Indigenous medication used by *Himachali* women to cure pregnancy discomforts

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The state of Himachal Pradesh with its difficult topography makes villages inaccessible and provision of basic health amenities more expensive and difficult. Besides this, there are areas, which are snow bounded and remain cut off for long period of time. Thus, the benefits from the advancement in medical sciences have not yet touched the rural areas. The indigenous system of care with age old procedure is still in vogue among them since pre-historic times. Maternal healthcare, too, draws extensively from the fund of indigenous knowledge, and a peep into this basket of time tested knowledge would reveal that the list of maternal health practices is both long as well as exhaustive. Almost every rural household is a repository of maternal health related indigenous knowledge, due to the common, everyday use of indigenous materials for preventive, protective, and curative purposes. Since due to various reasons, many indigenous knowledge systems are depleting at an alarming rate, therefore there is an urgent need to explore and document this unique knowledge before it is lost forever.

Documentation of such practices not only helps in probing the past but also helps in bringing to light even fragmentary information on traditional methods of our ancestors. Besides this, it would help to preserve for posterity the age-old practices, which would otherwise disappear, as most indigenous practices remain unrecorded and undocumented. Rural women certainly constitute a storehouse of indigenous knowledge by virtue of their accumulated experiences and practices that are unique to their culture and environment. Thus documenting and validating the indigenous knowledge of rural women will be helpful in modifying these indigenous methods of treatment on the basis of scientific validation, through blending of common local ingredients with modern technologies/methodologies in order to investigate different food preparations or practices, ingredients added and method of preparation. An attempt has, therefore, been made to document the indigenous knowledge/medication used to cure various pregnancy discomforts and to verify scientific rationale of the documented indigenous knowledge.

**Methodology**

The study was conducted in district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. In order to document the indigenous practices followed by rural women to cure
pregnancy discomforts, 4 villages namely Saliana and Deogran from Panchrukhi block, and Samloti and Ustehar from Nagrota Bagwan block were selected. Desired information was tapped from rural women of the district by using questionnaire based survey along with informal discussions. The method of preparation and consumption of the food given along with their dosage were recorded and compiled. Given that indigenous practices have their roots in local beliefs and customs, which are internally consistent and logical to those who use the same, it was necessary to objectively deduce this knowledge for its validation. Thus, for verifying scientific rationality of indigenous practices followed by rural women, the experts from the field of nutrition and gynecology were consulted. The documented data was also validated by referencing with the available literature.

Observations
The physical and psychological disorders of a pregnant woman are no different from any other individual. However, the principles of management differ, as strong medicines would harm the foetus. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, rural women use indigenous medication to a considerable extent for curing various pregnancy discomforts. The present investigation revealed the use of various plant materials for curing the pregnancy discomforts and maintaining the health of women during the vulnerable period. The plant resources being used by the rural people may be because of the fact that they are non–narcotic, have no side effects, easily available at affordable prices and sometimes the only source available to the poor. The information regarding various foods taken/practices followed to cure the pregnancy discomforts, method of preparation and consumption of a particular food preparation along with scientific rationality has been presented (Table 1). The food preparations/practices were followed by the respondents to cure a number of pregnancy discomforts like morning sickness, constipation, abdominal pain, cold and cough, backache and blemishes on face.

