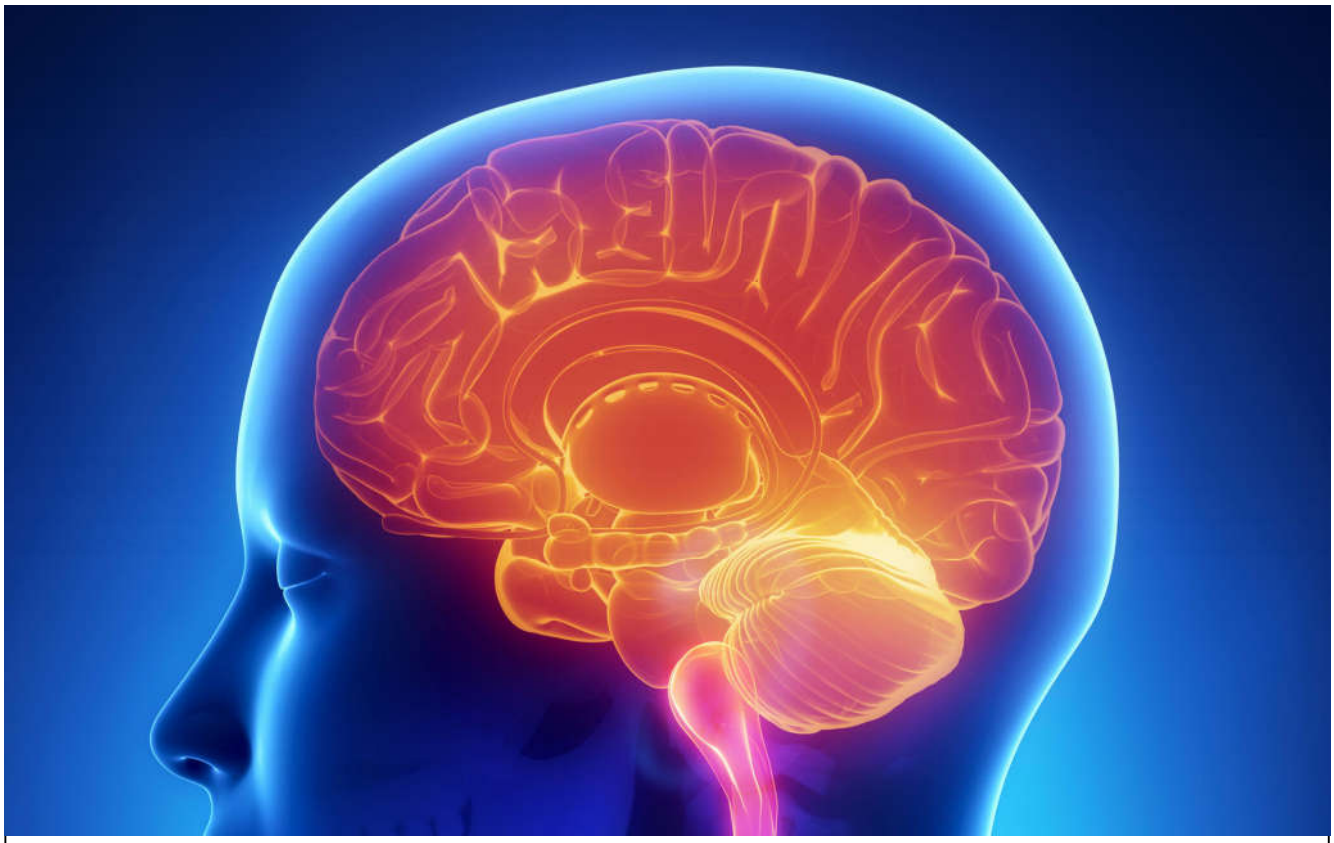

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SCIENTIFIC PLANT NAMES IN THEIR ETYMOLOGICAL AND ETHNOBOTANICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Some scientific naming brings uniformity in international communication, nay it helps bring ease as well. However, their Latinized jacket overshadows their original source of derivation and renders them rather unrecognizable. Learners of plant science are therefore perforce distanced in their effort to know vegetable kingdom. The present authors endeavored to analyze such scientific names etymologically thereby revealing the hidden elements of ethnobotany. As many as 47 generic plant names have been studied. It appeared that they are based on eight different criteria. It is hoped that such studies will help solve problems of mankind.

