

for use in liver disorders, but evidence for an effect in humans is not yet available. Systemic effects are questionable after oral administration due to low absorption. This does not exclude a local action in the gastrointestinal tract⁸.

USE IN THE NOTEBOOK

Curcuma longa is part of two recipes: one for purification of the blood, the other against menstrual and abdominal problems. In the first one it is mixed with resin of *Psidium guajava*, with *Bergenina ligulata*, honey, *Sesamum indicum* and an unknown resin, which has had to be wrapped around a cow. Everything is mixed together and eaten. In the second recipe a mixture is prepared from *Curcuma longa*, *Orchis incarnata*, *battis masala* (a mixture of 32 spices), honey, *Citrus aurantifolia*, *Sesamum indicum* and *shellac*. Again everything is mixed together, put at the inner and outer side of the hand of the patient, from where she eats it⁵.

Doses: each freshly prepared mixture contains around 0.5 g. It is administered only once daily⁹.

DIETARY USE

Turmeric is one of the most widely used spices in Nepali cooking. Vast quantities go into curries and give them their brilliant yellow color. It is also an important spice in *dal*, the most frequently eaten dish of rural Nepal. A typical *dal* recipe consists of: 2 cups of *dal*, 5 cups water, 2 teaspoons turmeric, 5 drops *Asa-fetida* water, 1 teaspoon black pepper, 1 teaspoon black cumin seeds, 309 fresh ginger, 1/2 cup of *ghee*, 1 big onion, 2 teaspoons chopped coriander leaves, 2 green chil-

farnesiferoles A, B and C, ferulic acid, and the coumarin derivatives foetidin and kamololonol are also present⁵.

MEDICINAL USE

In Nepal *Asa-fetida* is considered to be sedative, carminative, antispasmodic, diuretic, and anthelmintic, as well as emmenagogue and an expectorant. It is an aphrodisiac, and increases the sexual appetite⁵. Daily dose is around 0.2-0.5 g⁹.

PHARMACOLOGICAL ACTION

Asa-fetida has not been studied much. It produces slight inhibition of the growth of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Shigella sonnei*, and some of the sulfur compounds show pesticidal activity. Higher doses taken orally cause diarrhoea, meteorism, headaches, dizziness and enhanced libido⁶.

USE IN THE NOTEBOOK

Asa-fetida is part of a formula against witchcraft. "If a witch sucks (leaving a blue bruise or stain) on some part of the body the following four things should be applied without speaking: wood of *Maclura cochinchinensis*, of *Solanum torvum* and *Smilax lanceafolia*, and *Asa-fetida*. These things are mixed and rubbed on a rock to produce the paste for application."⁵.

DIETARY USE

Asa-fetida has been commonly used in Nepal for many centuries, especially in minute amounts as powder or as *Asa-fetida* water, as a flavouring agent in many curries or lentil preparations. *Asa-fetida* water is prepared by mixing one tea-

1. THE AYURVEDIC HYPOTHESIS

In the ancient Indian ayurvedic system disease is thought to result from imbalances between the Tridoshas Vata, Pitta and Kapha of an individual⁶. Food and medicine carry the qualities of hot, cold and neutral¹¹. These qualities influence the above mentioned imbalance. Unmodified spices and medicinal herbs are generally considered as hot or cold¹¹.

The village medical practitioners in general and, even more so, their patients have only rudimentary knowledge of the

to him during treatment), to have at least some amount of "good food" e.g. *ghee*, honey, turmeric or *Asa-fetida* in his remedy. In that way he feels more confident about its power. This additional security could be carried over to the patient.

We believe, that the relevance of these three hypothesis varies from case to case. They all contribute to the explanation of why food and spices are so often a part of traditional medical prescriptions.

"In fact, Asian cuisine is characterized by the adaptation of