



Ijapc 2018

Volume 8 Issue 1

www.ijapc.com

10/01/2018

Greentree Group



A Conceptual Scientific Analysis of Health Aspect of Sair Festival of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Indian medical science (Ayurveda) has been incorporated as a part of Indian traditions. At present where health for all is a major challenge, re vitalization for this ancient Indian pattern of understanding and incorporating health with tradition will be a great benefit.

Aim of study: To conceptualize and analyse the Sair festival practice in terms of health benefits.

Sair Festival: Symbolically it is celebrated as worship to god, but various customs being followed as a part of ritual is a hidden message for identification and protection of important medicinal plants and food items which are being prepared from them and are beneficial for health especially in winter season. **Discussion:** Indian society is a very religious society, belief in god and worship in any form is almost a part of every Indian. This seems to be a reason why worship of some crops are celebrated in order to inculcate the importance of these crops both financially by protecting the crops and also to make people aware of the benefits of these crops and herbs so that more people include them in their daily life thus getting proper nutrition and health in name of traditions. Use of *Kushmand (petha)*, *Tila*, *Bala*, *Maize*, *Apamarg*, *dhanya* and *Durva* which are really beneficial especially during winters is a great example of inculcation of Indian Medical Science (Ayurveda) in the traditions. **Conclusion:** Such customs and traditional festivals should be preserved and need to be presented with their scientific aspect to young generation so as to achieve health for all targets.

KEYWORDS

Ayurveda, Traditional herbs, Indian festival, Kushmand, Tila, Apamarg, Durva



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Received 07/11/17 Accepted 23/11/17 Published 10/01/18



INTRODUCTION

Indian medical science (Ayurveda) has been incorporated as a part of Indian traditions being followed from centuries. Though with time many of their primary aim of preserving health have faded away due to modification and just left as a formality. But in past it was the best way to provide health and to achieve the sole aim of Ayurveda that is to sustain the health of healthy by reaching to every level of the society.

At present where health for all is a major challenge, re vitalization for this ancient Indian pattern will be a great benefit. In Indian state of Himachal Pradesh many such customs are there which have scientific basis in respect to health like the traditional feast dham¹.

One of the most popular festivals is Sair. It's a fair celebrated in Himachal Pradesh to mark the end of the crop harvest. Sair festival is celebrated mainly in the interiors of Shimla, Mandi, Kullu and Solan districts every year in mid-September. Mandi district have its unique tradition of celebrating Sair, where the elders in a family offered "Durva", a sacred grass, with dry fruits items by the younger family members with touching feet

Aim of study: This review aims at collection of scattered knowledge of

traditional practices of Sair festival in its ancient form in of Mandi, H.P. and to conceptualize and analyse the practice in terms of health benefits.

Method: Classical texts of Ayurveda as well as PUBMED, MEDLINE database and relevant journals were used for the search of relevant literature and research papers. Papers published between Jan 1960 to Jan 2017 were only considered. The key words used for the search was , Ayurveda, 'Mandi' 'Sair festival', 'Apamarg' and 'Bala' etc. information from conversation from local inhabitant of Mandi were also included in the review to search out and understand proper tradition of celebrating the festival to evaluate and understand if any scientist aspect is present in terms of health in its celebration. Only research articles published in English language were considered.

Sair festival: As per the tradition, the Sair festival marks the end of summer and onset of harsh winter. Though symbolically it is celebrated as worship to god, but various customs being followed as a part of ritual is a hidden message for identification and protection of important medicinal plants and food items, which are being prepared from them and are beneficial for health especially in winter season. The following customs are



being followed in the Sair festival in Mandi district.

Worshipping *Dhanya* (rice, *Oryza sativa*):

Though this custom does not carry any medical values but this custom help creating awareness and importance of protection of newly sown *dhaan* (rice crops) pointing to importance of caring the crops among young generation. This is one of the major food consumed in hilly regions and maximum part of India.

***Durva* (*Cynodon dactylon L. Pers.*):** *Durva* is one of the wonder herb in Ayurveda though people in Mandi do not use this in diet or remedies in general. In this festival the *Durva* is only worshipped most probably it was started to mark the importance of this herb but at present people only worship it but people need to be made aware of this herb medicinal uses. Blood plays important role in homeostasis of body. During *sharad ritu* (autumn) blood becomes naturally impure², and the festival is celebrated at the juncture of *Sharad* and *Hemant ritu* this herb can be used to control mild to moderate *pitta raktaj vikriti*. *Doob* (*Durva*) is also used as a folk remedy in many parts of India for anasarca, calculus, cancer, carbuncles, convulsions, cough, cramps, cystitis, diarrhea, dropsy, dysentery, epilepsy, hemorrhoids, leucoderma, headache,

hemorrhage, hypertension, hysteria, bronchitis, asthma, tumors, measles, rubella, snakebite, sores, stones, tumors, urogenital disorders, warts, wounds, eye disorders and weak vision. It is also useful against pains, inflammations, toothache and grippe in children. The expressed juice of plant act as astringent and is applied to bleeding cuts and wounds to stop bleeding³. Studies have shown its effect as antidiabetic⁴, antioxidant⁵, anti-diarrheal⁶, Immunomodulatory⁷, Antiulcer⁸, Hepato protective⁹ and cardio protective drug.

