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Herbal Medicinal Plants Used Traditionally by Rural Women of Lakhimpur District, Assam: Need for Conservation

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Abstract

The survey is regarding the usage of herbal medicines in the treatment of common diseases by the rural women and house wives in the district of Lakhimpur, Assam during 2009-10. The survey revealed a total of 59.14 percent people of Assamese community prefer to go for traditional, i.e., herbal medicines collected and prepared from locally available plants for the treatment of certain diseases. The rural women prefers herbal treatment to a higher extent (64.4%) than the synthetic medicines (35.6%). This paper deals with the importance of cultivation and preservation of locally available medicinal plants and creation of awareness among the rural women and house-wives to realize the importance of the medicinal plants and their preservation.

Keywords : Herbal Medicine, Synthetic medicine, usage.

INTRODUCTION

Plants and plant parts as traditional medicine and food have been attaining supreme popularity since ancient time and from the very beginning of human civilization. Modern society has realized that some medicinal herbs would play a very important role in the future '*Materia Medica*' of the world. Modern researches on herbal medicine have brought to light some significant information that makes big promise to the cure of certain deadly diseases. Today, people stand at the cross road of herbal medicine and modern medicine prepared chemically. The modern medicine has brought along with it a lot of drugs none of which is non-toxic and cent percent safe for human use. On the contrary, the traditional herbal medicine teaches us to the principle of healthy living.

The district of Lakhimpur, Assam, situated at the far east corner of North East India is a region of rich biodiversity. Because of its location at the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, an environment with heavy rainfall and high humidity, conducive for a significant floristic diversity prevails in this region. The residents of the district, therefore, depend to a large extent on the varied plant species for food and medicine besides other uses. Most of the male population of the rural areas keep themselves busy in cultivation, fire wood collection and preparation and renovation of their houses. The women section is therefore, reported to be much more involved in maintenance of the house holds and to look after their children. They utilize different plant species locally available for food and remedy of certain common diseases of their own and their wards.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was made among the people, particularly women of six sections of Assamese community of the District of Lakhimpur during 2009-10 regarding usage of herbal medicine during the treatment of certain commonly occurring diseases such as cold, cough, fever, dysentery, worm, irritation, cut injury etc. (Table 1). The survey was on the basis of structured questionnaire to different sections of the community, both man

and woman individually and in groups and aimed at to know to what extent the common people opt for local plants as traditional medicine that are in use from very old days.

The second part of the survey was to enumerate the plant species that are of similar use by all the surveyed sections of the community, during the treatment of some common ailments. Information were collected as suggested by Schultes (1963) and Jain (1989) on the basis of spot interview with the growers, the head of the village referred to as ‘*Gaonbura*’, other senior persons of the locality having wide knowledge of the plant species and their traditional usage, and village medicine men commonly known as ‘*Bez*’. The works of Kanjilal *et al.*(1934-40), Dutta (2005) and Sarma , 2002) were referred to during taxonomic identification and medicinal importance of the plant species(Table 2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey revealed a total of 59.14 percent people of Assamese community prefer to go for traditional, i.e., herbal medicine collected and prepared from locally available plants for the treatment of certain diseases. The women prefer herbal treatment to a higher extent (59.28%) than the men (54.97%). Preference is almost equal in case of urban section and rural section (56.37 and 54.24 respectively). The maximum usage of traditional medicine (63.50) belongs to the ‘*Ahom*’ section. The lowest preference belongs to Survey No. 6, belonging to ‘*Konch*’ section.

Table 1: Percentage of usage of herbal and synthetic medicines by people of different ethnic groups and castes of Assamese Community in Lakhimpur District, Assam.

Section	Male		Female		Urban		Rural		Total	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
<i>Ahom</i>	69.3	30.7	62.3	37.7	52.8	47.2	69.4	30.6	63.50	36.50
<i>Chutia</i>	61.2	38.8	63.6	36.4	59.8	40.2	61.4	38.6	61.50	38.50
<i>Brahmin</i>	48.4	51.6	57.5	42.5	52.5	47.5	63.0	33.0	55.35	44.65
<i>Kalita</i>	54.8	45.2	59.6	40.4	62.1	37.9	64.0	36.0	60.12	39.88
<i>Koibarta</i>	44.5	55.5	68.4	31.6	62.6	37.4	70.3	29.7	61.45	38.55
<i>Konch</i>	51.6	48.4	44.3	55.7	48.4	51.6	67.6	32.4	52.97	47.03

Total(%)=	54.97	45.03	59.28	40.7 2	56.37	43.63	54.24	45.76	59.14	40.86
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C.D. at 5%= 0.83

Figures are av. of 5 replicates

T= Traditional herbal medicine

S= Synthetic medicine

The survey was aimed at finding out to what extent the common people opt for traditional medicine that are in use from very old days. It was interesting to note that a total of 59.47 percent prefer to go for traditional, i.e., herbal medicine collected and prepared from locally available plants for the treatment of certain diseases. The female section prefers herbal treatment to a higher extent (64.4%) than the male (59.3%). The preference is almost equal in case of literate section (49.7% and 50.3% respectively). The maximum usage of traditional medicine (70.3%) belongs to survey No.5, a village dominated by Missing community. The lowest preference belongs to Survey No. 5, a village of cosmopolitan habitat.

