

Survey



ETHNOMEDICINAL PRACTICES AMONG THE SONOWAL KACHARIS OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT :

Traditional uses of medicinal plants to treat the ailments by human being have been continuing since prehistoric time and still a large number of ethnic people are depend on herbal medicine. In the present study an attempt have been made to enumerate the medicinal plants used by Sonowal Kacharis of Assam. The paper deals with 57 plant species used as medicine to treat about 50 ailments.

KEY WORDS : Ethnomedicine, Sonowal Kachari, Assam

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INTRODUCTION:

The tribal people inhabiting in the different parts of the world, specially those of tropical countries have very close connection with vast resources of nature. Through the age they have learnt the uses of available natural resources to meet their day to day needs. Almost all such aboriginal people depend largely upon the wild plants for Magico-religious beliefs of treating various ailments concerned. These people have also learnt the uses of various plants and materials for remedial purposes and developed their respective system of vegetal medicines.

The villages inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis are far remote from urban places without hospital facilities. In some remote areas/villages there are no doctors or clinics. In this miserable conditions the people always depend on magico-religious rites of herbal medicines to treat their various ailments. The forests nearest to their villages are also very rich in wild medicinal plants. A large number of such plants are being used by the villagers or by the healers to treat their major and minor diseases.

The Tribe:

Sonowal Kachari is a plain tribe of Assam belonging to Indo-Mongoloid group of Tibeto Burman Linguistic stock. The Sonowal Kacharis have great affinity to Bodo-Kacharis of Assam. The Sonowal Kachari nostalgically trace their close relationship with the Barmans of Cachar, Bodo Kachari of Lower Assam and Dimas of North Cachar hills (Borrdoi, et al 1988; Sonowal, G. 1962). According to Edward Gait (1905) the Kacharis of Assam called themselves 'Bodo' or 'Bodo Fisa' (sons of Bodo), in the N.C. Hills they called themselves 'Dimasa' or 'Dima Fisa' (Sons of great river) and in upper Assam they known as 'Sonowals' after the Bodo term 'Sonolarya'.

The origin of the Sonowal Kacharis is shrouded in uncertainties. Even Endle, who spent some years with the Kacharis and published a monograph entitled "The kachari" (1910), could not give exact information on this regard. Whatever the origin the Kacharis who were engaged in gold washing or gold collection from the river Subansiri in the Ahom regime was known as "Sonowal Kacharis". The present habitations of the tribe confined mostly on the river bank of upper Assam of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur districts. As per 1991 census their total population was 3,57,773

Aim and Objective:

There is worldwide interests in folklore about medicinal herbs which leads to new sources of drugs. Therefore the main objective of the present study is to record the herbal medicines practised by the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam. A description of the medicinal plants and medicines reported to be used for treatment of various ailments by the Sonowal Kacharis or by the local healers is given in the following descriptions.

.Methodology:

The data discussed in this paper were collected by intensive survey during last five years in the villages inhabited by the tribe. The data are based on first hand information gathered from the practitioners of herbal medicines or local healer and personal observations on the use of remedies of ailments. The data crosschecked with different informations. The recorded plants are identified as far as possible, correctly and the vernacular/local name (Assamese) have been given. The descriptions are given in alphabetic order of botanical name of the plants.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions were asked to the herbal practitioners, local healer, traditional medicine men, and informants regarding ailments, symptoms and plant used.

1. How the is disease diognised?
2. What type of symptoms you observed and how you analyse the symptoms to detect an ailment?
3. What type of plants are used to treat a specific ailment?
4. Which plant parts are used?
5. Whether the plants or plant parts are freshly collected or preserved?
6. How the medicines are prepared?
7. What type of process you advise for applying the medicines?
8. How long you observe the patient after treatment?
9. Whether the plants or plant parts are available in your locality?
10. What type of measures you have taken to preserved the medicinal plants?

