

Traditional Medicine Among the Ahoms of Lakhimpur District, Assam

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Introduction :

Traditional knowledge refers to the innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional life styles ; as well as the wisdom developed over many generations out of their holistic, traditional and scientific utilization of the land, natural resources and environment. It is generally orally passed down from generation to generation and for the most part it remains undocumented (Kar, 2018).

Ethno- medicine is the area of anthropology that studies different societies notions of health and illness, including how people think and how people act about well being and healing. Ethno-medicine thus interacted with a growing body of research describing bio medicine as local methods are most suitable for standing medical systems that tailor treatment to patients among the different ethnic groups. Moreover, ethno-medicines are now in great demand in the developing world for primary health care not because they are inexpensive but also for better cultural acceptance between compatibility with the human body and minimal side effect.

A first step in its ethno-medical research is to learn how people label, categorize and classify health problem. Depending on the culture the bases for labeling and classifying health problem may be cause vector, affected body part, symptoms, or combination of these Often, the elders are the keepers of ethno-medical knowledge and they passed it down to their next generation through oral traditions (Thompson and Sloat, 2004).

Knowledge of ethno-medicinal translation has become increasingly relevant for public health because it identifies belief and practices among the foreign minority and underserved (Winch et al, 1996; Hahn 1999; Northridge and Mack 2002; Singer 1981). As mentioned, people tend to be ethnocentric about their medicine they hold dearly to their own medical traditions. Globalization and the resulting increase in culture contact leads to medical incongruences.

According to world Health organization (WHO) as many as 80% of world's population depends today on traditional medicine for their primary health care needs. The Human use of plants as a source of medicine dates back to the middle Paleolithic age around 60,000 years ago has learnt to identify and use plants according to their needs. It has been estimated that out of 4,22,000 of flowering plants available in this world approximately 5000 are used for medicinal purpose of which India represent 43% (WHO, 2019).

The increased use of traditional medicines and possibilities that would ensure its successful integration into a public health frame work. There are links between biodiversity and traditional medicine and their implications to public health (Alves and Rose, 2007). The local ideas and behaviors surrounding how to stay well and how to treat sickness, the author stressed to translate the aims of ethno-medicine to the people are aware of the potential humanitarian outcome of applied ethno medical study (Quinlan, 2011).

There is need of time to preserve ethno-medical knowledge for future

generations preservation of this traditional knowledge can be done by lessening the exploitation of natural resources by documentations to make its wider reach, by making tribal youth aware about its benefits and opting this as a carrier option and most important is by taking this ethno-medicinal knowledge with medicine system (Tripathi, 20019).

Objectives :

The study documents the traditional knowledge of diagnosis of the diseases, symptoms and precautions and necessary measures taken into consideration to prevent diseases. Another objective is to find out the health condition of the Ahoms of the study area and the prevalence of herbal medicine among them.

Area of study :

The field study was carried out among the Ahoms of Mohemari village under the Dhakuakhana sub-division of Lakhimpur district of Assam. The people of this village are very soft hearted and polite and were very much co-operative during interviews. Mostly they serve on agriculture. In Mohemari village, the villagers have good knowledge of common diseases and there remedial response in form of herbs, roots and shoots of plants. They follow patriarchal system of family structure. Linguistically, they belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Ahoms are distributed in all parts of Assam but majority of the Ahom populations are more concentrated in upper Assam in the districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Sibsagar.

Methodology :

The relevant data for this study were collected from the Mohemari village under the Dhakuakhana Sub-division of Lakhimpur district of Assam. Besides the surveys, interviews, collection of concrete case and informal discussion, group discussion etc were recorded. Based on the specific nature of data some relevant persons and sources were also contacted. Methods of selecting informants depended upon the distributions of local people having folk knowledge. They were requested to show the plant species they know on site. The wealth of the medicinal plant knowledge among the people of this village is based on hundred of years of belief and

observation. This knowledge has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Besides the herbal healers, the elderly persons, housewives etc. were also interviewed. Two local medicine men and a woman of this village were structurally interviewed.

Result and Discussion :

People with different cultural orientations and experiences have different notion with regard to the concepts of disease, cure and treatment; people of the traditional societies belief that illness might cause due to evil spirits, breach of taboo, black magic, sorcery etc. The modern health practices are merched along with the traditional health care system among the Ahoms of Mohemari village. Among the people of that area have been found to suffer from diseases like dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, general weakness, chicken pox, malaria, jaundice, paralysis, pneumonia, gastric, indigestion and vomiting etc.

In this Mohemari village, there are two herbal medicine men and a woman, so the people relies on them who give their services to the entire village and also the other neighbouring villages. While curing the patient they does not demand any money. They considered this expertise as a gift of the almighty as well as their forehead.

Some of the common ailments and their ethno- medicinal treatment in the study village are briefly discussed below:

Cough and cold :

To get relief from the cough pure honey is used extensively which is mixed with juice from Tulsi leave (*Ocimum santum*). It is said to be more useful in the cough of the babies. The adult take it in the form of paste made out of gingers and a kind of turmeric (*Kula-haldi*) (*Curcuma caesia* Roxb.).