INTRODUCTION

Scientific naming of plants started with the polynomial system before the middle of 18th century which culminated ultimately into a binomial system of nomenclature. The former system was rather descriptive and therefore contained many important features or properties of plants. Binomial system is actually an abbreviated form of it involving only first two words. In either of these, the observations, utilities and wisdom of the ancient coiners of the name were intermingled. Because of latinized coating, they became rather unrecognizable or tortioned. Still, if we analyzed them, elements of ethnobotany can be ravelled. Such ethnobotanical ravelling has been dome earlier by few authors (c.f.Sudhir Chandra, 1995, Patil, 2008). Really, these were pioneer the attempt in plant science to study scientific plant names in ethnobotanical perspective. This communication is on the same lines and is aimed at decoding the ethnobotanical treasure hidden in the botanical names.

METHODOLOGY ADAPTED

In two – word naming system, the generic name is the first one. The genus may contain one or more species. Some select generic names have been picked up and analyzed etymologically. On analysis, this attempt revealed past records of human relationships with the vegetable kingdom. Such generic names have been borrowed from literature sources like Hereman (1868), Bailey (1950), Coombes (1992) and Patil (2007). Generic name is followed by analysis of root words. Later they are explained in utilitarian point of view.

Enumeration

1. *Byrsonima* (Malpighiniaceae):
   Byrsa-hide; Bark of some species of this genus are used for tanning.
2. *Carpinus* (Cupuliferae):
   Car-wood; pinda-head; In ancient times, yokes of cattle were made from the wood of some species.
3. *Cimicifuga* (Ranunculaceae):
   Cimax- a bug; fugo-to drive away. Some species show insecticidal proper-ties e.g *C.foetida.*
4. *Citharexylum* (Verbenaceae):
   Kithara-a lyre; xylum-wood. It is supposed that that the wood was used for making musical instruments.
5. *Conyza* (Asteraceae):
   Konis-dust. Its powder was supposed to drive away flies.
6. *Cyperus* (Cyperaceae):
   Cypris-name of Venus: roots of some species thought aphrodisiacal.
7. *Elymus* (Poaceae):
   Elyo-to cover. Leaves of *E.maritimus* are woven into a coarse fabric.
8. *Epaltes* (Asteraceae):
   Epaltes-healing; as it is thought beneficial in healing
9. *Euphrasia* (Scrophulariaceae):

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Euphrasia- to delight. The plant is said to be useful for curing blindness.

