Ethnogynaecological Uses of Plants by the Lodha Community of Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal

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Abstract: An ethnomedicinal study was conducted in ten villages of Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal during 2012-2013 to collect information from traditional health healers/tribal communities on the use of medicinal plants for treatment of gynaecological problems among the women of the Lodha community. The tribal communities residing in this region are the Santhals, Mundas, Lodhas, Bhumis, Oraon and Kherias. The present study enumerates plant 30 species belonging to 22 families used by the tribal communities and medicinal healers of Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal in gynaecological problems of Lodha women. Each plant species has been listed alphabetically according to its botanical name, family, vernacular name, part(s) used, mode of preparation/administration.

Key words: Ethnomedicine • Gynaecological Disorders • Paschim Medinipur

INTRODUCTION

Traditional healthcare practices of indigenous people pertaining to human health are termed as ethnomedicine. World Health Organization has listed over 21,000 plant species used around the world for medicinal purposes. In India, about 2,500 plant species belonging to more than 1000 genera are being used in indigenous systems of medicine. Plants and plant-based medicaments are the basis of many of the modern pharmaceuticals we use today for our various ailments [1,2]. Ethnogynaecology is emerging as a new branch which deals with the treatment of ailments among tribal women, for example, abortion, menstrual trouble, menopause syndrome, morning sickness, leucorrhoea, infertility, delivery problems, etc [3]. Millions of women all over the world suffer from several menstrual problems. Many ethnomedicinal studies have been conducted to study the role of phytotherapy in women’s health and reproductive health problems [4-14]. Ancient ethnic communities around the world had learnt to utilize their neighborhood herbal flora for various curative as well as offensive purposes [15]. Preliterate indigenous populations used plants that were available in their local environments to treat illness and promote health. Rural women of India commonly experience gynaecological problems due to unhygienic living conditions, malnutrition and hard physical work, often even during pregnancy. Traditionally the tribal women prefer herbal medicines rather than modern medicines for menstrual trouble, conception disorders, birth control practices, sterility, abortion etc. In every village some women, locally known as ‘Dhai’, specialized in phytotherapy of different gynaecological diseases and conditions using commonly available plants. Much of this wealth of knowledge is totally becoming lost as traditional culture is gradually disappearing [16]. The present study is an attempt to integrate the traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge of the tribal communities and traditional healers of Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal pertaining to treatment of gynaecological problems of tribal women from the Lodha community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethnobotanical data was collected through individual and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interviews using semistructured open-ended questionnaires as proposed in standard literature[17]. Subjects were selected on the basis of their knowledge pertaining to the use of medicinal plants in tradition [18]. A total of 75 individuals...
(30-70 years) were interviewed during the survey including medicine men (Ojha), local dhais, elder villagers, plant collectors and forest dwellers belonging to Lodha community. Interview based field study and guided field work was done in which the taxonomic diversity, distribution, local names, parts of plants used in treatment of snake bite, preparatory methods and mode of administration of these plants were recorded [19]. Group discussion were made with the healers and local dhais to know their perception about the use of traditional folk medicines in gynaecological disorders of tribal women and their awareness about the conservation of phytodiversity. Plant collection was carried out by standard method [20]. Herbaria were prepared according to conventional herbaria technique [21]. All the voucher specimens were identified using relevant floras and standard literature [22-24] and deposited in the herbarium of the Department of Botany and Forestry, Vidyasagar University, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal. The collected plants were crosschecked by neighbouring herbalists and traditional medicinal healers. For each species the proportion of informants who independently reported the use of that particular plant in gynaecological disorders was assessed following.

RESULTS

In the present study, 30 plant species from 22 families traditionally used in treatment of gynaecological problems by the Lodha community of Paschim Medinipur has been documented (Table 1). The plants have been enumerated alphabetically according to their scientific name, habit, local name, family, parts used, mode of preparation and medicinal uses. Among the reported plants there are various species of trees, shrubs and herbs. The dominant families recorded are Fabaceae (5 species of plants), Euphorbiaceae (4 species of plants), Malvaceae (3 species of plants). The local healers and

