



Traditional Folk Medicine: A Study Of Gorkha Community In Assam

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Abstract: Assam have very rich tradition of herbal medicines used in the treatment of various ailments. Gorkha communities practice different types of traditional healing practices. Enough documentations are available on the healing practices in other communities except very scarcely available about Gorkha community of Assam hence the attempt was made for the same. A survey on folk medicinal plants was conducted in few places of Nagaon, Sonitpur, Udalguri and Biswanath district of Assam. All information was collected based on interview with the elder person of the family within the community. The identification of plants collected with the help of indigenous healers. Such medicines have been shown to have significant healing power, either in their natural state or as the source of new products processed by them. The study is mainly concentrated with documentation of the plants used to cure various ailments, diseases and to enquire about different healing systems.

Index Terms - Ethno-Medicine, Folk-medicine, Gorkha, Healing, Herbal practitioners.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Assam and Northeast India, has diverse topographical, geo-ecological and climatic gradients that have been distinct on distribution of various species of plants and animals. Biological resources in Assam represent a unique and an enormous diversity of flora and fauna due to variations in topography, altitude, and climate. Herbal medicine is the use of medicinal plants for prevention and treatment of diseases. The knowledge about herbal medicines passed on from generation to generation through oral folklore. A lot of medicinal plants traditionally used for thousands of years for curing diseases. Plants are their main source of remedy for the various diseases among the Gorkha people. Several *Vaidhya* and *Dhami-Jhakri* of this community use various plants to treat the diseases since the time immemorial. Hundreds and thousands of traditional healers *Amchis* are engaged in herbal medical practices. Traditional medicine is "it is the sum of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health and the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness." Gorkha people still maintained their socio-cultural traditions, practices and beliefs which their forefather followed. Such status quo may be noticed in the use of herbal medicine as a fast aid or for curing diseases. But details of medicinal plants used in India were reported and records on Folk medicines used by Gorkha community is lesser known. Traditional healing practices amongst Gorkha community is the method to treat ailments by using herbs in form of fresh drug, crushed juice, decoction of drug part and powdered medicine for oral intake and paste for local application on skin diseases and wounds. They use locally available medicinal herbs, cultivated drug from different habitat as well as cultivating depleting medicinal plants. The study tries to highlight the traditional medicine used for curing the minor ailments and practices which they hitherto believe as a first aid or the last destination of their query.

In many developing countries, a large proportion of the population relies on traditional practitioners and their armamentarium of medicinal plants in order to meet health care needs. Although modern medicine may exists side-by-side with such traditional practice, herbal medicines have often maintained their popularity for historical and cultural reasons. Recently, considerable attention has been paid to utilize eco-friendly, bio-

friendly plant-based products for the prevention and cure of different human diseases which is also free from side effects. But today due to deforestation, expansion of agricultural fields and the process of urbanization in the existed jungle brought threat to the use of medicinal plants. Much of the knowledge has remained endemic and has been kept secret by certain persons or families and very often it is seen that the knowledge is lost after death of the herbalists or traditional healers. Generally, these healers believed that if the secrecy of the medicine is disclosed, medicine becomes useless. As the result of the popularity of medicinal plants and their associated indigenous knowledge, the number of national and international institutions seeking information on these plants is increasing very rapidly. So that there is an urgent need to consolidate and organize all available information on medicinal plants of Assamese-Nepali.

2.0 Objectives

- Documentation of medicinal plants and their use patterns and existing traditional knowledge on medicinal plants within Assamese Nepali community.
- To study the importance of the herbal medicine.
- To study the locally available medicinal plants for curing diseases.

3.0 Methodology

The primary information regarding the use and values of plants are collected through the descriptive, observational and survey technique. The survey technique included individual and in depth interviews, and focus group discussion among the local plant users, community members and healers, persons having indigenous knowledge. Their local names, parts used, and purpose of use etc., with the participation of knowledgeable key interviewees / people have been studied. Secondary information was collected by reviewing numerous published research papers, reports, records etc.

4.0 Traditional Healer in Gorkha Community:

4.0.1 Ayurveda:

Folk medicine or ethnomedicine is not has long history basically in India. Indian people come to know that plant of our surroundings have medicinal properties. Which is rightly be guided by their experiments and the *Rishis* and *Munis* in the name of *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* by definition means the science of life. The origin of *Ayurveda* is traced back to the *vedic* times around 5000B.C. The medieval knowledge in *Atharvaveda*, one of the four Vedas is said to have generally developed into *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* is based on humors are *vata* (wind), *Pitta* (gall) and *Kapha* (mucus). A disturbance in the equilibrium of these humors causes disease. The traditional health care providers in Gorkha community can be classified as faith healers and medical providers can be divided into a. *Baidhya-kabiraj* and b. *Jadi-butiwala*. *Baidhya* and *Kabiraj* is ayurvedic physician who use elixirs, metal preparations and herbs to treat illness while *jadi-buti walas* use only herbs to treat illness.

