



Research Article

Traditional uses of *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi)

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Abstract: Tulsi often called the “Sacred basil” has been widely used in religious rites by Hindus, since Vedic times. Even now almost every Indian house has a Tulsi plant right in front and people usually start their daily chores after worshipping it. It is of great medicinal importance and is used as a household remedy for a variety of ailments.

Keyword: *Ocimum sanctum*, Sacred basil, Traditional uses.

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic value: This plant is believed to be very sacred by Hindu communities. Tulsi is also referred to as Haripriya by people residing in Khatana forest of Western Ghats which means very dear to Lord Vishnu. There are some indigenous people residing in Karanjveri and Kanfi villages of Khatana forest, and Waghasi forest in Rambhas and Vanarchond villages of Western Ghats who believe that the evil spirit cannot haunt a place

where this plant is grown. Hindus worship this plant in the morning as well as in the evening by placing oil or a Ghee lamp in front of it. According to Hindu tradition, a dead body is placed before a Tulsi plant or the plant is carried with the dead body to the cremation ground and planted at the funeral place in remembrance by many Hindu tribes reported by Kumar et. al. (2005). This plant is never burnt by any Hindu community.

Tulsi is an aromatic plant and has carminative, antipyretic, diaphoretic properties. Leaves, flowers and sometimes the whole plant is used in medicinal preparations. Juice of leaves is a domestic remedy for infantile cough, cold, bronchitis, dysentery and diarrhoea. Infusion of leaves is given in malaria fever, as a stomachic in gastric disease of children and hepatic infection reported by Chopra (1953). It improves appetite, infection of the ear, destroys intestinal worms and cures skin diseases such as itches, ringworm, leprosy, ulcer.

It has antibacterial, antiasthmatic properties reported by Sharma et al (1987), Palid (1983). In Ayurvedic literature one can find several references mentioning the usefulness of Tulsi in the treatment of all kinds of fevers reported by Nadkarni and Nadkarni (1996), Kurupe et al. (1979). It is one of the ingredients of the preparations like Tulasyadi thailam, Manasamitravatakam, Seetajwarari kasayam, Vilvadi gulika, Bala thailam etc. reported by Prajapathi (2003).

Distribution: The plant could be seen in almost all the Hindu household. The plant also occurs in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, China, Thailand and Malaysia reported by Mishra and Vaisya (1997).

Part used: Whole plant, root, leaf, and seed.

English- Holy basil, Sacred basil, Hindi –Kalatulsi, Tulsi, Bangla -Tulsi, Krishna tulsi, Kural Gujarati-Tulsi, Talasi, Kannad–Vishnu tulsi, Kari tulsi, Sritulsi, Tulashi-gida Malayalam -Tulsi, Trittava, Karuttatrttavu, Niella tirtua, Krishna tulsi, Panjabi - Ban tulsi, Tulsi, Tamil-Karuttulaci, Tulci, Telgu-Tulasi, Gaggera-chettu, Kondarki-Tulsi, Marathi -Tulasa, Tulsi by Anonymous (2001).

Types of tulsi studies by Ambasta (1994), Anonymous (2001). There are two varieties of Tulsi which are commonly found. The green type (Sri tulsi) and purple type (Krishna tulsi). They both are varieties of *Ocimum sanctum* Linn or *Ocimum tenuiflorum* (Figure 1) the other types of Tulsi which are available are as follows –

***Ocimum americanum* Linn.** English-Holy basil, Hindi –Vantulsi, Bengali – Kala tulsi has greenish leaves and white flowers.

***Ocimum canum* Sims** English- Holy

basil, Hindi- Vantulsi, Bengali – Kala tulsi.

***Ocimum basilicum* Linn.** English - Sweet Basil, Common basil Hindi - Babui tulsi, gulal tulsi, Kali tulsi, Mamari and Marua.

***Ocimum gratissimum* Linn.** English - Shrubby Basil, Lemon basil, Large basil Hindi – Ramtulsi, Bantulsi

***Ocimum kilimandscharicum* Guerke.** English - Camphor basil, Hindi - Kapur tulsi.



Figure 1. *Ocimum sanctum* Linn.

History and traditional uses:

In Bhav Prakash, its various Sanskrit names and medicinal properties are elaborately described in the following Shlokas writing by Mishra and Vaisya (1997).

Shlokas

तुलसी सुरसा गाम्या सुलभा बहुमन्जरी ।
अपेतराक्षसी गौरी भूतघ्नी देवदुन्दुभिः ।
तुलसी कटुका तिक्ता हृद्योष्णा दाहपित्तकृत् ।
दीपनी कुष्ठकृच्छ्रास्त्रपार्श्वरूक्कफवातजित् ॥

शुक्ला कृष्णा च तुलसी गुर्णस्तुल्या प्रकीर्तिता ।।
(भावप्रकाश 62-63)

Sanskrit name and uses: Tulsi, Surasa, Gramya, Sulbha, Bahumanjari, Apetarakshari, Gauri, Bhutaghnnee, Devadundubhi.

Tulsi has Katu, tikt, rasayukt, which is beneficial for the heart, ushna, dah, pitt, kark, agni deepaknam, kushth, mutrakruchhh, raktavikar, pasali ki pida, kaph, vayuvikar.

Medicinal properties: The plant is bitter, acrid aromatic, stomachic, demulcent, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, expectorant, febrifuge, and vermifuge. It is useful in treating cardiopathy, blood disorders, leucoderma, asthma, bronchitis, catarrhal, fever, otalgia, hepatopathy, vomiting, lumbago, hiccough, gastropathy in children, genitourinary disorders, ringworm, verminosis and skin diseases reported by Prajapathi (2003). Its seeds are mucilaginous and demulcent and are given to treat disorders of the genitourinary system. The infusion of the leaves is used as a stomachic in gastric disorders of children. The fresh root ground with water is applied to bee and wasp stings and bites from worms and leeches. The bruised fresh roots, stems and leaves are applied to the bites from mosquitoes. A decoction of the root is given as a diaphoretic in malaria fever.

