



Research Article

**INDIGENOUS HEALTH CARE PRACTICES OF THE TRIBAL OF THE WESTERN GHAT SATARA
DISTRICT (M.S.) INDIA**

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Abstract: Medicinal plants have been used for treatment of various ailments of human for time immemorial. The rural and tribal people of the country have a rich tradition of utilizing these plants even today. Gujarat has a significant population of tribal people residing in the western tribal belt. The area inhabited by tribal is rich in plant biodiversity. The Satara District of the state has around 40 per cent population of tribal. The tribal of this area have medicine men called Bhagat who treat various ailments of human and domestic animals. The present paper deals with the rich tradition of treatment with medicinal plants and documentation of a few plants that are used for treatment of skin diseases by the tribal Bhagats. The paper also deals with the conservation practices adopted by these medicine men to protect the biodiversity of the area.

Keywords: Medicinal plants, biodiversity tribal, traditional healing practices

INTRODUCTION

India has two of the twelve mega biodiversity hot spots in the world. It has only 4.2 per cent of the total geographical area of the world but it accounts for 7-8 per cent of the total species recorded in the world. As reported by the botanical and zoological surveys of India, it has 47,000 species of plants and 81,000 species of animals. Apart from the areas surveyed by these institutes there are regions like Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Himalayan region, deep forests of Assam etc. and it is anticipated that these areas are more richer than already surveyed¹. Also the country has a rich wealth of traditional and indigenous knowledge, both coded and informal. It has some of the oldest and richest and diverse cultural traditions associated with the use of medicinal plants since centuries.

Many workers object the use of word "traditional medicine" while describing the indigenous system of treatment of human ailments. According to them the herbal medicines used by average Indian in general and the medicine men in particular are time tested, scientifically validated and have proven to the tests of medical field since time immemorial. They suggest the use of word contemporary medicine instead of traditional medicine. Once upon a time the traditional system of medicine was considered as quackery and fringe, and now it is known as alternative and complementary medicine. In times to come, it will be called integrative or co-opted medicine².

WHO³ has defined traditional medicine as "it is a sum total of knowledge, skill and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences, indigenous to different cultures whether explicable or not, used on maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis and improvement of treatment of physical and mental illness".

Traditional medicine is an oral tradition purely empirical in nature that exists in all rural and tribal communities throughout the length and breadth of India. A short history of medicine can be explained as:

I have ear ach

2000 BC -- Here, eat this root

1000 AD -- That root is heathen, say this

prayer

1850 AD -- That prayer is superstition

drink this potion

1940 AD -- That potion is snake oil,

swallow this pill

1960 AD -- That pill is ineffective, take

this anti biotic

2000 AD -- That antibiotic is artificial.

Here, take this root.

The progress of medical acceptance for alternative methods for healing can be summarized as

1960 – Quackery

1970 – Fringe

1990—Alternative

1997 – Complementary

2001—Integrative, co- opted

Traditional knowledge is a body of knowledge associated with long term occupancy of a certain place regarding health management practices. It is experimental, informal, and uncodified knowledge as opposed to the literate or expert knowledge typically attributed to western or modern science.

India has vast inexhaustible resource of diverse variety of flora. Plants are being used as one of the

important alternative indigenous system of medicine since time immemorial. The history of use of plants and animals as source of medicine dates back perhaps to the origin of human race^{4,5}. The vedic literature says that humans have learned the medicinal use of plants from animals, those who possess the inherent capacity to recognize the medicinal plants from the nature⁶. In the developed world more than 50 per cent of the clinically useful drugs originate from natural resources., It is estimated that for 80 per cent of world population plants play a dominant role in the primary health care. Great improvement in the health care can be achieved by systematization of information about herbal medicine, improvement in the availability of plants, many of which are becoming rare or endangered, and by scientific validation and standardization of herbal medicine⁷. There are about 17000 flowering plants known to be available in India and 4000 are recognized as used in ethno medicine⁸. However, due to indiscriminate use many of them are now becoming vulnerable, extinct and a few of them have become extinct.

Though it has very Highest forest area, in terms of biodiversity it is very rich. The state has recorded 2198 species of flowering plants. A total of 1315 species are reported to have medicinal properties and all of them are used by rural in their traditional system of medicine⁹. Recently Maharashtra Ecological Education Research Foundation (2005) has recorded that there are 1315 species of plants found in Maharashtra as having medicinal value. Of the total species recorded in the state 195 are collected from forest and used for preparation of various medicines on commercial basis¹⁰.

