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TULSĪ: THE HOLY MEDICINAL PLANT

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ABSTRACT

Tulsī is an aromatic shrub which is originated in North Central India. Now it grows all over the India. In *Āyurveda*, *tulsī* is known as the “Mother Medicine of Nature” and “The Queen of Herbs”. It has both spiritual and medicinal value in Indian Society. This plant is used in different Hindu rituals. It has some medicinal use also. Modern researchers have also mentioned *tulsī* has anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-fungal properties.

Tulsī is known as the liquid *yoga* for its calming effect like *yoga*. Regular consumption of *tulsī* as tea may be compared with the regular practice of *yoga*.

Tulsī is worshiped as a goddess in Hinduism. The leaves of *tulsī* plant are used in different ceremonial rituals. Both *Āyurveda* and the Hinduism advocate the usages of *tulsī* for spiritual and medicinal purposes in our daily life. This paper is an attempt to high light the above mentioned values of this magical plant.

KEYWORDS

Tulsī, *Āyurveda*, Plant, Medicine

INTRODUCTION

Āyurveda is the ancient holistic health care system. It is also known as the *upaveda* or “auxiliary knowledge”. It is treated as a supplement of the *Vedas*, usually either the *R̥gveda* or the *Atharvaveda*. There are some legends regarding the origin of *Āyurveda*. It is said that Dhanvantarī or Divodāsa got the knowledge of this science from Brahmā.

There are three principal texts on *Āyurveda* which were written during early centuries of this era. These are the *Caraka Samhitā*, the *Śuśrūta Samhitā* and the medical portions of the Bower Manuscript, which is also known as *Bheda Samhitā*. The *Caraka Samhitā*¹ is often said to be the primary one though there is no clear chronology of these texts.

The modern world has realized the power of *Āyurveda*. There are some researchers, who are working on the medicinal values of various plants and herbs often used as traditional medicine against various diseases. *Tulsī* is such a medicinal plant, which grows wild in the tropics and warm regions. The botanical name of the *tulsī* is ‘*ocimum tenuiflorum*’. It is also known as ‘*ocimum sanctum*’ or holy basil.

METHODOLOGY

The study is basically an analytical one. It is based on descriptive method of research. This study is also based on secondary sources like books, journals, internet etc.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to study –

- (1) The spiritual value of *tulsī*
- (2) The medicinal value of *tulsī*
- (3) The commercial value of *tulsī*

HOLISTIC USE OF *TULSĪ*

Tulsī is a sacred plant for Hindu community. The Hindus worship *tulsī* as the incarnation of goddess Laksmī. Many Hindu families have *tulsī* plant growing in front of their home. Traditionally, *Tulsī* is planted in the central courtyard of Hindu households.

Two types of *tulsī* are worshipped in Hindu religion. First one is ‘*Shyāma tulsī*’, which has dark green leaves. This is important for the worship of Hanumān². ‘*Rāma tulsī*’ has light green leaves; and it is larger in size. Many Hindu families have the *tulsī* planted in a specially built structure and used to worship by lighting earthen lamp under the plant and offering water to it. The Hindus believe that Lord Viṣṇu adores *tulsī* the most. Hence the Vaishnavites worship *tulsī* to please Lord Viṣṇu. Even they wear beaded necklaces made of *tulsī* stems. According to the *Brahma-Vaivarta Purāṇa*, *tulsī* is an expression of Sitā³. It is often regarded as a consort of Krishna in the form of Laksmī⁴.

MEDICINAL VALUE OF *TULSĪ*

Tulsī has been used for thousands of years in *Āyurveda* as a medicinal plant. It is mentioned in the *Caraka-Saṁhitā*⁵. There are three types of *tulsī*, which have their references in *Āyurveda* are-

1. Krishna or *Shyāma tulsī* (*ocimum tenuiflorum*)
2. *Rāma tulsī* (*ocimum sanctum*)
3. *Vana tulsī* (*ocimum gratissimum*)

‘*Krishna* or *Shyāma tulsī*’ comprises purple colored leaves and dark stems. It is famous for its taste. This type of *tulsī* is known to be beneficial to treat throat infections, respiratory system, skin diseases and earache.