RESULTS:

Plant Name	Assamese Name	Uses of plants parts and Ailments
<i>Abrus precatorious</i>	Latomoni	Root juice in diarrhoea, dysentery, flatulence of children; stem juice in dysuria; seeds in tonsilities.
<i>Acorus calamus L.</i>	Boch	Rhizome in dysuria, cough with fever, infantile fever, anaemia.
<i>Allium sativum L.</i>	Naharu	Cloves use in dyauria, female sterility, tuberculosis, hypertension, stomachache, etc.
<i>Andographis poniculata</i> Wall (Burm. F.)	Chirota	Juice of the plant is use in fever, cough, malaria, etc.
<i>Ananas comosus L.</i>	Anaras	Tender leaf juice is give in diarrhoea, blood dysentery.
<i>Aristolochia indica A. Juss</i>	Nilakontha	Bark used in anaemia, latex applied in ulcer, scabies, etc; root juice in blood dysentery.
<i>Asparagus racemosus Wold.</i>	Satmul	Root juice give in anaemia and diarrhoea.
<i>Azadirachata indica A. Juss</i>	Mohaneem	Leaf juice in loss of appetite, stomachache, scabies, intestinal worm etc.
<i>Bambusa tulda Roxb.</i>	Jati Banh	Outer layer of culm applied on cut & wound as haemostatic.

<i>Caesalpinia bonduc</i> (L) Roxb	Letaiguti	Fruit used in gastric complaints, fever, typhoid.
<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L) Br.	Akon	Latex applied on ringworm, caries, etc.
<i>C. procera</i> (Ait) R. Br.	Akon	Same as above.
<i>Carica papaya</i> L.	Amita	Immature fruit given as antifertility.
<i>Centella asiatica</i> L.	Bormanimuni	Whole plant or shoot juice given in pain after child birth, gastric complaints, tuberculosis, cholera, dysentery, anaemia, etc.
<i>Cissampelos pereira</i> L.	Tubukilota	Root juice given in diarrhoea, dysentery, flatulence of child, cut & wounds, bone fracture.
<i>Cissus quadrangular</i> L.	Harjuralota	Past of stem applied on bone fracture, fresh pieces of stem also fasten around fractured bone.
<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i> (Chistm.) Swingle	Gul nemu	Aroma of fresh leaves is inhaled in vomiting; salt preserved fruit is given in dysentery & diarrhoea; seed given as vermicide.
<i>Clerodendrum colebrookianum</i> Walp	Nephaphu	Tender shoot given in hypertension.
<i>Commelina benghalensis</i> L.	Kana Simalu	Curry of tender shoot given in menorrhoea.
<i>Costus speciosa</i> Smith	Jamlakhuti	Rhizome juice is given in gripping stomachache of women, dysuria, jaundice, etc.
<i>Croton caudatus</i> Geisel	Mahudilota	Bark juice given in pneumonia, leaf juice given in urinary trouble.
<i>C. jaufra</i> Roxb.	Mahudi	Bark juice given in pneumonia.
<i>Curcuma caesia</i> Roxb	Kalahalodhi	Past of rhizome applied on joint pain, bone fracture.
<i>C. longa</i> L.	Halodhi	Paste of rhizome applied on pain & bone fracture, juice of rhizome is given orally in rheumatism, acidity, stomachache, etc.
<i>Cyclosorus extensus</i>	Bihlongoni	Leaves are used for treating pains, snake bite, etc. through incantation.
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	Dubori	Leaf juice given in dysuria and menorrhagia.