Western Maharashtra one of the forest rich areas of the state having moist deciduous forests in Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur districts. The Satara district is having an 45 per cent is covered by forest. Of the total forest revenue earned by the state, 70 per cent comes from the Satara. It has Pune on the north and west and on the south Sangli and Kolhapur district respectively. It is the highest rain receiving region of the state having average rainfall between 1800-2000 mm.

TRADITIONAL HEALERS OF THE SATARA DISTRICT

Bhagats are the traditional healers of the district. They use plants and mantras for treatment of various diseases. They are considered as the medium between god and men. Bhagats have lot of knowledge of medicinal plants and their uses¹⁰. Shankar¹¹ has noted that in India a total of 4786 plants are used for treating various ailments of men and animals on the other hand Ayurveda uses 1549 plant species and in Siddha 1151 plants are used. This indicates the rich source of information available with the traditional tribal healers. While information of few plants is documented much more is to be done to prevent loss of this traditional knowledge from getting lost. Majority of the traditional healers of the country do not share their knowledge with the outer world fearing commercialization, they pass on this tradition from generation to the eligible person who will not mis-use the knowledge. If this knowledge is used for personal gain or for harming other, both the Guru and the disciple will face the wrath of God is

the belief they have. Most of the traditional Healers do not charge anything from the patients they treat, and receive only willing full offerings from the patients after the treatment is over, now very few young persons are interested in learning the traditional system of treatment using plants. As a result of this the traditional science of treatment is being forgotten at a very fast rate and there is an urgent need to document the rich treasure of knowledge available with the existing traditional healers.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Field work was carried out in 68 villages of the district during a period from 2010-2011. The primary data was collected from 158 local healers hand persons having knowledge of use of medicinal plants in treatment of various diseases using several tools and techniques as participant and non-participant observations, schedules, interviews, case studies and group discussions. Secondary data was collected from government and non-government publications.

Informants and procuring information

As in many rural people communities, Bhagat/Vaidus/ traditional healers are medicine men among the tribal community of the Satara district. He is considered as a medium between men and God. The knowledge of plant uses particularly the knowledge of medicinal plants and uses of plants in treatment among the tribal groups are specialized and limited to a few numbers of people in the community who are recognized as Bhagat or medicine men. These persons are generally most respectable and rather indispensable members in the rural people society. Each Bhagat treats illness by a series of trials with different medicines. In general Bhagat treat all kinds of illness but some are specialized in specific illness. Some treat only children, or women or the aged. Some practitioners have inherited/acquired knowledge of certain special remedies and treat only specific illness. Most of the medicinal plants are obtained from the forest and a few other useful species are found growing near the villages. There are special harvesting techniques. The roots, barks, leaves, fruits etc. are taken from the plants of the required species. Of course some taboos and traditional practices like restrictions of collection of medicinal herbs are in existence. Usually women and children are not engaged in gathering plants of medicinal value.

The remedies of common ailments like cuts, headache, pain, fever etc. are known to most of the community members. In each community there are several individuals who though not recognized as Bhagat, possess medical knowledge and act as reliable informant. Thus the information has been sought from two broad categories:

1. From the recognized medicine men, the Bhagats and
2. From the other individuals possessing knowledge due to their personal efforts and interest.

The information so collected was consolidated and scientifically validated with the help of existing literature, medical staff of Ayurvedic Medical College, Satara.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As reported earlier, the Bhagat or medicine men of the treats the patient as a social service and does not charge any fee from them. They are engaged in one or the other profession for their survival. During the study we have made contact with 158 persons who were specialist in knowledge of medicinal plants and its use for treatment of various diseases of men and animal. Of these more than 94 per cent were farmers cultivating on scanty land they have. The remaining were farm labours. Due to scanty land and hilly terrain of the district many Bhagats (35.5%) migrate to nearby cities and towns in search of livelihood for 4-6 months. During the study (Table 1), we could record the use of 347 plant species including 109 trees, 208 herbs and 81 twines. These plants were used by Bhagats of Satara to treat 114 types of human ailments right from common cold, fever jaundice, bone fracture, diabetes, paralysis to cancer. During our study a total of 897 prescriptions were

documented for such diseases like ailments related to skin, stomach related problems, snake bite, fever, jaundice etc. The variety of prescription and the number of ailment for which the prescriptions are made suggest the deep knowledge of the medical sciences amongst the rural people of Satara. As it is out of the scope to present all the prescriptions here, a few of the prescription related to skin diseases are provided below. During the with number of Bhagats it was found that the selection of plant for treatment of a particular upon the availability of the healthy plant in the vicinity and the degree of sever ness of the ailment. Thus for old complaints of eczema use of Jal Agiyo is prescribed. Here it is attempted to give scientific names of almost all the plants but the names of few plants are purposefully avoided. It was the request of the informant Bhagats to keep them away from public domain.

