

Folk therapies of *Katkaris* from Maharashtra

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In the present era of globalization and intellectual property rights, India's folk knowledge of traditional remedies needs to be documented systematically. *Sahyadris* of Maharashtra have a diverse flora and fauna, and harbor numerous species of medicinal importance. *Katkaris* are one of the primitive tribes of India, residing in Thane and Raigad districts of western Maharashtra. Their remote locality, poverty and lack of touch with modern civilizations make them confined to the hilly areas around. In present paper an attempt has been made to document traditional remedies of *Katkaris* from Maharashtra with respect to 35 diseases, are discussed with respect to their cures from combination products of 33 plants and 7 animals.

Keywords : *Katkari* tribes, Folk medicine, Traditional remedies, Ethnomedicine

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Katkaris are one of the 75 tribes identified as primitive tribal groups by the ministry of welfare under the central sector scheme due to very low level of literacy, stagnant population, pre-agricultural stage of existence and economic backwardness¹. This tribal group is teetering on the brink of extinction². The community, a primitive forest tribes based mostly in Raigad and Thane districts of Maharashtra, lives in abject poverty³. The people are labourers, firewood sellers and experts in hunting. They have a good knowledge of various forest based medicinal plants.

Extreme poverty, malnutrition and lack of cleanliness lead to face them to the diseases like cholera, typhoid, chickenpox, scabies and other skin diseases⁴. Since they do not afford to go to the doctor to treat the same, ethno-medicines are the only option left for them. Their herbal medicines on snake-bite are highly effective.

Methodology

While staying and being with *Katkaris* intermittently for understanding their dialect and cultural habits since long, knowledge about their herbal medicinal treasure could be gained. Information on ethnomedicinal plant species collected during stay with them was discussed with many local

Katkaris, dwellers and cross checked. They revealed the information only after frequent persuasions. Prior informed consent was taken from the local people. Information regarding vernacular name, plant parts used, process of preparation of medicines, etc. was collected and authentic identification of plants was done with the help of different flora and monographs⁵⁻¹⁹. Efforts have been made to enlist some of the plants used in medicines and other popular remedies used by *Katkaris* of Maharashtra.

Results and discussion

In the province of *Katkaris*, both the general population and traditional folk healers continue to rely on plant and animal based remedies. Initially most of them were non co-operative because of the feeling that they will lose their secrets by sharing the practices and formulations on various diseases. Over a long period, efforts had to be made for gaining the folk knowledge. Gradually they opened up and shared the folk treasure with us. The information collected from different people was verified from the healers of other *Katkari Wadies* (A small place where a group of *Katkaris* resides). The whole information found almost no variation with little dissimilarity in plant parts used for the treatment (Table 1).

In Indian forests on hilly regions where extreme poverty of tribes as well as inadequacy of modern

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Table 1—Folk remedies of *Katkaris*

