

Essential oil : economic and herbal importance in Aromatherapy

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Accepted : February, 2010

SUMMARY

Aromatherapy is a truly holistic therapy taking account of the mind and body. Spirit of the aromatherapy in practice is only essential oils, no other form of aroma. Essential oils which are complex mixtures of numerous components, extracted from different parts of plants like seeds, bark, leaves, stems, roots, flowers and fruits. Their use in aroma therapy is due to the physiological effect of a single component of the essential oil, or more often of a group of components. Essential oil is widely used in high grade perfumery and cosmetic industries. It is also worked as a flavoring agent in major food categories, alcoholic and soft drinks. The economics of essential oil production depend on both the cultivation of the herbs and extraction of oils from the herbs. Developed countries have vast potential in cultivating the herbs due to their favorable climate, rainfall and geographical conditions. The rich biodiversity of the country is yielding plants sources of various therapeutically valuable chemical compounds or their precursors which are in great demand in national as well as international drug and pharmaceutical industries. Natural plant extracts are of interest as a source of safer or more effective substitutes for synthetically produced antimicrobial agents and may provide an alternative way to prevent food or feed from fungal contamination. Cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants, especially those having high commercial value, is opening new vistas for making agriculture profitable. Large scale cultivation of medicinal plants is inversely linked to popularity of easy and cheap collection of medicinal raw materials from their natural habitat.

Key words : Essential oils, Herbs, Aromatherapy, Medicinal plants

Since ancient times, the traditional system of medicine has become aroused the scientific curiosity of the common people, giving birth to an indian medical system called Ayurveda. Compilations of culinary herbs, Charaka and Susruta gave a detailed description of the plants, their properties, extraction techniques to get the active compound and procedures for ingestion of the medicine for effective treatment of various illness or disorder. The Indian knowledge of medicinal properties of herbs is reported in the *charak sanhita*, believed to be written 3000 years ago. The medicinal plants could grow in plenty across the country in every where.

India has been considered as treasure house of valuable medicinal and aromatic plant species. These plants have been used over the thousands year for human welfare in the promotion of health as drugs and fragrance materials. They play an important role in the health care of about 80% of world population. The rest 20% also dependent substantially on plant based medicines. It is estimated that more than half of the drugs under clinical use are derived from plants. There has been an upsurge

in the production of plant based medicines, tonics and body care products in recent years. Large proportion of people in developing countries still lives in rural areas. Medicinal and aromatic plants form an integral part of Indian rural and urban lifestyle. This sector is almost totally dependent on the traditional healthcare system based on herbals. Aromatics herbs like patchouli, citronella, geranium, vanilla, jasmine, lemon grass, khus, rose oil etc., are being used since long back. The uses are being reinvented by the modern science in the areas of aromatherapy, skin cares, cure of ailments, speedier recuperation and pest repellents. Healing potential of aroma therapy has been proven convincingly across the globe. China still remains the leading practitioner in this line. A tremendous increase in the production of herbal medicines and other products based on ayurveda, unani, naturopathy and homeopathy systems of medicines is observed directly or indirectly.

The source of raw material is mostly the natural vegetation. The rich biodiversity of the country is yielding plant sources of various therapeutically valuable chemical compounds or their precursors which are in great demand in national as well as international drug and pharmaceutical industry. This has put a great pressure on the raw materials, majority of which are obtained from plants growing either in the forests or other associated natural vegetation. Natural population of a number of medicinal plants is decreasing day by day due to man made activities. Fatty or volatile oil having specific therapeutic properties

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