Table: 1 Plants used in treatment of gynaecological disorders by the Lodha women of Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the plant/habit/habitat/Voucher Number</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Local name</th>
<th>Parts used</th>
<th>Mode of preparation/ administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achryanthes aspera L./Herb/SS102.</td>
<td>Amaranthaceae</td>
<td>Apang</td>
<td>Leaf, Root</td>
<td>1-2 ml of fresh root extract given orally twice a day as cure to menstrual pain. Decoction of fresh leaves is given orally as cure to stop excessive haemorrhage during early pregnancy. A thin paste is obtained by grinding fresh roots with sufficient quantity of water in a mortar and pestle. The paste is applied to external genitalia to induce labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allium sativum L./Herb/SS103</td>
<td>Amaryllidaceae</td>
<td>Rosun</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>1 gm of root powder is given with warm water in the morning to cure menstrual pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloë vera (L.) Burm. F./Herb/SS104</td>
<td>Xanthorrhoeaceae</td>
<td>Guriakumari</td>
<td>Leaf paste</td>
<td>Leaf decoction is given to relieve painful menstruation. Juice of leaves is given to lessen labour pain during delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristolochia indica L./creepers/SS105</td>
<td>Aristolochiaceae</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 gm of root powder is given with warm water in the morning to cure menstrual pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azadirachta indica A.Juss./Tree/SS108</td>
<td>Meliaceae</td>
<td>Nim</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Leaf decoction is given to relieve painful menstruation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butea monosperma (L.) Taub./Tree/SS110</td>
<td>Plantaginaceae</td>
<td>Brahmi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plant extract is taken to treat gonorrhoea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buxa microcarpa (L.) Pers/herb/SS118</td>
<td>Malvaceae</td>
<td>Simul</td>
<td>Fleshy roots</td>
<td>Root paste of young plants (1 gm) mixed with cow milk is given once a day in early morning for one month to regulate irregular menstruation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynodon dactylon (L.) Pers/herb/SS118</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>Durba</td>
<td>Whole plant</td>
<td>The whole plant paste is given to cure irregular periods. The juice with sugar is taken daily for a week to stop excessive bleeding during menstruation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalbergia sissoo Retch/tree/SS119 leucorrhoea.</td>
<td>Fabaceae</td>
<td>Sissoo</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Tender leaves made paste are taken with milk to treat menstrual pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datura metel L./Shrub/SS120</td>
<td>Solanaceae</td>
<td>Dhatura</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>1 tea spoon leaf decoction is given daily in amenorrhoea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emblica officinalis Guertan./tree/SS122</td>
<td>Euphorbiaceae</td>
<td>Amla</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Fruit pulp mixed with honey and taken in leucorrhoea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemitrema indica L./B.R./shrub/SS126</td>
<td>Apocynaceae</td>
<td>Anantmula</td>
<td>Root</td>
<td>Root paste is used for the treatment of leucorrhoea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L./Shrub/SS127.</td>
<td>Malvaceae</td>
<td>Jaba</td>
<td>Stem bark</td>
<td>Stem bark paste are taken by the Lodha women continuously 7 days for causing abortion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangifera indica L./tree/SS128</td>
<td>Anacardiaceae</td>
<td>Aam</td>
<td>Seed</td>
<td>Seed powder is given in leucorrhoea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimosa pudica L./herb/SS132</td>
<td>Fabaceae</td>
<td>Lajjabati</td>
<td>Root</td>
<td>Root paste mixed with honey administered is given for menstrual pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morus koenigii (L.) Sprengel./tree/SS134</td>
<td>Rutaceae</td>
<td>Kamini</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Leaf decoction is given with honey in menstrual pain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tribal population mostly used fresh plant parts. Dried plant parts are used in powdered form. The local tribes mainly used leaf, root, bark, rhizome, stem, fruit, seed, and latex of these plants as medicine for various ailments. The reported plants were mostly administered as decoction, extracts, paste, juice and poultice.

**DISCUSSION**

In the present study, 30 medicinal plants were commonly used in different gynaecological disorders of the women in Paschim Medinipur. Paschim Medinipur is inhabited by a number of tribal communities like Santhals, Mundas, Lodhas, Bhumij, Oraon and Kherias. The use of medicinal plants was a chosen practice in this district throughout history, the knowledge of which was gathered through the experience of many generations. The reported plants were used by more than one ethnic group. The local tribes mainly used leaf, root, bark, rhizome, stem, fruit, seed and latex of these plants. The consensus among users indicates that plants have curative effect. Several group of diterpenes (kaurenoic acid), phenyl propanoid glucosides, heterocyclic aldehydes and fatty acids(linoleic acid), steroidal saponins have been earlier reported from these plants [24]. Thus the present investigation can provide leads for specific gynaecological problems of women.

**CONCLUSION**

The ethno-medico-botanical survey of the villages of Paschim Medinipur district revealed that the people of this area are possessing good knowledge of herbal drugs but, as these ethnic societies are in progressive exposure to modernization; their knowledge of traditional uses of plants may be lost in due course. This knowledge needs to be inventorised and research related to isolation and purification of active compounds from these plants should be carried out to provide leads in future drug therapy.

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**REFERENCES**