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USES OF MEDICINAL PLANTS OF INDIA

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Introduction

Since the inception of our earth, plants are the integral part of our life, particularly the medicinal plants. We still use them in various modes. These are the gift of nature to us. India is rich in medicinal plants and people here have been using plants to cure diseases from old times. There are various systems of medications prevalent in the country which uses plants / parts of plants to heal diseases like Ayurveda Unani and Siddha. The use of plants is an old tradition for treatment of various diseases. It was the only way of curing different diseases until recently, when allopathic system of medication came into existence use of plants for treating diseases is well practiced in different areas of the world. It is safe system, having no side effects.

AJWAIN (HYOSCYAMUS)

Family: Solanaceae

Indian names

Hindi	Khurasani Ajwain
Bengali	Khurasani Ajwain
Gujarati	Khurasani Ajmo
Marathi	Khurasani Ova
Sanskrit	Parasikaya
Kashmiri	Badhan

The trade name is based on the scientific name.



Description: An annual or biennial bad-smelling herb, densely covered with glandular hair; stem up to 1 m high. Lower basal leaves 15-20 cm, margins toothed. Upper leaves smaller and divide into many segments. Flowers 2-3 cm diameter, pale green, streaked with purple, some borne solitary at the place of branching of stem, other in long, terminal spikes. Fruits 1.3 cm diameter, globose.

Distribution: The plant occurs in the western Himalayas from Kashmir to Garhwal at altitude of about 1,500 m to 3,000 m, commonly in waste place near habitations. It has been cultivated in several regions of India, such as Kashmir, Punjab, Utter Pradesh, Maharashtra and Nilgiri hills.

Drug and its properties: The dried leaves and flowering tops collected soon after flowering of the plant constitutes the drug. The drug has similar properties as *Balladonna* (*Atropa belladonna*). It is useful for relieving certain painful spasmodic conditions of muscles, and in hysteria, coughs etc. It also dilates the pupil of the eye.

Seeds of the plant also have medicinal properties; they are usually pasted and applied locally on pains. It can be grown in the Himalayan region in Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Utter Pradesh.

MEHANDI (HENNA)

Family: Lythraceae

Indian names

Hindi	Mehandi
Bengali	Mehandi
Gujarati	Mehandi
Kannada	Goravanti; Madarangi
Kashmiri	Mohuz
Malayalam	Mailanchi
Marathi	Mendi
Oriya	Benjati
Punjabi	Hinah
Sanskrit	Mendika, Raktagarbha
Tamil	Haru thonri, Marudhani
Telugu	Goranti

The trade name is based on the words Hanna which is the Arabic name of the drug.



Description: A middle-sized or large, much-branched shrub, sometimes tree-like; branches 4-angled, usually ending in a sharp point. Leaves opposite, 2-3 cm long, often acute and sharp-pointed. Flowers small, white or a pink, fragrant, in terminal large bunches. Fruit small, size of a pea, round; seeds many.

Distribution: The plant occurs in several parts of India, chiefly in the dried parts of the peninsula, but is usually cultivated in hedges. It also cultivated for commerce in Punjab, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Drug and its properties: The leaves of the plant have certain medicinal properties. They are astringent and are used as a prophylactic against skin diseases. They are applied locally on boils, burns and skin diseases. A decoction of the leaves is used as gargle in homes in headache, burning sensation in feet, etc.

The leaves have also been shown to have some action against tubercular and other bacteria, and in typhoid and haemorrhagia. The plant not, however, so far been put to much use in this manner. The bark and seeds of the plant are also reported to be used in Ayurvedic and Unani medicine.

ISHBGUL

Family: Plantaginaceae

Indian names: The local names of this plant in different regions and languages of India are minor variations of the Sanskrit word Ishapgola or Isapgol. The trade name is also based on that word.



Description: An almost stemless small herb, covered with dense or soft hairy growth. Leaves 8-25 cm long, very narrow. Flowers minute, in oval or cylindrical spikes, 1.5-4 cm long. Fruit 8 mm long, its upper half separates like a lid. Seeds boat-shaped.

Distribution: The plant grows naturally in only restricted areas in north-western India, but is largely cultivated elsewhere.

Drug and its properties: The seeds of this plant (as also of certain other species of the genus) constitute the drug. The useful properties of the seeds are due chiefly to the large amount of mucilage and albuminous matter present in them.

Ishabgul is very useful in several kinds of chronic dysentery, such as of amoebic and bacillary origin and chronic diarrhea. It is useful as a soothing agent for mucous membrane, and is useful in constipation. Seeds should be soaked in water before use, so that they soon get disintegrated in the alimentary canal; else the whole seeds can cause irritation or even mechanical obstruction in intestines. The large amount of mucilage in the seeds binds and

increases the mass of the stool, and smoothens its passing out. The action is, however, chiefly mechanical, rather than physiological.

Ishabgul husk (Ishabgul-ki-bhusi) is the dry seed coat of *Plantago ovate*; obtained by crushing the seeds and separating the husk by winnowing. The husk has the same properties as seeds; rather it has the advantage that there is no risk of mechanical obstruction or irritation in alimentary canal by the husk. The husk, therefore, is taken without any presoaking and is more easy to use than the whole seeds. The embryo oil of the seeds having 50 percent linoleic acid prevents arteriosclerosis. Oil is more active than safflower oil, and was found to reduce the serum cholesterol level in rabbits.

IMLI (TAMARIND)

Family: Caesalpiaceae

Indian names

Hindi	Imli
Bengali	Amlī Ambli
Kashmiri	Tamber
Sanskrit	Amlīka
Marathi	Ambli, Chinch
Tamil	Puli
Telugu	Chinta

The trade names are based on the English name of tree.



Description: A large tree, leaves compound, leaflets 10-20 pairs, about 1 cm long. Flowers yellowish with reddish streaks, in small erect clusters among the leaves. Fruits 8-20 cm long, 2-3 cm broad, fleshy, pendulous, brown in color; seeds 3-12, dark brown, shining, embedded in the fleshy, fibrous mass, which is the well known acid pulp of tamarind.

Distribution: The tree occurs commonly in the central and southern regions of India, and is planted throughout India on roadsides and in gardens.

Drug and its properties: The pulp of the fruit is medicinal. Tamarind pulp has laxative properties, its infusion in water is very refreshing drink, it is useful in fevers. As a laxative it is taken singly or in mixture with other purgative drugs. When mixed with other purgative drug, it reduces their laxative property.

ANISEED

Botanical Name: Pimpinella anisum

Indian Name: Velaiti saunf

Anise is an annual culinary herb belonging to ajwain or celery family. Its fruit, known as aniseed, is one of the oldest spices. The seed is ground-grey to grayish-brown in colour, oval in shape and 2.3 to 4.8 mm in length. It requires sunshine and warmth and does not grow satisfactorily in the tropical low lands. Aniseed is a native of Middle East. It was cultivated by ancient Egyptians, who valued its medicinal properties and culinary use. Its oil is a colorless or pale-yellow liquid, with the characteristic odour and taste of the fruit.



Properties: Aniseed is esteemed in medicine for its properties to relieve flatulence and to remove catarrhal and phlegm from the bronchial tube. These properties are due to the presence of the essential oil. The seed also copious perspiration and increases the volume and discharge of urine.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded from this study that the medicinal plants are used by the people from ancient times to treat various diseases. Mostly the knowledge about the medicinal use of plants is possessed by the elderly people. At present this knowledge is forwarded to world by Ayurveda, Unani & Siddha doctors, research scholars.

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