

KESAR – SAFFRON (*Crocus sativus* L.)

Saffron is a precious crop in the category spices. It is mostly cultivated in Pampore and Kishtwar areas of Jammu and Kashmir. In small amount, it is also cultivated in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh and some other North Eastern states of India. India is third largest producer of Saffron after Iran and Spain. Botanically Saffron - *Kesar* is stigma part of the flower of the tuberous herbal plant, *Crocus sativus* L. which belongs to family Iridaceae. It has a very special, strong fragrance and flavour. It contains oily substance, a colouring matter (crocetin), bitter substance (picrocrocin) and a glycoside known as crocin (different than 'crocin' available in the market). 1 Kg Saffron costs Rs.2-5 lakhs. As it is a precious substance adulterations and mixing are common problems in Saffron.

Saffron is used in Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy as well as Siddha system of Medicines. According to Ayurveda it is *kashaya* (pungent) and *tikta* (bitter) in taste and *snigdha* (unctuous) in nature. For identification and quality it is said to be similar to Blood (*Rakta*) therefore, all synonyms of *Rakta* denotes to Saffron (e.g. *shonita*, *rudhira*, *kumkum*). It alleviates all three humours (*tridosha-shamaka*). Qualitatively it is Hot, pleasant, appetizer, stomachic, digestive, anti-allergic, anti-toxic, analgesic, aphrodisiac, anti-spasmodic, emmenagogue, and also complexion promoter. It is used various pathological conditions such as cold, cough, asthma, dysuria, dysmenorrhea, amenorrhea, sore throat, liver disorders, neurological pains etc.

'*Kumkumadi oil*' is its specific preparation used as skin toner and in various skin ailments especially in Acne vulgaris.

Dr. Gopesh Kumar Sharma Email: drgopeshsharma@rediffmail.com