Discussion
The paper presents information regarding indigenous knowledge available with the rural women to cure various pregnancy discomforts. The people of district Kangra, like most of other indigenous people depend upon plant resources for their medicinal requirements for various pregnancy discomforts and in this way a traditional system of folk recipes has evolved in the area over a period of time. In majority of the ailments, viz. constipation, abdominal pain, cold and cough, rural ladies prescribed decoction of locally available plant species/herbs like Terminalia chebula Retz., Terminalia bellirica Roxb., Emblica officinalis Gaertn., Trachyspermum ammi Sprague, Mentha arvensis DC., Elattaria cardamomum L., Viola odorata L. and Glycyrrhiza glabra L. While consumption of powdered mixture of different plant was suggested for morning sickness and constipation. The study also revealed that paste of some of the fruits or rhizomes was used as a face pack for curing blemishes on the face. Ailments like swelling of limbs was treated by fomentation with water boiled along with different parts of the plant like leaves or vine. In majority of the cases, a combination of plants, herbs and shrubs was used for best results. Different plants mentioned in the study for treatment of various pregnancy discomforts have also been reported for similar uses, e.g. alike rural women of Himachal Pradesh, people of Rajasthan also consume Terminalia chebula Retz. to relieve constipation; and in Karnataka, Curcuma longa L. is used to remove blemishes on face. Same information pertaining to a particular remedy from different localities or group of informants reflects the accuracy and authenticity of the medicines.

