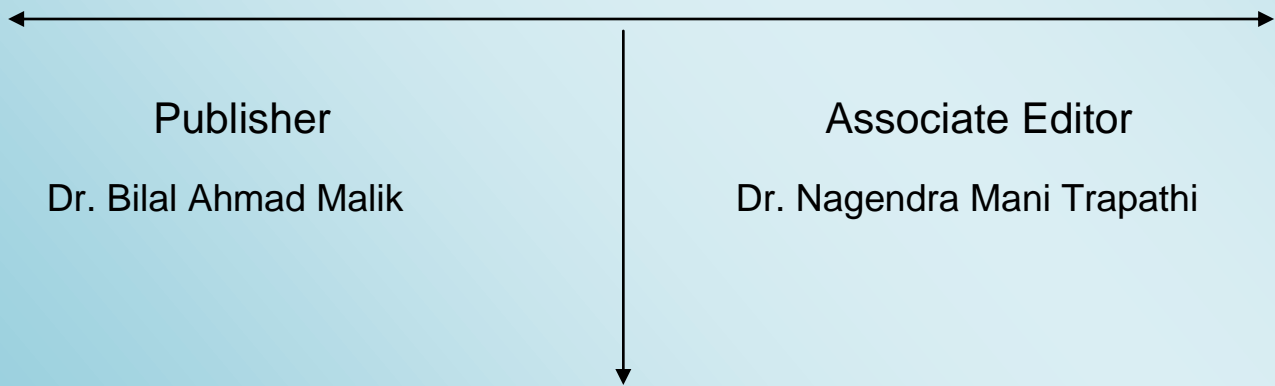


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HISTORY OF THERAPEUTIC AROMATICS

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ABSTRACT

India which was also known as the golden sparrow in ancient India has been gifted with various species of fauna and flora by nature. This land is gifted with the different kinds of plants and herbs which contributed to India's wealth from the times immemorial. As we know that Indian spices were in great demand in ancient as well as in modern times and spices became the main item of the trade and commerce from ancient times. Indian aromatic products were also having the great demand during the ancient times not only because of their sweet smell but also because of their therapeutic value. The aromatic oils were used for the healing purposes and were also used to treat various diseases. It was because of the therapeutic value of aromatic products that they were in great demand and thereby contributed a lot in the trade and commerce of the country. Thus it is necessary to have a knowledge regarding the history of therapeutic aromatics which I tried to conclude in this paper.

Keywords:- Sugandhi – Pusti – Gandhayukti – Kusta – Nalada - Aroma – Guggula – Tagara – Syama – Agarū – Sarja – Sandalwood – Candana – Aloe – Kaleyaka.

HISTORY OF THERAPEUTIC AROMATICS

The health giving nature of essential oils or essences of many plants were very well known by the Indians. This must be the reason why sugandhi was connected with pusti or health as early as the Vedic age.ⁱ Both Agni and Rudra are addressed as well perfumed. Hence a connection of fire, fragrant smoke and divine grace leading to worldly prosperity was always believed in. In the famous *Sri Sukta* the goddess is addressed as installed in a temple with gates of sandal wood.

The extraordinary properties of essential oils in the natural herbs are capable of affecting the brain directly and from there many psychological and physiological processes. The ancient science of ayurveda was well aware of this. The treatment by external application of various natural herbs was applied to the four types of illnesses viz., emergency, physiological, mental and natural.ⁱⁱ The various herbs were considered as important

dravya ausadhis.ⁱⁱⁱ Modern aroma therapy uses aroma lamps, aerosol applicators and inhalation devices for the treatment of depression, sleep disorders, stress and anxiety. In India also many techniques were used to extract the goodness of the aromatic products since Vedic times. They were practised along with religious hymns and mantras since the Vedic religion did not see a dichotomy between worldly desires and spiritual goals. Their religion permeated all their worldly activities.

