Ethnopharmacology of Banjara tribe of Umarkhed taluka, district Yavatmal, Maharashtra for reproductive disorders

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An attempt is made to document the formulations used by Banjara tribe of Umarkhed region of Maharashtra, specially practicing in reproductive disorders. In all 22 prescriptions using 39 plant species in different combinations are being enumerated here.

Key words: Banjara tribe, Maharashtra, Ethnopharmacology, Reproduction

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Tribal population of Umarkhed (Fig. 1), a taluka from Yavatmal district of Maharashtra state exceeds 30% of the total population. Andha, Bhil or Naikada and Kolam are scheduled tribes while Banjara belongs to Vimukta Jati (liberated tribe). Banjara is the major tribe with population of about 43,216 as per census 2001 (Fig. 2). Banjaras are distributed in many states like Andhra, Orissa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana. They are known by different names in different states. Etymologically the word Banjara originated from Sanskrit word Vannijya, which means trade. They are also known as Laman possibly because of their age-old business of carrying mainly salt Lavan along with other things of trade on the backs of bullocks. Banjara speak Golmaty / Gormaty language, which is much similar to Rajasthani language. Banjara settlements are on outskirts, mostly along North side hill slopes. Known as Tanda, they live in small huts, built with wooden logs and plastered inside with mud. Banjara have very complex caste system. They are reported to have four sub tribes, i.e. Mathuria, Charan, Laman and Dhadi. Higher castes like Mathuria or Mathura Laman also perform Vrathbandha of boys. There is at least one medicine man in each Tanda. About 70-75% people are dependent on traditional medicine, prescribed by local Vaidus. Nirrhitee was supposed to have created the earth, and Shakambhari created plant life. Excavations of Harappa have revealed a rectangular earthen mudra engraved with a female figure with legs apart and giving birth to a tree. Birds originated from Veenata, while reptiles from Kadru.

Tribals have their own practices for treating different reproductive disorders. However, for tribals it is an age-old concept and they have their own practices of birth control. During ethnobotanical survey of Banjara tribe of Umarkhed taluka it was found that local medicine men are using certain formulations, prescribed by their forefathers and is being passed down to present generation (Figs. 3-7).

Methodology

Sixty eight persons belonging to 62 different villages, representing a cross section of Umarkhed region were interviewed. Some of the medicine men are engaged in broad-spectrum health practices, while some deal with specific ailments only. The doses prescribed by medicine men are usually unmeasured quantity; it is only by practice that they fix the quantity of the material to be used. These quantities were actually weighed and are presented here in terms of grams. Most of the persons interviewed are illiterate, while few had only primary education. Field trips were also made with them to collect the plant species used (Figs. 8-17). Identifications were made with the help of standard floras. Herbarium specimens have been deposited in the herbarium of Department of Botany, Government Vidarbha Institute of Science & Humanities, Amravati.
Results and Discussion

Traditionally treatment of impotency, and to enhance the sperm count as male reproductive disorders and all gynecological problems by local medicine men are enumerated below:

Impotency

Mixture of Nargadde (Eulophia ramentacea Lind. Ex. Wight.) bulb powder and Ghodkand, Bhuikohla (Puraria tuberosa (Roxb. ex Willd.) DC.) tuber powder (5 gm each) is taken in the morning with water once a day for at least one month. Katsawar, Katshevari (Bombax ceiba L.) dried root, Kali musali (Curculigo orchioides Gaertn.) and Zunjurdi (Triumfetta malabarica Koen. ex Rottb.) dried stock (250 gm each) are powdered and mixed with equal amount (750 gm) of wheat floor. The mixture is roasted with cow ghee and laddus of 50 gm each are made. One laddu is eaten early in the morning on empty stomach till entire quantity is consumed. Talimkhana (Asteracantha longifolia (L.) Nees.) seeds, Kali Musli (Curculigo orchioides Gaertn.) dried stock and Ghodkand, Bhuikohla (Puraria tuberosa (Roxb. ex Willd.) DC.) tubers (5 gm each) powdered and mixed is taken daily with a glass of cow milk in the morning for seven days. Biba, Biwla (Anacardium occidentale L.) single nut, Kanguni, Kanga (Celastrus paniculatus Willd.) roots (50 gm), Jatashankar (Dioscorea bulbifera L.) tuber (50 gm) and Badam (Prunus amygdalus Baill.) seeds (50 gm) are powdered together and divided in seven equal parts. One part is taken every morning with cow milk for seven days.

Sperm count enhancement

One teaspoonful mixture of powdered Shivlingi, Putrada (Diplocyclos palmatus (L.) C. Jeffery) seeds and Aasoodkand (Withania somnifera (L.) Dunal) roots (500 gm each) is taken twice a day with cow milk for six months.