It was observed that some of the plants like Terminalia chebula Retz., Terminalia bellirica Roxb., Trachyspermum ammi Sprague and Elattaria cardamomum L. have been used for treating a number of pregnancy discomforts. Therefore, efforts should be made to survey the region thoroughly for more such plants. Thus, documentation of the indigenous knowledge exhibits the fact that though the modern medicine system has made spectacular strides during the last century, many people still follow native or indigenous system of healthcare. As regards scientific rationality of the indigenous practices/food preparations suggested by the respondents, the experts presented various medicinal properties of the plants. Data were compared with the available literature on medicinal plants and validity of practices calls for merging this indigenous knowledge with the modern scientific mainstream. Tapping of the rural knowledge in the indigenous herbal system may also be very well utilized for the preparation of medicine in combination with modern technique. The study has paramount importance as it restores and documents
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<th>Pregnancy discomfort</th>
<th>Composition of food given and method of use</th>
<th>Scientific rationale</th>
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<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Decoction of one fruit each of <em>harad</em> (<em>Terminalia chebula</em> Retz.) and <em>bahera</em> (<em>Terminalia bellirica</em> Roxb.) and two fruits of <em>amla</em> (<em>Emblica officinalis</em> Geernt.) is administered once a day till problem persists. Boiled and strained mixture of 1 teaspoonful of ground <em>ajwain</em> (<em>Trachyspermum ammi</em> Sprague), 2 cm piece of <em>garlakdi</em> (<em>Cassia fistula</em> L.) and 1 teaspoonful of ground <em>meethi saunf</em> (<em>Foeniculum vulgare</em> Mill.) in a glass of water is given 2-3 times a day.</td>
<td><em>Harad</em>, <em>bahera</em> and <em>amla</em> are purgatives thus facilitate evacuation of bowels.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Sanai</em> (<em>Cassia augustifolia</em> Vahl.) leaves are chewed. One teaspoonful of dried <em>isabgol</em> (<em>Plantago ovata</em> Forsk.) husk soaked in half glass of water is administered 2-3 times a day. Vegetable prepared from spinach (<em>Spinacia oleracea</em> L.) and <em>dudali</em> (<em>Euphorbia hirta</em> L.) leaves is given. Powdered mixture prepared from <em>dalchini</em> (<em>Cinnamomum verum</em> Presl.), 2 teaspoons of small cardamom (<em>Elettaria cardamomum</em> L.) and 1 teaspoonful of <em>meethi saunf</em> is consumed early in the morning empty stomach with boiled water. Banana is given to get relief from constipation.</td>
<td>Helps in liver stimulation and in pushing down the excreta. <em>Isabgol</em> is emollient, demulcent, laxative, helps in facilitating evacuation bowels. Helps in digestion, pushes down the excreta, and stimulates liver and intestines. <em>Dalchini</em> is aromatic and carminative; <em>saunf</em> is antitodal.</td>
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<td>Abdominal pain</td>
<td>Decoction of 1 teaspoonful of <em>ajwain</em> is employed. Decoction of 3 gm <em>bhabri</em> (* Ocimum gratissimum* L.), few leaves of mint (<em>Mentha arvensis</em> DC.) and 2 teaspoons of <em>ajwain</em> is consumed. Decoction of <em>kakarsinghi</em> (<em>Pistacia khitjuk</em> Stocks) pod (4 cm whole) is given.</td>
<td>Helps in proper digestion. <em>Bhabri</em> is antiflatulent; mint is carminative and stomachic; <em>ajwain</em> is stomachic and euphettic. <em>Kakarsinghi</em> has febrifuge and carminative properties.</td>
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<td>Morning sickness</td>
<td>Roasted and ground mixture (1 teaspoonful) of 50 gm <em>meethi sauf</em>, a piece of <em>mishri</em> and 10 gm <em>ajwain</em> is served with lukewarm water daily. Mixture of crushed onions (2) (<em>Allium cepa</em> L.) and few mint leaves after adding a pinch of salt is given. Mixture of <em>amla</em> powder (1 teaspoonful) and milk (1 glass) is given once a day.</td>
<td><em>Saunf</em> and <em>mishri</em> are cold in nature, increases appetite; <em>ajwain</em> helps in digestion. <em>Amla</em> is refrigerant and reduces acidity.</td>
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<td>Swelling of limbs</td>
<td><em>Satavar</em> (<em>Asparagus racemosus</em> Willd.) juice is given to the patient. Fomentation with boiled water along with <em>akasbel</em> (<em>Cuscuta reflexa</em> Roxb.) is recommended.</td>
<td><em>Satavar</em> is a diuretic and controls oedema. <em>Akasbel</em> acts as haemostatic, astringent and rubefacient. Eucalyptus acts as haemostatic, astringent, antiseptic, stimulating and rubefacient. Because of sodium content, high intake of sodium leads to swelling of body. Increased urination leads to decrease in oedema.</td>
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<td>Cold and cough</td>
<td>Boiled two small cardamoms, half teaspoon of black pepper (<em>Piper nigrum</em> L.), bay leaves (<em>Cinnamomum tamala</em> Nees &amp; Eberm.) and a pinch of salt in water is given about half glass per day after adding sugar and milk. Two teaspoon decoction of ground cardamom, <em>banafshah</em> (<em>Viola odorata</em> L.) and <em>mulathi</em> (<em>Glycyrrhiza glabra</em> L.) is given.</td>
<td>Cardamom is stimulating; bay leaves stimulate the nervous system; black pepper is an astringent and tonic. Cardamom is stimulant and carminative; <em>banafshah</em> is diaphoretic and emetic, antipyretic and has cooling effect; <em>mulathi</em> is an expectorant and is soothing to irritated mucous membranes.</td>
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<td>Backache</td>
<td>Four teaspoon mixture of roasted and crushed <em>sonth</em> (<em>Zinziber officinale</em> Rosc.) along with ghee and sugar is given daily. <em>Methi</em> (<em>Trigonella foenum graecum</em> L.) seeds (2 teaspoon) boiled in a glass of milk are given at bed time.</td>
<td>Provides strength. Reduces pains and stimulates nervous system.</td>
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<td>Blemishes on face</td>
<td>Paste prepared from 1 teaspoonful of milk and 7-8 almonds (<em>Prunus amygdalus</em> Batsch) soaked in water is applied on face. Mixture of half teaspoon turmeric (<em>Curcuma longa</em> L.) and 1 teaspoon of gram flour (<em>Cicer aritinum</em> L.) is applied on face.</td>
<td>Almonds provide nourishment due to the presence of iron; milk clears the skin. Turmeric possesses antibacterial and antiseptic properties, controls skin diseases and infection.</td>
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the fading out knowledge system of the rural areas and can help in providing a lead to new drug development for various ailments. It is hoped that this trend of indigenous knowledge, with the support of scientific validation, will result in this age-old knowledge regaining its legitimate place in modern society.

Acknowledgement
Author is highly grateful to rural ladies for providing the indigenous information used to cure the pregnancy discomforts. Thanks are also due to experts for expressing their opinion to build upon the rationality of validation.

References