‘*Rāma tulsī*’ is known for its cooling taste and characteristic fragrance. This variety of *tulsī* is found in India, China, Brazil and Nepal.

‘*Vana tulsī*’ is found in the Himalayas as well as the plains of India. It is found in Africa also. It is cultivated and grows wild throughout Asia and Africa. It is generally natural habitat plant.

Tulsī is considered to be an adaptogen⁶, balancing different processes in the body. It is widely known across South Asia as a medicinal plant and herbal tea. *Tulsī* extracts are used as *Ayurvedic* remedies for common colds, headaches, stomach disorders, inflammation, heart diseases, various forms of poisoning and malaria. This mother medicine of nature has been used in India for thousands of years as a principal herb of *Āyurveda*. This ancient medical science has discussed the physical, mental and spiritual health-promoting properties of the *tulsī* plant. The leaves of this plant are a nerve tonic and are useful for sharpening the memory. The juice of *tulsī* leaves is very effective in bringing it down high fever. A decoction of the leaves with honey and ginger is an effective remedy for bronchitis, asthma, influenza, cough and cold. Hence, it is the mother medicine of nature.

Tulsī leaves are very effective in case of ulcers and infections in the mouth. If we chew a few leaves daily on a regular basis, then we can prevent these problems. The *tulsī* leaves, dried in the sunlight and powdered, can be used for brushing teeth. The juice of *tulsī* leaves is a preventive as well as a cure for insect bites. It is beneficial in the treatment of ringworm and other skin diseases. It is also known that *tulsī* leaves mixed with sandalwood paste can also be applied in the forehead for getting relief from heat and headache. Hence it can be said that this plant has immense medicinal value.

This plant also reduces the level of blood cholesterol. Therefore, it is beneficial in cardiac diseases. *Tulsī* leave is anti-stress agent. It prevents stress, purifies the blood and prevents several common ailments. Again, the juice of basil leaves with honey will prevent the formation all types of stone. It helps normalize our health function. Thus, the *tulsī* or holy basil is effective for cancer, diabetes, high cholesterol levels, stress, the immune system, liver support and protection, digestion, arthritis, cataracts, wound healing etc. According to *Āyurveda*, this herbal plant nourishes a person’s growth to perfect healthy. It is taken in many forms as dried powder, fresh leaf and herbal tea⁷.

CONCLUSION

The *tulsī* plant is even known to purify or de pollute the atmosphere and also works as a repellent to mosquitoes, flies and other harmful insects. In this regard Prof Shrinivas Tilak, who teaches Religion at Concordia University, Montreal has made this historical citation: In a letter written to 'The Times,' London, dated May 2, 1903 Dr George Birdwood, Professor of Anatomy, Grant Medical College, Mumbai said, "When the Victoria Gardens were established in Bombay, the men employed on those works were pestered by mosquitoes. At the recommendation of the Hindu managers, the whole boundary of the gardens was planted with holy basil, on which the plague of mosquitoes was at once abated, and fever altogether disappeared from among the resident gardeners⁸."

Hence, commercial cultivation of *tulsī'* in those areas of our country where there are unprecedented occurrences of malaria and other diseases caused by mosquitoes can help combating this dreaded diseases.

This holy plant has the capacities to absorb more and more carbonic acid from the atmosphere and release maximum amount of oxygen. Thus, cultivation of *tulsī'* can help protect the environment. In disguise of many religious believe, these are some important scientific reasons why the Hindus plant *tulsī'* in their central courtyard and around the household.

Considering all the benefits of *tulsī'*, it is high time to start commercial cultivation and its proper marketing in a systematic way. We believe that *tulsī* leaves can be used as raw materials for medicine and cosmetics industries, and from that point of view, we can say that there is ready market for *tulsī* leaves..

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