

UDUMBARA (*Ficus glomerata* Roxb.): A MEDICO-HISTORICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

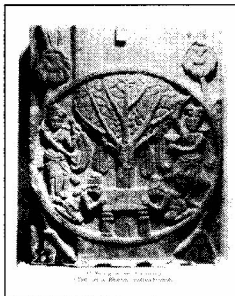
Udumbara is well known drug for its use since ancient times. *Atharvavēda* considers this as a divine plant and much used in religious sacrifice. It is also called as *Yajñōdumbara*. It grows abundantly in all parts of India. In *Āyurvēda* bark, leaves and unripe fruits etc. are used externally and internally to cure many diseases like *Pravāhikā* (Dysentery), *Pradara* (Menorrhagia), *Raktapitta* (Haemoptysis) etc. Thus its medico-historical importance and other details have been presented in this article.

Introduction

The word *Udumbara* according to *Shabdakalpadruma* (encyclopedia of Sanskrit) mentioned it as *Pumliṅga* (male gender). It is also called as *Yajñōdumbara* because it is used much in religious sacrificial believing as the best purifier¹⁰. *Udumbara* botanically known as '*Ficus glomerata* Roxb.' is an important medicinal and divine plant, mentioned in ancient Hindu literature, *Āyurvēda* and *Siddha* system of medicine. It is called cluster fig, Gular fig or country fig in English. It grows abundantly in all parts of India. It is found in moist localities like sides of ravine, along banks of streams and also on rocky slopes. It is often cultivated around villages for its edible fruits and shade. An evergreen tree grows up to 15-18 meters height and young shoots are glabrous, pubescent or scabrous. Leaf measures about 7.5-3.2-3 cm. ovate, oblong, tapering to a bluntish point at the apex with entire margins, glabrous on both surfaces. Fruits red when ripe, 1-2 inches in diameter. The fruits when fully ripe they have pleasant odour, resembling that of cider apples. The plant is one of the recorded hosts of the Indian Lac insects.⁸

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Myths and Traditions of *Udumbara*



Ficus glomerata, Roxb, *Udumbara* (2nd Cent. B.C., Bharhut, M.P.)
(Courtesy: Plant Myths and Tradition in India – Shakti M. Gupta)

In Ancient Indian literature plants are repeatedly mentioned in connection with customs, traditions and beliefs. In fact no ceremony is complete without some sacred plants being used.

The birth of various plants is given in *Matsyapurāṇa*. The legend is that by the power of their penances, *Ṛṣis Pracētasā* (ten brothers), had earlier protected the plants but *Agni*, burnt them. The *Ṛṣis* then married *Sōma Kanyā Marisā*, the daughter of *Sōma* and from their collective union was born *Dakṣa*. *Dakṣa* in turn produced on her innumerable plants and trees. According to *Vāmanapurāṇa* *Udumbara* arose from the north south side of *Yama*. The tree is sacred to *Hindus* and its wood is used in the *Hōma* ceremony. The roots of the plant are considered as *Brahma*, its bark as *Viṣṇu* and branches as *Śiva*. The tree is compared to *Viṣṇu*. In fact one of the names of *Viṣṇu* is *Udumbara*. Its fruit is kept on the person to keep the evil eye away. The seat of *Vivasvāna*, a Vedic god worshipped at the end of the *Sōma* sacrifice is made of it as well as the throne of king *Sōma* is carved out of its wood. The staff carried by a *Vaiśya* at his thread ceremony is made of it. The reason why the tree seldom has any flowers is because on *Dipāvalī* night, gods gathered on the tree and plucked all its blossoms. *Udumbara* is the *Bōdhi* tree of *Kanaka Muni*¹.

***Udumbara* in Non-Medical literature**

A distinctive part of Vedic medicine is its pharmacopoeia, especially its rich description of drugs, plants and its knowledge of the local flora. Botanical knowledge

occurs largely in the hymns of the *Atharvavēda* and is connected to a tradition of healing plant goddesses (8.7.1-8 & 11.6.16, 17)⁴. The hymns of *R̥gvēda* reveal less information about medicinal plants (*Auśadhī Sūkta* 10.97.1-23).⁵ Further investigations of the mythological traditions of plant divinities in the *R̥gvēda* and *Atharvavēda* may reveal interesting aspects of the homologization of religious ideas and help to identify elements of indigenous beliefs in ancient India. One of the most difficult problem faced by scholars of Indian medicine is the correct identification of the flora mentioned in the medical and non-medical literature.

