

RURAL FOLK PRESCRIPTIONS : PLEA FOR SEARCH OF SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

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Efforts have been made to reveal the information available on ethnobotany in reference to treatment of animals in Hisar area of Haryana state. Folk prescriptions used for different disease conditions in animals have been collected by contacting the actual man (Medicine man) and the local Veterinary surgeons. The data reveal that the rural folk prescriptions persist despite the availability of allopathic facilities in the area. Villagers as a matter of fact have faith in such prescriptions for animals ; some remedies are rather claimed to be better than the contemporary allopathic treatment.

Primitive human societies in various geographical regions have been using plants and plant products for various remedies, in one way or the other. These have been described as folk prescriptions. A large number of these prescriptions are endemic to certain areas, have survived through ages, and have passed from generation to generation through the word of mouth. They do not exist as written knowledge. In aboriginals, who reside in remote areas lacking organised medical infrastructure, dependence on their endemic prescriptions is exclusive. The term ethnobotany was coined for the first time by Hersberger¹ for use of plants and their products by the aboriginals. Very little was known about the medicinal plant lore of aboriginal people of India before the good work of Boddings² giving english translation of names, symptoms of diseases, and method of treatment. Later on, extensive studies on ethnobotany of medicinal plant lore in Bastar area of Madhya Pradesh, Kumaon region and Ladakh area were conducted by various workers.³⁻⁷

Today, ethnobotany is a well established branch of science. It has attracted much attention in several parts of the world, particularly in the developing countries where small or large populations still depend on natural resources in practically indigenous conditions. Ethnobotany, which is now called ethnomedicine, is classified into several specialized disciplines such as ethnonarcotics,⁸ ethnopediatrics,⁹ ethnogynaecology,¹⁰ and ethnopharmacology.¹¹ Aforesaid information pertains to human beings and the limited information available on animals is reported only as a tail piece. The present paper is devoted primarily to ethnobotany in reference to treatment of animals in Hisar area of Haryana state, besides compilation of relevant data, available as tailpiece.

Hisar district in Haryana state lies in South-West of Haryana at a latitude of 29°10' north and longitude of 75°46' east. The region is somewhat dry and sandy. The studies were conducted by contacting the villagers and the local veterinary surgeons in the area personally. A set of questions regarding prevalence of disease and curative/control procedures were asked to know about the folk prescriptions used in animals. The actual man engaged in treatment, the 'Medicine man', was also interviewed along with other villagers to get complete information. The information so collected was analysed. Scientific and popular names of the plants were recorded from Chopra's *Indigenous Drugs of India*.¹²

In Table 1 is given a list of ailments for which folk prescriptions were available. While the remedies for surgical problems are far superior in the allopathy, pica and haemoglobinurea amongst medicinal problems and hypogalactia, agalactia and anoestrus amongst the gynaecological conditions are not reported to respond so well when compared to their response to Haryana folk remedies.

TABLE 1
Disease Indications for folk treatments

Sl. No.	Medicinal problems	Surgical problems	Gynaecological problems
1.	Indigestion	Wound	Hypogalactia
2.	Colic	Maggot wound	Agalactia
3.	Diarrhoea	Inflammation of udder	Anoestrus
4.	Retention of urine	Conjunctivitis of eyes	Retained placenta
5.	Haemoglobinurea	Lameness	Prolapse of vagina
6.	Pica	Broken limb/fracture	Leucorrhoea
7.	Blindness	Dislocation of limbs	
8.	Dropsy	Gangrene of tail	
9.	Insect bite		
10.	Allergy		
11.	Rheumatism		
12.	Convulsions		
13.	Eczema		
14.	Mange		
15.	Lice and ticks		
16.	Stomach worms		
17.	Mastitis		
18.	Pneumonia		
19.	Anthrax		
20.	Haemorrhagic septicaemia		
21.	Black quarter		
22.	Actinobacillosis		
23.	Foot and Mouth Disease		
24.	Rinderpest		
25.	Rabies		

TABLE 2
Plants Used for Various Disease Conditions in Different Ethnic Groups in India.