Diseases	Local name of diseases	Plants / animals used for treatment or prophylaxis (Family)	Local name of plants / animals	Treatment procedure
Scabies	<i>Kharuj</i>	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i> (Combretaceae) (8,9)	<i>Arjun sadada</i> (8,9)	Bark of tree is roasted and paste of it obtained by trituration in oil is applied on affected parts of body.
		<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i> (Moraceae) (9)	<i>Fanas</i> (Jackfruit) (9)	Bark of tree is roasted and paste of it obtained by trituration in oil is applied on affected parts of body.
		<i>Pongamia glabra</i> (Fabaceae) (8,9)	<i>Karanji</i> (8,9)	A mixture of sulphur, camphor and <i>Pongamia</i> oil is applied to affected body parts.
Ringworm	<i>Gajakarna</i>	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Apocynaceae) (8,9) and <i>Ricinus communis</i> (Euphorbiaceae) (8,9)	<i>Ruie</i> (8,9) and <i>Erand</i> (Castor) (8,9)	Latex of <i>Calotropis</i> and <i>Ricinus</i> (castor) triturated with equal amount of Calcium carbonate (CaCO ₃) and is applied on ruined tissues.
		<i>Ficus scabriunscal</i> (Moraceae) sp. (8,9)	<i>Kharawat</i>	Affected part is scratched vigorously and latex of the tree is applied on it. Strong (High degree) irritation occurs.
German measles	<i>Govar</i>	<i>Ficus glomerata</i> (Moraceae) (8,9)	<i>Umbar</i> (8,9)	Root of the tree cut on Sunday or Tuesday before sunrise and sap oozing out of it is given to the patient to drink.
		<i>Oryza sativa</i> (Poaceae) (8,9)	<i>Bhat</i> (Rice) (8,9)	Rice hull is sprinkled on patient's body.
Chicken Pox	<i>Kanjinya</i>	Different legumes (Leguminosae) (8,9)	<i>Kadadhanye</i> (8,9)	Spicy soup of legumes is given to patient frequently.
Erysipelas	<i>Dhavare</i>	--	--	Triturate obtained in a Nickel vessel from curd made up of buffalo's milk, albumin of hen's egg and sulphur is applied on the patient's body daily and allowed to remain whole day without wiping it off.
Clefts in feet	<i>Chikhlya</i>	<i>Mangifera indica</i> (Anacardiaceae) (8,9)	<i>Aamba</i> (Mango) (8,9)	A sun-dried piece of unripe fruit of mango is rubbed on the cleft.
Cracked heels	<i>Payachya Bhega</i>	<i>Boswellia glabra</i> (Bursaceae) (8,9)	<i>Saladholi</i> (8,9)	Bark of the tree is rubbed against cracked heels.
Stinging pain in heels	<i>Kharad</i>	--	--	Stinging part of heels is stitched with thread.
Guinea worm	<i>Naru</i>	<i>Sida cardifolia</i> (Malvaceae) (8,9)	<i>Chikagee</i> (8,9)	Roots paste is applied on the affected area.
Armpit boil	<i>Khakamanjari</i>	<i>Manis crassicaudata</i> (Manidae) (10)	<i>Khavalemanjar</i> (Indian Pangolin) (10)	Scales paste is applied on armpit.
Stomach Ache	<i>Potshool</i>	<i>Calycopteris floribunda</i> (Combretaceae) (8,9)	<i>Baguli</i> (8,9)	A tablespoonful juice obtained from leaves of <i>Calycopteris</i> is gulped.
Colic in Stomach	<i>Waayagola</i>	<i>Adhatoda vasica</i> (Acanthaceae) (8,9,11) and <i>Praecitrullus fistulosus</i> (Cucurbitaceae) (8,9)	<i>Adulsa</i> (8,9,11) and <i>Tondli</i> (8,9)	A paste obtained by triturating the mixture of plants is applied in a thick layer on abdomen.
		<i>Viverricula indica</i> (Viverridae) (12)	<i>Ood</i> (Small Indian civet) (12)	Faeces of little civet are added to the above paste for immediate relief.

(Contd.)

Table 1—Folk remedies of *Katkaris*—Contd.

