

Ethnobotanical investigations of underground plant parts from North Central Tarai Forests of U.P.

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North central tarai region of U.P. offers a great scope for ethnobotanical studies because of its diverse flora and ethnic culture. The tribal population of the region primarily depends on ethnobotanical plants of their surroundings for food, shelter and curing their ailments. The present communication deals with the plant species of which underground parts are being used as food, as ethnomedicine in thirty ailments ; spices and condiments and source of dyes and tanins.

India presents a colourful mosaic of about 563 tribal communities which possess considerable knowledge regarding use of plants for livelihood, health care and other purposes through their long association with the forests, inheritances and experiences. Plants with medicinal properties enjoyed the highest reputation in the Indigenous system of Medicine all over the world. India has the richest and diverse cultural tradition called "Folk traditions" associated with the use of medicinal plants.

Traditional folk medicines are the application of indigenous belief, knowledge, skills and cultural practices concerned with human health. The ethnic people have provided several miraculous plants of medicinal value to modern civilization. In developing countries, more than 25 % of the medicines are based on plants and their derivatives. The necessity for documentation of indigenous knowledge of medicines has long been felt with increasing needs of medicines by human beings. It is desired that indigenous plant materials should be collected, identified, processed and utilised as sources of medicines. In India, it is reported that traditional healers use 2,500 plant species. During the last few decades, there has been an increasing interest in the study of medicinal plants and their traditional uses in different parts of the world. Presently, traditional healers are quite old. Due to lack of interest among the younger generations and their migration to cities for lucrative jobs, wealth of knowledge in this area is declining gradually, hence it is important that before the oral folk lore about the plant and plant

resources is lost for ever it must be properly documented and preserved. India is one of the twelve mega biodiversity centers of the world having vegetation with a variety of plants with medicinal value. The North Central Tarai Forest is next only to eastern and western ghats in plant biodiversity of India. The ethnomedicinal knowledge is also important from humanitarian point of view so that in long run this knowledge may help to identify important medicinal uses that can help in curing health around the world. As per report of Agricultural Statistical Directorate, U.P. total forest cover of North Central Tarai Region is 1,02,105 hectares. Since the North Central Tarai Region comprises the district of Shrawasti and Bahraich (U.P.) which is full of lush green forest vegetation of mega biodiversity, 12 forest villages, about 1900 families with approximately 1 : 1 female- male ratio of several tribal community dominated by Tharus residing there, the survey and documentation of ethnobotanical plants with special emphasis to underground plants was undertaken.

For the purpose of collection and documentation of ethnobotanical plants of North Central Tarai Forests of U.P., several field trips were conducted during July, 2006-June, 2008. The method of collection of voucher specimens, their preservation in Herbaria and technique for the collection of ethnobotanical information was followed as recommended by Jain (1989); Jain and Rao (1967); Rao (1989) and Singh and Mall (2007).

During field trips information's were collected on the basis of personal interviews with traditional healers, village head, knowledgeable person and old women of the society. The collected plant specimens were identified with the help of taxonomic literature and floras (Duthie, 1994; Hooker, 1872-1897). All the plant specimens were deposited in the Herbarium maintained in the department.

The Ethnobotanical informations collected from tribals and villagers of the study area are enumerated alphabetically as below:

Plants used as food:

Bulb and bulblets :

The Bulb and Bulblets of *Allium cepa* L. and *A.*

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