The *Atharvaveda* refers to the magical qualities of certain aromatic herbs which were capable of affecting the mental state. The mixture of madugha, nalada and usira was capable of enticing anyone along with a particular *mantra*. Sayana has interpreted *madugha* as yastimadhu or licorice, *kusta* as costus and *nalada* is interpreted as usira.^{iv} Madugha could mean both yastimadhu or licorice. Although both have aphrodisiac qualities, mahua is more suited in this case as a wine is made from its flowers and the essential oil which is present in its flowers also has intoxicating qualities.^v

Nalada has been identified with usira or khas khas even in Amarkosa.^{vi} Its root is refrigerant, aromatic stimulant, alexiteric and tonic besides having many other health giving properties.^{vii} Kusta is also an aromatic herb which is thermogenic, deodorant, aphrodisiac, anodyne, rejuvenating and tonic.^{viii} Its essential oil has antiseptic and disinfectant properties. It relaxes the involuntary muscle tissues and serves as a cardiac stimulant.^{ix} Its roots contain aromatic oils which have costus lactone, camphor terpene alcohol. It also contains saussurine alkali which has a remarkable effect on bronchial, gastrointestinal tract and involuntary muscles. It has a relaxing effect on these systems.

The *Atharvaveda* contains several hymns called *ayusyani*, i.e. prayers for health and long life and *bhaisajyani*, i.e. charms to cure diseases and possessions by demons of diseases. They reveal the contemporary belief that certain plants and herbs possess the magical power of curing diseases and removing evil spirits which are recognized now as psychosomatic disorders. The interesting fact in this context is that most of the plants and herbs are known for their sweet smell, e.g; kusta, guggula, laksa or rohini, madavati, madugha, usira, putika, tagara, vetasa, sigru, utpala, syama etc. Guggulu is said to derive from Sindh and the sea and its sweet fragrance keeps at bay diseases, especially consumption. The *Atharvaveda* extols the virtues of kustha plant by saying that in the third heaven above us stands the Asvattha tree, the seat of the gods. There the gods sought the kustha plant, the embodiment of eternal life. It is also called as Soma's benign friend and it is said that it comes from the snowy mountains.^x

The Jatakas refer to perfumer's shops^{xi} and gabled chambers where a king sat with his favourite queen which was filled with the sweet fragrance of sandal wood. Even in the early Buddhism the private chamber devoted to the Buddha's personal use was named as gandhakuti. Burning incense was later an essential part of all religious rituals.

The Mahabharata refers to ten types of smell or gandha which is the fifth quality of the earth in addition to sabda, sparsa, rupa and rasa. The categories of gandha are good, bad, sweet, acidic, acrid, exuding, compact, mild and lucid. The Anusasana parva speaks of many types of insence (dhupa) especially three types of dhupa. The first type is niryasa or aromatic resin exuding from trees like guggula and sallaki. The gods are fond of guggula incense but not of sallaki. The second type is obtained from the wood of aromatic trees like Agar, Sarala, Sarja, Devadaru, yaksa, raksasas, and pleasure loving men prefer agar. The third type krtrima is produced from fermenting sarja rasa and devadaru etc. this is dear to all gods, danavas, bhutas, and men.

Valmiki's Ramayana refers to many types of aromatic substances. King Dasaratha's dead body was preserved by a special type of oil kept in tailadroni.^{xii} Sandalwood was used for anointing the body.^{xiii} His body was cremated on a bier prepared with the wood of candana, sarla, padmaka and devadaru. All these were used in making incense, so using them in the funeral pyre was meant for preventing environmental pollution while burning the dead. The attics of royal palaces were perfumed with perfumes of agar and candana. The lalitvistara mentions gandhayukti among the sixty four arts.^{xiv} The Pali Brahmajala sutta gives a list of toilet activities which involved the use of perfumes. Uchchadana-anointing ones person with perfumes, parimardana-rubbing or massaging, nahapana-shampooing, malavilepana-applying pomade and wearing flower garlands, mukha chunnaka-applying powder to one's face.^{xv}

The Arthasastra refers to a variety of natural sources which were used as aromatics. The main ingredients were sandalwood, aloe and other aromatic resins and incenses. These are mentioned under the activities of heads of departments in connection with the examinations of precious articles received in the treasury.^{xvi} The varieties of sandalwood are described as light, smooth, not dry, unctuous with oil like butter, pleasant in smell, penetrating the skin, unobtrusive, capable of bearing heat, allaying heat and pleasant to touch.

There are different types of aromatic products like Sandalwood, Gosirsa sandalwood, Hari candana, Kucandana, Tailaparnika, aloe, bhadrasri, kaleyaka etc which contributed in the economic growth of our country. The aromatic products of India were the hope for the people of India because of their therapeutic nature and they

provide solace to many kinds of patients which were involved in different kinds of diseases. The aromatic products of India contributed a lot in the development of trade and commerce in ancient India.

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