Traditional processing of Shotti (Curcuma angustifolia Roxb.) - A rhizome based ethnic weaning food

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The paper explored the Traditional knowledge of rural women on processing of Shotti (Curcuma angustifolia; Family-Zingiberaceae) - a rhizome based ethnic weaning food, its collection patterns and temporal availability in the Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal, India. The information on preparation of weaning food and medicinal uses is based on the exhaustive interviews with local healers, practicing traditional system of medicine and elderly rural women. This knowledge is mainly confined to native people of North Bengal especially to the women of Rajbansi ethnic group. Details of the plant, parts used, method of preparation, dosage and mode of administration have been reported.

Keywords: Weaning food, Ethnic, Rajbansi, Rural, Uttar Dinajpur, Traditional

Indigenous knowledge (IK) refers to the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area. The development of IK systems, covering all aspects of life, including management of the natural resources, has been a matter of survival to the people who generated these systems. Such knowledge systems are cumulative, representing generations of experience, and trial and error experiments. The present study deals with traditional processing of a weaning food locally known as shotti mainly prepared from rhizomes of Curcuma angustifolia plant (Fig. 2.). Curcuma angustifolia belongs to family Zingiberaceae, is also known as East Indian arrowroot and is also used for medicinal purposes by the local herbalists. Curcuma angustifolia Roxb. is endemic to India, found in North western, Central and South India. It has been recorded in Central Himalayas, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and South India. The plant grows wild in many places. It is found in moist and cool situations at altitudes of about 450 m. and is cultivated to a small extent. Different parts of the plant has also been taken by mouth as a dietary aid in gastrointestinal disorders, and applied on the skin to soothe painful, irritated, or inflamed mucous membranes. The aim of paper is to popularize the plant as this is in the list of one of the endangered plant and recognized by very few young generation people and this traditional knowledge of preparation of shotti is also fading away with time.

Study area

Uttar Dinajpur district lies between latitude 25°11' N to 26°49' N and longitude 87°49' E to 90°00' E occupying an area of 3142 sq km and shares international boundary with nearby country Bangladesh in the East and flaked by the districts of Bihar on the West, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district on the North, and Malda district on the South. Geographically Uttar Dinajpur is bestowed with flat topography with a gentle southerly slope towards the main rivers of the district. Uttar Dinajpur forms a part of the basin lying between Rajmahal hills on the East. Based on the study, it has been found that the communities of North Bengal are rich in ethno biological knowledge, which has been transmitted from one generation to another. It has also been revealed that the Rajbansi communities living in the same region have their own traditional ethno botanical knowledge. The methods used for curing diseases have been found to be different from one community to other. The present study emphasized and also supported the fact that there is a profound and growing knowledge gap between old and younger generations. People of more than 50-65 yrs age know a lot about wild plant products as compared to younger generation.
Methodology

Arrowroot refers to any plant of the genus *Maranta*, but the term is most commonly used to describe the easily digestible starch obtained from the rhizomes of *Maranta arundinacea*. Other plants that produce similar starches include East Indian arrowroot (*Curcuma angustifolia*) (Fig. 1). For preparation of weaning food locally called *Shotti*, the rhizomes of the plant were cleaned to remove soil and dirt, peeled, grated, and soaked in water (Fig. 2). The water turns milky white and strained to separate grated flakes of rhizome and was kept for 12 hours. Excess water was drained; again some water was added and left for 6 hours. Finally the excess water was drained out, and the left over wet white dough was sun dried and crushed with hand to make fine powder. This starch is a white powder similar in appearance and texture to cornstarch (Fig. 3). Near about 2 kg of rhizomes were required to prepare 250 gm of weaning food. Ready *Shotti* or weaning food is generally kept in plastic jars or polyethylene packs and given to baby after boiling in milk or water according to availability for 3-4 times in a day.

Discussion

Ancient Indians had discovered this natural wealth many centuries ago and fashioned an art and science of natural healing using nature’s bounty. The Indian systems of medicine like Siddha, Unani, Ayurveda and non-documented tribal and folk medicine are the distilled wisdom of many centuries of natural health care.

According to the local healers, *Curcuma angustifolia* plant is also used for medicinal purposes like for curing worms and stomach ache. The rhizome juice and equal amount of lime water is given to patient twice in a day. In case of severe stomachache grated rhizome is kept on navel for about 10-20 mins.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the traditional knowledge on wild food plants like *Curcuma angustifolia* and its ethnic preparations is on sharp decline. Unless efforts are made to educate the younger generations about their importance, it may be lost in near future. Efforts should make from every end to improve the food security in rural areas and in the improvement of wild food status, whose potential as source of nutrition is currently under valued. Steps are needed to undertake extensive education about their importance as a nutritionally balanced food and as a direct and indirect source of income particularly for the resource poor families.

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References