritive drinks.

6. *Barleria prionitis* (Acanthaceae)

Local name – Vajradanti

Medicinal use – The Sahariyas use the leaves and the whole plant as febrifuge and expectorant in the treatment of chest pains,

cough and tuberculosis. Leaves are chewed to relieve toothache. Dried bark is used in cough. Plant decoction is used in dropsy as body wash.

7. *Calotropis gigantea* (Asclepiadaceae)

Local name – Aakdo, Madar

Medicinal use – The roots of this plant are expectorant and emetic. The extract of the root is used by Sahariyas in cold, cough and asthma which occurs due to decreased immunity power. Leaves are used in fevers; powdered flowers in cold, coughs, asthma and indigestion.

8. *Cannabis sativa* (Cannabaceae)

Local name – Bhang

Medicinal use – The impure resin from flowering parts is narcotic and sedative in nature. This resin is used for sleeplessness and nervous disorders by Sahariyas.

9. *Curculigo orchioides* (Hypoxidaceae)

Local name – Kali musli

Medicinal use – The powder of the dried root is used against impotency by Sahariyas. This plant is also used in the case of liver disorders. Rhizomes are used in piles, jaundice, asthma and diarrhoea. The plant is also used as demulcent tonic.

10. *Cuscuta reflexa* (Cuscutaceae)

Local name – Amarbel

Medicinal use – The whole plant is anthelmintic. The plant parts are rubbed locally for relief in chest pains. Plant is also used in liver disorders and urinary problems.

11. *Cocculus hirsuitus* (Menispermaceae)

Local name – Bajerbel, Jaljamni

Medicinal use – The decoction of the roots and leaves are used as poison. Leaf juice with mucilage is taken as cooling medicine for gonorrhoea. The plant is externally used for eczema. The roots are laxative.

12. *Datura innoxia* (Solanaceae)

Local name – Kala dhatura

Medicinal use – Dried seeds or leaves are crushed into powder. Powder along with lukewarm water is useful for the treatment of asthmatic bronchitis. The plant is used as pre-anaesthetic in surgery during child birth.

13. *Saccharum bengalense* (Poaceae)

Local name – Munja, Sara

Medicinal use - This is the plant that provides power and life to the Sahariya people therefore acts like a energy booster. This plant when taken orally with butter compensates all the nutrients which the Sahariyas lack in their diet.

14. *Euphorbia granulata* (Euphorbiaceae)

Local name – Dudheli

Medicinal use - the juice of the plant when taken orally protects from spermatorrhoea.

15. *Fagopyrum esculentum* (Polygonaceae)

Local name – Kotu

Medicinal use - This is highly nutritive plant and exceptionally rich in good quality protein with the essential amino acid “Lysine” which is usually deficient in most of the cereals.

16. *Ficus bengalensis* (Moraceae)

Local name – Bargad, Bad

Medicinal use – One or two drops of fresh latex of leaves if taken which sugar candy for 15 to 20 days continuously is useful to cure genetic debility and enhances robustness and strength. It is very useful as a power tonic as it is very nutritive.

17. *Hemidesmus indicus* (Asclepiadaceae)

Local name – Dudhi, Anantmool

Medicinal use – The Sahariyas use the root paste of this plant orally for impotency. The plant is used as a tonic given in case of loss of appetite. It is also used to treat leucorrhoea and as blood purifier.

18. *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* (Malvaceae)

Local name – Gudhal

Medicinal use – The leaves and flowers of this plant are astringent in nature. The leaves and flowers are grinded in water and sugar and used by Sahariyas for cure of syphilis. The flowers are rich in Vitamin B complex and all important minerals required by the human body. Leaves are used as laxative.

19. *Leptadenia reticulata* (Apocynaceae)

Local name – Jivanti, Dori

Medicinal use - The plant is stimulant and restorative, used in ear and nose troubles. The alcoholic extract of root shows antibacterial activities. That tubers, leaves and follicles are very nutritive and are eaten as vegetables.

20. *Mentha spicata* (Lamiaceae)

Local name – Pahari pudina

Medicinal use – The plant is stimulant and antispasmodic. Sweet infusion from leaves is used in infantile stomach disorder. The Sahariyas also use the paste of this plant as cure for Scorpion sting.

21. *Madhuca indica* (Sapotaceae)

Local name – Mahua

Medicinal use – This plant is very nutritive and of manifold uses to Sahariyas. The flowers are edible, astringent, tonic, appetizer, cooling in nature and nutritive given in coughs. The dried flowers are given with pure ghee in piles. The leaves and fruit pulp being very nutritive are given as cattle feed. The Sahariyas also use the decoction of the leaves orally in chest pains.

22. *Panicum sumatrense* (Poaceae)

Local name – Sava

Medicinal use – This plant has very calorific value and is also rich in Iodine and Carotene. The Sahariyas cook the grain like rice and also make the flour for puddings and cakes.

23. *Phyllanthus emblica* (Euphorbiaceae)

Local name – Amla

Medicinal use – The fruits are a richest source of Vitamin C. The Sahariyas also use the seeds of the plant as a cure for syphilis.

24. *Urginea indica* (Liliaceae)

Local name – Jangali piaz

Medicinal use - The bulbs are used as cardiac tonic by Sahariyas. It is also used in chronic bronchitis and asthma.

25. *Zizyphus jujuba* (Rhamnaceae)

Local name – Banber

Medicinal use – The leaves are bitter and cooling; cures cough so given in throat troubles.

Ripe fruits are nutritive and used as a tonic.

CONCLUSION

Thus it can be said that the tribal people are not properly aware of the diseases originating from malnutrition but with their crude and traditional knowledge they try to overcome the causes of malnutrition by making maximum use of the plant wealth growing in their close vicinity.

Now there is an urgent need to catalogue such plants used as herbal medicines by Sahariyas and other tribes all over our country and to collaborate with the chemists to analyse the compounds in the plants which they used as nutritive and of other use.

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