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Economical uses of plants by tribals from Valsad district of Gujarat, India

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India has over 38 million tribal inhabiting varied geographical regions and climatic zones. The total number of tribal communities is around 550 (Jain, 2001; Desai, 2002). Within the country, the states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan are three dominant pockets of tribal population. The state of Gujarat ranks fourth in India with respect to tribal population. The forest areas all along the eastern boundary of Gujarat state are predominantly inhabited by a tribal population that counts to *ca* 14.0 % of the total population of the state, as against the all India percentage of 6.81 %. (Census, 2001). An attempt has been made to compile the ethnobotanical utilization of 39 species of plants belonging to 37 genera in day to day life of different area such as Dharampur, Kaparada, Pardi and Umergam in Valsad district of Gujarat state. The traditional Knowledge regarding the use of these plants is widely applied by these ethnic groups.

The term Ethnobotany was first defined by Harshberger (1896). Since then various workers have expressed their views regarding the importance and concept of Ethnobotany. Schultes (1962) defined it as the study of relationship that exists between the people of primitive societies and their surrounding environment. Jain (1981) defined it to be the relationship between human society and plants.

With the process of civilization and urbanization rapidly advancing, there is an imminent danger of losing forever these valued treasures of information. Due to the large scale developmental activities in the study area, there has been of late lot of urban influence on the local population. The communication systems transport and educational facilities are also gradually improving. The natural consequence of all these developmentally would be a partial or total loss of botanical folk-lore. "What does interest us academically and practically is how to salvage some of the medico-botanical lore before it shall have been forever entombed with the culture that gave it the birth" (Schultes, 1960). It is therefore desirable that a joint venture by ethnologists, botanists and chemists be made to explore the vast lore available with these primitive societies.

In India significant work has so far been done in this direction. However, mention may be made of the works of Jain (1991; 1999; 2002), Maheshwari (2002), Pal and Jain (1998), Pushpangadan (1995), Sinha (1996) and Singh and Pandey (1998). These contributions can be considered as a landmark in the contribution of Indian taxonomists towards ethno botanical investigations.

The present work was the outcome of the first hand ethnobotanical survey conducted during 2007 to 2008. Data is based on personal contact and observations and interviews with local tribes of the district. Voucher specimens were collected for making herbarium sheets by standard method along with the information on uses, vernacular names, family, etc. The voucher specimens have been deposited in the herbarium of Biology Department, B.K.M. Science College, Valsad.

This paper presents 39 plants and its economical uses from the study area.

Abrus precatorius Linn. (Fabaceae):

Locally called as "Chanothi". The paste of the root applied on wounds and sores of cattle. Seed paste mixed with goat's milk is administered for menstrual disorders. Seed paste is applied for curing baldness. The roots are crushed and mixed with water and from this water 2-3 drops is administered through nostrils as a remedy of migraine. The fruits are crushed to powder and mixed with water and store in copper vessels overnight applied externally on skin diseases.

Achyranthes aspera Linn. (Amaranthaceae):

Locally called as "Aghedo". The roots are used as oxytocic. The plantation of the plant near human settlements keep's away the scorpion. Roots are also administered as a remedy for curing piles. Ashes are used against deafness.

Alangium salvifolium (L. f.) Wang. (Alangiaceae):

Locally called as "Ankol". Root bark is used as an antidote for poisons. It is also used for leprosy and syphilis. The decoction of the bark is administered in the treatment for hydrophobia. Ripe fruits are used to increase vitality and also to cure tuberculosis.

Albizzia lebbeck (L.) Bth. (Mimosaceae):

Locally called as "Siris". The bark decoction is used