

Indian Butter Tree: A Panacea for Many Ailments



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Introduction

Use of herbal medicine for cure of ailments is a tradition from time immemorial and still it is practiced among the community. Tribal community are dependent on forest products and they use different parts of plants for various purposes including medicinal use. In past decades, lot of scientific research and development is focussed on herbal medicine for treatment of various health challenges in different national healthcare settings. Herbal medicine is used across the Globe in a large scale and very often it is used along with other drugs [1]. Among the Traditional medicine practice most commonly used practice in developing countries is herbal medicine [2]. Majority in Africa use herbs in their day to day life to treat ailments [3].

In China, traditional herbal medicine along with western medicine was tried to tackle SARS though the expert committee suggested to ensure effectiveness of conventional Chinese medicine based on herbs and maintain utmost standard and quality [4].

India too has a rich heritage in terms of use of herbs in traditional medicine especially among tribal populations besides the research work embodied in "Charaka Samhita: wherein details of use of medicinal plants are mentioned. India too is not lagging behind in the field of herbal pharmacology. Out of so many medicinal plants available in the flora of India in different terrain mahua plant or Madhuca Longifolia (Indian butter tree) is a plant of Indian origin which is a large to medium deciduous tree of family Sapotaceae. It is an important economic plant growing throughout the subtropical region of the Indian subcontinent. Tribes uses its different parts as food, drink, construction of house and most important use as a medicine. Its tremendous therapeutic potential needs to be unravelled. Advocacy and awareness among researchers, botanists, biochemists, pharmacologists and biotechnologists has to be made to utilize all its potential for the benefit of Mankind.

Active constituents present inside the different part of the plant, determine the therapeutic value of the plant including secondary metabolites. Saponin, is an alkaloid found in the leaves, and Sapogenin which is a glucoside is present in seeds of this plant. Various Photochemical studies on this wonder tree ascertained the presence of steroids, saponin, flavonoids and many active ingredients including newer components like madhucic acid (penta cyclic triterpenoids), madhushazone, four new oleanane type triterpene glycosides and madhucosides A and B which have medicinal properties [5].

Traditionally its bark has been used against diabetes, rheumatism, ulcers, bleeding and tonsillitis. Its different parts have anti-inflammatory, analgesic and antipyretic properties. Its use has been evidenced against infertility, hyperglycemia, bacterial infections and cancer. Long back, I had prescribed acyclovir for an adult who had herpes with blisters all over his trunk. After few days he came to me and I saw the patient was asymptomatic. I was happy thinking that the antiviral has worked. But the patient told that he could not purchase the drug because it was costly for him. As per the advice of local traditional healer he took seedcake of Madhuca Longifolia and burnt it. He exposed his body to the smoke or fumes of the seedcake and all the blisters were fallen. Its antiviral property needs to be confirmed by further research [6].

Conclusion

The Medicinal properties of this wonderful Mahua tree are not known to the researchers of today. On the backdrop of antimicrobial resistance, lack of affordability of people of developing countries, researchers should show interest and work intensively towards finding different ingredients of this plant and conduct experiment for treating ailments which will benefit Mankind in terms of less cost, minimal side effect and socio-cultural acceptability of herbal medicine by the community.

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