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**MEDICINAL PLANTS MENTIONED IN THE HOLY BIBLE AND IN SIDDHA SYSTEM  
AND THEIR ETHANOMEDICINAL STUDIES**

*Dr. Shyamala Rajkumar, Dr. J. Annathai, Dr. S. Natarajan*

*Siddha Central Research Institute*

*Chennai, India*

**ABSTRACT**

Many medicinal plants have been mentioned in the Holy Bible. This article surveys the medicinal plants mentioned in the Holy Bible and in Siddha Medicine and its ethno botanical importance. A list of 15 medicinal plant species, parts used, habit and habitat, therapeutic used and pharmacological actions is presented. This review focus the rich traditional knowledge of medicinal plants used in Siddha Medicine. It also evinced the exchange of medicinal plant knowledge in treating ailments between the countries.

Key words: Bible, Medicinal plants, Siddha medicine, Ethno botany

**INTRODUCTION**

The practice of medicinal plants has existed since prehistoric times. There are three ways in which the plants are being useful to mankind. The first is as food, then as agents in the synthesis of drugs and thirdly as organic molecules found in plants which may be used as models for synthetic drugs. The doctrine of signatures<sup>1</sup> reveals about the usage of plants, respective of the shape of human organs and their curative properties like Liverwort, Toothwort etc. Now the medicinal properties of plants involve collaborative effects that can include Ethno botanist, Anthropologist, Pharmaceutical Chemist and Physicians. Many modern medicines had their origin from medicinal plants and the example extends like Aspirin from Willow bark<sup>2</sup>, Vincristine and Vinblastine from *Catharanthus roseus* etc<sup>3</sup>. The Holy Bible<sup>4</sup> is a book of documentation. Though the people of old testament are nomads and were wandering in the wilderness they have documented their existence, traditions, medical terminologies, old medical practices, dietetics and medicinal uses of the plants in rocks, skin of animals and palm leaves by symbolic representations. The use of Tamil words in the Holy Bible for the commodities like ginger and cinnamon are identical. The foreign visitors like Ptolemy Pliny, furnish us valuable information

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regarding the export trade of drugs, spices and animal products like ivory, pearl etc. to other civilized parts of the world. The Arabs and Greeks also seemed to have kept a busy trade with South India. The Historian P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar in his works on 'The Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture' and 'History of the Tamils' says that medicinal products like ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper etc. were sent from South India to Rome. Pliny had good cause to complain of the heavy drain of Roman gold to south India in buying costly pearls, ivories, spices, drugs etc.<sup>5</sup>. The findings of Roman coins dating from the reign of Augustus buried at different parts of Tamil country and the records of foreign visitors bear ample testimony to the fact that commercial and cultural relations existed between South India and the civilized world. The Academy of Tamil Literature flourished for a considerable period during the Pre – Christian era. Siddha medicine of Dravidian origin, developed by Siddhars, is very ancient and unique and is presently practiced in Southern parts of India. Siddha material medica is vast and consists of herbals, metals, minerals and animal products. Herbal remedies are the first and foremost in alleviating the illness. 'Vērpāru taḷai pāru meñcinakāl parpam centuram pāraei'<sup>6</sup> According to the above saying to start the treatment first prescribe the medicine from plant origin and if the condition worse, then treat with high order drugs like Parpam and Centuram. Medicinal plants play a vital role in the treatment as well as in the preparation of high order drugs. In the Holy Bible there are ample references about medicinal plants and single drugs which are being used in Siddha system. It is a maiden attempt of the authors to correlate the descriptions mentioned in the Holy Bible with botanical identity.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Detailed information about 15 various species of Ethnobotanical importance mentioned in the Holy Bible and Siddha literature was collected. Plant species were arranged in order of Tamil name, English name, Hebrew name, Botanical name, Family name, Habit and Habitat, Part used and Medicinal uses. The references are first mentioned as in Holy Bible and then as in Siddha literature.

