Herbal folk remedies of Bankura and Medinipur districts, West Bengal

Ashis Ghosh
Ramkrishna Pally, Medinipur (West)-721 101, West Bengal

Received 10 January 2002; revised 24 January 2003

Twenty two medicinal plants belonging to nineteen families used by the tribals/ local communities of Bankura and Medinipur districts, West Bengal have been reported as the potential drugs against twenty common ailments of the people.

Keywords: Herbal folk remedies, Tribals, Bankura, Medinipur.

Herbal medicines are assuming greater importance in the primary health care of individuals and communities in many developing countries. There has been an increase of demand in international trade because herbal medicines are very effective, cheaply available, supposedly have no side effects and used as alternative to allopathic medicines. Moreover, in most countries the herbal medicine market is not adequately regulated and the products are therefore unregistered and often not controlled by regulatory bodies. The establishment of regulation and registration procedures has become a major concern in both developed and developing countries.

Two rural districts, Bankura and Medinipur (previously Midnapur, Midnapore) are the tribal inhabited regions of West Bengal. Bankura lies between 22° 38' & 23° 38' North latitude and between 86° 36' & 87° 46' East longitudes. It has an area of 6,881.24 sq. km. and the total forest area of 1404 sq. km. Medinipur, the largest district of West Bengal, lies between 21° 36' & 22° 57' North latitude, and 86° 33' & 88° 11' East longitudes. It occupies an area of 14,081 sq. km. and the total forest area of 1,70,895.13 hectare approximately.

In Bankura, 12% population are tribals. The principal tribals are the Bhumij, Koras, Mahali, Mech, Munda, Kora and Santhals. In Medinipur, the tribals are 10% of the total population. Some of the backward groups in this area are Sabar, Santhal, Kadut, Naskar, Munda, Mahato, Sardar, Rajan, Sidhar, etc. Although these people are very poor but they have their own unique culture and life style. Both the tribals and local people of the districts depend on the plants for day-to-day medicinal purposes. Indeed, they have perfected their art of healing too. In spite of rapid urbanization, effecting remarkable changes in the social, cultural and economic spheres, the traditional art
of herbal cure and health care is still popular among the tribals and local people. This indigenous system of medicine has almost remained unexplored except for a few reports. The present endeavour aims to record the less known medicinal uses of 22 species of angiosperms as herbal medicines. There are also some earlier reports of herbal medicine applicable to patients in Bankura and Medinipur.

Methods of survey

The present work is based on information collected from tribal and local informants concerning common ailments of the people. The survey was conducted during 1999 to 2001, among the villagers, the folk doctors, tribals and local communities. Information was collected from them through personal contact at first, and then the treatments were applied to the patients to test their effectiveness. The name of some informers from Bankura and Medinipur districts are: Neul Lohar (Joypur, Bankura), Ratan Kisku (Bachurdoba, Jhargram, Medinipur), Parthasarthi Mishra (Panchal, Bankura) and Amar Kisku (Chilkigarh, Medinipur).

Findings of survey

The raw materials for medicine preparations were collected from the fields, forests, and sometimes purchased from local market also. Medicines were prepared at home, whenever necessary, by boiling, crushing, mixing the materials, preparing the pastes, etc.

The plant drugs are arranged alphabetically in order of their botanical names; first name is considered in case of multi-component preparations. The plants, their local names, parts used, and method of application against various ailments, have been documented. These are as follows:

- **Acacia nilotica** (Linn.) Willd. ex Delile syn. A. arabica (Lam.) Willd. var. indica Benth. (Mimosaceae) (Babla).
  - Ten to twelve gram of dried latex, along with ghee and sugar, is fried, and used with a glass of milk, once a day, for 7 days in case of spermatorrhoea.

- **Aegle marmelos** (Linn.) Correa ex Roxb. (Rutaceae) (Bel).
  - The juice extracted from root bark and mixed in a cup of milk is prescribed to induce sleep and as a remedy for depression and weak heart.

- **Allium cepa** Linn. (Liliaceae) (Piyaz).
  - Bulbs are eaten as raw food especially in summer season to prevent sunstroke.

- **Amaranthus tricolor** Linn. (Amaranthaceae) (Lal-notey).
  - Root juice is applied locally to the cut wounds to check bleeding.

