Introduction

*Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Kuntze, commonly known as Flame of Forest, belongs to the family *Fabaceae*. It is locally called as *Palas*, *Dhak* or *Khakar* and found in mixed or dry deciduous forests in western and central part of India. It is a medium sized tree with crooked branches and large 3-foliolate leaves. Large flowers are scarlet red with orange tinge. Leaf-like pods are flat and 1-seeded. Different parts of the tree are being used since ages in medicine and for other purposes. The utility and importance of the tree to local inhabitants of Jalgaon, Dhule, Nandurbar and Nasik forms the subject matter of this paper.

Methodology

Extensive field trips were conducted during 1997 to 2004 for gathering enthnobotanical information related to Flame of Forest. The rural inhabitants and tribal people such as *Pawara*, *Bhil*, *M a v a c h i*, *V a n j a r i*, *Kokani*, *Warli*, *Mahadeo-koli*, *K a t k a r i*, *Thakur*, etc. were interviewed repeatedly and the information was verified by actual observations in the region. The data collected has been compared with the literature, viz. (i) The Wealth of India : A Dictionary of Indian Raw Material Series¹, (ii) A Dictionary of Economic Products², (iii) Dictionary of Indian Folk Medicine and Ethnobotany³, (iv) Handbook of Medicinal Plants⁴, (v) Cross-cultural Ethnobotany of North-East India⁵, (vi) Applied Ethnobotany : A Case Study on The Kharias of Central India⁶, (vii) Tribal Medicine⁷ and other recently published research papers, so as to point out about its new reports. The new reports are asterisked in the text. The specimens have been deposited in the Herbarium, Department of Botany of Pratap College, Amalner and Arts, Commerce and Science College, Nagaon (Maharashtra).
Ethnomedicinal Uses

Root
*(i) Root pieces are heated and then extracted. About 2-3 spoons of it are advised at night as a remedy against impotency. It is administered for one month.
(ii) Root powder is applied on injury of snake-bite. Spoonful of root powder mixed with water is drunk as an antidote for snake-bite.i

Stem
(i) Stem bark powder is used to apply on injury caused due to axe.
*(ii) Stem juice is applied on goitre of human beings.
*(iii) Paste of stem bark is applied in case of body swellings.

Leaf
*(i) Petiole is chewed and the juice is sucked to cure cough, cold and stomach disorders.
*(ii) Leaf juice is dropped into eyes to treat conjunctivitis.
*(iii) Leaf powder, about two spoonfuls per day for a month is drunk mixed with a cup of water to treat urinary complaints and also against urinary stone.
*(iv) Extract of fresh leaves is employed to kill intestinal worms.1, 2, 4, 7.
*(v) Leaf extract is used to gargle in case of sore throat.
*(vi) Leaf extract, about a cup, is administered regularly at night for a month to a diabetic patient.
*(vii) Leaf extract, about three to four spoons, is drunk at night for two to three months. It checks irregular bleeding during menstruation.

Flower
*(i) Fresh flower extract is useful in spermatorrhoea. About 20 ml is taken orally per day at night till cure.
*(ii) It is also useful to prevent pus from urinogenital tracts of males.
*(iii) Flowers are crushed in milk and sugar is added. Three to four spoons if drunk per day for a month helps to reduce body heat and chronic fever.
*(iv) Flowers are soaked in water overnight and a cup of this infusion is drunk every morning against leucorrhea till cure. It is also useful for strangury.
*(v) Flowers are boiled in water and cooked to obtain a dye.5
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Seed
(i) Two to three seeds are powdered and consumed by children as a remedy against intestinal worms.1, 2, 4, 7.
*(ii) Seeds are crushed in milk and this mixture about two spoons is taken orally to treat urinal complaints and also against urinary stone.

Gum
*(i) It is applied for cracks on foot sole before going to bed.
*(ii) Two spoons of diluted gum are advised for dysentery till cure.

Miscellaneous
*(i) Fibre : Bark fibres are obtained from stem for making cordage.1, 3, 4.
*(ii) Fish-poison : Stem bark powder is used to stupefy fishes.3
*(iii) Fodder : Green leaves are good fodder for domestic animals.2
*(iv) Domestic utensils : Fresh leaves are used for making dinning plates and bowls.1, 2, 4, 5
*(v) Protection : Leaves are also used for making Ghongda to protect from rains.
*(vi) Vegetable : Flowers and young fruits are used as vegetable by tribals.3
*(vii) Dye : Flowers are boiled in water and cooked to obtain a dye.5
*(viii) Festival : Fresh twigs are tied on horns of bullocks on occasion of ‘Pola’ festival.

Discussion and Conclusion
Utility of roots against impotency; stem bark against body swelling, stem juice against goitre, petiole for cough, cold, stomach disorders; leaves for conjunctivitis, diabetes, sore throat, bleeding menstruation; flowers for reducing body heat against chronic fever, spermatorrhoea, leucorrhoea, pus from urinogenital tracts of males; seeds for urinal complaints and also against urinary stone. All parts of this tree species are employed for various purposes by the rural folks and aborigines in the region. This demonstrates that the tree is a boon for indigenous people. The species showed...
great potentiality and appeared to have a broad-spectrum effect on several ailments. It is, therefore, suggested that these indigenous practices should be scientifically screened and followed up by a multi-disciplinary team of ethnomethodists, botanists, physiochemists, pharmacologists and medicinal experts for appropriate tests. The aborigines in some localities have their major dependence on such trees, hence, they should be trained for appropriate methods of collections of major and minor forest products.

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References