Fever :

In common fever water boiled with coriander seeds (*dhania*) is taken as medicine for two or three times a day for one or two days. In same situation a mixture of fluid extracted from the *durun* (*Leucus aspera*) flower and black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) powder is taken orally.

Eye infection :

To get relief from the eye problem or any kind of eye infection the *Konahimalu*

(commelina diffuse) should apply as eye drops.

Diarrhea :

Intake of lemon juice is believed to bring relief from diarrhea. The wild herbs locally known as *Durun-bon* (*Leucas aspera*), *Mani-muni* (*Centella asiatica*) and *Mosundari* (*Hoxttunia Cordata*) are also taken as leafy vegetables. Some people also use young shoot of *Joba* or China rose (*Hibicus rosa-senesis*) or guava or modhuri aam (*psidium guajava*) as a medicine for diarrhea.

Stomach pain :

The stomach pain is treated by locally available medicine prepared by bark of *aam* or mango (*Mengafira indica*), *Kal* or banana (*Musa*) and bark of *Amara* or hog-plumtree (*Spondias mombin*). All these items are pounded and then administered in empty to the patient for a week or so. The leaf of *durun-ban* (*Leucas linifolia*) is also used in the stomach pain and indigestion.

Pneumonia :

Medicine for the disease is prepared from by grinding the Leta guti (*Caesalpinia bonducella*) and *jaluk* (*Piper nigrum*) is with a glass of warm water along with pinch of salt which should be take in empty stomach for cure.

Urinary trouble :

Urinary trouble is common health problem in the village. The ailment is cured by drinking juice extracted from the leaves of *dupor tenga* (*Bryophyllum pinnatum*). Some villagers used *tengesitenga* (*Oxalis corniculata*) juice extracted from the hole plants.

Mental disease and nerves Problem :

Medicine for these diseases are prepared from *brahmi* leaves. The juice is exact from the whole *brahmi* plant (*Bacopa monnieri* L.). The *brahmi* leaves are given to patient in regular dietary intake also.

Piles :

Medicine for the disease is prepared by consumes table from *bon jaluk* (*Oldenlandia diffusa*), *huhwani*, *kheharaj* and *manimoni*, etc which take with empty stomach for three days. Moreover for curing piles, the worm cast is dried up and mixed with water and then the water is administered to the patient once a day in empty stomach and also used to eat papaya regularly one to two weeks.

Inadequate breast milk :

A lactating mother who does not have sufficient milk to feed her baby, the mother is given the medicine prepared from the barks of jack fruit tree and black pepper. These ingredients are grinded and the paste is administered to the mother twice a day. The mothers are given to eat papaya at Their regular dietary chart.

Abnormal bleeding during menstruation and after delivery :

The juice extract of two or three flowers of *Roktojoba* (*Hibiscus rosasinensis*) is mixed with same amount of milk boiled or raw is consumed only a day or as per requirement helps in limiting the blood flow during excessive bleeding.

The juice extract of the bark of *Ashok gose* (*Saraca indica*) is consumed to stop internal bleeding, one spoon is consumed once or twice during the period of bleeding.

Lever disorder :

Pain in the upper partion of the stomach along with digestive complaints is considered to be the symptoms of liver disorder. The people used wild herbs such as *manimuni* (*Centella asiatica*) and *durun-bon* (*Leucas aspera*). The continuous use for these herbs at least once a day for a week is required to get possitive result.

Gastric :

The medicine is prepared from particular varieties of *halodhi* or turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), *ada* or ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), clove or *laung* (*Syzygium aromaticum*) and baby leaf of *tejpat* (*Laurus nobilis*). These are pounded into a paste from which pills are made. One or two pills are administered early morning in empty stomach. The course needs to be continued for one week.

Vomiting :

To prevent vomiting the people generally use ginger or *ada* (*Zingiber afficinale*) and leaves of lemon (*Citrus limon*).

Headache :

Herbal medicine for headache is prepared from *durunbon* (*Leucus aspera*) and a wild vegetable locally known as *tengeshitenga* (*Oxalis corniculata*) all these ingredients are pounded and juice applied at the nose and also used to paste of coconut, dalseni and sun flower.

Dysentry :

The medicine is prepared from the tender leaves of *Modhuri* (*Psidium guajava* L.)

and leaves of *manimuni* (*Centella asiatica*). These are pounded into paste and then mix with half cup of water and half tea spoon of sugar and then the juice is administered to the patient once a day in empty stomach.

Facture :

The gum of Dimoru (*Ficus glomerata*) is applied in the affected area and then banded till 3-7 days.

Tonsil :

It is treated with local medicine prepared by *Jaluk* (black pepper) and bark of *kathana* (*Ervatamia coronaria*), all these ingredients are pounded and then boiled in water to get the extract. A cup of extract is administered after the dinner for two or three days to the patient.