10. *Fraxinus* (Oleaceae):
Phrasso- to enclose or fence in; The plant was used especially for hedging.
11. *Holosteum (*Caryophyllaceae):
Holos-all; *osteon*-bone; The plant was used to cure bone fracture.
12. *Jateorrhiza* (Menispermaceae):
Jat, Jatosa-healing; *rhiza*-root; The roots were supposed useful to cure snake bite.
13. *Ophiorhiza* (Menispermaceae):
Ophis- a snake; rhiza –a root; The roots were supposed useful to cure.snake bite.
14. *Pulicaria* (Asteraceae):
Pulex-a flea, a kind of flea-bane; It is thought useful to drive away fleas.
15. *Sagina* (Caryophyllaceae):
Sagina-fodder; The plant is thought nourishing for sheep.
16. *Thymus* (Lamiaceae):
Thyo- to perfume; It was once used for making incense in the temples.
17. *Acer* (Asteraceae):
Ac- a point; the word signifies sharp. The wood was used for manufacturing into heads of spikes and lances.
18. *Aegilops* (Poaceae):
Goats Eye; It is supposed to be useful for treating eye disease.
19. *Aesculus* (Sapindaceae):
Esca-food, nourishment.The name signifies edible fruit.
20. Anagallis *(*Primulaceae):
Anagelao-to laugh; It signifies the power of removing despondency.
21. *Anchusa* (Boraginaceae):
Anchusa – a cosmetic paint; *A.tinctoria* was used for colouring the skin by the ancients.
22. *Angelica* (Apiaceae):
Angelus-angelic virtues. This quality was used to cure contagious diseases and for blood purification.
23. *Antidesma* (Euphorbiaceae):
Anti- against;*desmas*-band; Bark of *A.bunius* was used for making ropes. The ropes were used to tie thereby preventing snake bites.
24. *Archangelica* (Apiaceae):
Arche-chief; *angelica*-archangelic virtues. It possesses archangelic property and it is said to be revealed by Archangel Raphael.
25. *Aristolochia* (Aristolochiaceae):
Aristos-beet; *lochia*-birth. It is thought useful for childbirth.
26. *Asplenium* (Polypodiaceae):
Splen-spleen. It is supposed beneficial in spleen complaints.
27. Baptisia (Asteraceae):
Bapto-to dye. In allusion to the dyeing property of some species of the genus.
28. *Brosimuna* (Artocarpaceae):
Brosimon-good to eat. In allusion to edible fruits.
29. *Bubon* (Apiaceae):
Boubon-signifying the groin. It alludes its medicinal quality.
30. *Calla* (Araceae):
Kalas- beauty.Species of the genus are showy and worth cultivatron.
31. *Doricnium* (Fabaceae):
Dory-a spear.It was used to poision spears.
32. *Erica* (Ericaceae):
Erica-to break.Some species were thought useful to treat urinary bladder stones.
33. *Eryngium* (Apiaceae):
Ereugo- to belch. Some species of the genus are beneficial against flatulence.
34. Erysimum (Brassicaceae):
Erion-to draw, to cure. It is reputed as a cure against sore throat.
35. *Juncus* (Juncaceae):
Jungo- to join.Ropes were made from these plants.
36. *Lapsana* (Asteraceae):
Lapzo-to purge. Some species were thought purgative in action.
37. *Opopanax* (Apiaceae):
Opos-juice pan-all.The juice of the plant is supposed to cure all diseases.
38. *Oroleus* (Fabaceae):
Oro- to excite; *bous*-an ox.The plants were used for fattening oxen.
39. *Paronichia* (Illecebraceae):
Para-near; onyx-a claw. It was thought a cure for tumor developed near nail.
40. *Piscidia* (Fabaceae):
Entire plant is used as a fish poison.
41. Plumbago (Plumbaginaceae):
Plumbum- a disorder of the eyes. Some species were used to cure the said disorder.
42. *Scrophularia* (Scrophulariaceae):
Scrofulae- swelling of the neck glands. Plants were supposed useful in treating the said swelling.
43. *Viburnum* (Caprifoliaceae):
Vieo to tie. Plant branches are pliable and hence useful to tie.
44. Zea (Poaceae):
Zao-to like. It is in reference to the nutritive quality of the grains.
45. *Diganthia* (Poaceae):
Dignus-worthy, fit. It warrants fitness of plants as fodder.
46. *Reseda* (Resedaceae):
Resedo-to heal. It was applied in case of external bruises and wounds.

DISCUSSION

Common or vernacular names, being not uniform, were/are severely criticized by scientific community. It was once felt necessary to have uniform system of naming plants. Gradually a set of rules have been drafted and approved by International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN).It is now accepted by all. The names are now thought to be Latin, instead of their derivation. This practice helps avoid nomenclatural chaos

(Naik,1984).The scientific names of plants have latinized coating and therefore sometimes they are beyond recognition of their source of derivation and even the original meaning of the word. It has now become a practice to cram these latinized names by the learners of plant science without knowing their origin and meaning. The coiners of scientific names have incorporated observations, knowledge, perception, understanding and appreciation of surrounding nature and society (*cf.*Patil, 2008).While latinizing the plant names, they have been greatly torsioned and rendered less recognizable. It is, therefore, felt necessary to explain them etymologically. On etymological analyses, it is also made clear that some elements of man-plant relationships can be also revealed (*cf* Mehrotra and Mehrotra, 2005; Patil, *loc.cit*.).Some more examples have been focused in ethnobotanical perspective, in this paper.

The present authors studied 47 scientific particularly generic names of plants borrowed from different literary sources as stated earlier. These have been critically analyzed etymologically. Their meaning is explained briefly and underlying reasons are then limelighted. These analyses and reasons for nomenclature are varied depending upon the ancient plant world and human societies. The coiners of generic names caught fancy of interactions between man and plants. They could take notice of the knowledge, experience and practices of the human societies in the respective part of the world. These got incorporated eventually into the generic names. They are based on various criteria such as: (I) miscellaneous uses (ii) local technology (iii) eatables (iv) medicinal uses (v) crafts (vi) accidental snakebites (vii) utility for domestic animals (viii) perfumery and (ix) plant beauty. All these criteria are indicative of man's dependence no plant kingdom for food, shelter and medicine.

Local technology e.g. tanning also form the basis of nomenclature. Such technology is suggestive of human society being more advanced. Secondly; use of incens in temples indicates utility in religious common public places. Thus the scientists who coined the generic plant names could not remain aloof from the knowledge and utilities of plant by the local people. They intermingled them while coining names. The present authors, therefore, appeal for more investigations on this line. Such study will solve problems of society to some extent thereby and add to knowledge of the society.

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