Ethnic group	Scientific name of the plant	Popular name of the plant	Disease condition	Method of administration
Hisar, Haryana	<i>Acacia arabica</i>	Kikkar/Babul	Diarrhoea	Decoction of leaves is used orally.
	<i>Acorus calamus</i>	Bach	Pica & Mange	Decoction of stem is used
	<i>Areca catechu</i>	Supari	Pro lapse of vagina	It is mixed with gum and <i>Dest khand</i> and is given orally.
	<i>Balsamodendron caudatum</i>	Bhainsa Gugul	Rheumatism in camels	Guggal decoction is prepared under slow fire and after mixing with ghee, it is given orally.
	<i>Bambusa arundinacea</i>	Bans	Retained placentae	It is triturated and mixed with gur and given orally.
	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i>	Karanja	1. Lameness due to internal pain 2. Leucorrhoea	Mixed with ghee or milk and given orally.
	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	Lal mirch	Anoestrus	Two uncrushed mirch are given with bread orally.
	<i>Camellia sinensis</i>	Tea	Haemoglobinuria.	Decoction of tea leaves is used.
	<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>	Nibu	Hypogalactia To increase the quantity of milk	Lemon juice is mixed with mustard oil and Noshadar and is given orally.
	<i>Crotalaria juncea</i>	Sunn	Drenching pneumonia	On a old gunny bag some sugar is poured and burnt. Furnes are used to expel the irritant medicine through nasal discharge.

TABLE 2 (Contd.)

Ethnic group	Scientific name of the plant	Popular name of the plant	Disease condition	Method of administration
Hisar, Haryana	<i>Curcuma aromatica</i>	Amhaldi	1. Lameness due to internal pain 2. Leucorrhoea	It is fermented in milk and given orally for 10-15 days.
	<i>Curcuma zedoaria</i>	Kachuri	Colic	Stem and fruit are pounded and given orally.
	<i>Cuscuta reflexa</i>	Amarbela	Inflammation of udder	After boiling in water, it is used for fomentation.
	<i>Fumaria officinalis</i>	Pitpapara	Allergy	Decoction of leaves is used orally.
	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	Mehndi	Prolapse of vagina	Mixed in water and given orally.
	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> Linn.	Tobacco	Colic	Decoction of leaves or Huka ka pani is given orally.
	<i>Piper longum</i>	Piplamul	Prolapse of vagina	It is given in fermented whey and given orally.
	<i>Tribulus alatus</i>	Bhakra	Retention of urine	Decoction is prepared from fruit and given orally.
	<i>Vernonia anthelmintica</i>	Kaliziri	Diarrhoea	It is mixed with ghee and given orally.
	Bastar Tribes Madhya Pradesh	<i>Catalopsis gigantea</i>	Ak	Kills worms in ulcers of cattle
<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>		Nibu	Wound	Leaves are mashed and applied to wounds of cattle locally.
<i>Chloroxylon sweetenia</i>		—	Wound	-do-

TABLE 2 (Contd.)

Ethnic group	Scientific name of the plant	Popular name of the plant	Disease condition	Method of administration
Bastar M.P.	<i>Coccoloppermum religiosum</i>	—	Broken limbs of cattle	The bark of the tree is pounded and applied to the affected part.
	<i>Erythrina resinata</i>	—	Body pain	The tuber is pounded and applied locally.
	<i>Gardenia gummiifera</i>	Dikamali	Maggot wound	Gum of this plant is applied to kill maggots.
	<i>Gardenia turgida</i>	—	To prevent lachrymation (Conjunctivitis)	The fruits are pounded and packed into a bamboo tube; juice is squeezed into the ailing eyes of cattle.
	<i>Mucana pruriata</i>	Kawanah	Stomach worms in calves	Stinging hairs on the pods are scrapped off with a knife, mixed with gur and is given in pills.
Kumaon region U.P.	<i>Nyctanthes arbortristis</i>	Harsinger	1. Internal injuries 2. To knit broken bones	The bark is mixed with that of <i>Terminalia arjuna</i> and is mashed. The resulting paste is rubbed at the affected site.
	<i>Orthocarpum rubincundus</i> Benth	—	Wound healing	Roots are dried, powdered, and applied to wounds.
	<i>Sapindus emarginatus</i>	Ritha	Wound of vulva	Bark decoction is given.
	<i>Aesculus indica</i>	—	1. Leucorrhoea 2. Hypogalactia	Decoction is prepared from roots and given orally. Crushed seeds are given to cattle to increase the quality and quantity of milk.
	<i>Bergenia ligulata</i>	Pakhanbed	Diarrhoea	Powdered roots mixed with <i>Glycine max</i> seeds is given orally.

