



Traditional medicinal plants of Zanskar (Ladakh)

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ABSTRACT

Herbal medicine was long practised by indigenous peoples all over the world. The knowledge of the medicinal properties of many of the plants was usually as a result of trial and error. Medicinal plants are used differentially for specified purpose plant parts such as root, stem, flowers, and seed contain different photochemical in different quantity. The medicinal plants should be studied according to photochemical and be conserved for the use of future generations. The present communication deals with the study of the medicinal plants and the richness of the traditional system (Amchis) of medicine in of Zanskar (Ladakh). Besides listing 31 plant species of medicinal value, the philosophy behind this system of medicine and the causative factors are also briefly mentioned.

Key words : Medicinal plants, Zanskar

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INTRODUCTION

Medicinal herbs were long practised by indigenous peoples all over the world. Siddha system of medicine is the oldest in the world. It stresses the wisdom and importance prevention of disease. Alternative system of medicines are of two categories, traditional and recent. Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha are the traditional systems of medicine. The use of medicinal plants as traditional medicines is well known in rural areas of many developing countries (Gupta *et al.*, 2005). Nature has provided a rich storehouse of herbal remedies to cure all mankind's ailments. The knowledge of the of the medicinal properties of many of the plants was usually as a result of trial and error. Medicinal plants are used differently for specific purpose plant parts such as root, stem, leaf, flower and seed containing different phytochemicals in different quantity.

Zanskar, lying in the Southwest of Leh, is cordoned by Kishtwar and Purig in the West and Northwest, Lahoul in the South, Upshi in the East and the rest of Ladakh in the North (Fig. A). People over the passage of time have discovered the medicinal properties of plants growing around them and have fully exploited this knowledge. In this region people who

practise medicine, a system akin to the one prevalent in Tibet, are called 'Amchis'. Amchis prepare medicine with the help of local flora and fauna, to which some locally available minerals are also added. Despite the fact that modernization is making inroads into this region and the traditional system of curing is getting replaced by allopathic medicine at very fast rate, the Amchis, now very few in number, still command a great respect from the local people and are in great demand

In the Tibetan system of medicine, which is also the basis of that practised by Amchis, the art of treatment is called "grow-wa-rig-pa" (knowledge of healing).

This system is based on the original teachings of Buddha still preserved in rgyud-bzhi (four-tantras). According to this system a disease is the result of dynamic disequilibrium of various psychological (delusion, ignorance confusion, leading to attachment, greed, desire, hatred, aversion and aggression) and cosmophysical (earth, water, fire air and space) energies, besides improper dietary, behavioural and environmental factors.

To start with, Amchis prescribe very simple treatment which includes proper diet and proper mental, emotional and physical behaviour. Subsequently natural drugs (mostly of plant origin), starting from less potent to highly potent ones, are prescribed. A word of caution here is important, that, none of these plants is used alone as such and each prescription

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