Atharvavēda

In *Atharvavēda* *Udumbara* was mentioned as an amulet to be worn to get power and force away hunger (A.V. 19-31).⁴ In this hymn *Udumbara* described as lord of all *Maṇis* the showerer of energy and nourishment, food and riches. In those days plants were also used as *Maṇi* (amulet) to ward off the evil spirits. Vedic literature mentions that, this acts as energy because of its inherent *Vīrya* (power).

Udumbara Maṇi helps to bringout the increase and betterment of all kinds of cattle in the dairies. According to Griffith or *Sāyaṇa*'s descriptions, *Udumbara* used as amulet. Where as Devi Chand opines that *Udumbara* to be a mechanical, appliance emitting magnetic or electric currents through its wood which is prepared for ladies in the sacrificial ceremonies of the Hindu for such power of radiation. These radiations may help the growth and breeding power of cattle and even grains. Many plants were used for *Yajñās* (rituals) in the Vedic period. *Sruva*, *Camasa*, *Idhma* and *Upamanthanī* are the four items of the *Yajña* witch are prepared from *Udumbara* (6.3.13).^{6, 12}

It is believed that sacred fire produced by *Udumbara* wood generates prosperity, welfare, wealth, glory and energy. *Udumbara* mentioned as the giver of various things of daily usage and destroyer of enemies.⁷

In Hymn 31. 10th verse three things are essential for the prosperity of life for a common man i.e. a river of sweet water near by, the wife and the *Udumbara*. Because *Udumbara* helps to flow the stream of wealth through its plenteous milk, fruits as food, and sweet juices. This is not an exaggeration because this holistic *Udumbara* has plenteous valuables. The field for research in to the scientific truths, lying hidden in the Vedic texts gives some clues. Analysis of the following parts of *Udumbara* assert the above hymn. (A.V. 19:13)

Analysis of the fruit shows the following values: moisture- 13.6; aluminous- 7.4; fat- 5.6; carbohydrates-49.0; coloring matter- 8.5; fiber- 17.9; ash- 6.5; silica (SiO₂)- 0.25 and phosphorus (p₂)- 0.91%. Shed leaves afford valuable mulch. Analysis of the leaves shoes (air-dry basis); nitrogen- 0.915; phosphorus (P₂O₅)- 0.163 and lime (CaO)- 5.57%. *Ficus glomerata* is a good shade tree for coffee.⁸

The latex of the tree contains 4.0-7.4% caoutchouc. The coagulum of the latex is used in the manufacture of ground sheets and waterproof bonded paper. It is added to the extent of 10% to have a latex as a plasticizer. Birdlime is prepared from the juice of the stem.

The wood is grey or grayish white and soft. It is not durable, but lasts well under water and can be used for well curbs. It may be used for outhouse doors, cross pieces for carts, rice mortars, planks and shutters, and for making toys and effigies, cheap furniture, sides of carts frames, ploughs, oars, yokes, bellows and fuse box fittings. It may be used also in cheap turnery work, e.g. bed legs, lacquer ware and cotton reels, and as light packing case wood. It is reported to be suitable for matchboxes. This wood is used for mummy boxes by the Egyptians.

The bark contains 14% tannin. It is astringent and a decoction of it is used as a wash for wounds. The root is reported to be useful in dysentery. The leaves are ground to powder and mixed with honey and are given in bilious affections. The fruits are astringent, stomachic and carminative. The milky juice is administered in piles and diarrhea⁸.

Vāmana Purāṇa

This *Purāṇa* occupies the fourteenth place out of 18 *Purāṇas*. This *Vāmana Purāṇa* contains information on medicinal plants, which are also used in *Āyurvēda* for treating different diseases *Udumbara* referred at two places, one as best for purification (15:13) another to add in the water for bath during the month of chaitra for better life.