**RESULTS**

1. Tamil Name	<b>Ilavankam</b>
English Name	Clove
Hebrew name	Tsiporen
Botanical Name	<i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> (L.) Merr. & Perry <sup>7</sup>
Family	Myrtaceae

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Habit	Shrub
Habitat	Native of Moluccas. Cultivated in south India
Part used	Dried floral bud
Medicinal uses	Used in flatulence and dyspepsia

**References from the Holy Bible:** Clove is one of the ingredients to make the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:24).

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Pitta mayakkampētiyoḍuvāntiyumpōm  
cuttavirattakkaḍuppuntōṅṅumō – metta  
**ilavaṅkaka**ṇḍavarukkērcukamākum  
malamaṅkēkaḍḍumeṇavāḷttu”<sup>8</sup>

In Siddha, clove is used to cure diarrhoea, vomiting, dryness of mouth, excessive thirst and toothache.

**Pharmacological action**

Appetizer, Anti spasmodic, Carminative.

2.Tamil Name	<b>Vacampu</b>
English Name	Sweat Flag
Hebrew name	Kenehbosem
Botanical Name	<i>Acorus calamus</i> L. <sup>9</sup>
Family	Araceae
Habit	Herb
Habitat	Throughout India and Ceylon, in marshes, wild or cultivated.
Part used	Rhizome
Medicinal uses	Used in dysentery in children, insectifuge in snake bite

**References from the Holy Bible :**

**Calamus** is mentioned as an article of Syrian commerce (Ezekiel 27:19). Vacampu has a rich ethno botanical history dating back possibly to the time of Moses in the old testament of the

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Bible and in early Greek and Roman medicine . It is used in fragrant essence in perfume oil.  
(Exodus 30:23)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

**Vacampinaipodiceytudatuvinilvaikalu**  
**Micaiyenappiraltevanaiyakalume<sup>10</sup>**

In Siddha system it is used in the treatment of worm infestation, stammering of speech, epilepsy and for poisonous sting.

**Pharmacological action**

Carminative, Disinfectant, Germicide

3. Tamil Name	:	<b>Kottumalli</b>
English Name	:	Coriander
Hebrew name	:	Gad
Botanical Name	:	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L. <sup>11</sup>
Family	:	Umbelliferae
Habit	:	Herb
Habitat	:	Throughout India
Part used	:	Seed
Medicinal uses	:	Used as carminative and appetizer

**References from the Holy Bible :** The manna (heavenly food) looked like the seeds of **coriander**  
(Exodus 16:31 & Numbers 11:7).

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“**Kottumalliveppamkuḷirkāyccalpittamantañ**  
**carttivikkaltākamoḍutātunadḍam – kattiyelum**  
**vātavikārmaḍarvaṅkarttapiviraṇam**  
**pūtalattillātakaṅṅumpōṅṅu”<sup>12</sup>**

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Good digestive, improves taste, gives relief to hiccup and thirst, increases semen, cures mouth ulcer.

**Pharmacological action**

Appetizer, Carminative, Diuretic

4. Tamil Name	<b>Cīrakam</b>
English Name	Cumin seed
Hebrew name	Kammon
Botanical Name	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L. <sup>13</sup>
Family	Umbelliferae
Habit	Shrub
Habitat	Cultivated throughout India except Bengal and Assam and the chief areas reported are Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.
Part used	Seed
Medicinal uses	Useful in dyspepsia and diarrhoea

**References from the Holy Bible :** Cumin seeds were mentioned in the book of Matthew, in the teachings of Jesus Christ regarding one tenth of our earnings to charity (Mathews 23:23)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Vāntiyarucikuṇmamvāinōiypilīkam  
pēntirumalkallaḍaippilāñcaṇamuḍ – cērntakammal  
Ācaṇakudāriyeṇumantakkirakaṇṇyum  
cīrakattainītinamun tin”<sup>14</sup>

It cures stomach ache, liver disease, urolithiasis, fever and gives coolth to eyes.

**Pharmacological action**

Appetizer, Carminative, Stimulant.