4.0.2 Plant parts used and mode of preparation

The different parts of plants used as medicines as per the respondent's response are whole plant (usually in herbs), bulb, climbers, flowers, fruits, latex, leaves, petiole, root, root bark, roots of herb, resins, rhizome, seed, shrubs, trees, stem, Tuber and tender. Usually, the different parts of plants were made into paste, juice, powder, decoction and raw form. In most of the cases people uses fresh plant as a medicine. Single plant or a part of the plants was also found to be taken as a whole. The doses of the medicine depend upon the form how it was used. The dose differs with different plants.

4.0.2 Table-1

Disease	Botanical Name	Nepali Name	Family	Parts used	Local use
Anthelmintic	<i>Alstonia Scholaris</i> (L)	Chhataun	Apocynaceae	Bark	Juice
	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Titepaati	Asteraceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> Juss.	Neem	Meliaceae	Bark, leaf	Powder/ Juice
	<i>Cassia tora</i> L.	Tapre	Fabaceae	Leaf	Juice/Powder
Burn & Boils	<i>Aloe vera</i> (L)	Gheukumari	Liliaceae	Leaf	Gel
	<i>Heliotropium strigosum</i>	Chiraiya	Boraginaceae	Whole plant	Paste
	<i>Scorparia dulcis</i> L	Mithijhar	Scrophhlariaceae	Whole plant	Paste
	<i>Sesamum indicum</i> L.	Til	Pedaliaceae	Seed	Paste
	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i> L.	Aaloo	Solanaceae	Tuber	Paste
Blood circulation	<i>Vitex negundo</i> L.	Simali	Verbenaceae	Leaf	Juice
Backbone pain	<i>Abrus precatorius</i> L.	Lalgedi	Fabaceae	Seed	Powder
Cuts and wounds	<i>Acacia Arabica</i> (Lam)	Babul	Fabaceae	Bark, Tender	Powder/Juice
	<i>Ageratum conyzoides</i>	Ilam Jhar	Asteraceae	Whole plant	Paste
	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L) Schott.	Kalo kachu	Araceae	Petiole	Gel
	<i>Cynodon dactylom</i> (L)Pers.	Seto dubo	Poaceae	Whole plant	Paste
	<i>Magnifera indica</i> L.	Aanp/ Aam	Anacardiaceae	Fruit	Paste
	<i>Clematis gouriana</i> Rox b ex DC	Junge Lahara	Ranunculaceae	Leaf	Paste
	<i>Tagatus erecta</i> L	Sayapatri	Asteraceae	Leaf	Paste
	<i>Tridex procubens</i> L	Puthali Jhar/ Husure Jhar	Asteraceae	Leaf	Paste
Cough & cold	<i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>	Kagati	Rutaceae	Fruits	Paste
	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i> L.	Apamarg	Amaranthaceae	Root	Juice
	<i>Bauhinia racemosea</i> Lamk.	Bhorla/ Tarul	Caesalpinaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Adathoda vasica</i> Nees	Asuro	Acanthacease	Leaf/ flower	Paste
	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Ait) R.Br.	Aank	Ascpidaceae	Flower	Powder
	<i>Cassia fistula</i> L.f	Rajbriksha/ Amaltas	Caesalpinaceae	Leaf/ Flower	Paste
	<i>Butomopsis lanceolata</i> (Roxb.)	Kuro	Butomaceae	Whole plant	Juice
	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> Nees	Bans	Poaceae	Stem	Juice/Powder
	<i>Nyctanthus arbortristis</i> Linn.	Paarijat	Oleaceae	Flower, Leaf	Juice
	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i>	Tulsi	Lamiaceae	Whole part	Juice
	<i>Terminalia chebula</i> Retzius	Harro	Combretaceae	Fruit	Powder
	<i>Zingiber officinalis</i> Rosc.	Aduwa	Zingiberaceae	Fruit	Roasted
	<i>Cassia fistula</i> L.f.	Rajbrikchha	Fabaceae	Fruit	Powder
Constipation	<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	Bethusag	Amaranthaceae	Whole plant	Juice
	<i>Cuscuta reflexa</i>	Aakashbeli	Cuscutaceae	Whole plant	Juice
	<i>Leucas lavandulifolia</i>	Gaante phool	Lamiaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Neolamarckia cadamba</i>	Kadam	Rubiaceae	Bark	Juice
	<i>Atrocarpus lakoocha</i>	Badahara	Moraceae	Bark, root latex	Juice
	<i>Bauhinia purpurea</i>	Tanki	Leguminosae	Bark	Juice