High blood pressure :

The local medicine man prepared medicine for high blood pressure from the root of *satmul* (*Asparagus raemosus*) and the root of *tamul gas* (bettle nut tree), *Debodaru tree* (a kind of pine tree). The ingredients are pounded and a few tablets are prepared and administered twice daily for three five days to the patient and regularly used to *nefafu* leaf (*Calorodendro*) in their diet.

Rickets :

When a child suffer from ricket disease, then local medicine man prepared medicine from *Ashwa Gandha* (*Withania somifera*) powder and cow's milk or ghee boiled in water. The milk paste containing the extracts of ingredients is only orally administered to the child one to two week and so.

Ear pain :

The local medicine man prepares for ear pain using a plant known as *Ramtulokhi*, *dhatura* and sesame oil. The liquid is extract from the leaf of this plant is given ear drop against ear pain and *sajina* leaf (*Morniga pterygosperman*) liquid is given as ear drop also.

It has been observed that the Ahoms rely on ethno-medicine in case of disease and illness some of these are home remedies and some are specially prescribed by herbalist or folk medicine man available in their community. Besides using herbal medicine the Ahoms try to cure diseases through magico – religious beliefs and practices. ‘Evil eye’ considered to be a case of certain ailment particularly among the children. Generally the minors become the victims of such persons.

This is popularly known as *mukh-loga* (evil-eyes). Generally, it causes indigestion, diarrhea , fever and vomiting etc. So in this regard the medicine man use betel leaf which ripped with mustard oil and chants mantras and rubbed the betel leaf all over the body of the affected person and then the leave is to be burned to get relief. For certain other diseases like pox, one – sided headache (*huruj kopali*), dog bite, insect bite etc, they still use traditional magico – religious therapy like blood sacrifices, incarnation of magical spell etc. Among them small pox is believed to be act by deity aie. To get relief from the suffering the individuals be worshipped and appeased. Here the medicine man performs a vital role by doing some rituals on the name of the deity. A pair of betel nut is offered to appease the deity. After cure the affected family member offer a small feast to the neighbour which contain sweet rice made of milk, fruits etc.

Conclusion :

It is observed that the Ahoms have ample knowledge about the medicinal values of plants that are easily available around their localities for treating many common diseases. The traditional Medicare system among them broadly belong to two types, namely, Magico – religious and Herbal medicines. As a matter of fact, in their traditional system, they take not only to curative measure but also to preventive health care measure. The life histories of the traditional medicine man have also incorporated for relative understanding of the system. Spreading and preserving this knowledge on traditional plant and their use become important for human existence and welfare. So that the younger generation should be increased by the Government to protect and cultivate these valuable herbal plants. Government should think to provide necessary fund before these medicinal plants get lost due to impact of modernization and urbanization and also due to deforestation at the same time the indigenous knowledge of Ahoms by curing certain common diseases required in – depth research in times to come.

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Table - 1
Medicinal plants used by Ahoms for treatment of various ailments

Sl. No	Local Name	Scientific Name	Part used	Ailments
1	Tulsi	Ocimum sanctum	Leaf	Cough
2	Kula haldi	Curcuma caesia Roxb.	Rhizome	Cough
3	Durun bon	Leucas aspera	Flower	Fever & Headache
4	Jaluk	Piper nigrum	Seeds	Fever & Tonsil
5	Konahimalu	Commelina diffusa	Gum	Eye infection
6	Mani – muni	Centella asiatica	Leaf	Diarrhea & Dysentery
7	Mosundari	Houttunia cordata	Leaf	Diarrhea
8	Joba	Hibiscus rosa-senesis	Leaf	Diarrhea & Abnormal bleeding during menstruation and after delivery
9	Modhuri aam	Psidium guajava	Leaf	Diarrhea & Dysentery
10	Aam	Mengafira idica	Bark	Stomach pain
11	Amara	Spondias mambin	Bark	Stomach pain
12	Leta guti	Caesalpinia bonducella	Fruits	Cough & pneumonia
13	Dupor – tenga	Bryophyllum pinnatum	Leaf	Urinary trouble
14	Tengesitenga	Oxalis corniculata	Whole plants	Urinary trouble & Headache
15	Brahmi	Bacopa monnieri L.	Leaf	Mental disease
16	Bon jaluk	Oldenlandia diffusa	Leaf	Piles
17	Ashok gose	Saraca indica	Bark	Abnormal bleeding during menstruation
18	Halodhi	Curcuma longa	Rhizome	Gastric
19	Ada	Zinziber officinal	Rhizome	Cough & Gastric
20	Laung	Syzygium aromaticum	Fruits	Gastric

21	Tejpat	Laurus nobilis	Baby leaf	Gastric
22	Nemu	Citrus limon	Leaf	Vomiting
23	Dimoru	Ficus glomerata	Gum	Fracture
24	Kathana	Ervatamia coronaria	Bark	Tonsil
25	Satmul	Asparagus raemosus	Root	High blood pressure
26	Sajina	Morniga pterygosperman	Leaf	Ear pain