Kautilya Arthaśāstra

It is an exceptional work on ancient Indian polity. Written by *Kautilya*. The work claims to date from the period 321-296 B.C. It is voluminous work, contains 15 books. In Book number XIV, chapter-I, Section-177 secret practices with different formulations for the destruction of enemy's troops were mentioned. For example one formulation called *Madana yōga* contains *Udumbara* as main ingredient for poisoning grass and water. It is a stupefying preparation.

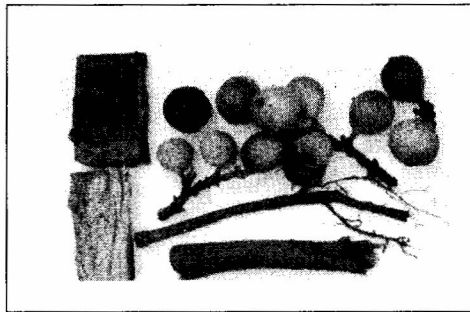
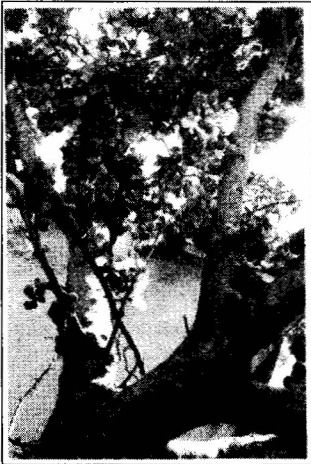
Holy Bible

The Bible is genuinely documented book representing the wisdom of god, medical knowledge and the culture. It contains information of some medicinal plants, which are useful for treating different kinds of ailments. *Udumbara* is mentioned six times in the Bible. Prophet Isaiah administered a cataplasm (cake) made of figs to the inflamed parts of king Hezekiah for cure. (Isa: 38:21-22) Its abundant small fruits are still used in Egypt as food.

Udumbara as per *Āyurvēda*

Ācārya Caraka has classified *Udumbara* under *Mūtra Saṅgrahaṇīya Varga* and *Kaṣāya Skandha*. He mentioned this drug at 35 places in his *Caraka Samhitā*. He considered both *Candana* (Sandal) and *Udumbara* are best among all plasters that alleviate burning of the skin (Ca. Su. 25/ 49).¹³ *Caraka* considered *Udumbara* fruits are the best among edible fruits (*Phala Śrēṣṭha*).

Sūsruta classified *Udumbara* in *Nyagrōdhādigaṇa* and mentioned this drug at eleven places whereas *Vāgbhata* mentioned it at about sixteen places^{2, 14}



Udumbara (Ficus glomerata Roxb.)

(Courtesy: Database on Medicinal Plants used in *Āyurvēda*, CCRAS)

Properties and uses

- Rasa (taste)** : *Madhura* (Sweet) and *Kaṣāya* (Astringent)
- Guṇa (property)** : *Guru* (Heavy) and *Śuṣka* (dry)
- Vīrya (potency)** : *Śīta* (Cold)
- Vipāka (after taste)** : *Kaṭu* (Pungent) but ripe fruits are *Madhura* (Sweet)
- Karma (action)** : Alleviates *Kapha* and *Pitta*, promotes healing of wounds and fractures, facilitates conception and enhances the complexion. The bark is galactagogue in action.

Parts used

- : Root, root barks, leaves, fruit, milky-juice latex and galls.
- The unripe fruits alleviate *Pitta* and *Kapha* purifies the blood, constipative and relieves thirst.
- Slightly ripe fruits aggravate *Pitta*, causes thirst and syncope and are useful in bleeding, vomiting, haemoptysis and hemorrhagic.
- The ripe fruits aggravate *Kapha*, alleviate *Pitta*, purifies the blood, increases appetite, beneficial in burns, thirst, fatigue, swellings and syncope.
- The roots are useful in treating dysentery.
- The bark is astringent, anti-diabetic, refrigerant and useful as a wash for wounds highly efficacious in threatened abortions and also recommended in uropathy⁹.
- Powdered leaves mixed with honey are given in vitiated conditions of *Pitta*. Decoction of leaves is used as wash for wounds and ulcers.
- The latex is aphrodisiac and is also administered in hemorrhoids and diarrhea.