5. Tamil Name	<b>Vellaipōntu</b>
English Name	Garlic
Hebrew name	Shum
Botanical Name	<i>Allium sativum</i> L. <sup>15</sup>

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Family	Liliaceae
Habit	Herb
Habitat	Widely cultivated in India
Part used	Bulb
Medical uses	Fever, Cough, Ear ache

**References from the Holy Bible :** Israelites used **garlic** as food in Egypt (Numbers 11:5)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

Canniyotuvātantalainōyutāḷvali  
maṅṅivarunīrkōvaivaṅcītam – aṅṅamē  
vuḷḷullikkānpāivuḷaimōlarōkamumpōm  
**veḷḷuḷḷitannalveruṇḍu** [16]

Used to cure chronic cough, dyspnoea, dropsy and anorexia,

**Pharmacological action**

Expectorant, Carminative, Diuretic, Tonic.

6. Tamil Name	<b>Attippalam</b>
English Name	Fig
Hebrew name	Teenah
Botanical Name	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L. <sup>17</sup>
Family	Moraceae
Habit	Tree
Habitat	Throughout India
Part used	Fruit
Medical uses	Menorrhagia, Haemoptysis

**References from the Holy Bible :** In Biblical time **figs** were eaten fresh, dried or pressed into cakes (I Samuel 25:19, 30:12). Jesus made frequent use of the fig trees for illustration especially in the case of barren fig tree to teach spiritual fruitfulness (Matthew 21:19) A cake made of figs has been applied to the pilavai (carbuncle) of King Hezekiah for cure. (Isaiah 38:21)

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**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Erattamuṇḍakkumiḷaittameyyaittērañ  
Curattilāmaveppaittolaikkum – curatta  
Mūlattaikkaḍituḷumvaṇṇikabattontam  
Pulattatacaiyattippalam”<sup>18</sup>

In Siddha Attippalamanapagu which is considered to be useful in the prevention of nutritional anaemia. It also has laxative property.

**Pharmacological action** : Haematinic, Laxative

7.Tamil Name	<b>MatulaiPalam</b>
English Name	Pomegranate
Hebrew name	: Rimmon
Botanical Name	<i>Punica granatum</i> L. <sup>19</sup>
Family	Punicaceae
Habit	Tree
Habitat	Cultivated in many parts of India
Part used	Fruit
Medical uses	Cardiac tonic, Haematinic

**References from the Holy Bible :** Pomegranate juice was enjoyed as a cool drink and as wine (Song of Solomon 8:2)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

Veḍikkuvīḷpaḷakukuvīpaḷattaiṅkimelliyacīlaikaḍḍi  
Kaḍukkenappiḷintukonḍukaṇḍucarkkaraiyun  
Kuḍittiḍaveppumāruṅkuḷirntiḍumaṅkamellam  
Vaḍittanaṅmoliyināleimātuḷampalattincāre<sup>20</sup>

In Siddha it is administrated to cure fever due Alal humour, all types of diarrhoea, bleeding piles, excessive thirst and anaemia. Increases semen and gives vitality. In Siddha Matulai manapaguis good for Hyper emesis gravidoram and in the prevention of nutritional anaemia.

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**Pharmacological action** : Coolth, Astringent, Styptic

8. Tamil name	<b>Tirātcaip palam.</b>
English Name	Grapes
Hebrew name	Debash
Botanical Name	<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L. <sup>21</sup>
Family	Vitaceae
Habit	Climber
Habitat	Cultivated in many parts of India especially in the north-west
Part used	Fruit
Medicinal uses	Haematinic, Laxative

**References from the Holy Bible** : The Israelites found enormous clusters of **grapes** growing in Canaan. (Numbers 13:23)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Vepparucitākamviraṇaṅcuvācakayam  
Eyppadaiyapittamerattmpittaṅ – ceppum  
Maḍimantammēkammataṁūrccaiyumpōṅ  
**Koḍimuntarikkaṇikkukru** <sup>22</sup>

The raisins (dry grapes) have laxative property. It is administered for fever, anaemia, cough, jaundice, removes mouth dryness and abnormal taste. It's a good cardiac tonic.