Ayurvedic properties: The pharmacodynamics of Tulasi has been described in Ayurvedic literature reported by Database on Medicinal plants (Anonymous, 2001) which is as follows -

Rasa - Katu, Tikta, Guna - Laghu, Ruksha, Veerya - Ushna, Vipaka - Katu, Doshaghnata - Kaphavatashamaka. Rogaghnata - Kachchu, Dadru, Shiroroga, Karnashoola, Vedana, Akshepayukta vikara, Agnimadya, Vishtambha, Krimiroga, Hriddaurbalya, Raktavikara, Kasa, Shavasa, Parshwahoola, Yakshma, Mootrakrichchhra, Shukrameha, Twagvikara, Vatashlaishmika, Jwara, Pratisyaya, Vishmajwara, Sheetajwara, Visha, Daurbalya. Karma - Jantughna, Vedanahara, Shothahara, Twagdosahara, Shirovirechan, Akshepashamaka, Deepana, Pachana, Anulomana, Krimighna, Hridya, Raktashodhaka, Kasahara, Shwasahara, Kshayanashaka, Mootrala, Shukrala, Jwaraghna, Sheetaprashamana, Vishaghna, Balya.

Doses- Juice 5-10ml, powder 1-3 gm.

Formulation and preparation:

Ayurvedic Formulations, Tulsi is used in various Ayurvedic formulations such as Jwarasamharaka rasa, Tribhuvana kirti rasa, Mukta Pancamrta rasa, Mahajvarankusa rasa, Darvi taila, Panchanana taila, Mahatrinaka taila, Manasamitra Vataka Similar results were reported by Anonymous (1996), Anonymous (1999), Anonymous (2001), Anonymous (2003).

Formulations used in folklore and traditional medicines:

It has been widely used in folklore and tribal medicine for the treatment of the various diseases. Some of these uses are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Traditional uses of *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi)

S.No.	Tribals/Localities	Diseases	Remedies	Studies by
1.	Bundi district Rajsthan	Kasa (Cough)	Decoction 5-6 flower, gud (jaggery) and turmeric before going to bed.	Shakhava and Batra (2006)
		Mouth sores	Leaves are chewed.	
		Eczema	Paste of Tulsi leaves is applied to the affected area.	
		To kill lice	Paste made with the leaves is spread on a cloth and massaged into the scalp for an hour to kill lice.	
2.	Tharu Tribe of Devipatan (UP)	Foetus is protected from evil eyes	Paste made from the leaves is applied over navel of the mother to protect the foetus from evil eyes	Kumar et al. (2006)
3.	Rural Population Haryana	Pain in Delivery, period pain	Extract from the leaves is taken with gud (jaggery) and cow's milk to relieve pain after delivery	Yadav et al. (2006)
4.	Sringer taluk Karnataka	Common Cold, Cough, Congestion	Extract from the leaves is administered orally with honey	Prakash and Krishnappa (2006)
		Scabies, Measles, Itching, ringworms	A mixture of salt and ground leaves is rubbed into the affected area	
		Body ache, toothache	Tulsi leaves and clove leaves are massaged on the affected area	
5.	Palliyar tribe in Srivilliputhur, Western Ghat, India	Fever	Ten grams of freshly cleaned root is continuously boiled in 250 ml of water along with equal quantities of fresh leaves of Vishnukarandi (<i>Evolvulus alsinoides</i> (L.) L.) and Tulsi (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.) to produce 50 ml of decoction. The filtered decoction is taken orally twice a day for 2-3 days to control fever.	Muthukumarasamy et al. (2004)
6.	A region of Konkan	Vomiting and Diarrhoea	Tulsi seed is rubbed with cow's milk and taken orally.	Nadkarni and Nadkarni (1996)
		Remittent fever	Decoction of leaves with the flower of <i>Careya arborea</i> and Black Pepper is taken orally.	
		Skin diseases (itches, Ringworm, Leprosy, bad blood, etc.)	Persons affected with skin diseases, should drink the juice of tulsi.	
		Croup, catarrh, Bronchitis and Diarrhea	Dried Tulsi leaves are used in a decoction as a domestic remedy.	

7.	Local People of district Chitrakoot Region U.P.	Dysentery	5-6 leaves mixed with 10 gms sugar are given to children orally.	Studies by authors
		Malarial fever	Tulsi leaves, Kalimirch, Neem leaves, Chiraita (whole plant), Dhaniya seeds and Guduchi stem & bark are all used to make a decoction and is taken once a day in the morning for 5 days.	
		Common Cold and Cough	Tulsi leaves with Kalimirch are used to make a decoction and taken orally by the patient.	
		Skin diseases	Tulsi leaves, Kalimirch, Neem leaves and Garlic are mixed and applied to the affected area.	
		Common fever	Tulsi leaves, Kalimirch, Ginger and Haldi are used to make a decoction and administered orally.	
		Stomach pain (Acidity)	A powder made from Tulsi seeds and mixed with 10 drops of Ginger juice is taken twice a day for 2 days.	
8.	Western, U.P.	Spermatorrhoea	10 gms of Tulsi seeds are taken with 20 ml honey once a day for 5 days	Khan et al. (2005)
9.	Tribe in Bargarh district, Orissa	Ulcer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paste made using tulsi seeds is applied to cure the ulcer. A paste made using the leaves (1/2 teaspoon) is also taken orally twice a day to cure the ulcer. 	Sen and Behera (2003)

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