Dosage

- Cūrṇa* - 3-6 gms.
- Kvātha* - 30-60 ml.
- Kṣīra* - 10-20 drops

Important Formulation

Pañcavalkala Kvātha, Udumbara rasa, Nyagrōdhādi Kvātha Cūrṇa and Mūtra Saṅgrahaṇīya Kaṣāya Cūrṇa.

Therapeutic uses with references

- It is used in *Dhūmapāna* and it is one of the drugs which diminish the quantity of Urine (*Ca. Sū* 4/15 & 5/22)
- It is excellent for external application (*A.S. Sū.* 13)
- The Tila oil which is extracted after *bhāvanā* with the milky exudation is used for medicating a tampon applied in menstrual disorders (*Ca. Ci.* 30/ 77,78)
- The ripe fruits are useful in bleeding and hemorrhages (*Su. Uttara.*, 45/ 23). The juice of fruits (ripe) is excellent for relieving thirst (*Su. Uttara.*, 48/ 22, 23).
- The *Kṣāra* is given with honey and ghee in hiccoughs (*Su. Uttara.*, 50/20)
- The unripened fruits are given with goats milk to prevent the miscarriage (*Ca. Śarīra.* 8/24)
- The bark is used to treat voracious appetite (*Ca. Ci.* 15/ 230)
- *Rājanighaṇṭu* has made a special mention of the property of the bark protecting the fetus in the womb and of its galactagogue action.
- Infusion of the bark is given in diabetes, as mouth wash, and used in dysentery, menorrhagia and haemoptysis (Chopra's Indigenous Drugs of India; pp 579)
- Juice of fruits is useful in cases of *Raktapitta* (*Ca. Ci.* 3.)

Vernacular nomenclature of *Udumbara*

Arabic	- Jamiza
Bengali	- Dumur, <i>Jajñadumara</i> , <i>Yajñadumbara</i>
Bombay	- Umbar
Burmese	- Atti, Rumadi
Central Provinces	- Umbargular
Chambal	- Trimbal
English	- Cluster fig, Country fig
Gond	- Thoja
Gujarathi	- Umar, Umara, Umbar, Umbro
Hindi	- Dimere, <i>Gūlar</i> , Lelka, Paroa, Umar, Umrai, Tue
Kharwar	- Dumer
Khond	- Toga
Kannada	- Atrti
Kolami	- Loa, Lowa
Konkani	- Rumbod

Kumaon	-	Gular
Kurku	-	Alawa
Lambada	-	Golaru, Guldredu
Lepeha	-	Chongtay
Malaya	-	Dumar
Malayalam	-	Atti, Audumbaram, Jantu Phalam, Udumbara
Marathi	-	Atti, Gular, Dumer, Rumadi, Umar, Umbar, Umbara, Umbaram, Umbra
Merwara	-	Umbri
Mumdari	-	Loadaru
Nepalese	-	Dumri
North Western Provinces	-	Gular, Lolka, Marva
Oriya	-	Dimiri, Dumuro, Jognandum buro, Udumboro
Persian	-	Tamar Pishah
Philippines	-	Aymit
Punjabi	-	Bathar, Dadhuri, Kakammal, Kathgular, Kumbal, Palak, Rumbal.
Pushtu	-	Ormul
Sanskrit	-	<i>Udumbara</i>
Santal	-	Loa, Lowa
Simhalese	-	Atteeka
Tagalog	-	Tibig, Tibigmalalaqui
Tamil	-	Anai, Anjiram, Asamarudam, Asuvatam, Aththi, Atham, Athavu, Atti, Are, Koli, Malaiyinmunivan, Tumbaram, Tuniyangam, Udumbaram.
Telugu	-	Atti, Bodda, Brahamamedi, Medi, Paidi, Udumbaram.
Tulu	-	Arti, Atti.
Urdu	-	Gular

Synonyms of *Udumbara* mentioned in some important Ayurvedic texts

S. No.	Synonyms	A.K	D. Ni.	B.P.Ni	K.Ni	S.G.Ni	R.Ni	M.Ni	S.Ni
1.	<i>Apuṣpaphala</i> Sambandha	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+
2.	<i>Brahmavrkṣa</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-