Ovulation enhancement

Freshly collected Rajhans (Adiantum philippense L.) whole plant (2 gm), Kala-kand (Dioscorea pentaphylla L.) tuber (1 gm) and Sag (Tectona grandis L.f.) root bark (1 gm) is given through beetle leaves to eat thrice a day for three days. Ghanfodi, Madkafodi (Cardiospermum helicacabum L.) seeds and Shivlingi, Putrada (Diplocyclos palmatus (L.) C. Jeffery) seeds (2 gm each) pounded with one betle leaf is eaten thrice a day for three days.
Menorrhegia

Freshly collected Katekomai (Cyphostemma seto-sus Roxb.) root, Penghagara (Tacca leontopetaloides Ktze.) tubers and Aasoodkand (Withania somnifera (L.) Dunal.) roots (2 gm each) is given through betle leaf to eat thrice a day for three days from first day of menstruation. Palas (Butea monosperma (Lam.) Taub.) bark (10gm), Jeera (Cuminum cyminum L.) seeds (5 gm) and Gadi Shakkar (candy sugar) (20 gm) ground with 100 ml water, divided into three equal parts is taken thrice a day for three days from first day of menstruation. Salai (Boswellia serrato Roxb. ex Colebr.) leaves (25 gm), Jeera (Cuminum cyminum L.) seeds (10 gm) and Gadi Shakkar (candy sugar) (50 gm) ground and mixed with 100 ml curd, divided into two equal parts is taken twice a day for three days before menses start. Root tubers of Kala kand (Dioscorea pentaphylla L.) and Penghagara (Tacca leontopetaloides Ktze.) (2 gm each) is eaten with betle leaf thrice a day for three days from first day of menstruation.

Amenorrhegia

Penghagara (Tacca leontopetaloides Ktze.) root tubers and Kali dudhi (Holarrhena antidysenterica (Roth.) Wall. ex. A.DC.) bark (2 gm each) is taken with betle leaf twice a day for seven days. Root powder of Bhutokhola Ghodkand (Puraria tuberosa (Roxb. ex Willd.) DC.) and Aamata, Yermule (Ziziphus oenoplia (L.) Mill.) (2 gm each) is taken with water twice a day for seven days. Powder of Safed gunj (Abrus precatorius L.) (White variety) root (2 gm), Bhutokhola, Ghodkand (Puraria tuberosa (Roxb. ex Willd.) DC. root tuber (5 gm), Gidhya sag (Hy- menodictyon obovatum Wall.) bark (5 gm) and Aasudkand (Withania somnifera (L.) Dunal.) (5 gm) is taken with water daily in the morning for seven days.

Healthy foetus

Powder of Hingan, Hingu (Balanites aegyptiaca (L.) Del.) and Kali musali (Curculigo orchioides Gaertn.) roots (5 gm each) is taken with water in every morning for a month.

Contraceptive

Powder of Ranbhendi (Abelmoschus ficulneus (L.) Wight and Arn.) whole plant (20 gm), Aam (Mangifera indica L.) bark (20 gm), Kartule (Momordica dioica Roxb. ex Willd.) tubers of male plant (10 gm) and Biba, Biwla (Semecarpus anacardium L. f.) bark (20 gm) is taken with water in the morning for six days from first day of menstruation. Kartule (Momordica dioica Roxb. ex Willd.) tubers of male plant, Talap (Striga angustifolia (D. Don) Sald.) whole plant (25 gm) and remnants of elephant excreta (25 gm) ground together and eight tablets are made. One tablet is taken twice a day starting from menses. Wavding, Waywarang (Embelia ribes Burm. f.) seeds (50 gm), Pimpli (Piper longum L.) fruiting inflorescence (10 gm) and Khaneka soda (Sodium bicarbonate) (1 gm) ground together is equally divided into five parts. Each part is taken every day in the morning for five days starting from 1st day of menstruation. Chana (Cicer arietinum L.) seeds and Nagvel (Piper betle L.) roots (50 gm each) ground together is equally divided in five parts. Each part is taken with water every day in the morning for five days starting from menses. Jeera (Cuminum cyminum L.) seeds, Bharati (Maytenus senegalensis (Lam.) Excell.) young tender shoots and Gadi shakkar (candy sugar) (50 gm each) ground together is divided equally in five equal parts. Each part is taken daily in the morning with water starting from menses for five days. Kartule (Momordica dioica Roxb. ex Willd.) tuber of male plant (1 gm), Biba, Biwla (Semecarpus anacardium L. f.) bark of sterile plant (2 gm) and Guhara (Sterculia urens Roxb.) bark (2 gm) ground with 50 ml of water, filtered through cloth is taken in the morning for five days starting from menses. Gajar (Daucas carota L.) seeds and Hing (Asafoetida) (10 gm each) ground together is equally divided into five parts. One part is taken with water in the morning on empty stomach for five days starting from menses.

Of the twenty-two formulations reported using 39 plant species, only few have been reported earlier. Korkus of Melghat and Gujjaras of Uttar Pradesh use tubers of Eulophia ramentacea in treating impo-tency. Roots of Bombax ceiba are used in treating impotency by people of Indo-Nepal border area; it is interesting to note that epicarp of the fruit is known to induce sterility in males. Like Banjaras, tribals of Shevarai hills are reported to use seeds of Astera-cantha longifolia in impotency. Adiantum philip-pense is used by Banjara in the preparation of drug for ovule enhancement, while roots of the plant are used in southern western Ghats for inducing permanent sterility. Mangifera indica bark is used as contraceptive in Central India, while the people of Sheva-rai hills use the whole plant powder. Though con-siderable literature is available on ethnic uses of plant
species, information regarding ethnoformulations is scanty. It is very difficult to get the information from local medicine men, especially about the formulations. Tribals treat almost every reproductive disorder except venereal diseases.

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