

Elephantopus scaber L. - A traditional panacea for several ailments

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Abstract

The role of natural products, herbal medicines, and traditional medicines is being increasing in the recent years for the prevention and management of human disorders. The present paper deals with ethnomedicinal use of Elephantopus scaber L. collected from Nishangada forest (Kakraha range) of Bahraich, a tarai district of eastern U.P. India. During field survey on 5th August 2006 and 2nd January 2007, out of many collected plants we got the information about a herbaceous flora locally called as “Hastipata” by tribal peoples. These tribals are the migrants of Nepal in Nishangada forest (Kakraha range) of Bahraich, working as labour named as Phool Kumari, Pooja Chaudhary and Man Kumari Chaudhary. The botany name of plant was confirmed by available literature in the department library. The tribals informed us about its use regarding the cure of various human ailments. The gathered informations from them revealed that the decoctions of fresh leaves are used as wash for eczema. Crushed leaves are boiled in the coconut oil and applied to ulcers and eczema. The paste of root is applied in rheumatism and the tribal people apply powder of root with pepper in toothache. The tribals informed that, this traditional knowledge about the plant “Hastipata” has descended from one generation to another as domestic practice and treatment given by them is found very effective.

Keywords: Herbal medicines, Ethnomedicinal herb, Tribals

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient healing system of India, flourished in the Vedic era in India. According to historic facts, the classical texts of Ayurveda, Charak Samita and Sushruta samita were written around 1000 B.C. The Ayurvedic “Materia Medica” includes 600 medicinal plants along with therapeutics.

During field survey on 5th August 2006 and 2nd January 2007, of Nishangada forest (Kakraha range) of district Bahraich, out of many collected plants we got the information about a herbaceous flora locally called as “Hastipata” by tribal peoples. These tribals are the migrants of Nepal in Nishangada forest (Kakraha range) of district, working as labour named Phool Kumari, Pooja Chaudhary and Man Kumari Chaudhary. The tribals used to cure various human disorders by the plants found in this area an important ethnomedicinal herb Elephantopus scaber L. (Asteraceae) grows in grasslands preferring wasteland. The tribal told that, this herbaceous flora have been used in the traditional health care system from time immemorial. Particularly among the tribal communities and their knowledge of plant has descended from one generation to another as a domestic practice.

Materials and Method

During the field survey for collection of plants, the local tribal people were contacted and interviewed, questionnaire method was adopted for this purpose. The botanical name of plant was confirmed by available literature in the departmental library by Duthie, 1994 and Joshi, 2000. It was observed that Elephantopus scaber L. (Asteraceae) grows in grasslands preferring wasteland. It has a dichotomously branched, deeply stout penetrating root and tuberous root that regenerates, when the shoot is removed. The stem is smaller, leaves alternate, lies flat on the ground. Flowering heads born in clusters at the end of
the branches and are usually enclosed by three leaflike bracts. The herbarium of plant species was prepared scientifically following the method described by Sass, 1985. The plant specimen was mounted on herbarium sheet and herbarium sheet was submitted in the department for record. The tribals told that decoction of fresh leaves is used as wash for eczema. Crushed leaves boiled in coconut oil are applied to ulcers and eczema. Crushed leaves are also applied to cure for snakebite and furuncle swelling. Juice of leaves is applied to scalp and powder of root with pepper is applied to toothache. The tribals told that this traditional knowledge regarding plant has descended from one generation to another as a domestic practice (Brahmam, 2000).

Results and Discussion

The study was based on indigenous knowledge of medicinal plant *Elephantopus scaber* L. (Asteraceae) which was collected during survey and the medicinal importance was told by tribal people of area. This medicinal plant of the area is indirectly linked with the traditional and culture of local people and due to the same reason, the survey yielded interesting results. During the study, it was also found that, aforesaid plant species is over harvested due to their extensive uses and has reached at the brink of extinction. It is used to cure various skin diseases such as eczema, ulcer and eruption. The plant is also used in toothache, vomiting and in bronchitis. It is evident from gathered information that the young generation is not fully aware of the significance of this medicinal flora as compared to old generation. Hence, it is essential that this awareness should be created among people in conserving this medicinal plant.

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References


