**Ethnopaediatrics in Garhwal Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India**

**(Psychomedicine and Medicine)**

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**Abstract:** Garhwal Himalaya has its peculiar topography, vegetation, people and traditions. In the remote areas traditional customs and beliefs are still maintained and modem trends are yet to reach, which provide interesting scope of ethnobotanical studies. The present paper pertains to typical practices in ethnopaediatrics in Garhwal Himalaya, India. The inhabitants use different plants in primary health care of children. Different charms and amulets associated with the common ailments of children have been discussed. [New York Science Journal 2010;6(3):xx-xx]. (ISSN: 1554-0200).

**Key Words:** Ethnopaediatrics, Garhwal Himalaya, indigenous knowledge, local communities.

**1. Introduction**

According to WHO approximately 80% of World population in developing countries depends on traditional medicines for primary healthcare (WHO, 2002) and in modern medicine too, nearly 25% are based on plant derived drugs (Tripathi, 2002). Garhwal Himalaya lying between the latitudes 29o 26 to 31o 28 N and longitudes 77o 49to 80o 06 E (Figure 1) occupies an important place in Indian subcontinent. About 80% of the total population is rural and the inhabitants are called the Garhwalis or Paharis. Besides Garhwalis the area is inhabited by populations of different tribal communities such as Gujjars, Bhoxas, Tharus, Koltas, Kinnauries, Junsaris, etc. (Anonymous, 1961; Atkinson, 1882; Berreman, 1972; Joshi, 1929). They have their own cultures, medicines, foods, etc. and are well versed with valuable knowledge accumulated through a long period of experience. Even now they are dependent on the natural resources from the forests for their sustenance and for the treatment of various ailments.

The plants are still serving as remedies for various ailments in crude form, as modern medicine has not adequately armed the therapeutic arsenal of the natives of remote areas. The literature abounds in investigations on folk medicines in different parts of India (Jain, 1963; Jain and Kapoor, 2007; Rao and Jamir, 1982; Gaur *et al*., 1985; Gaur, 1999; Tiwari, 1986; Maheswari, 2000; Singh *et al*., 2002; Ayyanar and Ignacimuthu, 2005; Prusti, 2007; Semwal *et al*., 2010) but little attention has been paid on plants used in ethonopaediatrics. Documentation of such practices is required in view of gradual disappearance of this knowledge in new generations. Therefore, an attempt has been made to record the indigenous uses of plants in ethnopaediatrics particularly covering psychomedicinal aspects as practiced in remote areas of Garhwal Himalaya, India.

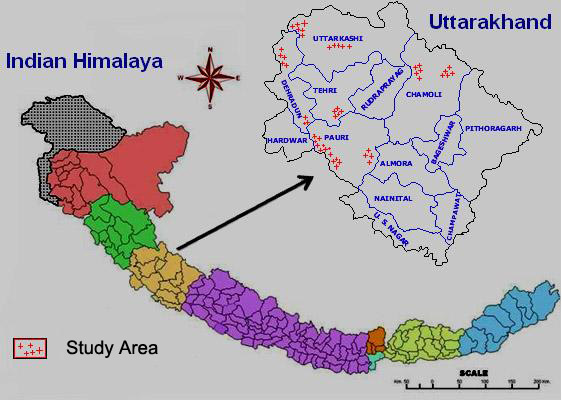


Figure 1. Map showing study area in Garhwal Himalaya

**2. Methodology**

Extensive field surveys were made in different villages of Garhwal Himalayan region of Uttarakhand. Information on plants used in paediatrics by the inhabitants was collected from peasants, shepherds, housewives, people practicing medicine and psychomedicine from different pockets of Garhwal Himalaya. The plant specimens have been deposited in the Garhwal University Herbarium (GUH). In the following text the botanical names have been followed by the vernaculars, the plant parts, preparation and the ailment in which particular plant is used.

**3. Results & Discussion**

The sole purpose of medicine or other practices of prevention and remedies is to lead healthy life and longevity. Therefore, it is not unusual that a number of other practices are adopted for the purpose which may not have a direct relation with the medicine (Sen Gupta, 1906; Van Wart, 1948).

The present study explored 45 plant species employed as medicine by the local communities in the different ailments of children, out of which 13 were used as psychomedicine (Table 1) and remaining 32 as medicine (Table 2). It is evident from the investigation that the local communities have own beliefs and practices regarding the use of herbal medicines with preventive and curative measures as suggested by the practitioners. The survey also reports that the properties of medicinal plants are known only to the traditional healers and few older persons of the community which generally do not reveal this knowledge to others.

Beside psychomedicine a good number of plants were used in medicine of children as household remedies. The common preparations were powder, paste, juice, decoction, infusion, etc. The herbal preparations were generally made up of single plant species. It has been observed that the diseases of children are treated somewhat different than that of adults.

The concept of health, diseases and treatment amongst the inhabitants varies with respect to their culture and settlements. The common theory of diseases implies that every illness which is not connected with visible influence is caused by breach of some taboo or hostile spirits. Such beliefs become more conspicuous when the inhabitants feel that medicine used for certain ailments is not responding, consequently they begin to depend on omens and totems, under the belief that physical troubles in the normal system of life are due to effect of supernatural powers. On such occasions, several peculiar psychomedicinal practices associated with specific hymns (Mantras) and apparatus (Tantras) are followed. Thus two systems of medicine exist in the area:

1. Using the medicine through hymns i.e. psychomedicine, and
2. Using the medicine directly i.e. general medicine.

Of these the formal is restricted to a selected band of practitioners the mystery men, who generally do not disclose the identity of plant or the process of activation, while the latter is used in the form of household remedies. In psychomedicine the plant is activated by the process.

