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Yastimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) – An important plant of Ayurvedic system of medicine

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Abstract

Ayurveda is the foundation stone of ancient medical science. *Glycyrrhiza glabra* is used in Ayurveda in the form of decoction, infusion or as lozenges. The herb possesses spermatogenetic properties. Yastimadhu churna is used to cure catarrh, cough, hoarseness, asthma, laryngitis, bronchitis and gonorrhoea.

Keywords: *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, Yastimadhu, Ayurveda

Introduction

Traditional Ayurvedic medicine is one of the important parts of the splendid cultural heritage from our ancient civilization. It is the summation of India's experience in struggling against illness through centuries. It has played an important role in prosperity of India and is still of incalculable value. With its unique and complete theoretical system, it stands firmly among the medical sciences of the world.

Glycyrrhiza glabra Linn a hardy perennial herb and undershrub, belonging to the family Fabaceae has been known in pharmacy for thousands of years as an important medicinal plant. The dried, peeled or unpeeled underground stem and roots constitute the drug known as liquorice. Liquorice extract is a constituent of cough syrups, throat lozenges and pastilles. The main chemical constituent of liquorice is glycyrrhizin and glycyrrhetic acid. These exert a powerful influence on human steroid hormone function. glycyrrhetic acid exhibits a significant and specific anti-tumour promoting activity (Bhakuni, 1990; Khare, 2000) [4, 10]. The herb is recognized all over the world as a tonic, soothes internal body surfaces, reduces muscle tension and spasms and works as a mild energizer. About two-thirds of Chinese herbal compounds incorporate liquorice.

It is cultivated in Italy, France, Russia, Germany, Spain and China. India imports the drug on a considerable scale i.e. 5000-10,000 tons from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma and Singapore (Farooqi and Sreeramu, 2001). Attempts have been made to cultivate *G. glabra* in several parts of India particularly Baramulla, Srinagar and Jammu districts of Jammu and Kashmir, Dehradun and Delhi. Its cultivation is likely to be successful in the temperate Himalayas and in the hilly districts of South India.

Materials and methods

Crude herbal drugs were collected from the crude drug dealers and deposited in the Herbarium of Department of Botany, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. In order to verify the efficacy of the traditional herbal medicine, information was collected from many Vaidyas and Hakims practicing Ayurveda.

Results and Discussion

In India, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* is popularly known as Jethimadhu, Yastimadhu, Jestimadhu or Mulehatti. It is widely used in Ayurvedic system of medicine.

The renowned classical texts of Ayurveda have described different uses of the plant

- 1. Sushruta Samhita:** Root yields poisonous drug.
- 2. Bhava Prakash:** It is cooling, tasty, useful in ophthalmia, deranged bile, oedema, removes pimples and dermal ulcers, consumption, allays thirst and is used for hair treatment.

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3. **Madanavinodam:** It causes heaviness, increases strength and vigour, useful in deranged bile.
4. **Dhanvantarinighantu:** It is tasty, refrigerant, cures deranged bile, increases strength, cures deranged phlegm and consumption, works as antivenom, alleviates thirst.
5. **Kaiyadevanighantu:** It is sweet, invigorating, cooling, improves skin colour and voice, beneficial for hair, removes deranged wind, bile and phlegm, cures wounds, consumption, oedema and pimples.
6. **Madananighantu:** It is tasty, refrigerant, tonic, cures bleeding tendency and dermal ulcers, improves voice and useful in ophthalmia.
7. **Rajanighantu:** It is sweet, cooling, unctuous, appetizer, useful in ophthalmia, deranged bile, oedema, dermal wounds, allays thirst, increases strength and vigour.
8. **Nighantu Ratnakaram:** There are two types – terrestrial and aquatic. It is sweet, refrigerant, appetizer, useful in ophthalmia, oedema, consumption, dermal ulcers, improves voice, removes bleeding tendency, thirst, fatigue, impurities in blood, newly formed ulcer and works as antivenom. (Dutt, 1989; Dash, 1991) [8, 6].

Ayurvedic medicines composed solely of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (Yastimadhu) are

1. **Yastimadhu Churna:** a demulcent, expectorant and slightly laxative. It is taken in a dose of 20-60 g with honey thrice a day for the treatment of inflammatory affections, catarrh, cough, hoarseness, asthma, laryngitis, bronchitis and gonorrhoea.
2. **Jestamadh Shira:** An expectorant, laxative and demulcent, used for sore throat, cough, hoarseness and bronchial affections. (Pathak, 1970; Chitale, 1997).

There are several preparations of Yastimadhu, as recommended by Ayurvedic practitioners

1. In case of pain in head, sides and shoulders, the parts are sprinkled with milk and decoction of Yastimadhu.
2. 640 g of ghee is cooked with 80 g paste of Yastimadhu and 10.24 litres Amalaka (*Emblia officinalis* Gaert.) juice. It is a good remedy for epilepsy.
3. Anaemia is cured by taking decoction of Yastimadhu with honey.
4. Oedema is destroyed by applying paste of Yastimadhu, tila (*Sesamum indicum* Linn.) and milk with butter. (Sengupta, 1984) [12].
5. Pain of the accidental wound is removed by applying locally warm ghee mixed with Yastimadhu.
6. Paste of Yastimadhu mixed with Nimba (*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss.) leaves, acts as wound cleaning.
7. Ghee mixed with Yastimadhu pacifies burns caused by alkali.
8. In corneal opacity, Yastimadhu extract is used with honey as collyrium.
9. Cow's milk mixed with Yastimadhu and sugar promotes lactation.
10. 10 g of Yastimadhu powder mixed with ghee and honey followed by intake of milk acts as an aphrodisiac. (Devraj, 1985) [7].
11. Yastimadhu mixed with sugar is used for urticaria.
12. Yastimadhu mixed with honey is used as pressed snuff for treatment of hemicrania.
13. Powder of equal part of Yastimadhu and rhizome of Katuki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*) 1-3 g bruised in 50 ml water, taken with 5-10 g raw sugar twice a day is a good remedy for heart diseases.
14. In case of fistula in ano, paste of tila (*Sesamum indicum*),

- Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) leaf and root of Yastimadhu, prepared in milk is applied externally. (Sharma, 1996) [13].
15. Phthisis or tuberculosis can be treated by taking powdered root of Yastimadhu and wood of Rakta Chandan (*Pterocarpus santalinus* Linn.) with milk thrice a day.
16. 3 g of powdered root of Yastimadhu boiled in 250 ml milk is taken twice a day in throat diseases. (Bakshi, et al., 2001) [3].
17. In case of pleurisy, fine powder of equal part of bark of Arjuna (*Terminalia arjuna* Linn.), root of Yastimadhu and Kustha (*Saussurea lappa* C.B. Clarke.) is given with milk twice a day.
18. If there is dry cough associated with burning sensation, then a tablet prepared from Yastimadhu, pepper and dry grapes is given.
19. Unctuous enema is given with oil cooked with Yastimadhu in case of scrotal enlargement.
20. Yastimadhu 1g and aconite 250mg are pounded finely and mixed with mustard powder. Dropping it in nostrils removes all types of headache (Anonymous, 1963; 1986) [1, 2].

Conclusion

India is a proud possessor of an impressive system of medicine viz. Ayurveda. Ayurvedic system of medicine is more and permanently effective than Allopathic medicine. Ayurveda is mainly based on the use of plants. *Glycyrrhiza glabra* is one of the most extensively investigated herbs. The herb is immunostimulatory and is used in a wide range of health conditions. Here, attempts are made to document various medicinal uses of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*.

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