

## Nigella sativa Linn: A Golden Seed

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(Accepted : May, 2006)

### SUMMARY

*Nigella sativa* is a miraculous herb due to its many properties and has no side effects as in allopathic drugs; hence it is called as “golden seed”. The present review highlights the different pharmacognostical aspects of the plant *Nigella sativa*. It has been traditionally used to treat many diseases like respiratory tract related diseases, inflammatory diseases, to improve defense system, to treat digestive problems etc. The most economical part of this plant is seed. The chemical composition consists of tannins, resins, proteins, reducing sugar, glycosidal saponin, melanthin and also 1.0 per cent melanthinigenin.

Key words: *Nigella sativa*, Kaloungi.

The plant Kaloungi (*Nigella sativa* Linn) is a medicinal plant belonging to the family Ranunculaceae. It is also known by some other names like black cumin, small fennel or mangaraila.<sup>1</sup> It is an annual herbaceous plant and is believed to be indigenous to the Mediterranean region but has been cultivated into other parts of the world including Arabian Peninsula, northern Africa and parts of Asia. Black seeds has been traditionally and successfully used in the middle and far east countries for centuries to treat ailments including bronchial asthma and bronchitis, rheumatism and related inflammatory diseases, to increase milk production in nursing mothers, to treat digestive disturbances, to support the body's immune system, to promote digestion and elimination and to fight parasitic infestation. Its oil has been used to treat skin conditions such as eczema and boils and is used topically to treat cold symptoms<sup>2-3</sup>.

### HISTORY OF BLACK SEED

*Nigella sativa* (Black Seed) was discovered in Tutankhamen's tomb, implying that it played an important role in ancient Egyptian practices. The earliest written reference to black seed is found in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Isaiah contrasts the reaping of black cumin with wheat: For the black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over the cumin, but the black cumin is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod. (Isaiah 8:25, 27 NKJV). Easton's Bible Dictionary clarifies that the Hebrew word for black cumin, “ketsah,” refers to “without doubt the *Nigella sativa*, a small annual of the family Ranunculaceae which grows wild in the Mediterranean countries, and is cultivated in Egypt and Syria for its seed.”<sup>4-5</sup>

Dioscorides, a Greek physician of the 1st century, recorded that black seeds were taken to treat headaches, nasal congestion, toothache, and intestinal worms. They were also used, as a diuretic to promote menstruation and increase milk production. The Muslim scholar al-Biruni (973-1048), who composed a treatise on the early origins of Indian

and Chinese drugs, mentions that the black seed is a kind of grain called alwanak in the Sigzi dialect. Later this was confirmed by Suhar Bakht who explained it to be habbi-Sajzi (viz. Sigzi grains).<sup>6</sup>

In the Greco-Arab/Unani-Tibb system of medicine, which originated from Hippocrates, his contemporary Galen and Ibn Sina, black seed has been regarded as a valuable remedy in hepatic and digestive disorders and has been described as a stimulant in a variety of conditions, ascribed to an imbalance of cold humours.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Sina (980-1037), most famous for his volumes called “The Canon of Medicine,” regarded by many as the most famous book in the history of medicine, East or West, refers to black seed as the seed “that stimulates the body's energy and helps recovery from fatigue or dispiritedness.” Black seed is also included in the list of natural drugs of Al-Tibb al-Nabawi, and, according to tradition, “Hold onto the use of the black seed for it has a remedy for every illness except death.” This prophetic reference in describing black seed as “having a remedy for all illnesses” may not be so exaggerated as it at first appears.<sup>2</sup>

Recent research has provided evidence, which indicates that black seed contains an ability to significantly boost the human immune system - if taken over time. The prophetic phrase, “hold onto the use of the seed,” also emphasizes consistent usage of the seed.<sup>3</sup>

### MORPHOLOGY

The dried seeds of annual plant are used for their medicinal uses. These seeds are black in color and taste is slightly bitter. Seeds are available in shapes like flat, oblong, angular or funnel. These seeds are 0.2 cm long and 0.1 cm wide.<sup>8</sup>

### MICROSCOPY:

Transverse section of the seed shows single layered epidermis consisting of elliptical, thick-walled cells covered externally by a papillose cuticle, and filled with dark-brown contents. Epidermis is followed by a 2 to 4 layers of thick-

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