***Jambiri Nimbu* (*citrus jambhiri*):** Citrus fruits especially *Jambiri* lemon: In the winter season people usually have an increased proportion of fats in terms of Ghrita, Oily food, Sweets in upcoming festivals. Citrus fruit especially *Jambiri* lemon which is customarily taken by elders here after meals with luke warm water. But this practice is gradually fading away. But it need to be re vitalised as this fruit is very good in reducing cholesterol and cardio protective. Moreover, its fresh juice has been reported to be beneficial in arthritis and digestive disorders¹⁰.

***Dridheh* (*Bala*) *Seda cordifolia*:** The word *Dridheh* means Strength to body. It is one of the major Ayurveda herb for general debility. The root extract of *Bala* along with



shunthi (*zingiber officinalis*), ripened coconut called as *giri* (*khoppa*), *moong daal* (*Vigna radiata*). *Sida cordifolia* is an established medicine for many ailments which are more frequent in winters like bronchial asthma¹¹, cold and flu, chills, lack of perspiration, head ache, nasal congestion, cough and wheezing¹², aching joints and bones and edema¹³. Also it helps in controlling blood sugar level¹⁴. The roots have recently been used to cure Parkinson's disease and as a food supplement for fat loss¹⁵. It is a tonic, astringent, emollient, aphrodisiac and it is used in the treatment of leucorrhoea, gonorrhoea and general debility also¹⁶⁻¹⁷. Main ingredient being *Munga dal* (*Mudga*) which is the best pulse as per Ayurveda (legumes or *shimbi dhanya*)¹⁸. It is beneficial in the regulation of gastrointestinal upset and to moisturize the dry skin in winters¹⁹. Mung beans contain balanced nutrients, including protein and dietary fiber, and significant amounts of bioactive phytochemicals. It possess good antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and antitumor activities helps in regulation of lipid metabolism²⁰⁻²¹. This is mixed with cow *Ghritha* which is a great source of vitamin A and coconut *giri* (dried coconut powder) which itself is very nutritious with anti-bacterial, antifungal,

antiviral, antioxidant properties²², also *shunthi* is added which help in proper digestion for this dish. Thus making it a complete food for winter seasons with great health benefits.

Puthkanda (Apamarg): The plant of *Apamarg* worshipped on this day. It is a symbolic practice to keep the society aware for this important medicinal herb. It is being used in the rural area of Mandi and as folk medicine in many part of India as remedy for Cough and viral infection, toothache²³. It is also used as anti-asthmatic, antitussive and in urinary calculi, influenza, piles, and bronchitis and abdominal pain²⁴⁻²⁵⁻²⁶.

Tila plant (sesamum indicum): The plant is worshipped as they are harvested in this season in order to mark the importance of protection of this crop. Later when the crops are ready during *makar Sankranti* or *lohri* festival, *Tila* and *Guda* (Jaggery) *laddu* (a type sweet dish) are prepared which have very good nutritional value and are good for winters. Moreover *Tila* is advised as *pathya* in *Hemant* and *Shishir ritu* (winter season).

Maize (baby corn): It is one of the major crop harvested in this region thus to mark its importance it is worshipped on this day. Studies have indicated that baby corn is good source of various nutrients like protein, crude fibre, carbohydrates and dietary fibres



and its nutritional quality is at par or even superior to many other commonly used vegetables²⁷. Thus worshipping it impart importance of this nutrition rich food among people.

Petha (kushmand, Benincasa hispida): It is a very good *medhya* drug (*nootropic*) mentioned in the Ayurvedic literature²⁸. *Kushmand* is described as the best among the *valli phala* in the texts²⁹. Its fruit called as *petha* help in increase of immediate memory and possess antidepressant activity³⁰. It also possess tissue protective preventive effect on colchicine induced Alzheimer's disease via direct and indirect antioxidant activity³¹. As the *sair* festival comes at the beginning of *Hemant ritu* and end of *Sharad ritu (ritu sandhi)* this fruit will help in correction of *pittaja* disorder which may have occurred during *sharad ritu*³².

DISCUSSION

Indian society is a very religious society, belief in god and worship in any form is almost a part of every Indian. Probably this seems to be a reason why worship of some crops are celebrated in order to inculcate the importance of these crops both financially by protecting the crops and having better yield and also to make people aware of the

benefits of these crops and herbs so that more people use it, plant them near their house and also include them in their daily life thus getting proper nutrition and health in name of traditions. Ayurveda emphasis on proper *Ritucharya* (season wise conduct in terms of diet, activities). As per Ayurveda in *Hemant Ritu* (winter season) one should use unctuous, sweet foods. Among cereals and pulses, new rice, green gram (*Mudaga*), etc., are mentioned to be used. Various fats, sugarcane products, *Tila* (sesame) have to be included in the diet³³⁻³⁴. Thus use of *Kushmand (petha)*, *Tila*, *Bala*, Maize, *Apamarg*, *dhanya* and *Durva* which are really beneficial especially during winters is a great example of inculcation of Indian Medical Science (Ayurveda) in the traditions.

CONCLUSION

India is a rich society with many traditional practices. In ancient times Indian system of medicine have been incorporated in them to benefit maximum people in terms of health but with time these festivals have been modified according to convenience and the customs have become just a formality, leaving the true benefits of the custom behind. As the paper discussed that if the tradition is practiced in its real sense it is

really beneficial for health hence such customs and traditional festivals should be preserved and need to be presented with their scientific aspect to young generation so as to achieve health for all target.

Acknowledgement: The authors are thankful to Director General CCRAS and to Assistant Director Incharge, RARIND, Mandi for their valuable support and guidance.



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