Ethnomedicinal practices among *Khonds* of Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh

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The paper provides information on 11 medicinal plants belonging to 10 families, used by *Khonds* for treatment of various ailments. The local names, method of preparation and administration of medicine are mentioned. *Khonds* largely depend on herbal medicines for primary healthcare and the prevalent ethnomedical system is attributed to their cultural framework.

**Key words**: Ethnomedicine, Medicinal plants, *Khond* tribe, Andhra Pradesh

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Health and disease are measures of the effectiveness with which human groups, combining cultural and biological resources, adapt to their environment. Every culture irrespective of its simplicity and complexity has its own beliefs and practices concerning diseases. The culture of a community determines its health culture. Health problems and practices of any community are profoundly influenced by interplay of complex social, economic and political factors. Due to the belief in supernatural elements and religion in matters concerning health, the tribals are almost invariably found to repose faith in diviners or the traditional medicine men, sorcerers and shamans. However, tribals are not averse in accepting western medicine, whenever available. Ethnomedicine deals with those beliefs and practices relating to health and disease, which are the products of indigenous cultural development. Few studies are available on tribal health from India such as on *Jaunsaris*, health & hygiene among rural populations of India, personal & environmental hygiene among castes & tribes of West Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, health culture among *Saharias* of Rajasthan, ethnomedicine among *Savaras* of Orissa and on ethno-medical practitioners among *Khonds* of Orissa.

**Methodology**

The paper is based on the data collected on ethnomedicinal practices among *Khonds* during April 2004-October 2005. Four ethnomedicinal specialists (*Guravagadu*) were identified from the study villages of Chintapalli mandal, Visakhapatnam district. Detailed interviews were conducted and data was collected on the nature and use of medicinal plants in curing various ailments. The specimens were collected in their natural form, mounted using standard techniques and transported to the headquarters for conducting taxonomic classification. Additional information is collected on the socioeconomic, religious and cultural aspects, ethnomedicinal practices, etc.

Andhra Pradesh has relatively high concentration of tribal population, i.e. 41.99 lakhs with about 33 scheduled tribes. They constitute 6.31 % to the total population. Andhra Pradesh stands seventh position in India and first in southern peninsula with regard to scheduled tribes population. The area selected for the present study is a part of Paderu ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) area of Visakhapatnam district. The major tribal groups inhabiting the study area are Konda Savara, Gadaba, Khond, Porja, Konda Reddy, Konda Dora, Bagatha, Valmiki, Jatapu, Mali, Konda Kammara, Mukha Dora, Kotiya, Koya, etc. *Khond*, classified, as primitive tribal group chiefly inhabit in the densely wooded hill

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slopes in the scheduled areas of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Results and discussion

It is observed (Table 1) that indigenous treatment is available among Khonds for various ailments such as snakebite, blood motions, induced abortions, delayed deliveries, epilepsy, jaundice, vomiting, diarrhoea, paralysis, etc. The herbal specialist Guravagadu seasonally collects medicinal plants and plant products from their natural habitat, prepare decoctions and paste with the mixture of leaves, tubers, stem, root, flower or buds, and administer the respective medicine in appropriate dose to the patients. The duration of treatment is usually one week for common ailments, to two weeks for other diseases. Due to rampant deforestation, green cover is fast disappearing even in tribal areas, and the ethnomedicinal specialists face difficulty in locating the medicinal plants in their vicinity. Seasonal availability of some selective medicinal plants is also observed to influence the native treatment.

Ethnomedicine or folk medicine systems were developed in the context of physical environment and the sociocultural milieu of the respective communities. The magico-religious specialist of the Saora is called Kudanboi, who is also a specialist in ethnomedicine. Among Savaras, medicine prepared from the seeds of sitagur or custard apple is used for treatment of jaundice, scabies is treated with a medicine prepared by mixing neem (Azadirachta indica A. Juss.) and karanja (Carissa carandas Linn.) oil in different proportions. Neem and karanja oil are also used for treatment of rheumatism. For the treatment of tuberculosis, medicine prepared out of Capparis zeylanica Linn., Terminalia bellirica Roxb., Emblica officinalis Gaertn. and patala garuda (Corrallocarpus epigaeus Benth. ex Hook. f), a snake poison neutralizer is used.