**Pharmacological action**

Laxative, Diuretic, Nutritive, Coolth

9. Tamil Name	<b>Pēriccam palam</b>
English Name	Dates
Hebrew name	Tamar
Botanical Name	<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> L. <sup>23</sup>
Family	Palmae
Habit	Tree

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Habitat	Cultivated and self sown in sind and south Punjab
Part used	Fruit
Medicinal uses	Asthma, Chest complaints and cough

**References from the Holy Bible :** The wandering Israelites reached Elim where there were seventy palm trees (Exodus 15:27). When Jesus entered Jerusalem and the people kept the palm leaves on his way (John 12:13). The date palm flourished throughout the near East, especially around the Nile River and the Red sea. Bethany was called the 'House of dates' and Jericho 'the city of palm trees'.

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Pērīntēṅṅkaṅikkuppittamakamūrccaicuram  
Nīrānta yam neḍuntākam – pērā  
Erattapittamnīriḷiviḷaippaṅamarōci  
Vūrattamalakkaḍumaṅumōtu <sup>24</sup>

In many Siddha preparations **palm dates** are being used. It is used in fever, polydipsia and constipation.

**Pharmacological action**

Aphrodisiac, Febrifuge, Laxative, and Nutritive.

10. Tamil Name	:	<b>Vattumaikottai</b>
English Name	:	Almond
Hebrew name	:	Shaked
Botanical Name	:	<i>Prunus amygdalus</i> <sup>25</sup>
Family	:	Rosaceae
Habit	:	Tree
Habitat	:	Cultivated in the cooler parts of Punjab and Kashmir
Part used	:	Kernel
Medicinal uses	:	Used as Stimulant and Nervine tonic

**References from the Holy Bible :** **Almond** nuts were carried to Egypt by Joseph brothers (Genesis 43:11). The holy lamp stand cups are like almond flowers. (Exodus 23:33). When Aaron's rod budded, it brought forth almonds (Numbers 17:8)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

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Aḍappamvitaiyāmvātumaipparuppinālai  
MuḍarperiyaKaṇpaḍalammāruñ – caḍakkenavē  
Puṇmēṛkoḷuppakalumpōkamumvuṇḍakumeṇa  
Muṇmēṛpukalvārmakiḷntu <sup>26</sup>

The Kernels are good for eye ailments, heals sores, corrects hoarseness of voice and increases semen.

**Pharmacological action**

Aphrodisiac, Demulcent, Emollient, Nutrient

11. Tamil Name	<b>Akilkattai</b>
English Name	Sweet scented wood
Hebrew name	Ahalim
Botanical Name	<i>Aquilaria malaccensis</i> Lam. <sup>27</sup>
Family	Thymelaeaceae
Habit	Tree
Habitat	Himalayas, Bhutan, parts of Bengal and in hilly forest of Assam
Part used	Heart Wood
Medicinal uses	Diarrhoea, Vomitting, Snake bite

**References from the Holy Bible** :Mentioned as one of the ingredients of anointed oil (Psalms 45:8), applied to body of Jesus Christ along with other perfumes <sup>4</sup>

**References from the Siddha Text :**

Taḷarntaviruttarukkāntakkamaṇattal  
Vuḷaintacuramanaittumōḍum – vaḷarntikaḷum  
Mānē !**akirpukaikkuvāntiyarōcakampōm**  
Tānētaḷarcciyaruñcāṛru <sup>28</sup>

In Siddha system, it is used in many oil preparations and it is used as an external application in the treatment of sinusitis, headache. The smoke of the bark gives relief to fever, vomiting and tastelessness.

**Pharmacological action**

Cholagogue, Deabsorbent, Stimulant, Carminative, Aphrodisiac

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12. Tamil Name	<b>Vellaippōllam (Valentira Polam)</b>
English Name	Myrrh
Hebrew name	Mor
Botanical Name	<i>Commiphora myrrha</i> <sup>29</sup>
Family	Burseraceae
Habit	Tree
Habitat	A native of Arabia and of the African coast of the Red Sea
Part used	Gum Resin
Medicinal uses	Amennorrhoea and uterine affections

**References from the Holy Bible** : It is used as a domestic perfume (Proverb7:17), for purification (ritual) of women (Esther2:12), as a burial spice (John 19:39). **Myrrh** is one of the gift's presented to baby Jesus and mother Mary by the three kings (Matthew 2:10 - 12). Ishmaelite came from Gilead with spicery, balm and myrrh (Genesis37:25).