3.	<i>Haritākṣa</i>	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
4.	<i>Hēmadugdha</i>	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+
5.	<i>Hēmadugdha</i>	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
6.	<i>Hēmadugdhi</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
7.	<i>Jaghanīphala</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
8.	<i>Jantuphala</i>	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+
9.	<i>Jantuvṛkṣa</i>	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-
10.	<i>Kalāskanda</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
11.	<i>Kāñcan</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
12.	<i>Kṛimikaṇṭha</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
13.	<i>Kṛimikaṇṭaka</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
14.	<i>Kṛimiphala</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
15.	<i>Kṣīradru</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
16.	<i>Kṣīri</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
17.	<i>Kṣīravṛkṣa</i>	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+
18.	<i>Kṣīriphala</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
19.	<i>Kuñjara</i>	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
20.	<i>Phaṇi Mukha</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
21.	<i>Pavitraka</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
22.	<i>Puṣpahīna</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
23.	<i>Puṣpaśūnya</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
24.	<i>Sadāphala</i>	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-
25.	<i>Saumya</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
26.	<i>Śitaphala</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
27.	<i>Śitavalka</i>	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
28.	<i>Śitavalkala</i>	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
29.	<i>Śvētavalkala</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
30.	<i>Sucakṣu/Sacakṣu</i>	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
31.	<i>Supratiṣṭhita</i>	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
32.	<i>Vasudruma</i>	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
33.	<i>Yajñāṅga</i>	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
34.	<i>Yajñaphala</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
35.	<i>Yajñasāra</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-

Kāy (Ripe Fruit)

- Cuvai* (Taste) - *Thuvarppu* (Astringent)
Thanmai (Potency) - *Thaṭpam* (Semi hotness)
Pirivu (After taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)
Ceykai (Action) - *Thuvarppi* (Astringent)
Kuṇam (Properties) - Useful in the treatment of *Veḷḷai* (Leucorrhoea),
Vāthanōy (*Vāthā diseases*), *Cūlai* (Colic Pain), *Uḍalveppu* (Boly heat),
Puṇ/Viraṇam (Wounds), *Malamiḷakum* (Also laxative)

Aththikkāy Thanṇai Arunthiṇṇāl Āraṇāṅkē !

Eththikkum Mēkam Iruppathuṇḍō ? - Caththikkum

Vātham Akalum Malaṅkaziyum Cūlaiyoḍu

Mīthanalum Puṇṇumpōm Viḷ.

(*Akaththiyar Kuṇapāḍam.*)

Pazam (Fruit)

- Cuvai* (Taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)
Thanmai (Potency) - *Thaṭpam* (Semi hotness)
Pirivu (After taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)
Ceykai (Action) - *Kuruthi Perukki* (Cordial), *Malamiḷakki* (Laxative)
Kuṇam (Properties) - *Kuruthiperukum* (Improves blood), *Malamkaziyum* (Laxative)

Athavuthanṇa Kāyiṇai Yiyaṇmurai Yāyuṇa

Vithamuṇu Meyyiṇil Viṇaiyclā Makalumē.

(*Thēraiyar Kāppiyam*)

Pāl (Latex)

- Cuvai* (Taste) - *Thuvarppu* (Astringent), *Cīru Inippu* (Mild Sweet)
Thanmai (Potency) - *Thaṭpam* (Semi hotness)
Pirivu (After taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)
Ceykai (Action) - *Thuvarppi* (Astringent)
Kuṇam (Properties) - Useful in the treatment of *Pithtakōpam* (Elevated Piththam), *Nīrizivu*
(Diabetes), *Cūlai* (Colic Pain), *Iraththa Mūththirakkiriccaram*
(Haematuria)

Kāramō Ḍuṭṭiṇṇāṅ Kāthukiṇṇra Piththaththai

Nīrizivaic Cūlaikaḷai Nīraḍiththai - Cēruṅ

Kiriccaraththaip Pōkkuñ Kiḷar Kōḷi Yennum
Maraccarumap Pālathanai Vāñku.

(Akaththiyar Kuṇapāḍam.)