Dysentery & Diarrhea	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L)Corr.	Bael	Rutaceae	Fruit	Juice
	<i>Holarrhena pubensens</i> (buch ham) Wall exG.Don	Indrajau/ Bhaate Khirra	Apocynaceae	Bark	Powder
	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L)Skeel	Jaamunnu	Myrtaceae	Bark/ Leaf	Juice
	<i>Woodfordia fruticosa</i> Salisb.	Ras Dhayenro	Mytaceae	Flower	powder
	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Bhang	Cannabaceae	Flower	Juice/ Powder
	<i>Capsicum annum</i>	Khursani	Solanaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	Ghodtapre	Apiaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Dalbergia sissoo</i>	Sisaau	Fabaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Dhatura metal</i>	Dhaturo	Solanaceae	Root, seed	Juice
	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Bar/ Bargad	Moraceae	Bark, Latex	Juice/Powder
	<i>Hygrophila auriculata</i>	Taal Makhana	Acanthaceae	Leaf, Root	Juice
	<i>Imperata cylindrical</i>	Siru	Poaceae	Root	Juice
	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Titri	Fabaceae	Leaf, Fruit	Juice
	<i>Mentha spicata</i> L.	Pudina	Lamiaceae	Leaf	Powder
	<i>Zyzphus mauritiana</i>	Bayaphal	Rhamnaceae	Root, Bark	Juice
Earche	<i>Allium Sativum</i>	Lasun	Amaryllidaceae	Bulb	Paste
Eye Diseases	<i>Allium cepa</i> L	Pyaj	Liliaceae	Bulb	Juice
	<i>Emblica officinalis</i> Gaertn	Amla	Euphobiaceae	Fruit	Juice
	<i>Lecus stlligera</i> Wall ex Benth	Dronpushpi	Lamiaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Moringa oleifera</i> Lam	Saijan	Moringinaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Santalum album</i> L.	Shreekhand	Santalaceae	Leaf	Juice
Fever	<i>Amaranthus viridis</i>	Lude saag	Amaranthaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Clerodendron viscosum</i>	Chitu/Bhenta	Verbenaceae	Tender	Juice
	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i>	Kamal	Nelumbonaceac	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i> L.	Apamarga	Amaranthaceae	Whole plant	Decoction
	<i>Echinops echinatus</i> Roxb.	Thakal Kanta	Astereceae	Root	Juice
	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i> L.	Krishna Tulsi	Lamiaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i> (Wild) Miers	Gujro	Menisprumaceae	Stem, Leaf	Juice
	<i>Vitex negundo</i> L.	Simali	Verbenaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Zingiber officinalis</i> Rosc	Aduwa	Zingiberaceae	Rhizome	Juice
	<i>Nymphaea nouchali</i>	Bhetiphul	Nymphaeaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Nyctanthus arbortristis</i>	Paaijat	Oleaceae	Flower, Leaf	Juice
	<i>Euphorbia</i>	Dudhe Jhaar	Euphorbiaceae	Stem	Juice
Gastric	<i>Terminalia bellirica</i> (Gaertn.) Roxb.	Barro	Combretaceae	Bark, Fruit	Juice
	<i>Curcuma angustifolia</i>	Tikhur	Zingiberaceae	Rhizome	Juice
	<i>Acorus calamus</i> L.	Bojho	Acoraceae	Rhizome	Juice
	<i>Melia azedarach</i> L.	Bakaaino	Meliaceae	Bark	Juice/Paste
Hair Tonic	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>	Amla	Euphorbiaceae	Leaf, Fruit	Juice/Powder
Headache	<i>Areca catechu</i>	Supari	Arecaceae	Fruit	Powder
	<i>Brassica rapa</i>	Tori	Cruciferae	Seed	Oil
	<i>Cinnamomum tamala</i>	Tejpatta	Laurel	Stem	Juice
Jaundice	<i>Carica papaya</i> L.	Mewa/Papita	Caricaceae	Leaf, Fruit	Juice/ Raw