TABLE 2 (Contd.)

Ethnic group	Scientific name of the plant	Popular name of the plant	Disease condition	Method of administration	
Kumson U.P.	<i>Brassica rugosa</i>	Rai	1. To induce lactation (Agalactia) 2. Internal Worms	1. Seeds are thrown in fire. The smoke is used to induce lactation. 2. Seeds are crushed and mixed with curd and powder of turmeric and given orally.	
	<i>Cuscuta reflexa</i>	Amarbela	Lice	Juice of stem and extract of leaves are used for local application.	
	<i>Juglans regia</i>	Akhrot	Lice and ticks	Dried leaves are used as insecticide.	
	<i>Prunus persica</i>	Baddam	Eczema	An oil extracted from seeds is used locally.	
	Santhal Tribes, Bihar	<i>Abrus precatorius</i>	Gunja	Nightblindness and fractures	—
		<i>Acacia arabica</i>	Kikkar	Rinderpest	—
		<i>Andrographis peniculata</i>	Charayetah	Bite of rabid jackal or dog	—
		<i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i>	Kadamba	Foot and Mouth disease	—
		<i>Bauhinia purpurea</i>	Khairwal	Haemorrhagic septicaemia	—
		<i>Capparis horrida</i>	—	Dropsy	—
	Amechies of Ladhak	<i>Clerodendrum phitomoides</i>	Arni	Dysentery and anthrax	—
		<i>Phyllanthus embilica</i>	Jar amla	Convulsions	—
<i>Geranium aconitifolium</i>		—	Insect bite	The paste of flowers is applied.	
<i>Prangos pabularia</i>		—	1. Indigestion 2. To induce milk	Powdered root of plants mixed with water is given orally.	

Scientific and popular names of the plants, parts of the plants used and mode of administration in different ethnic groups in India are reproduced in Table 2. It was also observed that different plants were being used in the same disease conditions by different tribes as is evident from Table 3. Method of agreement in terms of disease conditions calls for a study of common useful factors in various plants used in distant geographical region.

TABLE 3

Plants Used for Same Disease Condition in Different Ethnic Groups in India

Disease condition	Hisar area	Bastar area	Kumaon area	Santhal area	Ladakh area
Diarrhoea	<i>Vernonia anthelmintica</i> (Kaliziri) <i>Acacia arabia</i> (Kikkar)	—	<i>Bergenia ligulata</i> (Pakhanbed)	—	—
Internal worms	—	<i>Mucuna prurita</i> (Kawanch)	<i>Brassica rugosa</i> (Rai)	—	—
Indigestion	<i>Curcuma zoodaria</i> (Kachuri)	—	—	—	<i>Prangos pabularia</i>
To induce lactation	<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i> (Nibu)	—	<i>Brassica gugosa</i>	—	-do-
Fractures	—	(i) <i>Cozylopermum religiosum</i> (ii) <i>Nyctanthes arbortristes</i> (Harsinghar)	—	<i>Abrus</i>	—
Leucorrhoea	<i>Caesalpinia crista</i> (Karanja)	—	<i>Aesculus indica</i>	—	—

In the Hisar area, the 'medicine man' had comparatively more knowledge about folk prescriptions. This pattern was found to be in conformity with the observations of Jain.⁴ These prescriptions were in practice independent of allopathic facilities available in the area. Use of the folk prescriptions in animals gave a sense of satisfaction to the villagers. As stated above, remedies for certain disease conditions were claimed to be even better than those obtained in modern medicine. The knowledge of folk prescription may add to the scope of modern treatment.

Archaeology has been used as a powerful tool for studying material remains of the extinct man, but it does not directly tell us anything about their beliefs and ideas. Morgan¹³ revealed that this gap may be filled up by ethnology. He developed the principle of comparative method while conducting his studies among American aboriginals. Thus, through the study of conditions of tribes in several ethnic periods, we can deal substantially with the ancient history and conditions of remote ancestors. Thomson¹⁴ built the method further. We can also apply this method for placing the origin of the Indian folk veterinary practice in historical frame of development.

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