Folk medicines for some diseases prevalent in Lakhimpur district of Brahmaputra valley, Assam

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Received 2 August 2005; Accepted 20 March 2006

Abstract
An attempt has been made to prepare a list of folk medicines invariably used by Bejes (medicine men) and Bejinis (medicine women) for treating 10 different diseases namely abdominal pain, abscess, allergy, amebiasis, asthma, backache, fungal infection of nail, lice control, piles and pinworm infection which are prevalent in some rural areas of Lakhimpur district of Brahmaputra valley, Assam. Information on twenty two plant species is given in this paper for further studies.

Keywords: Folk medicines, Bejes, Bejinis, Brahmaputra valley, Barak valley, Lakhimpur, Assam.
IPC code; Int. cl.7 — A61K 35/78

Methodology
The study was conducted during 2004-2005. A number of bejes and bejinis were contacted and medicinal information was collected. Efforts have been made to see the plants in wild and collect plant specimens with their reproductive parts. Herbarium sheets were prepared according to conventional herbarium technique9 and identification of specimens was done with the help of Flora of Assam10 and deposited in the herbarium of the Botany Department, Dibru College, Dibrugarh, Assam. Folk-medicines used for the treatment of different diseases by the rural people of Lakhimpur are enumerated below.

(Folk medicines Sl. No. 1, 2, 7 are collected from local medicine men of the Kalitas; 3, 5, 6 from the Ahoms; 4, 10 from the Chutiyas; and 8, 9 from the Sonowal Kacharis tribe).

1. Abdominal pain: Three spoonful leaf extracts of Narasingha, Murraya koenigii (Linn.) Speng. (Rutaceae) is taken orally thrice a day until cure. Three spoonful leaf extract obtained from equal amount of leaves of Machandari, Houttuynia cordata Thunb. (Saururaceae) and Purai, Basella alba Linn. (Basellaceae) is also taken in similar manner until cure.

Vol 5(4) July-August 2006
**Houthuynia cordata**

**Murraya koenigii**

**Authors with a local medicine woman**

**Euphorbia neriifolia**

**Centella asiatica**
2. **Abscess:** Stem exudates of Hiju, *Euphorbia nerifolia* Linn. (Euphorbiaceae) and leaf exudates of *Pategoja, Kalanchoe pinnata* (Lam.) Pers. (Crassulaceae) are used by Kalitas by applying over the affected area three times a day for three days. Leaf extract of Jatuka, *Lawsonia inermis* Linn. (Lythraceae) after slightly boiling is applied over the affected areas thrice daily until cure.

3. **Allergy:** The extract obtained from young leaves of *Bhadailata, Paederia foetida* Linn. (Rubiaceae) is mixed with edible portion of rhizomatous stem of Nohoru, *Allium sativum* Linn. (Liliaceae) and given to take once daily for five days in the treatment of allergy.

   The extract obtained from the leaves of *Pochotia, Vitex negundo* Linn. (Verbenaceae) is also applied over the affected area twice daily for five days in the treatment of allergy.

4. **Amebiasis:** Four-teaspoonful leaf extracts of *Bor manimini, Centella asiatica* (Linn.) Urban (Apiaceae) mixed with small amount of common salt is given to take orally thrice daily until cure. Fruit juice of *Gulnemu, Citrus limon* (Linn.) Burm. f. (Rutaceae) is also used in similar manner.

5. **Asthma:** About 10g root of *Robab tanga, Citrus maxima* (Burm.) Merrill (Rutaceae), 5g of rhizomatous stem of *Ada, Zingiber officinale* Rosc. (Zingiberaceae) and three fruits of *Hilikha, Terminalia chebula* Retz. (Combretaceae) are crushed finely with a pinch of black salt and given to take twice daily for a week.

6. **Backache:** Tubers of *Alu, Solanum tuberosum* Linn. (Solanaceae) is crushed finely and applied over the affected area.

7. **Fungal infection of nail:** Leaves of *Kanibih, Croton tiglium* Linn. (Euphorbiaceae), *Tuloshi, Ocimum sanctum* Linn. (Lamiaceae), *Neem, Azadirachta indica* A. Juss. (Meliaceae) and rhizomatous stem of Nohoru and *Halodhi, Curcuma domestica* Valeton (Zingiberaceae) are crushed finely and applied over the infected nail for whole night. If it is not cured in one dose the same is applied next month also.

8. **Lice control:** Leaves of *Mahavringoraj, Wedelia chinensis* Merr. (Asteraceae) are crushed and applied over the scalp for half an hour. The process is repeated in four days intervals for a month. Fruit of *Datura, Datura metel* Linn. (Solanaceae) is applied in the same manner. The juice extracted from the leaves of *Pategoja* is also applied over the scalp for 15 minutes for the same treatment. It is repeated at 5 days intervals for a month.

9. **Piles:** Edible portion of a ripe fruit of *Am, Mangifera indica* Linn. (Anacardiaceae) with a small amount of rhizomatous stem of *Ada* is given to take twice daily for a week. After removing the outer portion of modified root of *Mula, Raphanus sativus* Linn. (Brassicaceae) is allowed to insert in the rectum and kept as such for whole night. Next morning the used portion is removed and the area is cleaned with extract of rhizomatous stem of *Mula*. It is repeated every week until cured.

10. **Pinworm infection:** Three leaves or seven seeds of *Gulnemu* are crushed and given to take orally early in the morning for several days. About ten matured seeds of *Amita, Carica papaya* Linn. (Caricaceae) are also given to take orally early in the morning with empty stomach for five days.

**Conclusion**

In the present paper information on 22 different plant species is given; out of these, 19 plant species belong to Dicotyledons and 3 are Monocotyledons. It is noticed that both wild and cultivated plant species are used for the preparation of folk medicines by the inhabitants of study area. Some of the medicinal plant species used by these people like, *Curcuma domestica, Allium sativum, Ocimum sanctum, Zingiber officinale*, etc. are being used for the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines by pharmaceutical companies8. Moreover some of the plant species mentioned in this paper are also reported in some earlier works by various authors. As for example *C. domestica* and *O. sanctum* are reported for the treatment of diarrhoea.
in cock and hen and dysentery in human beings\textsuperscript{11,12}, \textit{A. sativum} and \textit{Paederia foetida} for bone fracture\textsuperscript{13}, \textit{Basella alba} in the treatment of epilepsy and \textit{C. domestica} in pimples\textsuperscript{14}.

Since the uses reported in this paper are different from earlier reports, the biochemical analyses and pharmacological studies of these plant species may bring some new scientific information of immense ethnopharmacological interest.

References


