VI. CONCEPTS AND CONTROL OF GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS IN AYURVEDA

a. Emesis

Emesis (vomiting), dysentery/diarrhoea and fever are the most common and evident symptoms of a myriad of gastrointestinal disorders.

In the classical ayurvedic works by Charaka (Chakrapani, 1940), Sushrutha (Sen Gupta, 1959) and Bhavaprakasha (Misra Vaishya, 1969), 60 species were cited in the control of emesis and 43 species in the control of purgation (Table 1). A survey of a large number of diverse publications on indigenous plant based medicine shows that the use of these species was sustained through a couple of millennia and more have been added. The uses in India of some of the species are also being cited in foreign publications (Oliver-Bever, 1986). Particulars of 79 species currently well known for their effects in emesis and purgation are presented in Table 2.

Application of modern concepts of the mode of action of herbal drugs in the control of emesis and purgation (or the antistates of these) has resulted in the identification of particular species towards a desired therapeutic effect. However, the concept of infection as the cause of emesis and purgation is, understandably not evident in the earlier
Indian literature. Nevertheless, number of species in Tables 1 and 2, as will be discussed in the subsequent pages, have pronounced antibacterial/antiviral effects.

In Ayurveda the name 'Chardi' is mentioned as a disease in which vomiting is the cardinal symptom. It is believed to be caused by the morbid humor Kapha which originates in the stomach. The foremost treatment is to control the deranged humors especially the aggravated Kapha. 'Langhana' (starvation) is the prime factor adopted to reduce Kapha. Medicine is prescribed based on the aggravated humor and the season. In order to stop vomiting, the symptom in many diseases, the practice is first to cure the disease so that the tendency to vomit gradually disappears.

Vomiting may be caused due to consumption of contaminated food or on seeing blood, corpse or due to obnoxious smells.

Vomiting involves the forceful ejection of the contents of the stomach through the mouth. In modern medicine vomiting (emesis), is recognised as due to indigestion of food, mental worries, infestation of the intestine with pathogenic bacteria, or pregnancy.

b. Diarrhoea

'Atisara' is the name for diarrhoea in Ayurveda. Diarrhoea is the passage of watery stools. According to the
science of Ayurveda, any gross disturbance caused in the 'agni' or the digestive fire makes the stomach incapable of digesting food which is fatty, heavy, or mixed with toxic materials, resulting in watery stools. Diarrhoea may be caused by the vitiation of vata or pitta or kapha or due to a combination of all three or due to sudden fright, shock, anxiety, sorrow and amatisara, caused by amadosha or undigested food.

The treatment involves rekindling the digestive fire by administering drugs which are penetrating, carminative and digestive.

c. Infantile diarrhoea

Children who are affected with diarrhoea, have either consumed contaminated food or milk. Diarrhoea in children is mostly accompanied by vomiting and a griping pain in the stomach.

d. Dysentery

In ayurvedic terms what is now known as amoebic dysentery is called Pravahika and bacillary dysentery as Raktatisara.

Dysentery is a condition wherein the patient passes blood along with stools, or mucus with or without faeces. It is generally due to the inflammation of the lower part of the intestine causing pain in the abdomen.
e. Cholera

In Ayurveda cholera is called Vishoochika and is recognised as one of the most severe diseases of the stomach and intestines.

In the practice of ayurveda, the physician does not administer any drug to stop vomiting or diarrhoea or fever, but instead allows the patient to continue with the symptoms for a few more hours till all toxins are expelled from the body.

Nevertheless, as presented in the database a large number of plant species have been in use in the control of the symptoms of emesis, purgation and fever.

VII. CHOICE OF THE SPECIES FOR THE DATABASE AND ENCYCLOPAEDIC PROFILES

The comprehensive list of plants used in the control of gastrointestinal disorders gathered from various sources includes 945 species (Table 3). It is possible that this list may grow longer with time.

The database includes 127 species of plants chosen from the comprehensive list for a detailed treatment. The choice of these species is not necessarily absolute. Another person may choose some other species or some more species and leave out some. Nevertheless, the majority of the species in the