

Research Documents with New Comments 12

Introductory Note

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

Medicinal herbs of Chhattisgarh, India having less known traditional uses. XIII. Saja (*Terminalia alata*, family: Combretaceae)

Research Note - Pankaj Oudhia

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Saja is not a new tree for the natives of Chhattisgarh. Its timber is used in buildings, joints, beams, tool-handles, veneer, plywood, boards etc. It is also found useful in fire proof buildings. In Chhattisgarh, there are many places named on Saja. It shows that Saja is present in Chhattisgarh since long time and in abundance. Although Saja is not in the list of popular medicinal trees of the state but during my ethnobotanical surveys in different parts of the state, I noted that that the natives and traditional healers are aware of its medicinal properties and uses. Unfortunately, this traditional knowledge in form of written document is not available. As these uses are limited to few natives and healers and they are not getting support from any one the valuable traditional knowledge is ending with them. This observation motivated me to write a separate article on medicinal uses of Saja. In reference literatures related to different systems of medicine in India I have got much information on other Terminalia species but do not found much on Terminalia alata (Saja).

Common Indian names of Saja	
Languages	Names
Bengali	Asan
Gujarati	Sadar
Hindi	Saja, Saj, Asan, Sain

Kanarese	Sadada
Marathi	Ain
Oriya	Sahaju
Tamil	Karramarda
Telugu	Nalamaddi
Sanskrit	Raktarjun
English	Indian Laurel

Most of the modern literatures describe this tree as valuable timber giving tree. Saja is not in the list of non-wood forest produces of Chhattisgarh. When I asked the herb traders whether they are aware of medicinal properties and uses of Saja or not, they showed ignorance. Botanically, Saja (*T. alata* syn. *T. tomentosa*) is a large deciduous, straight stemmed tree, with wavy crown, 32 meters or more. Stem clean, straight bole. Bark grey to black, with deep, longitudinal fissures and transverse cracks. Leaf elliptic or ovate, with one to two glands near the base. Flower dull yellow, in terminal axillary panicles, pedicel 1 mm long, thick, calyx villous, lobes. 1.5x1mm, ovate-triangular, filaments 3mm long. Fruits upto 5 cm long, with 5 broad, coriaceous horizontally veined wings, 400-700/kg. Seed 13000 per kg. Flowering time May to July whereas fruiting time February to May. According to reference literatures, bark yields tannins (upto 19%) and useful in tanning leather and dyeing cotton. As mentioned early, not much has been written in reference literatures about this herb as medicine, these reference literatures describe the bark as useful in medicines. Bark is bitter, styptic and useful in ulcers, fractures, bronchitis and haemorrhages.

The natives and traditional healers of Chhattisgarh, aware of medicinal uses of Saja, use its bark both internally and externally in treatment of many common diseases. As first aid remedy the aqueous paste of bark is prepared and applied externally in case of injuries. It stops the bleeding immediately. The powdered bark is used to heal the wound in less time. In order to mature, the immature boils, the natives, extract the juice from bark and mix it with leaf juice of Kali Tulsi. This combination is applied externally on immature boils. According to the healers, the ash collected from burning the bark, is hot in nature. It is applied externally on the affected parts of patients having the problem of paralysis. They consider it one of the promising treatments. To stop the severe cough, ash is given with honey internally. Daily two doses are given and treatment is continued till complete cure.

Through my ethnobotanical surveys, I have noted that the natives and traditional healers specialised in use of Saja as medicine, are limited to Saja rich areas only. In my previous articles, I have mentioned frequently that in this part of earth over thousands villages have been named on herbs and these villages can be the bases for scientific studies related to bio-diversity, ethnobotany and other related subjects. Through my surveys, I have identified Saja rich areas where these experts live. By systematic planning, we can encourage and support the natives and traditional healers and conserve valuable traditional knowledge about Saja herb.

Thank you very much for reading the article.

New Comments added on February 15, 2011

Through recent Ethnobotanical surveys focused on Saja tree I have collected much information on its different aspects. The surveys revealed that Saja plant parts are used in 35 Traditional Formulations for Type II Diabetes, 155 Traditional Formulations for different types of cancer, 30 Traditional Formulations for Sickle Cell Anaemia, 113 Traditional Formulations for Bone related diseases and 300 Traditional Formulations for Malaria as primary, secondary and tertiary ingredients. Modern literature still gives no information about its Traditional medicinal uses. The surveys focused on Medicinal Insects of Saja tree resulted in new interesting information. The Healers of present generation are still using Medicinal Insects of Saja in different Formulations.

Although Traditional Allopathic Knowledge is practiced throughout the state in order to enrich Saja with desired medicinal properties but I studied the Traditional Allopathic practices of Healers of Chhattisgarh Plains in detail. They use over 100 herbal extracts and leachate for this purpose. Here I observed once again that the Healers of young generation are not much interested in this knowledge. I have documented this knowledge in its original form.

Few years back when Jatropha planting at commercial level was in full swing the Healers were much aware of its impact on many forest species. Many of them stopped using Saja tree parts as medicine, surrounded by dense Jatropha population. They claimed that Jatropha Allelochemicals are curse for Saja growth and also it affects its medicinal properties. I conducted small laboratory trials but failed demonstrate this effect. As you know, laboratory trials give different results as compared to field trials specially in the fields of Allopathy. I requested the young researchers to focus their studies on this aspect but as there was no available reference on this aspect they hesitated to work on this new aspect.

Now Jatropha is decreasing in forest due to poor maintenance. The expert Healers are happy that now they can use Saja trees as source of medicine.

The results of recent surveys resulted in special chapters on Saja in my Diabetes and Cancer reports.

Citation

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