The study conducted on ethnomedicinal practitioners among Khonds indicate the presence of seven different types of medical specialists such as general practitioners, traditional bonesetters, specialists in the treatment of diseases among children, poisonous bites, epilepsy, dental care, etc. The results show that there is a high degree of indigenous knowledge and that the traditional systems of medicine are still practiced by the tribal communities. The table below summarizes the medicinal plants used for various ailments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S No</th>
<th>Botanical name</th>
<th>Local name</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sansevieria roxfurghiana</td>
<td>Dumparasu ossoh</td>
<td>Snakebite; 1-2 % of the paste prepared from leaves and root is applied on the affected portion of the body three times a day for three consecutive days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Boerhaavia diffusa</td>
<td>Bandibissah Osso ottawakuccha</td>
<td>Blood motions; all parts of the plant are used in the preparation of paste which is administered once in a day for three consecutive days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Crinum asiaticum</td>
<td>Ejayathi leaf</td>
<td>Abortion; leaf is placed laterally on the underside of the head for a certain period of time to cause abortion. It will also facilitate easy delivery. Leaf is sometimes placed over the ear of the pregnant woman till she delivers the baby. Prolonged placement of the leaf will result in hemorrhage and ultimate death of the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Piper longum Linn.</td>
<td>Pippallla chettu Katti ossoh</td>
<td>Epilepsy or fits; plant parts mixed, ground to prepare paste is administered once a day for three days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Desmodium gangeticum DC. (Fabaceae)</td>
<td>Ubbu chettu Katti ossoh</td>
<td>Jaundice; root, tuber and leaves are used in preparing a paste, which is swallowed. It also improves RBC count of blood and provides fairer skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mimos hexapoda Linn.</td>
<td>Gorriaya Sawali katti ossoh</td>
<td>Vomiting &amp; Diarrhoea; paste is prepared from tuber dried into tablets and administered daily once in divided doses till the control of the disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oberonia ensiformis Lind. (Orchidaceae)</td>
<td>Podhu</td>
<td>Paralysis; paste is prepared using all parts, applied regularly on the affected regions of the body till the disease is cured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Orthosiphon rubicundus Benth. (Lamiaceae)</td>
<td>Upaka ossoh (Wuledi chettu) Single tuber</td>
<td>Buds &amp; flowers are used for colouring of food materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vernonia cinerea Less. (Asteraceae)</td>
<td>Netturu ossoh</td>
<td>Tubers and leaves are used to control shivering in patients suffering from fever.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
infertility and abortion. The major diseases reported among Khonds include leprosy, gonorrhoea, major ulcers, paralysis, mental problems and snakebite. Among Jaunsaris, dried petals of banafshah flower (Viola pilosa Blume) and podina (Mentha arvensis Linn.) are used for treatment of fever. For the treatment of scorpion/snakebite, pterygosperma (Moringa oleifera) mixture prepared out of sondi (Moringa indica) is used for treating bone fractures. The bark of Babool (Acacia nilotica) is used in asthma. The paste of mahua (Madhuca indica J.F.Gmel.) is used in the cure of ulcers. Babool leaves (Acacia nilotica Delile) are used in the treatment of conjunctivitis. Turmeric solution (Curcuma domestica Valeton) is used in the treatment of skin diseases like scabies and eczema while its paste mixed with lime is used for curing fractures.

The present study on 11 medicinal plants used by Khonds tribes for the treatment of various ailments can possibly be used as a potential source for making herbal medicines against some diseases and can be treated as a document for preserving the ethnomedicinal knowledge for posterity. Further, studies in this direction are needed in future to document the information on other available medicinal plants used by Khonds for treatment of various other diseases prevalent among them.

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References