Diseases	Local name of diseases	Plants / animals used for treatment or prophylaxis (Family)	Local name of plants / animals	Treatment procedure
Intestinal Obstruction	<i>Nasa fugane</i>	--	--	A black <i>saree</i> is twisted on abdomen of the patient and the ends of <i>saree</i> are pulled in opposite directions slowly mimicking swimming action. This is repeated 5 times.
Anasarka	<i>Nalagooda</i>	<i>Ziziphus xylopyrus</i> (Rhamnaceae) (13)	<i>Ghoti</i>	Crushed leaves are applied in thick layer on and around navel.
		<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i> (Caesalpiniaceae) (6,8,9)	<i>Aapata</i> (6,8,9)	Bark of the plant is removed on Saturday and a rope from it is tied on the left wrist of the patient.
Desentry and Diarrhoea	<i>Hagawan</i>	<i>Dolichos biflora</i> (Fabaceae) (8,9,11)	<i>Hulaga</i> (8,9)	Soup of <i>Dolichos</i> is given to drink.
Cholera	<i>Pataki</i>	<i>Macaca</i> sp. (14)	<i>Wanar</i> (Monkey) (14)	Roasted stomach soaked in slurry of tamarind fruit is given to the patient to eat.
		<i>Tamarindus indica</i> (Fabaceae) (8,9)	<i>Chinch</i> (Tamarind) (8,9)	
Worms - <i>Ascaris lumbricoides</i> (Nematodal infection)	<i>Janta</i>	--	--	A spoonful ash of burnt wood is fed to the patient with little water.
Involuntary emission of semen	<i>Dhatupatan</i>	<i>Cylista scariosa</i> (Fabaceae) (8)	<i>Ranghevda</i> (8)	Rootlets of <i>Cylista</i> crushed with water on the stone is given to the patient with cow's milk.
Prophylaxis of above		<i>Acacia catechu</i> (Fabaceae) (8,9)	<i>Khair</i> (8,9)	Juice of plant is given with cow's milk as a measure of prophylaxis.
Urinary Obstruction	<i>Mutravarodh</i>	<i>Tectona grandis</i> (Verbenaceae) (8,9)	<i>Saag</i> (Teak) (8,9)	Bark and seed of Teak are rubbed with water on the hard rock and the paste is fed to the patient.
Stye	<i>Raanjanwadi</i>	--	--	Left hand little finger or Copper ring is rubbed against another hand and touched to the stye frequently.
Corneal opacity	<i>Dolyat Ful padne</i>	<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i> (Caesalpiniaceae) (6,8,9)	<i>Aapata</i> (6,8,9)	Flowers picked up before sunrise and affected eye is swept with it. The flower is held near the eye and slowly and carefully blown in a downward direction.
Headache	<i>Dokedukhi</i>	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i> (Anacardiaceae) (8,9)	<i>Bibba</i> (8)	The carpel of the plant rubbed with water on the hard rock and the paste is applied as a thick layer on forehead.
		<i>Eleusine coracana</i> (Poaceae) (8)	<i>Nachnee</i> (8)	Thin paste of seeds flour of <i>Eleusine</i> is applied on the forehead.
		<i>Piper betle</i> (Piperaceae) (8,9)	<i>Nagwel</i> (8,9)	Edible oil is applied to leaf and heated. This hot leaf is pressed on children's forehead.
Migraine	<i>Ardhashishee</i>	--	--	Forehead veins are pulled with teeth.
Toothache	<i>Daatdukhi</i>	<i>Acacia arabica</i> (Mimosaceae) (8,9)	<i>Babhul</i> (8,9)	Piece of bark of the tree is held between molar teeth.
		<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Apocynaceae) (8,9)	<i>Ruie</i> (8,9)	Latex is filled in the tooth cavity.

(Contd.)

