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ETHNO-BOTANICAL ASPECTS OF DIET SUPPLEMENTARY FOOD PLATNS OF JHUNJHUNU DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

Jhunjhunu district is situated in the north-eastern part of Rajasthan. Major part of this district falls in the category of desert. Due to scanty and erratic rainfall, famines occur frequently. In addition to basic food, a large number of supplementary food sources are in practice in this district. During famine the substitutes resorted to as food materials are the grains of *Cenchrus biflorus*, *C. prieuril*, *C. setigerus* and *Dactyloctenium aegyptium.* Seeds of *Acacia senegal*, *Indigofera linifolia* and *Holoptelea integrifolia* are pounded and mixed with flour of 'Bajra' or other food grains. Seeds of *Citrullus colocynthis* and *C. lanatus* are grounded and mixed with 'Bajra' flour to prepare bread. Local people also roast or fry these seeds with chillies and eat. Leaves of *Aloe barbedense* are used as vegetables. Twigs of *Portulaca oleracea, Trianthema portulacastrum*, *Amaranthus vividis* and *Chenopodium album* are used as vegetables. Young fruits of *Capparis decidua*, *Acacia senegal*, *Bauhinia racemosa*, *Citrullus lanatus*, *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, *Moringa oleifera*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Momordica balsamina* and *M. dioca* are cooked as vegetables.

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic people have searched several "miracle plants" of immense food and medicinal values to the modern civilization. The primitive cultivars and wild relatives of crop plants preserved by the indigenous ethnic people may hold the "genetic key" of many valuable miracle crops of the future. In 1973, an American Scientist discovered two obscure strains of Sorghum (*Sorghum vulgare*) possessing germ plasm for high protein content from the farms of Ethiopian tribals. One gene from a single Ethiopian traditional variety of barely plant now protects California's 160 million US $ annual barley crop from "yellow dwarf virus". A useless wild wheat plant grown by the indigenous community of Turkey was used to give disease resistance to commercial wheat varieties worth 50 million $ annually to the US alone. Ethnobotany, as an organized discipline of study in India, is rather young, just about seven decades old (Jain 1992, Jain et al. 1984, Jain 1997). Some specific uses of the wild plants by the local inhabitants have been discussed in this paper.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An attempt has been made to describe ethnobotanical use of wild plants of Jhunjhunu district. In order to gather varied and abundant information of local plant uses, a number of urban, sub-urban and rural places of Jhunjhunu district were visited. Both men and women of different castes, ages and origins were interviewed to collect valuable information. This undoubtedly helped in collecting a rich variety of useful domestic recipes in vogue in Jhunjhunu district.

STUDY AREA

Jhunjhunu district is situated in north-eastern part of Rajasthan, between $27^0 38'$ to $28^0 31'$ north latitudes and $75^0 02'$ to $76^0 06'$ east longitudes. A part of this district falls in the category of desert and due to scanty and erratic rainfall, famines occur frequently. In addition to basic food, a large number of supplementary food sources are in practice in this district.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSISON

SUPPLEMENTARY CEREALS DURING SCARCITY PERIODS

During famine or the period of scarcity of primary crop plants, the substitutes resorted to as food materials are the grains of *Cenchrus* species viz, *C. biflorus* (Bhurat), *C. prieurti* (Lambio-bhurat), *C. setigerus* (Kala-dhaman) and *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (Makro). These are collected for being used during lean period.

SEEDS OF SOME LOCAL PLANTS MIXED WITH CEREALS

Seeds of *Acacia senegal* ('Kumta'), *Indigofera linifolia* and *Holoptelea integrifolia* (Monkey's bread) are pounded and mixed with flour obtained from 'Bajra' or other food grains. Seeds of *Citrullus colocynthis* (Tumba) and *C. lanatus* ('Mateera') are washed several times with saline water to remove the bitter principles and then dried, grounded and mixed with 'Bajra' flour to be made into bread and taken as a supplementary food. Local people also roast or fry them with chillies and eat. The bark of *Acacia leucophloea* (Aroonj) and *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri) are pounded and mixed with maize flour and consumed by poor people during periods of severe famine.

SPECIAL FOOD PREPARATIONS

The fleshy leaves of *Aloe barbedense* (Gwar pattha) are eaten either raw with common salt or used as vegetables. It is also made into 'Ladoos' (Special sweet preparation) with 'deshi ghee' and sugar.

Vegetables

Young shoots of *Portulaca oleracea* (Kulfa), *Trianthema portulacastrum* (Satee), *Amaranthus viridis* (Chaulii) and *Chenopodium album* (Bathua) etc. are used as vegetables. Young fruits of *Capparis* (Tindsi), *Leptadenia pyrotechnica* (Kheemp), *Moringa oleifera* (Sainjana), *Prosopis cineraria*, *Momordica balsamina* (Safed Karela) are also cooked as vegetables.

Fruits

Ripe fruits of *Aegle marmelos* (Bel), *Azadirachta indica* (neem), *Bauhinia racemosa*, *Capparis deciduas*, *Cirullus lanatus*, *Cordia dichotoma*, *Cucumis melo*, *Salvadora oleioides* ('Jhal or Piloo'), *Zizyphus nummularia* (Bor) etc. are eaten raw by local people. Both young (Sangri) as well as mature and dried (Khoka) fruits of *Propopis cineraria* (Khejri) are also eaten by local people and sometimes mature dried ones are stored and consumed during scarcity of food.

Sources of vegetable oil

Eruca vesicaria (Tara-mira) and *Sesamum indicum* (Til) are cultivated for obtaining edible oil by crushing their seeds. The oil cakes are also used as milch animal feed.

MISCELLANEOUS FOOD PLANTS

Flower buds of *Prosopis cineraria* are consumed by children with a great interest. The tubers of *Cyperus rotundus* (Motha) are roasted and eaten, often these are dried and powdered and mixed with the flour of 'Bajra' and 'Jowar'.

The whole plants of *Trianthema portulastrum* (Kala satta), *Gisekia pharnaceoides* (Sureli) and *Portulaca oleracea* (Lunkia) are eaten because of their saline taste, but cause paralysis when consumed in excess.

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