<i>Cyperus rotundus</i> L.	Keyabon	Tubers given in cough, fever, dyspepsia.
<i>Dentella repens</i> Forst	Bonjaluk	Shoots given in Lochial discharge, stomachache.
<i>Dillenia indica</i> L.	Outenga	Fruit decoction given in dysentery; pulp of the fruit used as hair wash for dandruff.
<i>Garcinia cowa</i> Roxb. ex, DC	Kuji thekera	Preserved fruit pulp given in indigestion, dysentery, cholera, etc.
<i>G. morela</i> Desr.	Do.	Same as above.
<i>Houttuynia cordata</i> Thunb	Mochandari	Decoction of shoot/leaf given in dysentery, blood dysentery, flatulence & colic and bilious pain.
<i>Hydrocotyle javanica</i> Thumb	Sarumanimuni	Juice of whole plant given in gripping pain after child birth, gastric complaints, dysentery, blood dysentery, cholera, stomach pain in menses, lochial discharge, tuberculosis, etc.
<i>Kalanchoe pinnata</i> (Lamk) Pers	Dupartenga	Leaf juice given in dysuria, kidney stone, gall bladder stone.
<i>Lasia spinosa</i> (L.) Thw.	Changmora	Tender leaf petiole eaten as vegetable in anaemia and after child birth.
<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.	Jetuka	Paste of leaves applied on cut & wound as antiseptic; paste used to tattoo the hands by girls.
<i>Leucas plukentii</i> (Roth.) Spr.	Durunbon	Leaf juice given in indigestion, stomach problem, pneumonia, nasal problems, etc.
<i>Mentha spicata</i> L.	Padina/Paduna	Leaf juice given in loss of appetite, diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Morinda angustifolia</i> Roxb.	Achugach/ Achukori	Same as <i>Lawsonia inermis</i> .
<i>Musa bulbisiana</i> Colla	Athiakol	Alkaline solution of ashes of dried rhizome and fruit bark given in dysentery and applied externally as antiseptic.
<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> L.	Sewali	Juice of tender shoot given in malaria, typhoid, fever etc; flower also eaten as vegetable for same purpose as shoot juice.
<i>Oxalis corniculata</i>	Tengechi	Leaf juice in dysentery.

<i>O. debilis</i> H.B.K	Bor tengechi	Same as above.
<i>Paedaria foetida</i> L.	Bhedailota	Leaf juice given in gastric complaint; leaf eaten as vegetable in menstrual problem after child birth, stomach problem, etc.
<i>Papever somnifera</i> L.	Kani	Opium is taken to relieve pains, opium mixed with water given in amoebic dysentery.
<i>Phlogacanthus thyrsoformis</i> (Hardw.) Mabb	Titaphul/ Titabahok	Juice of tender shoot given in cough & fever, malaria, dysentery.
<i>Piper nigrum</i> L.	Jaluk	The fruit form one of the important ingredient in the preparation of number of medicines.
<i>Psidium guajava</i> L.	Modhuri	Juice of tender shoot given in dysentery, blood dysentery, cough & fever, malaria, etc.
<i>Rhynchosyilis retusa</i> (L.) Bl.	Kapauphul	Juice of tender leaf applied on otorrhoea.
<i>Riccinus communis</i> L.	Erapat	Leaves are applied accompany with incantation on snake bite, joint pain, to drive out evil spirit; seed oil applied on rheumatism.
<i>Sarcochlamys pulcherrima</i> (Roxb.) Gaud	Mechaki	Leaf decoction given in diarrhoea, gastric ulcer, menstrual problem.
<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels	Jamuk	Preserved fruit juice given in diarrhoea, dysentery & stomachache.
<i>Terminalia belerica</i> (Gaertn.) Roxb	Bhumura	Decoction of fruit given in gastric ulcer, stomachache.
<i>T. chebula</i> Retz.	Silikha	Same as above.
<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i> Miers.	Sagunilota	Paste of stem applied on bone fracture, waist pain, knee pain, cut & wounds.
<i>Vitex negundo</i> L.	Pochotia	Leaf juice given to gargle in tonsillities; decoction of leaves given in rheumatic pain; branches are used as tooth brush, which cure toothache and pyrrhoea.
<i>Zanthoxylum nitidum</i> (Roxb.) D.C.	Tezmuri	Root juice given in menstrual complaints, toothache; branches are used as tooth brush, which cure toothache and pyrrhoea.

CONCLUSION:

A total of 57 different plant species have been recorded which are used as medicine to treat about 50 different ailments by the Sonowal Kacharis. Out these 57 plant species 20 species seem to be little known or some are unknown on comparison with common literature of medicinal plants, while the other species are common. Some medicinal plants are also used as vegetable and some are used in rice beer. From the study it is revealed that different methods are employed in preparation of medicine, some are : preparation of decoction, paste, pills, vegetable, etc.

The study also revealed the frequency of different plant parts used in the medicines. The leaf and shoot are the commonest parts used, followed by root and tuber, fruit, bark, seed, whole plant, flower, stem juice and latex.

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