- **Azadirachta indica** A. Juss. (Meliaceae) (Neem) leaves and **Piper nigrum** Linn. (Piperaceae) (Golmorich) fruits.
  - The leaves of Neem and fruits of Golmorich, 5 each, are given to diabetic and high blood pressure patients regularly.

- **Bryophyllum pinnatum** (Lam.) Oken syn. B. calycinum Salisb. (Crassulaceae) (Pathar-kuchi).
  - Tender leaves are crushed along with a pinch of rock salt and extracted. Two
spoonful extract is taken twice a day in case of hyper-acidity and indigestion.

*Calotropis procera* (Ait.) Ait. f. (Asclepiadaceae) (*Shet akanda*).

The latex of the plant is locally applied to the cut wounds, till cured.

*Citrus sinensis* (Linn.) Osbeck (Rutaceae) (*Musambi*).

The patients having general weakness are advised to take musambi juice daily.

*Cocos nucifera* Linn. (Palmae) (Green fruit - *Dab*).

Milk of the green coconut is used as cream to the chicken pox scar.

*Cynodon dactylon* (Linn.) Pers. (Poaceae) (*Durba*).

Five shoots are crushed along with 25 grains of polished rice in cold water and the paste is eaten once a day in empty stomach for a month for the treatment of habitual abortion.

*Ficus benghalensis* Linn. (Moraceae) (*Bot*).

Tender bot leaves are immersed in half glass of water for overnight and the infusion is used as a drink in the morning every day in case of blood sugar.

Two pieces of prop root cap, fried with ghee, is given to the patient suffering from dysentery, once a day for 3 days.

One drop of fresh latex mixed with a pinch of karpur, is applied externally to the eye in case of cataract, till cured.

*Lawsonia inermis* Linn. (Lythraceae) (*Meheri*).

Pillows made up of flowers are used to induce sleep.

Leaf juice is applied locally to the wounds, 2-3 times a day, to cure candidiasis.

*Moringa oleifera* Lam. (Moringaceae) (*Sajina*).

One spoonful juice of fresh leaves is taken daily in empty stomach in case of high blood pressure.

*Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn. syn. *N. speciosum* Willd. (Nymphaeaceae) (*Padma*).

Four seeds are crushed in half glass of water and a drink is prepared. The drink is given daily in the morning for 21 days for the treatment of habitual abortion.

*Piper betle* Linn. (Piperaceae) (*Pan*).

Warm petiole is applied locally to the cut wounds thrice a day, till cured.

*Psidium guajava* Linn. (Myrtaceae) (*peyara*).

Four pieces of mature fruit are immersed in half glass of water for overnight and a drink is prepared. The drink is given every day to the blood sugar patients.

*Syzygium jambos* (Lam.) Alston (Myrtaceae) (*Jam*).

One spoonful juice of fresh leaves, along with ghee, is taken in the evening in case of enuresis.

*Tamarindus indica* Linn. (Caesalpiniaceae) (*Tentul*).

*Tentul* fruit is given daily to reduce cholesterol.

*Trichosanthes anguina* Linn. (Cucurbitaceae) (*Chichinga*).

One spoonful leaf juice is taken twice a day for 10 days in case of menopausal problems.

*Trichosanthes dioica* Roxb. (Cucurbitaceae) (*Patol*).

Juice extracted from the roasted fruits is used as oil to the chicken pox scar.
Vitex negundo Linn. (Verbenaceae) (Shet nishinda).
Crushed root bark with cold water is given to snake bite patients.

Discussion
It is observed that the traditional medicinal plants in India are fast eroding. It is necessary to inventorize and record all ethnomedicinal information among the diverse ethnic communities before they are completely lost. The tribals of Medinipur and Bankura district, West Bengal use locally available plants both ethnobotanically and ethnomedicinally in various forms. Under herbal folk remedies, the role of these plants has become very important. The present report aims at preservation and dissemination of such knowledge practiced by these tribals and local communities. This information may be helpful to further research because the medicines so prepared by these plants are very effective, cheap and supposedly have no side effects.

Acknowledgement
The author is grateful to Prof. Bimal Krishna Das, Syed Nurus Saim, Prof. Alok Bhattacharya, Tuplu Putatunda and Sarathi Maity for their encouragement.

References