**References from the Siddha Text :**

Cūllaikayarōkamcoṟikarappānkuṁmamivai  
Mēlai vāyinkōlpōlmēkuṁkān – nīlacakkara  
Vālamēṇattōṟṟumulaimātaracai! **Vālēntira**  
**pōḷartaṇaiyeḍukkumpōtu**<sup>30</sup>

In Siddha system, myrrh is used in the treatment of secondary amenorrhea, anemia and wheezing.

**Pharmacological action**

Appetizer, Expectorant, Emmenagogue

13. Tamil Name	: <b>Kuntirikam</b>
English Name	: Frankincense
Hebrew name	: Lebonah
Botanical Name	: <i>Boswellia serrata</i> <sup>31</sup>
Family	: Burseraceae
Habit	: Tree
Habitat	: Madhya Pradesh, Deccan, Bihar, Orrisa

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Part used	: Gum Resin
Medicinal uses	: Rheumatism, Nervous and Skin diseases.

**References from the Holy Bible :**

**Frankincense** is an ingredient of the anointing oil (Exodus 30:34). An offering of sweet savor (Leviticus 2:2).

**References from the Siddha Text :**

Kācacūvācaṅkaṇattamēkakkāḍḍi  
Vīcuviḍakkadiviruccukuḍḍam – pēcu  
Paḍartāmaraciraṅkupaṇḍaviraṇaṅkal  
Eḍarciyyirkuntirikkamēntu<sup>32</sup>

The external use of Kuntirikatailam is good for sores, tinea like skin diseases, scabies, boil and carbuncle. It is administered internally for cough, wheezing and for poisonous sting.

**Pharmacological action**

Expectorant, Emmenagogue, Coolth, Diaphoretic

14. Tamil Name	<b>Aruvata</b>
English Name	Rue
Hebrew name	Peganon
Botanical Name	<i>Ruta graveolens</i> L. <sup>33</sup>
Family	Rutaceae
Habit	Herb
Habitat	Cultivated in Indian gardens
Part used	Leaf
Medicinal uses	Rheumatism, Pain, Worm infestation and Colic

**References from the Holy Bible :** **Rue** a shrubby plant, cultivated for its supposed medicinal properties and was tiethable (Luke 11:42).

**References from the Siddha Text :** This medicinal plant is confined only to Siddha system. Leaves are good for dysmenorrhoea, stomach ache, dyspepsia, intestinal worm infestation and sinusitis <sup>34</sup>

**Pharmacological action**

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Anthelmintic, Anti spasmodic, Emmenagogue, Carminative

15. Tamil Name	<b>Kariapolam</b>
English Name	Aloes
Hebrew name	Alloeh
Botanical Name	<i>Aloe vera</i> L. <sup>35</sup>
Family	Liliaceae
Habit	Herb
Habitat	India-From dry westward valleys of the Himalayas upto Cape comorin
Part used	Dried Juice
Medical uses	Reduce inflammation and used as fragrance.
Pharmacological action :	Stimulant, Appetizer, Cathartic, Emmenagogue

**References from the Holy Bible** : Like long rows of palms or gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the Lord or cedars besides the water (Numbers 24:6). Nicodemus, who at night, went with Joseph taking with him about thirty kilogrammes of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). The fragrant substance extracted from the wood of this plant was used to embalm the dead. Myrrh and aloes grow there with all the most fragrant perfumes (Songs of song 4:14)

**References from the Siddha Text :**

“Marpuvalivikkamvayirruvalipakkanoi  
Varmekakkattiyodumavatamparulakil  
Nilankaikalilnilaiculaiyurika**rutta**  
**Polamtanaikkanirpom**”<sup>36</sup>

Dissolve the drug in water boiled it and apply for traumatic contusion and pain, chestpain, inflammation, stomachache, dysmenorrhoea

**Pharmacological action**

Stimulant, Appetizer, Emmenagogue, Cathartic

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**Discussion:**

Fruits, nuts and vegetables are daily dietary requirements and helpful in the maintenance of health and medicinal plants are highly curative for ailments and prevention of disease. Fruits, nuts and spices contain various medicinal and therapeutic agents and this is due to the presence of phytochemicals like tannins, phytosterols, vitamins and minerals. All these food supplements should be consumed fresh as far as possible. From ancient time, humans have been using this fruits, nuts, spices and aromatic medicinal herbs for alleviating the disease conditions. Approximately more than 70% of the Siddha drugs are prepared from the fresh plants. Likewise the other Indian system of medicines like Ayurveda and Unani are also prepared from herbs.

