

## AWARENESS ABOUT INDIAN TRADITIONAL HERBAL MEDICINES IN INDIA

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### **Abstract**

India has a rich traditional knowledge and heritage of herbal medicine in the form of *Ayurveda*. India is the largest producer of medicinal herbs and is called as botanical garden of the world. But due to easy availability and fast action conventional allopathic medicine are used in large scale. In recent times due to side effects and growing cost of allopathic medicine, people are now looking for alternative medicines, herbal medicines being one of them. In the paper presented, awareness about common as well as lesser known herbal medicines is studied. Based on the results of survey done in Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, India, it was found that among common herbal medicines, medicinal value of only four herbs; turmeric, tulsi, ginger and neem are known by more than 50% of the population whereas more than 70% population do not know the medicinal use of some of the lesser known herbal medicines. Even more than 90% of the population is not aware of most of uncommon plants of medicinal value.

**Key Words:** Herbal medicines, alternative medicines.

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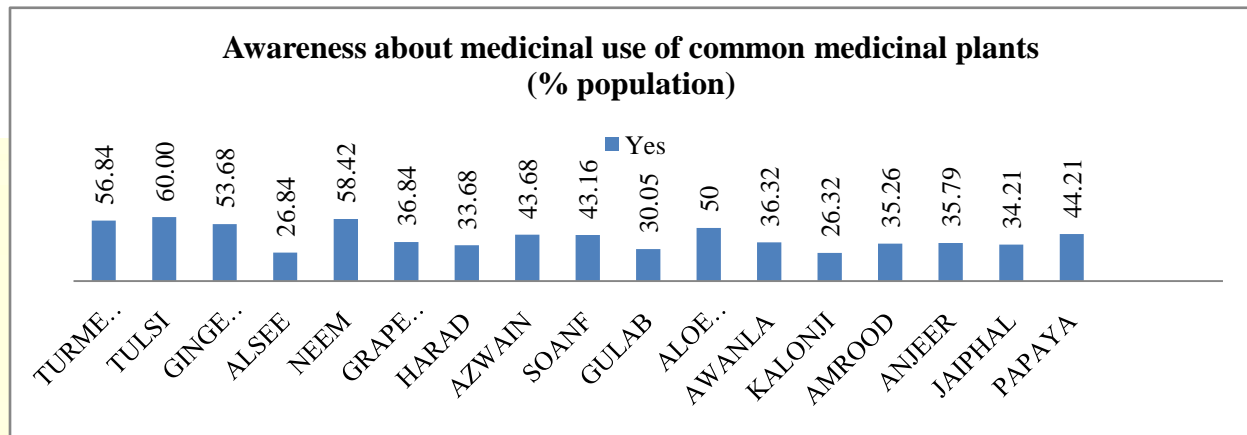
**Introduction:**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently defined traditional medicine (including herbal drugs) as comprising therapeutic practices that have been in existence, often for hundreds of years, before the development and spread of modern medicine and are still in use today<sup>1</sup>. Plants have always been used for medicinal purposes in India in traditional health care system. India has long tradition of use of herbal medicines for health care either in the form of medicine or herbal supplements. Indian traditional medical knowledge and practices uses plants as cure or as food supplements. From ancient Indian literature it is evidence that the various parts of the plants were used as medicine for the treatment of disease of human beings under traditional medicines like Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha.

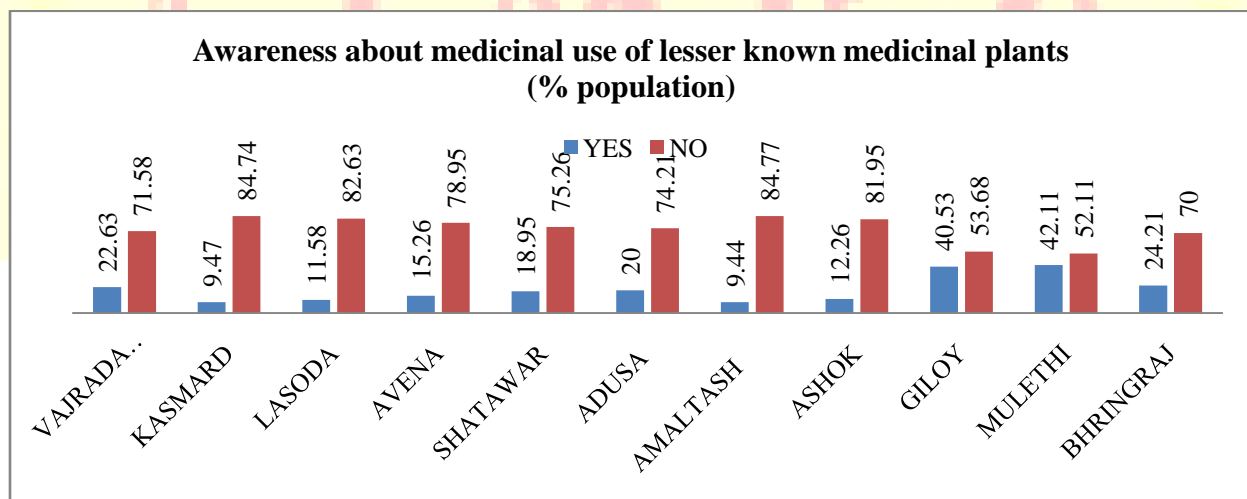
Considering the adverse effects of synthetic drugs<sup>2,3</sup>, the people are looking for natural remedies which are safe and effective. In recent years growing interest in traditional herbal medicines in the has provided an option for use of medicinal plant resources as complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) due to their diversity, flexibility, easy accessibility and low or no side effects. India officially recognizes over 3000 plants for their medicinal value. It is generally estimated that over 6000 plants in India are in use in traditional, folk and herbal medicine, representing about 75% of the medicinal needs of the Third World countries<sup>4</sup>. The objective of the study was to know the awareness level of the people about common and lesser known or uncommon herbal medicines in a fast growing Indian city.