	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	Mehandi	Lythraceae	Leaf	Juice
Menstrual disorder	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>	Apamarga	Amaranthaceae	Root	Juice
	<i>Beula utilis</i>	Bhojpatra	Betulaceae	Bark	Juice
	<i>Cajanus cajan</i> (L) Millsp.	Rahar	Fabaceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Aank	Apocynaceae	Leaf, Root	Juice
	<i>Elensine coracona</i>	Kodo/Ragi	Poaceae	Fruits	Juice
	<i>Ocimum gratissimum</i>	Ram tulsi	Lamiaceae	Root/leaf	Juice
	<i>Oxalis corniculata</i>	Chari amilo	Oxalidaceae	Root/plant	Juice
Measles	<i>Vallaria solanacea</i>	Dudhne Lahara	Apocynaceae	Whole plant	Paste
Piles	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Dumri	Moraceae	Bark, Latex	Juice/Powder
Skin disease	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Neem	Meliaceae	Bark, Leaf	Paste
	<i>Cassia tora</i> L.	Sano Tapre/ Chakra mandi	Fabaceae	Leaf	Juice/Powder
	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Bar/Swami	Moraceae	Bark, Latex	Juice/Powder
	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Pipal	Moraceae	Bark/fruits/leaf	Juice/Powder
Stomach pain	<i>Justicia adhatoda</i>	Asuro	Acanthaceae	Whole plant	Juice/Powder
	<i>Aegle marmelous</i>	Bel	Rutaceae	Leaf, Fruit	Juice
	<i>Apluda Mutica</i>	Daklejhar	Poaceae	Whole plant	Juice
	<i>Hibiscus rosa</i>	Ghantiphul	Malvaceae	Flower	Juice
	<i>Phyllantus emblica</i>	Amlaa	Eurhorbiaceae	Leaf, Fruit	Juice
	<i>Musa</i> (Spp.)	Kera	Musaceae	Stem	Juice
Vomiting	<i>Artemisia dubia</i>	Titepaati	Asteraceae	Leaf	Juice
	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	Nariwal	Arecaceae	Bark	Juice
	<i>Cuscutta reflexa</i> Roxb	Akash beli	Convolvulaceae	Whole plant	Juice

5.0 Result and Discussion:

The present discussion on ethnomedicine within the Gorkha community in Assam will definitely plays a crucial role in the documentation and preservation of traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants, significantly impacting both present and future society. Ethnomedicine, deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Gorkha people, has been passed down orally through generations, primarily practiced by traditional healers such as *dhamsi-jhakri* and elderly members of the community. When these healing practices and the use of indigenous herbs are openly discussed-whether through community meetings, academic collaborations, or informal storytelling-it creates an opportunity for systematic documentation of the plant species, their local names, therapeutic uses, methods of preparation, and associated rituals. This documentation not only safeguards this valuable knowledge from the risk of extinction due to modernization and cultural assimilation but also opens the door for scientific validation and research. Once validated, these practices can be integrated into broader healthcare systems, making primary healthcare more accessible in remote areas where modern medical facilities are scarce. Moreover, further study on this topic raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity and promote the sustainable use of natural resources, encouraging the conservation of local flora. For the present society, this means improved healthcare, cultural revitalization, and even economic benefits through the cultivation and responsible commercialization of medical plants. For the future, it ensures intergenerational transmission of ancestral wisdom, strengthens community identity, and offers a foundation for innovative, eco-friendly health practices. Thus, the revival and more research on ethnomedicine within the Gorkha community not only honor traditional knowledge but also contribute to building a more sustainable, inductive, and culturally respectful future.

6.0 Conclusion

Medicinal plants are inseparable from local livelihoods because they have long been collected, consumed and managed through local customs and knowledge. Most plant-based medicines, after formulation, are administered orally. However, in cases of skin diseases and bone fractures, such medicines are generally not prescribed for orall consumption. It has been observed that, in most cases, plant products are prepared in combination with other plants or natural substances. Ayurvedic and Homeopathic system of treatment are increasing their popularity day by day while the folk and shaman medical practices are declining and in many

cases are facing the threat of extinction due to increasing modernization or defying the practices by new generation. The medical plants gradually becoming extinct due to developmental activities or extension of agricultural field. Domestication of these plants is of utmost importance to stop these trends. On the other hand, we know that Assam has a rich reserve of varieties of medicinal plants and herbs. Most of those plants and their medical application are known only to the natives and the tribes residing in various parts of Assam for ages. Most of the medicinal plants have not yet been explored experimentally. The active ingredients present in these plants of the state of Assam may be used for designing some new drugs and pharmaceutical agents which can pave some new alleys in the world of pharmaceutical sciences and be blessing for mankind as alternative drugs. So, there is an urgent need to consolidate and organize all available information on medicinal plants from the local bodies.

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