

Book Review

Oushadheeya sasya smpathu (Medicinal plant wealth) in Kannada by P.S. Venkatarama Daithota

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After Rio Convention on Biological Diversity, all countries especially the gene rich nations like India are busy in taking stock of their biodiversity and in valuation of bioresources. Converting biological wealth into monetary wealth through bio-prospection and product development is a priority agenda before India. Medicinal plants sector is one such promising sector where India can become a world leader provided authentic and highly potent plant drugs are systematically evaluated and taken up for bio-prospection. Indian heritage of medicinal plants goes back to pre-Vedic times, ca 4000-4500 years. In addition, in India we have perhaps one of the richest ethno botanical traditions in the world. Over 8000 species of plants in Indian Flora are supposed to be medicinal and yet, the Indian medicinal plant sector is dismal and perhaps more attention is needed in this direction. In the last two decades, there has been a new trend in the preparation and marketing of drugs based on medicinal plants. These preparations, labeled herbal drugs or phytomedicines, are single plant extracts or fractions thereof and are distinct from the pure chemical entities of molecular drugs. Therefore, not only authentic information on medicinal plants but also correct identities of medicinal plants is a must for sustainably harvesting our medicinal plant wealth for the human betterment. The present book serves to fill such a knowledge gap and forms a new brick to the edifice of Indian medicinal plant sector.

The author has done a commendable job of providing a complete and comprehensive account of 280 medicinal plants of Karnataka State. The book is presented in 2 parts – first part deals with 5 scholarly articles dealing with a few general issues of medicinal plants contributed by different workers. These include the General introduction to Botanical Science covering importance of plants, medicinal plant wealth including poisonous plants, diseases of medicinal plants, scientific binomial nomenclature of plant species and so on by Dr. Shankar Bhat. Another chapter on the “Milestones of Usage of Medicinal plants by Dr. Sathyanarayan Bhat provides details of such plants which were used in Vedic rituals and are even today in high esteem, conservation of medicinal plants through taboos and religious sanctity attached to such plants, plants that were used in dental problems and as mouth wash in ancient literature, single

plant drug treatment, plants in ayurvedic treatises and even touches the latest issue of Noble Prize awarded in 2015 to a traditional botanist – a recognition to the area of medicinal plants. The third chapter by Dr. V. V. Bhat provides an insight into the heritage of Indian medicinal plants traced from the Vedic literature. Grouping or categorization of medicinal plants attempted in Vedas, in ancient works like *Charak samhita*, etc. He further justifies the existence of life in plants as was stated in many Shlokas of Mahabharatha. Certain enigmatic plants such as *Kalpatharu*, *Soma*, *Somalata*, *Sanjeevani*, etc are discussed for which we still do not have the exact botanical equivalents. The write up on Venkatarama Daithota, the herbalist by Shri Padre summarizes the local herbal remedies and throws light on the methods of disease treatment by Venkataramana, the author of the book. The section on the Medicinal Plant Wealth by the author discusses apart from other issues traditional single drug remedies – information inherited from his father, Shri Pt. Shankarnarayn Bhat, a doyen of his time in the area of herbal drugs.

The Second part, which is the main part of the book (pp 65-471) provides the complete details of the medicinal plants and their usage. An index of all medicinal plants (Kannada names) given at the beginning helps in locating the details of these plants in the book. The plants are arranged according to alphabetical order of kannada names. For each entry of medicinal plant, the ailment or disease for which it is used, details of vernacular names in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, and Sanskrit, its equivalent botanical name and family is provided. Surprisingly, the botanical names are not only up-to-date but also without any spelling mistakes, which normally we find in such works. Part of plant used as drug is also mentioned. Conspicuously, these details are provided in a Box which helps the readers in knowing quickly the plants and diseases/ailments for which used. Descriptions of the plants provided is so simple that even a common man can understand, appreciate and recognize the plant. This is followed by detail information of its application, dose, and number of days for medication, etc. Each plant is also provided with a simple line drawing, although a colour photograph of the plant would have been more useful. This will help any common person to recognize the plant and collect it as and when need arises. The line drawings of the plant though simple are botanically very accurate and serve the purpose. At the end an appendix of all Botanical names referred to in the book is provided. As a botanical scientist, I feel that some data on the distribution and habitat of medicinal plants would have been more useful for those interested in collecting the plants. This would have further enhanced the value of the book.

The printing and get up of the book is excellent. The cover page showing the photograph of *Tinospora cordifolia* (Amrutha balli) justifies the title of the book. On the whole the book reveals the extraordinary efforts put in by the author in collecting huge amount of data on medicinal plants – vernacular names of different languages, up-to-date and correct botanical names, elaborate usage of the medicinal plants/parts of plants and ailments for which applied, etc. Considering the amount of information, quality of paper used, and efforts in making line drawings of all medicinal plants, the slightly higher price of Rs. 500/ can be ignored. But this

limits its distribution only to research institutes and Universities, local medicine men, ayurvedacharyas, and other public organizations. Overall, the book is a praiseworthy, long awaited contribution to the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants of India in general and Karnataka in particular.

In my opinion, it is one of the best works on medicinal plants in recent years. The authors richly deserve generous compliments by the entire botanical and ayurveda fraternity. The reviewer earnestly compliments the efforts of the author and hopes that the present work serves the growing needs botanists, pharmacologists, pharmaceutical industries, Ayurvedic Colleges and Universities, and other common public interested in knowing and making use of the medicinal plants growing in their surroundings. I have my best wishes for this book.

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