**Methodology:** In the paper presented a survey was conducted in Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh in India to study the awareness about common and lesser known plants or plants which are not commonly found in surroundings that are used in Indian traditional medicine system, *Ayurveda* as medicinal resources. People were asked about medicinal use of common or easily available plants (Turmeric, Tulsi or Basil, Ginger or Sonth, Alosee or Flex, Neem, Grapes or Munakka, Harad, Azwain, Soanf, Gulab, Ghritkumari, Aanwala, Kalonji, Amrood, Anjeer, Jaiphal, Papaya) and lesser known plants Vajradanti, Kasmard, Lasoda, Avena, Bharangi, Gurmar, Shatawar, Amaltas, Adusa, Ashok, Bhringraj, Mulethi, Giloy, Vacha, Shirish, Jatamansi and Nirgundi. Data was compiled and presented in the form of bar diagram. Based on the results of the survey an educational package was prepared about lesser known herbal medicines.

**Observation and Results:** In the survey it was found that among common herbal medicines, medicinal value of only four herbs; Turmeric, Tulsi, Ginger and Neem are known by more than 50% of the population highest being Tulsi (60%) then Neem (58.42%).



**Figure 1:** Bar diagram showing awareness about medicinal use of common medicinal plants. Amongst lesser known plants, medicinal value of only Mulethi and Giloy are somewhat known by more than 40% of the population. More than 70% population do not know the medicinal use of Vajradanti, Kasmard, Lasoda, Avena, Shatavar, Adusa, Amaltas, Ashok and Bhringraj. More than 90% of the population is not aware of the medicinal value of Bharangi, Gurmar, Vacha, Shirish, Jatamansi and Nirgundi.



**Figure 2:** Bar diagram showing aware about medicinal use of lesser known medicinal plants

**Discussion:**

India has one of the richest plants medical traditions in the world in the form of Ayurveda. The World Health Organization (WHO) has listed 21,000 plants, which are used for medicinal purposes around the world. Among these 2500 species are found in India, out of which 150 species are used commercially as herbal medicines or health food (nutraceuticals) on a fairly large scale. Whole plant or plant parts like root, bark, fruit or flower are not only used as cure but also as health food or nutritional supplements.

Indian ancient literature had described properties and uses of many medicinal plants and these are still used in the classical formulations, in the *Ayurvedic* system of medicine<sup>5, 6, 7, 8, 9</sup>. Charak, Sushruta and Vagbhata described 700 herbal drugs with their properties and clinical effects. About 8,000 herbal remedies have been codified in *Ayurveda*. In India around 20,000 medicinal plant species have been recorded recently<sup>10</sup>. But lack of awareness about herbal medicine limits the option of use of these as complementary and alternative medicines in India.

According to the study many herbal formulation contains plant material which are not known by common people. For example, Triphala, a combination of Bahera (*Terminalia bellerica*), Harad (*Terminalia chebula*) and Aanwala (*Emblia officinalis*) is known by people by name but its constituents are not known by most of them even though it occurs in 219 herbal formulations<sup>10</sup>. India is the largest producer of medicinal herbs<sup>11</sup>. It is generally estimated that over 6000 plants in India are in use in traditional, folk and herbal medicine, representing about 75% of the medicinal needs of the Third World countries<sup>12</sup>. Three of the 10 most widely selling herbal medicines in developed countries, namely preparation of Garlic (*Allium sativum*), Ghritkumari (*Aloe barbadensis*) and Ginseng (*Panax* species) are available in India. Even Garlic ranked second, Ginseng rank fourth, Ghritkumari ranked seventh and *Ephedra* species ranked eighth in ten best selling herbal medicine in U.S.A.<sup>10</sup>. India is the largest grower of Isabgol or Psyllium (*Plantago ovata*) and Senna (*Cassia senna*). Even Isabgol or Psyllium seeds and husk, castor oil and opium extract alone account for 60% of the exports.

The practices of using herbal medicines continue today because of its biomedical benefits as well as place in cultural beliefs in many parts of world and have made a great contribution towards

maintaining human health<sup>13</sup>. But results of the study shows that though herbs of medicinal value are being used in many herbal preparations of major pharmaceutical companies and these plants are the source of revenue in India, common people are less aware of the medicinal usage of the plants being used in medical formulations.

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