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Diseases	Local name of diseases	Plants / animals used for treatment or prophylaxis (Family)	Local name of plants / animals	Treatment procedure
Fever	<i>Taap</i>	<i>Holarrhena pubescens</i> (Apocynaceae) (15)	<i>Kuda</i> (15)	Aqueous extract of stem bark of plant is given to the patient suffering from fever.
		<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i> (Caesalpiniaceae) (6,8,9)	<i>Aapata</i> (6,8,9)	If fever recurs every day but does not persist very long then, bark collected on Saturday and rope is made out of it which is tied on left wrist of the patient.
Asthama	<i>Dama</i>	<i>Cynopterus sphinx</i> (Pteropodidae) (16)	<i>Chambat -Falakshani waghul</i> (16)	Aqueous extract of animal is given to the patient to drink.
Hyperlipidaemia	<i>Medavruddhi</i>	<i>Careya arborea</i> (Lecythidaceae) (8,11)	<i>Kumba</i> (8)	Leaves juice is given to patient to drink.
Fall off in yield of--milk		<i>Citrullus vulgaris</i> (Cucurbitaceae) (8)	<i>Halinda</i> (8)	A bulb is fed to cows and buffaloes.
Cramps	<i>Petake yene</i>	--	--	Affected part is fomented with glowing fire red cow-dung cake.
Epilepsy	<i>Pheet yene</i>	--	--	The child is wrapped in a cloth by his aunt (<i>Attya</i> – Fathers sister) and the child is turned from one side to another side asking child's mother - <i>Gata modla?</i> , she should answer <i>Modla</i> .
Wound	<i>Jakham</i>	<i>Blepharis repens</i> (Acanthaceae) (17)	<i>Hadsandhee</i>	Latex oozing out from stem is poured on the wound and tied with cloth.
		<i>Python molurus</i> (Pythonidae) (18)	<i>Ajgar</i> (Python) (18)	If wound is big then faeces of python are filled into it.
Burns	<i>Bhajane</i>	<i>Euphorbia tortilis</i> (Euphorbiaceae) (19)	<i>Perakut</i>	Latex oozing out from stem is applied on burnt portion immediately.
Cobra (<i>Naja naja</i>)--bite		<i>Varanus bengalensis</i> (Varanidae) (14)	<i>Ghorpad</i> (Bengal Monitor) (Monitor lizard) (14)	Oil obtained by melting adipose fat of this animal is given to drink and head of patient is rubbed with palms vigorously. The patient is believed to vomit the poison.
		<i>Holarrhena antidysenterica</i> (Apocynaceae) (8,9)	<i>Kuda</i> (8,9)	Rootlets of plant are chewed, patient vomits. It is believed that poison goes out with it.
<i>Furse</i> (<i>Echis carinatus</i>) bite	--	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> (Apocynaceae) (8,9)	<i>Upatsadi-Anantmul</i> (8,9)	Juice of <i>Hemidesmus</i> leaves is given to drink.
		<i>Moringa oleifera</i> (Moringaceae) (8,9,11)	<i>Shevga</i> (8,9)	<i>Moringa</i> bark is chewed till vomiting occurs.
Scorpion sting	--	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Apocynaceae) (8,9)	<i>Ruie</i> (8,9)	Roots of <i>Calotropis</i> are rubbed against hard stone with water and paste obtained is applied on stung area and little of it is given to eat.
		<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i> (Caesalpiniaceae) (6,8,9)	<i>Aapata</i> (6,8,9)	Leaves are given to chew and air is blown into ears.
		<i>Mangifera indica</i> (Anacardiaceae) (7,8)	<i>Aamba</i> (Mango) (7,8)	Sticky oozings of the plant are applied on stung area.

health services is common, folk medicines play a key role in treating various ailments. It is also observed that traditional association of *Katkaris* with deep forests helps in conservation of medicinal plants and retain the ethnomedicinal knowledge.

Of the 35 diseases studied, systemic and skin infections and/or infestations are more common among *Katkaris*. Use of plant and plant parts as well as animals is prevalent as remedies for various ailments, former being employed to a large extent.

In the present paper 33 plants, 7 animals and various customs are discussed with respect to their ethno-medicinal applications prevalent in the *Sahyadris* of Maharashtra by *Katkari* tribe. Whole plant or various plant parts like bark, leaves, roots, wood, seeds, flowers, carpel, fruits, bulb, sticky oozes, latex etc. are seen to be successfully utilized as remedies. Use of different animals, their products as well as various body parts, viz. stomach, scales, adipose tissue, excreta, milk eggs etc. is very common in treating some of the ailments. Sulfur, Camphor, Calcium carbonate, Nickel, thread, *saree* etc. also find use in folk therapies. Some strange customs like pulling forehead veins with teeth and uttering some customary words is also not very uncommon among *Katkaris*.

All this makes us know that *Katkaris* have preserved their knowledge of medicine since long time. Major part of their medicines comes from natural origin where it is easily available in Indian tropical rain forests.

In view of greater importance and use of folk medicines in modern therapeutics, developments and conservation efforts should be focused on this natural wealth. Systematic analysis and pharmacological investigations of the cited plant and animal species & their products is required to know the accuracy of therapeutic values for optimum and best possible utilization of the traditional knowledge.

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