

Research Documents with New Comments 10

Introductory Note

This series is an effort to present the updated research documents with information collected through recent Ethnobotanical surveys (December 2010 onwards).

Traditional medicinal knowledge about common herbs used for Rheumatism in Chhattisgarh, India

Research Note - Pankaj Oudhia

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During my stay at Ambikapur city for practical training programme on Agriculture for 6 months, I have learnt a lot from local community. Ambikapur is situated in Northern hilly regions of Chhattisgarh. Ambikapur is well known for diverse flora, undulating topography and dense forests. Beside local community, thousand of migrant Bengali families from Bangladesh have been resettled by the government. As they are living since very long time, their culture has mixed with local culture. In front of every Bengali home, I have noted a presence of shrub called "Nishindi". According to local Bengali community, the presence of this shrub saves their home from ghosts. They use this shrub for its unique medicinal properties. In many common diseases it is used both externally and internally. In acute and chronic rheumatism, they use Nishindi in many ways. The most attractive and common use is wooden shoes. These shoes are made of the wood of Nishindi and believe to prevent rheumatism in normal person. These wooden shoes are very popular among children. For patients suffering from chronic rheumatism, they prepare wooden bed from the wood of Nishindi. They also boil the fresh Nishindi leaves in water and fumes are passed on the affected part. During my survey, I have found very few patients suffering from rheumatism in Bengali community. Even people from Ambikapur city regularly visit to Bengali villages for the treatment of rheumatism. Locally rheumatism is known as Amvat, or Sandhivat.

I have not found the natural occurrence of Nishindi in Ambikapur and adjacent areas. Locally Nishindi is also known as Mediki (because its presence in Med i.e. bunds) and Nirgundi. The scientific name of Nishindi is *Vitex negundo*. Over 13 species have been reported in India. In Chhattisgarh, the natural occurrence of *Vitex negundo* has been reported. *Vitex* is a large, aromatic shrub with quadrangular, densely whitish - tomentose branchlets. Bark is thin and grey. Leaves 3 to 5 foliolate, leaflets lanceolate, entire or rarely crenate. Flower bluish - purple, small in penduncled cymes, forming large, terminal often compound with pyramidal panicles. Fruits globose, drupe, black when ripe. Use of bark powder of Nishindi for the treatment of sciatica is also popular in this region. In scientific literatures, use of *Vitex* for rheumatism is well documented but the description of unique ways used by Bengali community has not been

mentioned. I am not sure about its efficiency against ghosts but I think their ancestors have associated this useful shrub with ghost to keep this shrub in home garden forever. You will get details of other potential and popular uses of Nishindi in my next articles.

New Comments added on February 8, 2011

I have collected hundreds of Nirgundi shoes from the Traditional Healers and distributed to the sufferers around the world. My interest in it forced me to document more information available on this aspect. As result I collected information on over 300 species used to prepare shoes, bed and other wooden articles in order to manage different diseases. Last week I requested the Healers to prepare shoes for patients suffering from Paraplegia and one pair for patient suffering from hypertension.

The information I collected during my stay at Ambikapur was very less. Hence I decided to visit the region frequently in order to get in-depth information. I observed that the Healers of this region have atleast 55 strict criteria for selection of potential Nirgundi for preparation of Healing wooden articles. They practice Traditional Allelopathic Knowledge to enrich Nirgundi plant parts with desired medicinal properties. I observed many Nirgundi plants under treatment from many years. In alone Ambikapur region over 143 types of herbal solutions are used for this purpose. It is bitter truth that this knowledge is in danger as young Healers are not interested in adopting complicated procedure of Traditional Allelopathic Knowledge practice. They are less interested in Healing wooden articles. "This is not innovative concept. There is no market and we feel that no one is interested in it." They commonly say when I encourage them to prepare it.

I see tremendous scope in it because everyone, to whom I presented it responded in positive manner and asked, rather forced me to provide more such divine articles. My clients at Indian metros showed deep interest in its marketing. I introduced them to the Healers because only Healers can prepare it. Healers were not interested in leaving the daily practice as preparation of shoes requires much time and effort. As alternative I encouraged rural youths and through my writings and lectures motivated the authorities to suggest farmers to grow useful species so that this large scale preparation would not affect its population in forest. But as you know it is always difficult to push the authorities for new project.

"The important thing is its effectiveness." The interested clients say clearly. They know that there is ever increasing market of such products not only in India but also in global platform. One top level forest officer of Chhattisgarh raised his objections about such wooden articles when this Botanical.com article was appeared first. I presented a pair for his mother. Satisfied with its performance he promised to promote it but still I am waiting for his initiative.

Many times I think that by writing about such unique knowledge I am exposing the fantastic idea to innovative neighboring countries like China. China is occupying Indian market with alarming rates even idols of our God and Goddess are coming from China. This global marketing policy has affected local artisans and to the Healers to great extent. That is why I always keep important part of knowledge secret.