Table 1. Plant species used in Psychomedicine.

Botanical Names Vernacular Part used Uses

*Achyranthes aspera* L. Sajji Root Exorcism

*Artemisia nilagrica* (Cl.) Pamp. Kunja Whole plant Insanity

*Berberis aristata* DC. Kingor Root Exorcism

*Betula utilis* D. Don Bhujyar Bark Amulet

*Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb. Akashlagula Whole plant Exorcism

*Echinops cornigerus* DC. Kandara Whole plant Insanity

*Geranium wallichianum* D.Don ex Sweet Ratanjot Whole plant Cholera

*Mallotus philippensis* (L.) Muell. Ruina Whole plant Insanity

*Prunus cerasoides* D. Don Payya Bark Amulet

*Trichosanthes tricuspidata* Lour. Ilaru Fruit pulp Psoriasis

*Urtica ardens* Link. Kandali Whole plant Exorcism

*Verbascum thapsus* L. Setia Tamakhoo Root Jaundice

*Zanthoxylum armatum* DC. Timru Wood Exorcism

**3.1 Charms and amulets**

Several charms and amulets are used either as prevention or cure to various ailments of children, most of which lack the explanation of properties attributed to them. Some of them are:

1. Amulets made of *Betula utilis* (Bhojpatra) or *Prunus cerasoides* (Paiyan) bark is hung around the neck of children or tied in the arm or waste for their well being.
2. Beeds made of soaked grains of wheat are tied on the hands, neck and feet of infants suppose to control diarrhoea and vomiting.
3. Beeds made of *Acorus calamus* rhizome are hung around the neck of children as prevention for diarrhoea and indigestion.
4. A small pouch containing seeds of *Trachyspermum ammi* is hung around the neck of children with the assumption that it strengthens the digestion.

Table 2. Plant Species predominantly used in the ailments of children in Garhwal Himalaya, India.

Botanical Name Vernacular Part used Preparation Ailment

*Aconitum heterophyllum* Wall. Atis Roots Powder Fever, stomachache

ex Royle

*Acorus calamus* L. Bauj Rhizome Powder Spasmodic pain

*Actaea acuminata* Wall. Mamira Roots Powder Cough

ex Royle

*Allium wallichii* Kunth. Pharan Leaves Paste Indigestion

*Angelica glauca* Edgew. Choru Roots Powder Colic, flatulence

*Arnebia benthamii* (Wall. ex Balchhari Roots Paste Cuts and wounds

G. Don) John

*Bergenia stracheyi* (Hook. f. et Shilphari Roots Paste Sores

Thoms.) Engl.

*Boerhavia diffusa* L. Punyara Roots Powder Jaundice

Carum carvi L. Siya jeera Seeds Powder Constipation

*Delphinium daundatun* Wall. Nirbishi Roots Paste Sores

ex Hook. f.

*Fumaria indica* (Haussk.) Pugsl. Pitpapra Whole plant Powder Fever

*Hedychium acuminatum* Kapporkachri Roots Powder Dyspepsia

(Roscoe) Wall.

*Megacarapea polyandra* Benth. Bharmola Roots Powder Fever, stomachache

*Origanum vulgare* L. Van tulsi Leaves Powder Whooping cough

*Paeonia emodi* Wall. ex Royle Dhandaru Roots Paste Skin diseases

*Paris polyphylla* Smith Satwa Roots Powder Diarrhoea

*Picrorhiza scrophulariflora* Karwi Roots Decoction Fever, stomachache,

Pennell cough

*Rheum australe* D. Don Dolu Roots Paste Body swellings

*Rhododendron anthopogon* Bhotiacha Leaves Infusion Cough and cold

D. Don

*Roylea cinerea* (D. Don) Baill. Karwi Leaves Juice Fever

*Saussurea lappa* (Decne.) Kuth Roots Paste Skin diseases

Sch.-Bip.

*Swertia chirayita* (Roxb. Chirayita Whole plant Decoction Fever, intestinal worms

ex Flem.) Karst.

*Taraxacum officinale* Wever Dudhlle Leaves Paste Wounds

*Terminalia chebula* Retz. Haira Fruits Powder Constipation

*Thalictrum foliolosum* DC. Pilijari Roots Juice Eye inflammations

*Thymus linearis* Benth. Van ajwain Leaves Decoction Cough

*Trachyspermum ammi* (L.) Ajwain Seeds Powder Spasmodic pain

Sprague.

*Viola betonicifolia* Smith Banafsa Leaves Decoction Cough

*V. biflora* L. Banafsa Leaves Decoction Cough

*V. canescens* Wall. Banafsa Leaves Decoction Cough

*Zanthoxylum armatum* DC. Timaru Bark Infusion Toothache

*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe Aadu Rhizome Juice Cough

The information obtained from the local communities is useful for future researches in the field of pharmacology, in clinical and biological studies. In the recent years practice of folk medicine system has been diminishing fast among the people due to modernization and little interest of younger generation towards inherent knowledge. This is leading to the loss of several customs, rituals and traditional healing art. Therefore, it is essentially warranted to make efforts for retrieval of folk knowledge, before it is wiped out.

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05/02/2010