PLANTS ASSOCIATED WITH WITCHCRAFT AND EVIL EYE

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ABSTRACT: The present article, continuation of a previous work, is an attempt to study the plants to which magical properties are attributed. It is based on published information as well as survey conducted by the authors.

Not so long ago, diseases were thought to be induced by evil spirits and the remedy was exorcizing the spirit. Most of the time the magic did not work. In occult belief, plants are supposed to have their own individual and group spirits. Lower elementals are often believed to stay in plants, in a coconut grove, a lone quivering leaf is supposed to have magical powers. Nearly all people, ancient or modern, seem to have developed something of a medical herblore, frequently mixed with much magical material. Magical properties have usually been ascribed to vegetable poisons or their antidotes.

Results and Discussion

In some parts of Southern India, Tamarind (Tamarindus indica) tree is considered to be haunted by spirits. In Punjab, old people believe that large trees such as ficus growing Quit away from the village are haunted by the evil spirits. Evil spirits are known as ‘Jumbies’ in the islands of the West Indies. Jumbie seeds are strung and used as an ornament and worn as an amulet to ward off evil and to bring good fortune. Hard seeds of Bholia (Symplocos spicata) strung as beads are hung round the neck of the children to avert evil spirits (Mehra et al, 1975).

Anthocephalus indicus flowers are to ward off evil spirits by the tribes of Gauhati, inhabiting near the kamakhsya hills in Assam (Karnick et al, 1981). In Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, Nirgundi (Vitex negundo) and Vasaka (Adathoda vasica) leaves are kept in the lap while taking a young or sick bay from one place to another. It is said that these leaves protect the body from evil spirits and evil eye. Actually these plants are highly antimicrobial in nature and might be helping the young ones from...
infectious organisms. Sangli (Skimmia laureola) incense and smoke are used against supernatural forces, namely ghosts and evil spirits, (Pathak et al, 1980). Adeantum caudatum is administered to a patient affected by natural forces (spirits) by tribes of shiv Khori forest area of Western Himalayas (Karnick et al, 1982). Parents put putranjiva roxburghill rosaries around the children’s neck to preserve them from harm and to ward off diseases attributed to evil spirits. During journey, a pregnant woman or a lactating mother is expected to carry a bunch of neem (Azadirachta indica) leaves for protection against all evil elements. On the sixth day after their confinement, tribal woman hang garlands made from Ipomoea pes-capre on their huts to protect their pregnancy from evil spirits. Celtis caucasica plan was used to be made into charms in Peshawar valley to keep off the evil eye from men (stewart, 1869). Indians living in Trinidad, water khus Khus plants in dark nights of August-September, it is believed that evil spirits linger near the plants Swahili people of Zanzibar burn curry leaves as incense to keep devils away from their sick children. Fine finger grass and Devils shoestring plants are used to ward off bad dreams and evil spirits. In ancient Europe, it was customary to gather saint john’s wort (Hypericum seouleri) on saint john’s day (24th June) and hung up in the windows as a preservative against evil spirits, storms and thunder, thereby giving it an ancient name, devils flight’. Peganum harmala seeds were burnt to keep off the evil spirits at lights and to avert the evil eye (Stewart, 1869). Druids, a relic of ancient pagan times, used the Vervain herb’ to ward off the evil eye.

Recipe of plants and parts viz., Boswellia sp., securidaca longipedanculata, Biophytum crassipes and cannabis sativa was also used to ward off evil eye in Tanzania (Mathias, 1982). In India, to counter the effects of evil eye, burning of dry red chilli fruit is a common practice. In Punjab, garlic bulbs (Allium sativum) are strung into garlands and are hung around the children’s neck to ward off evil eye.

Small branches of Sal (Shorea robusta) are used by Indian villagers to detect witches. In idle ages Vervain herb was very popular in Witches brew. Henbane (Hyoscyamus niger) was one of the main ingredients permitting the witches of medieval times to experience effects of intoxication and hallucination. During the middle ages in Europe, belladonna or deadly nightshade assumed importance in witchcraft and magic. Mandrake Mandragoza officinarum became famous in magic and witchcraft due to its Mandrake Mandragoza officinarum became famous in magic and witchcraft due to its powerful narcotic effects. The root of this plant is likened to a human body and this extraordinary resemblance led to the early belief that excercised great supernatural power over the human body and mind. Jezebel plant named after the wicked queen of biblical times, is generally prized and related to superstitious women of wicked intention. Herb Veronica is also mentioned in English charms (Singer, 1958). Rue was considered as antidote or a counter charm against the witch practices, while Tyrol people carried Rue with agrimony, maiden fern, Broom straw, and ground ivy to sense the presence of witches.
“Trefoil, vervain, saint john’s Wort, Dill, 
Hinder witches of their Will”.

Adathoda vasica stems are used in the Naga 
hills for divining and to foretell omens. A 
herb of eternal life was very popular in 
china. It was known as jen Shen now called 
ginseng (Panax ginseng). Its roots actually 
look like a human body with a head, two 
hands and two feet. To a common observer, 
the surprising results of healing practices 
only gave an impression that the cure has 
been affected by nothing but magic or 
witchcraft (Said, 1981). Oldest magical 
plant, mandrake was revered as far back as 
genesis for its alleged aphrodisiac powers 
and its use as a drug persists even today. In 
Greece, Circe stirred mandrake into her 
potion for turning men into swine. Because 
its forked roots resemble legs, the mandrake 
was often depicted in medieval Europe as a 
tiny human figure, as in 1498 French 
drawing of a “Female root”.

Conclusion

Use of plants magical practices is certainly 
the corruption of the use of plants in folklore 
or indigenous systems of medicine. It is a 
stage in the development of medical 
herblore, indicating confused situations, a 
partially analyzed set of scientific 
information mingled with many individual 
and social prejudices. It is a stage of 
exploitation of uneducated masses by semi-
educated and selfish persons.

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