The Holy Bible is the documented reference books describing about ailments, their treatment and prevention of disease conditions, usage of spices and aromatic agents which were used in their rituals of Old and New Testament period. The fertile land of Nile, Jordan and Red sea have abundant fruits and nuts bearing trees. According to the verses of Jeraimiah, King Esakkiah had carbuncle and it was cured when prophet Samuel asked him to apply the poultice of Fig<sup>4</sup>.

The modern pharmacology throw light for the ethnic claims for the spices, fruits, nuts and aromatic plants. The results show that garlic is beneficial in reducing blood cholesterol, triglycerides levels and systolic blood pressure in hypercholesterolemic rats. The experimental results show that garlic may beneficially affect two risk factors for the atherosclerosis – hyperlipidemia and hypertension<sup>37</sup>. Allicin, one of the active principles of freshly crushed garlic homogenate, has a variety of antimicrobial activities. The main antimicrobial effect of Allicin is due to its chemical reaction with Thiol group of various enzymes. Eg. Alcohol dehydrogenase, etc.<sup>38</sup>. Clove oil extract possessed antimicrobial activity against all bacteria and yeast tested<sup>39</sup>. Presence of unique combination of airways relaxant constituents in crude extract of *Acorus calamus*, a papaverine – like dual inhibitor of calcium channels<sup>40</sup>. Diet has been recognized as a corner stone in the management of diabetic mellitus. Spices are known to exert several beneficial physiological effects including the antidiabetic influence. Cumin seeds have been reported to be hypoglycemic<sup>41</sup>. *Ficus glomerata* possess significant gastroprotective activity which might be due to gastric defence factors and phenolic might be the main constituents responsible for this study<sup>42</sup>. Pomegranate fruit is widely used in the food and process industries due to its excellent nutritional and health value and as a raw material for the manufacture of secondary product such as jellies, dyes and cosmetics. Fruit fractions showed antimicrobial effects on staphylococcus aureus and pseudomonas aeruginosa but no E.coli<sup>43</sup>. Phenolic compounds present in nearly all parts of grape berries are increasingly believed to exhibit antioxidant and antimicrobial activities

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and to play a significant role in the prevention of diseases including cancer and cardiovascular diseases<sup>44</sup>. Date crop is of great economic importance in Egypt. Fruits of the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L. Family. Palmae) are very commonly consumed in Egypt. The antioxidant activity of the edible portion ought to attribute to the presence and  $\alpha$  – tocopherol<sup>45</sup>. On administration of 2.5 g almond seed and its proportionate fraction, viz 1.22 g defatted seed and 1.28 g oil to three groups of albino rabbits, they showed a definite hypoglycemic action during a two months study. The active factor seems to be a non oil fraction which is only partly soluble in ethyl ether<sup>46</sup>. The study proves that aqueous extract of *Aquilaria agallocha* had exhibited significant anticonvulsant activity in mice<sup>47</sup>. Myrrh has been used as an antibacterial and anti inflammatory agent. Administration of myrrh reduced the CLP-induced mortality and bacterial counts and inhibited inflammatory mediators<sup>48</sup>. *Boswellia serrata* tree is commonly found in India. The therapeutic value of its gum has been known. It possess good anti inflammatory, anti arthritic and analgesic study. The study reveals BSE (*Boswellia serrata* extract) is recommended in the patients of osteoarthritis of the knee with possible therapeutic use in other arthritis<sup>49</sup>. The antimicrobial activity of this plant would help for development of a new alternative medicine system which has no side effects. *Ruta graveolens* stem extract s possess a broad spectrum of activity and open the possibility of finding new clinically effective antimicrobial compounds<sup>50</sup>.

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