Rasont – A traditional crude drug prepared from Berberis sp and its uses

A Rajasekaran* & Nilay Kumar
Himalayan Forest Research Institute, Panthaghati, Shimla 171 009, Himachal Pradesh
E-mail: rajsekaran@yahoo.com

Received 26 June 2007; revised 3 November 2008

Rasont (locally known as rasaunt or rasanjana) is a crude, concentrated extract prepared from the roots and stem bark of several species of Berberis L. Traditionally, the village folks prepare the crude extract and use it to cure several ailments. The paper describes the indigenous method of preparation of rasont and its uses in Solan and Shimla districts of Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Rasont, Rasanjana, Crude drug, Traditional medicine, Traditional knowledge, Berberis sp,

IPC Int. Cl.3: A01K61/00, A61P1/04, A61P1/06, A61P1/08, A61P7/00, A61P7/04, A61P9/14, A61P13/00, A61P13/02, A61P15/00, A61P15/02, A61P27/00, A61P27/02, A61P29/00, A61P31/02

Rasont (also called rasaunt or rasanjana) is a crude, concentrated extract prepared from the roots and stem bark of several species of the genus Berberis L. (Family: Berberidaceae). Out of 55 species of Berberis reported in India, 21 species of Berberis are found in Himachal Pradesh1,2. Species such as B. lycium Royle, B. chitria Lindl. and B. aristata DC. are generally used for the preparation of rasont in Himachal Pradesh. Berberis together with Mahonia (barberry) is known for its efficacious medicinal properties. Traditionally, the local people prepare the rasont and use it to cure several ailments, including conjunctivitis, bleeding piles, ulcers, jaundice, enlarged liver and enlarged spleen. Apart from the traditional uses, the roots of Berberis are used in the preparation of several Ayurvedic drugs, therefore it has great demand in the market. The report on the traditional preparation of rasont and its uses was collected during 2004-2006, while conducting the extensive ethnobotanical surveys in Solan and Shimla districts of Himachal Pradesh, with an aim to assess economic potential of the plant in the area. Six local Vaidyas in the area were contacted and the information on the uses of rasont was documented. The voucher specimens of the plants used have been deposited in the herbarium of Himalayan Forest Research Institute, Shimla. The traditional method of preparation of rasont and its uses as followed by local people has been described in the paper.

*Corresponding author

Traditional method of preparation

For the preparation of rasont, roots and stem bark of Berberis L., locally known as Kashmal are collected from the well grown plants. The collected roots, which are free from insect attack, are cleaned and washed in tap water to remove soil particles. In Solan district, local people use roots and stem bark of B. lycium Royle, whereas in Shimla district, people use roots of different species such as B. chitria Lindl., B. lycium Royle and B. aristata DC. The collected roots are chopped into small pieces and boiled in water in an aluminum vessel under low heat for 5–6 hrs (Figs.1 &2). While boiling, care should be taken to boil the extract over low heat with continuous stirring to avoid burning of the extract. The watery extract is constantly stirred until the extract has a syrupy consistency (Fig. 3). Then, the extract is filtered to remove the root samples and the impurities, and the extract is boiled again for an hour and cooled in the open air. After cooling, the extract becomes semi-solid and is called rasont (Fig. 4). It can be stored in the form of small globules in a cool and dark place. Rasont should not be stored in direct sunlight or in a hot place.

Traditional uses

Rasont is a useful household remedy in several ailments, including conjunctivitis, opthalmia, bleeding piles, skin eruptions, ulcers, jaundice, enlarged liver and enlarged spleen. For curing eye diseases especially conjunctivitis and opthalmia, rasont is
applied on the eyelids. *Rasont* is used as a wash for bleeding piles. *Rasont* mixed with honey is a useful application to aphthous sores and ulcerations of the skin. It also effectively reduces the uterine inflammations, hence is valuable for the treatment of leucorrhea and menorrhagia. For treating jaundice and other liver disorders, it is taken orally along with the honey. The gargles of *rasont* with water are beneficial in the ailments of the mouth and throat.

**Stages in the preparation**

Unfortunately, due to urbanization and modernization, the traditional knowledge on the preparation of *rasont* and its uses are getting depleted among the younger generation. Moreover, degradation of natural habitats and destruction of forest areas have resulted in the decline of the natural populations of some of the *Berberis* species particularly *B.aristata* DC. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop strategies for the conservation and management of these precious plant resources.

**Acknowledgement**

Authors are thankful to Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, Ministry of Science & Technology for providing necessary financial support for undertaking the study. Thanks are also due to all the local people in Solan and Shimla districts for sharing their traditional knowledge.

**References**