Documenting Grandmas’ prescriptions for skin ailments in Valsad district, Gujarat

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The four years survey of 207 persons of Valsad district yielded about 2,177 remedies for different ailments from tribes and the rural populace of the district. The information was classified into 23 disease groups based on their utility. The paper emphasizes information gathered for one of such groups, skin ailments. There were about 54 recipes. The detailed analysis of the data includes recipes, dosages and diet restrictions. Since the information collected was the inherent, age old knowledge, it was named as grandmas’ prescription. A prior informed consent was obtained from the knowledge providers.

Keywords: Skin disease, Ethnomedicine, Grandma’s prescriptions

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India has a great ethnic wealth. It is inhabited by nearly 40 million tribal people of different ethnic groups¹. These tribes as well as rural population still depend upon their age old system of herbal medicines for all ailments. Tribes and rural people possess great bonanza of knowledge in medicinal plants which is gradually getting depleted. Therefore, surveys were undertaken to document the knowledge of herbal medicine prevailing amongst the tribes of Valsad district of South Gujarat region². The paper enumerates herbal remedies used by the tribes and rural populace for curing skin diseases. Ethnobotany and ethnomedicinal studies of Valsad including flora of the area were carried out³–¹³. Mahyavansi & Bhambi are main scheduled tribes, and Dhodia, Dubla, Konkana, Vaarli, Naika, Gamit, Kotvaliya, Chodhra, etc. are scheduled castes inhabiting the area.

Methodology

Survey was carried out for Valsad district and surrounding areas. A questionnaire prepared in Gujarati was distributed in different areas. Seventy eight persons were interviewed frequently and 129 person occasionally for gathering the information. At many places, people having knowledge of medicinal plants or prescribing herbal medicines were interviewed. They have shared complete information with plant samples used for the treatment. Care was taken to collect the specimens for correct identification and preserved as herbarium specimens. Herbarium samples are deposited in the herbarium of Shri Bapalal Vaidya Botanical Research Centre, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, Gujarat.

Enumerations

The paper deals with the plants used by tribes for skin diseases. The terms are not used in a strict medical sense, but are based upon the information gathered from the local people and the tribes.

Acne

Paste of black jamun (Syzygium cumini) seeds abraded on stone with water is applied on acne. Fine paste of sandalwood (Santalum album), turmeric (Curcuma longa) powder and Mindhal (Xeromphis spinosa) is applied on the face. On drying, rose water is dabbed on it with the help of cotton. Application of fresh mint (Mentha spicata) juice over the face every night cures pimples and prevents dryness of skin.

Boils and pustules

Powder of burnt dried fruits of harde (Terminalia chebula), amla (Phyllanthus emblica) and baheda (Terminalia bellirica) along with honey is applied on
Juice of crushed garlic is applied on affected area. Paste of turmeric applied over affected skin. This causes blisters; intense itching is subsided by applying thin paste of orange peel (Citrus aurantifolia) powder with water. Powdered poppy (Papaver somniferum) seeds mixed with water and lime juice is applied on the affected areas. Dried curry leaves (Murraya koenigii) mixed with coconut oil and kept in sun is massaged on skin before bath to prevent any type of itching, eruption and imparts a healthy glow to the skin. Ground seeds of Palash (Butea monosperma) mixed with lemon juice is applied to ameliorate itching.

**Leucoderma**

Leaf ash of kantasherio (Barleria prionitis L.) mixed with butter is applied to cure leucoderma.

**Psoriasis**

Water extract of bitter gourd (Momordica charantia) is taken daily in the morning. Water boiled with Neem leaves is used for bath. Latex obtained from banyan tree (Ficus benghalensis) is applied on the patches formed due to psoriasis. The mud pack made by mixing clay with a little water, applied on the affected areas has been found to be highly beneficial. The dried clay is removed and replaced by a fresh pack.

**Ringworm**

Dried rhizome paste of turmeric is applied over ring worms. The skin is washed thoroughly with hot water and a paste made from mustard seeds is applied. Ringworm can be cured by applying either juice or paste made of marigold leaves (Tagetes patula); leaves of tulsi (Ocimum sanctum) also have a curative effect. Paste made from lime juice and borax powder is applied. Seeds of Negro coffee (Cassia occidentalis) are roasted, crushed and soaked in curdled milk for 3 days; curd is rubbed on the

Fungal infection

Seed paste of radish (Raphanus sativus) with little ghee is applied on the affected part. Paste of mustard oil and turmeric powder is applied on the affected area. Alternatively, mustard oil is applied and turmeric powder is sprinkled over it. Paste of fern (Adiantum caudatum) and sandalwood is applied on the affected area. Papaya latex is also applied on the affected area of the skin.
patches. If ringworm becomes chronic, it should be rubbed with a coarse cloth smeared with latex of swallow wort (Calotropis procera).

**Scabies**
Application of mint ( Mentha spicata) leaf juice over the affected areas is helpful. Bitter gourd juice mixed with lime juice is sipped slowly in empty stomach once a day till cured. Unroasted Bengal gram (Cicer arietinum) flour is an effective cleansing agent.

**Skin allergies**
Powder of sunth (Zingiber officinale) and ajwain (Trachyspermum ammi) in equal proportion is taken with water. If allergy is due to cold, decoction of arduis (Justicia adhatoda) leaves is taken. Pills, made from powder of kesar (Crocus sativus), elaichi (Elettaria cardamomum), javantri (Myristica fragrans), akkalkaro (Spilanthes calva), taj (Cinamomum zeylanica), clove (Syzygium aromaticum) and camphor in equal quantity with betel leaf juice is taken with water.

**Warts**
Fresh juice of barely ripe figs (Ficus carica) is applied on warts. Leaf juice of marigold (Tagetes patula) is also applied over warts. Stem latex of fig trees as well as crushed leaves are applied on the affected areas. Chopped onions kept in a dish, covered with salt are left overnight. The resulting juice is applied till cured. Pineapple (Ananas comosus) juice is applied to the wart till it is cured. Peepal leaves are burnt and ash is applied on warts as well as foot corns. Piper betel petioles are rubbed on warts till they are shed.

**Discussion**
The survey revealed that the villages of Valsad utilize a very high number of herbal medicines. Valsad showed the largest number of species (95) used for medicinal purposes among all the districts covered, closely followed by Dangs district with 73 species. The results of survey are very encouraging. Research in traditional medicine may lead to finding of new active molecules. The work is an attempt in documenting of ethnic formularies, methods and the grandmas’ prescriptions prevailing in the society since time immemorial. The ritual or a remedy that has sustained through the test of time, must have inbuilt beneficial effect or else it will be weeded out and forgotten. There is an ample scope for the development of novel drugs based on plants. Chemurgic drugs after strict GMP, IQC and FDA surveillance could compete with chemical based modern medicines.

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