In whole Chhattisgarh, Aak or Fudhar is well known for the treatment of rheumatism. I have also used it. Almost every plant part of Aak alone or in combination with other herbs is useful. In majority of cases, external application is preferred. Application of freshly harvested leaves with lukewarm ghee on painful joints in an age old practice in Chhattisgarh..

New Comments added on February 8, 2011

Although it looks very simple and many times users doubt about its efficacy but in almost all cases this simple use gives immense relief to the sufferers. Last year I was in Maisuru for delivering guest lecture in International Biodiversity Conference. I visited to my family friend where I was informed that friend's mother is suffering from knee pain and all preparations are on for surgery. I searched the wasteland around his house and found Aak plants. I demonstrated its simple use. His mother assured me to use it up to one month and if it fails then she will think of surgery. As addition I suggested some modifications in her present diet schedule and added herbal leachate and extracts. I returned back.

Within a week I got positive response but she complained that Aak latex is causing skin irritation when leaves are tied around knees during sleep. Oh my God!!! I never demonstrated her to use leaves in this way. Application was simple "Apply freshly harvested leaves with lukewarm ghee on painful joints." Never said to tie leaves round the clock. She corrected the error and later informed that she is not willing to go for surgery.

I suggested this simple use to thousands of sufferers. Many times I have to make this simple use bit complicated so that patients can take it seriously and sincerely. But I confess that effect is result of simple use only. It is good to see that patients in Indian metros are now adopting such simple uses. They are saying goodbye to painkillers and other inflammatory drugs.

Last week I was informed about the patient suffering from joint pains and on modern medicines every month wasting thousands of rupees with no relief. I suggest this simple use and also slight modification in daily schedule. It acted in promising ways. While visiting to the patient's house I found Aak plant. The family members were worshipping it but unfortunately not aware of its miraculous healing properties.

"Send me the pictures of wasteland herbs present in your surroundings and I will make you healthy" this concept is working well and through it I am knowing the fact that Aak is present throughout India and common people are getting aware about its divine healing properties.

The pillow and mattresses prepared from Aak floss are prescribed to patients suffering from chronic rheumatism. The fresh roots with Sesamum oil is also used as external application.

New Comments added on February 8, 2011

Just to add. Pillows and mattresses prepared from Aak are not only useful for chronic rheumatism but also in more than 45 common as well as complicated diseases. I have written a lot on its different aspects in my Diabetes report.

The scientific name of Aak is *Calotropis gigantea* and 3 species have been reported in India. In Chhattisgarh, I have found two species *Calotropis gigantea* is preferred over *Calotropis procera* in Chhattisgarh by traditional healers I have found this botanical description in scientific literatures. *Calotropis* is large shrub (upto 4-3 meters high), much branched, often gregarious, branches stout, covered with powdery pubescence. Leaves opposite sessile, elliptic, or ovate oblong, thick, base cordate, sometimes amplexicaul, both surfaces tomentose, flowers in umbellate cymes, purplish or white, and buds avoid. Fruits follicles, 9-0 cm long broad, green. Flowering time in Indian conditions is February to July *Calotropis* is a popular Homoeopathy drug commonly used in many diseases including for weight loss.

An eminent traditional healer from Raipur city, the capital of Chhattisgarh, specialized in treating rheumatism use wooden roller and herbal oil prepared from many native and exotic herbs. He has visited abroad many times for treatment. Surprisingly, he charges no fees for his miracle treatment. Even he arranges and bears the cost of herbs (for preparing oil). Daily morning you can see hundreds of patients standing in front of his small home. He treats both poor and rich patients equally. Fortunately, he is my relative and by relation he is my uncle. Once during my visit to dense forests of Bastar, an old traditional healer has told the secret of wooden roller used by them to treat the rheumatism. According to him they use pith of Mahua or Tendu trees (Over 100 years old) for preparing wooden roller. There is a strong need to search the science behind this.

New Comments added on February 8, 2011

Recent Ethnobotanical surveys enriched my knowledge about such wooden rollers and matter worth plus 15 GB on this unique aspect is now available at CGBD.

I have experienced the miracle healing properties of these wooden rollers. Also I have found the herbal oil prepared from many herbs viz. Tobacco, Opium, Cannabis, Nux vomica, Asafoetida, Pippali etc. effective. This oil is applied externally in affected parts. I have noted from all the traditional healers expertise in rheumatism that they suggest their patients to drink a lot of water along with treatment.

After long and exhaustive sitting with traditional healer of village Gunderdehi, I have found a unique formula to prevent rheumatism. According to this traditional healer, from childhood one has to put a small potato tuber in the pocket of pant.

This will save him life long from rheumatism. He informed me that it is mentioned in ancient literatures but I have yet not found that literature. I feel this use needs scientific investigation. Similarly like potato during hottest part of year, the common people are advised to keep raw onion in the pocket in order to avoid the harmful effect of hot winds. This is age old practices. Now science has also proved onion's efficiency. Similarly, there is a need to evaluate the efficiency of potato against rheumatism.

Beside these, Garlic oil and long term use of pure honey are also recommended by the traditional healers of the Chhattisgarh.

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