

A Case Study:

Ethnobotanical uses of plants by tribals of Kaparada taluka in Valsad District of Gujarat, INDIA

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(Accepted : April, 2008)

Key words : Ethnobotanical, Plants.

The term Ethnobotany was first defined by Harshberger (1896). Since then various scientists 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. (India has over 38 million tribals 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 dominating 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 predominately inhabited by a tribal population that counts to ca 14.0% of the population of the state as against the all India percentage of 6.81% (census, 2001)

The Kaparada taluka has moderate population of tribal communities. The research work was done under this area. The major tribes found in Kaparada taluka is Kokana, Varli, Bhils, Nayakas, Dhodiya and Halpati.

These tribals are to a large extent cut off from the civilized urban societies mainly due to lack of proper communication systems. Illiteracy and various superstitions born out of it are very widespread. All these factors contributed to a large content the continued existence of these uncivilized populations, which are solely dependent upon primitive practices and forest products for food, shelter, agricultural implements, utensils, fodder, fish poisons fiber, bidi wrappers, gum, tannins, and medicine etc for their sustenance.

Due to the constant companionship with surrounding environs tribal have by the trial and error methods gathered fairly good information about the utility of plants. This knowledge is well preserved and kept a secret to be passed in from generation to generation. Tribal have implicit faith in plants and their remedial

properties. Their medicine men locally called as “Bhagats” use plants or plant products for curing diseases and ascribe magical healing powers to many of them. Certain plants are used as sources of food especially during famine. These uses of plants are local in the strictest sense. *i.e.* Sensu Strictu. At time different uses are attributed the same plants by different tribal in the same area.

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 developmental 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.

Study Area:

Kaparada taluka is 45 Km. away from Valsad district and 15 Km. away from Dharampur taluka in Valsad district in South Gujarat. As far as the area of Kaparada is concerned no one has paid attention to it since a very long period till to day even though it is very rich and fertile as far as plants are concerned.

The earlier floristic work was conducted by various experts like J.A. Inamdar had done his work in 1968, A preliminary survey of flora of Dharampur forest. H.M.Vora had done his work in 1983, Floristic survey of Dharampur Taluka and A.S.Reddy's work is 'Flora of Dharampur forests'.

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