Table 2: Percentage of usage of traditional and synthetic medicine in the treatment of common diseases in Lakhimpur District, Assam

Village	Male		Female		Literate		Illiterate		Total (%)	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
01	67	33	72	28	47	53	76	24	65.5	34.5
02	76	24	54	46	48	52	59	41	59.3	40.7
03	58	42	63	37	59	41	61	39	60.3	39.7
04	44	56	69	31	52	48	64	36	57.3	42.7
05	72	28	77	23	48	52	84	16	70.3	29.7
06	46	54	54	46	38	62	47	53	46.3	53.7
07	52	48	62	38	56	44	59	41	57.3	42.7
Total (%)	59.3	40.7	64.4	35.6	49.7	50.3	64.3	35.7	59.4	40.6

T = Traditional Herbal Medicine

S = Synthetic Medicine

A wide variety of wild as well as commonly grown herbs and parts of plants are most frequently used by the people as immediate remedy to certain diseases that occur most frequently among the children. Few plant extracts are also popularly used frequently for few diseases of women. The survey reveals 21 plant species that are in frequent use by all

sections of the rural people traditionally as remedial measure of common diseases Table (3).

Table 2. Some local plants most commonly used as medicine in different ailments by Assamese community, Lakhimpur, Assam.

Name of ailment	Assamese Name	Eng. Name	Botanical Name	Parts used
Jaundice	<i>Kordoi</i>	Karambola	<i>Averrhoa carambola</i> Linn	Fruit juice
	<i>Kuhiar</i>	Sugarcane	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> Linn.	Stem juice
Cough & Cold	<i>Tuloshi,</i>	Sacred basil	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Linn.	Flower & Leaf
	<i>Ada</i>	Ginger	<i>Zinziber officinalis</i> Rosc	Rhizome juice
	<i>Jaluk</i>	Black pepper	<i>Piper longum</i> Linn.	Fruit
Dysentery, Diarrhoea	<i>Musandari</i>	Chamaleon plant	<i>Houttuynia cordata</i> Thumb	Whole plant
	<i>Manimuni</i>	Indian pennywort	<i>Centella asiatica</i> Linn	Whole plant
	<i>Madhuri</i>	Guava	<i>Psidium guyava</i> Linn	Fruit & tender leaf juice
Constipacy	<i>Amita</i>	Papaya	<i>Carica papaya</i> Linn	Ripe Fruit
Pain	<i>Halodhi</i>	Turmeric	<i>Curcuma longa</i> Linn	Rhizome paste
	<i>Akon</i>	Madar	<i>Calotropis gigantean</i> (L) Br	Leaf
Fracture	<i>Harjora</i>	Medica gum	<i>Cissus quadrangularis</i> Linn	Stem
Cut injury	<i>Narji</i>	Marigold	<i>Tagetes petula</i> Linn	Leaf juice
	<i>Aparajita</i>	Butterfly creeper	<i>Clitoria ternatia</i> Linn.	Leaf juice
Memory weakness	<i>Brahmi</i>	Brahmi	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i> Pennel	Whole plant
Worms	<i>Mohaneem</i>	Margosa	<i>Azadiracta indica</i> A.Juss.	Leaf
	<i>Titaphul</i>	Red basak	<i>Phlocanthus thyrifloras</i> (Roxb)	Inflorescence
Scabies	<i>Khorpat</i>	Senna	<i>Cassia alata</i> Linn	Leaf & Flower
	<i>Lemtem</i>	Chalmogra	<i>Gynocardia odorata</i> R.Br.	Leaf extract
Fever	<i>Tubuki Lota</i>	Velvet leaf plant	<i>Cissumpelos parera</i> Linn	Leaf paste
	<i>Salkonwori</i>	Aloe	<i>Aloe vera</i> Tourn ex.Linn	Leaf paste

CONCLUSION

Women in the rural areas of the district of Lakhimpur are generally found to be much more concerned on the use of certain wild and cultivated plant species during the

remedial measures of common diseases of their wards and self-remedy. However, due to the ignorance of a large section of the society regarding the potentiality of the plants of medicinal importance, little importance is given in the conservation of these plants (Phukan, 2010). Herbal medicine today owes its existence much to the skill of the ancient traditional folk healers only. It is time for all of us that we should lay much emphasis on the conservation and research activities of medicinal plants of India. Future of traditional medicine which had a glorious history in India since the Vedic periods (4,500 B.C.) should again be regained by the society. The government must come forward to take care of it. Fortunately, people are getting conscious of the side effects of synthetic medicines. So there is hope that herbal medicine will find its place and recognition in the society in due course.

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