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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A BRIEF REVIEW OF MEDICINAL PLANTS TRADITIONALLY USED BY DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Every society makes provisions for health care delivery systems for its members with a view to providing medical and related services for the maintenance of good health and also prevention and treatment of diseases. Much before the advent of modern medicine, these societies developed their indigenous medicinal system through interaction with their environment. This paper, through literature review and survey, examines the features of commonly used herbal medicinal system in Assam which has often provided advantage to the people.

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INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, a large proportion of communities still rely on traditional practitioners and their armamentarium of medicinal plants in order to meet health care needs. Although modern medicine may exist side-by-side with such traditional practice, herbal medicines have often maintained their popularity for historical and cultural reasons, as well as they also provide vitamins and minerals essential for growth and development. Assam is rich in different greens which are seasonal herbs like lai (*Brassica competiss*), lapha (*Malva verticillata*), paleng or spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), chukka or sour spinach (*Rumex oleracea*), khutora (*Amalanthus*), doron (*Leucus limifolia*), nefafu (*Clerodendron corlobrokianum*), manimuni (*Centella asiatica*), matikaduri (*Alterneuthera sessilis*), kolmou (*Ipomoea aquatica*), maralia (*Spermacoc luispida*), they are grown in the kitchen garden of every family. These plants are also known to have nutritive and curative values. Several researchers have found that different plants like *Momordica charantia* (bitter melon), *Aegle marmelos* (Linn), *Dillenia indica* (Linn), *Cannabis sativa*, *Cinnamomum tamala*, *Carrica papaya*, *Moringa oleifera*, *Musa paradisiacal*, *Mimosa pudica*

are very effective in treating diabetes mellitus in easily accessible manner. Studies also reports the indigenous ethno medical knowledge of the Tai-Khamyangs of Sivasagar district, Assam and their medicinal use like that for bone fracture, bronchial asthma, burn injuries, eczema, epitasis, cough, eye infection, fever with cold, dog bite, dysentery, gastric etc. Hence a study was planned to briefly review some medicinal plants traditionally used by different communities of Assam

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on a secondary literature review and a survey of 50 household in Beltola area of Guwahati. A list of 16 randomly selected common herbs/plants formed the questionnaire and the participants mostly elderly woman of the household were asked whether they were aware of the use of these plants/herbs and also to specify them. All the 50 respondents are from various communities like caste Assamese Hindu, Bodo, Kachari, and the respondents were in the age from 50 years and above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this survey revealed that majority of the household, even in urban places; use these commonly available herbs and plants for minor ailments in the family and as immediate relief.

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Table. List of the herbs/plants used in the survey

S. No	Plant species	Family	Vernacular names	Part used	Application
1	<i>Alternanthera sessilis</i>	Amaranthaceae	Matikaduri	Leaves	Juice used for growth of hair and stomach trouble. Given to mother to increase the flow of milk after birth.
2	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Compositae	Chirota	Leaves	Juice as blood purifier. Used against worm troubles, asthmatics Trouble, brain disorder and nervous affections.
3	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>	Liliaceae	Satamul	Roots	Roots are used as demulcents; Wild diuretic, prepared medicated oil is good for rheumatic pain, nervous disorder. Also useful in dyspepsia, diarrhea and dysentery.
4	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Asclepidaceae	Akon	Roots/leaves	Heated leaves are in sprain and flower pain. Flowers are considered as digestive remedy for cough, asthma, and cold. Root bark is used in dysentery; cough, skin disease, cutaneous affection, and elephantiasis. Juice as purgative and good for tooth ace.
5	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Cannabinaceae	Bhang	Leaves/ flower	Dried flower used medicinally as sedative, analgesic, narcotic.
6	<i>Catharanthus roseus</i>	Apocynaceae	Nayantara	Roots/leaves	The parts of plant are used as anti-carcinogenic agent
7	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	Urban Umbeliferae	Bor manimuni	Whole plant	The whole plant has medicinal properties, used in dysentery, liver trouble, nerve disorder, and stomach problem and induces appetite, taken with milk to improve memory, good for skin disease and a blood purifier, given to women after childbirth
8	<i>Clitoria ternatea</i>	Leguminasae	Aparajita	Leaves	Juice of leaves mixed with salt applied around ears in earache and swelling of adjacent gland to relieve pain. Juice antidote against snake poison.
9	<i>Colocasia esculanta</i>	Araceae	Kochu	Leaves/ roots	Leaves used for blood coagulation in small injuries, roots used in pharyngitis.
10	<i>Mimosa pudica</i>	Leguminasae	Lajukilata	Leaves	Leaf juice with milk is used as a good remedy for piles.
11	<i>Tagetes petula</i>	Marigold	Narji	Leaf juice	Cut injury where leaves provide immediate relief.
12	<i>Ocimum canum</i>	Labiatae	Bon tulsu	Leaves	Leaves made into paste applied to the fingers to relieve from fever. Seed are used as remedy for dysentery. Leaves used in skin disease.
13	<i>Oldenlandia corymbosa</i>	Rubiaceae	Bon jaluk	Whole plant	Juice applied in burning sensation of palms, juice is good for liver trouble, urinary disorder in children, jaundice, fever and bilious infection
14	<i>Phyllanthus niruri</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Bon amlokhi	Whole plant	Whole plant is used in jaundice. Young leaves are good for dysentery. Root juice is used in urogenital troubles.
15	<i>Solanum indicum</i>	Solanaceae	Tita bhekuri	Roots/ leaves	Roots are used to cure toothache, Asthma and in cough.
16	<i>Xanthium strumarium</i>	Compositae	Agora	Roots/ leaves	Used against long standing malarial fever, urinary trouble.

However, it is usually the elder members of the family who could identify the herbs as common plants found abundantly and also point out their usage. The younger members of the household were not aware of all the specified plants and were also not able to point out the usage of most of them.

Conclusion

Traditional medicine is a knowledge which has now been confined only to a certain age group. Increasingly the younger generation finds it hard to acknowledge the effectiveness of these herbs and plants in our day to day life and are now more inclined to modern allopathic medicine. However, these traditional medicines often provide cost effective benefit to people and act as immediate relief in various common ailments.

There is an increasing need to preserve the tradition of these locally available herbs and plants passed on from older to younger generation.

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