Pattai (Bark)

Cuvai (Taste) - *Thuvarppu* (Astringent)

Thaṇmai (Potency) - *Thaṭpam* (Semi hotness)

Pirivu (After taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)

Ceykai (Action) - *Thuvarppi* (Astringent)

Kuṇam (Properties) - Useful in the treatment of *Kīzvāyokkaḍuppu* (Anal tenesmus), *Kuruthip Pōkku* (Menorrhagia), *Cīthakkaziccal* (Dysentery with mucus), *Nārrappuṇ* (Foul smelling wound), *Veḷḷai* (Leucorrhoea)

Vīru Kaḍuppiraththam Veṇcītha Raththamoḍu

Nāruvira Nañkaḷelām Nāḍāvām - Kūruñkāl

Aththitharu Mēkampōm Āyizaiyē ! Eññārum

Aththippār Paḍḍaik Kaṛi.

(Akaththiyar Kuṇapāḍam.)

Kaḷ (Toddy)

Cuvai (Taste) - *Cīru Inippu* (Mild Sweet)

Thaṇmai (Potency) - *Thaṭpam* (Semi hotness)

Pirivu (After taste) - *Inippu* (Sweet)

Ceykai (Action) - *Uḍarrēṛri* (Alterative)

Kuṇam (Properties) - Useful in the treatment of *Enpaipparriya Mēkam* (Syphilis with bone affected), *Uṭcūḍu* (Heat), *Piththa Mayakkam* (Giddiness due to Piththam), *Nīrvēṭkai* (Thirst)

Aththimē Kañcū Ḍathimayakkan Thākamum Pōm

Aththimā Vēriluṇ Ḍāmathuvil - Niththiyamuñ

Cīṇiyēnum Pēyan Ceñkaṇiyē Nuñkalanthē

Pāṇuvutha Yañkuḍiththup Pār.

(Akaththiyar Kuṇapāḍam.)

Modern Literature

Botanical name : *Ficus glomerata* Roxb.

Family : Urticaceae

Description:

1. Macroscopic - Bark greyish-green, surface soft and uneven, 0.5-1.8 cm thick; on rubbing white papery flakes come out from outer surface, inner surface light brown fracture fibrous; taste, mucilaginous without any characteristic odor.
2. Microscopic - Transverse section of bark shows cork, 3-6 layers of thin-walled cells filled with brownish contents; cork cambium single layered secondary cortex 6-12 layered of composed of thin walled, rectangular cells arranged regularly, a number of secondary cortex cells contain starch grains and some contain rhomboidal crystals of calcium oxalate most of the cells filled with chloroplast giving green appearance; cortex a fairly wide zone composed of circular to oblong, thin-walled cells, containing orange-brown contents most of the cells filled with simple and compound starch grains, a number of cells also contain cubical and rhomboidal crystals of calcium oxalate, some cortical cells get lignified with pitted walls found scattered singly or in large group through cortical region; secondary phloem a very wide zone composed of parenchyma with patches of sieve tubes, companion cells by modularly rays; phloem parenchyma circular to oval and thin walled; phloem fibers much elongated, lignified very heavily thickened and possess a very narrow lumen; medullary rays to pent seriate, widen towards peripheral region; a number of ray cells also get lignified and shows pitted walls as described above; lacticiferous cells also found in phloem region similar to parenchyma but filled with small granular masses; starch grains and rhomboidal crystal of calcium oxalate also found in most of phloem parenchyma and rays cells; cambium, when present, 2-3 layered of tangentially elongated thin-walled cells¹⁵.

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सारांश

उदुम्बर : एक चिकित्सिकीय ऐतिहासिक समीक्षा

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प्राचीन काल से उदुम्बर अपने उपयोग के कारण सुप्रसिद्ध है। अथर्ववेद इसे दैव वृक्ष के रूप में और धार्मिक अनुष्ठानों में अत्यधिक उपयोगी मानता है। इसे यज्ञोदुम्बर भी कहा जाता है। यह भारतवर्ष के सभी भागों में प्रचुर मात्रा में उत्पन्न होता है। आयुर्वेद में इसकी छाल, पत्तियाँ और अपरिपक्व फलों का बाह्य एवं आभ्यन्तर उपयोग प्रवाहिका, प्रदर, रक्तपित्त आदि व्याधियों की चिकित्सा में किया जाता है। इस प्रकार इसके चिकित्सिकीय ऐतिहासिक महत्त्व और अन्य विवरण को इस लेख में प्रस्तुत किया जा रहा है।