Table 1: List representing some botanicals and /or their particular part used for treatment of various diseases in Satara district.

S. No	Disease /ailment	Common name	Latin name	Useful part	Method of use
1	Ring worm loss of hair in circle	Gajkarni		Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
2		hatsura	<i>Heliotropium indicum</i>	Leaves	Apply juice of leaves on affected parts
3		Africanmillet	<i>Elusine corocana</i>	Seed	Apply paste of seed powerd on affected part
4		Limdo	<i>Azadirecta indica</i>	Seeds	Apply seed oil on affected parts
5		Rui	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Latex	Removes dandruff and hair loss
6		Bavachi	<i>Psoralia corylifolia</i>	Seeds	Apply seed oil on affects parts
7	Itchnig	hiptage	<i>Hipatage benghlensis</i>	Tubers	Prepare paste of tuber and apply
8		Bahava	<i>Cassia fistula</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of seeds on affected parts
9		Poision nut	<i>Strychnos nux vomica</i>	Seeds	Apply pastes of leaves on affected parts
10		Karvand	<i>Carissa caradas</i>	Bark	Give a cup of decoction of bark twice a day
11		Karanj	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i>	Seeds	Apply seed oil on affected parts
12		Ashvagandha	<i>Withania somnifera</i>	Roots	Apply seed oil on affected parts
13		Daru halad	<i>Berberis asiatica</i>	Tubers	Skin becomes fair with application of paste of tuber
14		Chitrak	<i>Plumbo zeylanica</i>	Roots	Apply juice of roots
15		Kali karav		Leaves	Apply pastes of leaves on affected parts
16		Wagh nakhi		Fruits	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
17		Gundi	<i>Cordial rothil</i>	Bark	Apply bark paste for skin disease of children
18		Latakaranja	<i>Caesalpinia crista</i>	Seeds	Apply paste of seeds on affected parts
19		Sitafali	<i>Anona squamosa</i>	Bark	Apply past of bark on affected parts

20		Shevaga	<i>Moringa oleracia</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts and take leaf juice twice a day
21		Hopbush	<i>Dodoina viscosa</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
22		Elephant Crepper	<i>Argeriya speciosa</i>	Leaves	Apply juice of leaves on affected parts
23		Kher	<i>Acacia catechu</i>	Bark	Mushrooms produced on the dry stem of kher are crushed and applied
24	Ulcer	Ghasdoro	<i>Typha elephantine</i>	Fruits	The fibers from fruit are applied on affected parts
25		Khad dhaman	<i>Grewia hirsute</i>	Leaves	Apply powder of dry leaves on affected parts
26		Maka	<i>Zea mays</i>	Seeds	Seedless corn is burnt and the ash mixed with honey is given
27		Karanj	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i>	Seeds	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
28		Satodi	<i>Bohravia diffusa</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
29		Nasotar	<i>Perculina turpethum</i>	Leaves	Apply powder of dry leaves of affected parts
30	Lucoderma	Umario	<i>Ficus glomerulus</i>	Fruits	Juice from small fruits given with old jaggery
31		Tarada garmalo	<i>Cassia fistula</i>	Bark	Crushed bark applied on affected parts and powder of bark taken twice a day
32		Jangali draksh	<i>Vitis carnosia</i>	Bark	Seeds taken twice a day
33		Peniculatus	<i>Celastrus</i>	Seeds	Seedsoil apply on affected parts and massaged
34		Bhoy umbar	<i>Ficus hispida</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
35		Parijat	<i>Nyctanthus arbortristis</i>	Flowers	Apply juice of flowers on affected parts
36		Bavachi	<i>Psoralea corylifolia</i>	Seeds	Seed oil applied on affected parts
37	Lucoderma	Adad vdid	<i>Pheselous radiates</i>	Seeds	Dal is eaten and the paste of flour applied
38		Kher	<i>Acacia catechu</i>	Bark	Bark decoction taken a sour food
39			<i>Acacia Arabica</i>	Bark	Apply paste of bark on affected parts
40		Gunj	<i>Abrus pricatorius</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
41	Itching	Tulasi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
42		Aval	<i>Caesalpina</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
43		Puvadion	<i>Cassia tora</i>	Leaves	Eat leaves in thr form of bhaji
44		Ambali	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Fruits	Put tamarind in the form of bhaji
45		Mahudo	<i>Bassia latifolia</i>	Bark	Bark boiled in water,used for aking bath
46	Ringworm	Khatibhendi	<i>Hibiscus cannabinus</i>	Seed	Seed burnt and the ash with coconut oil
47		Garmalo	<i>Cassia fistula</i>	Laves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
48		Kali kanthar	<i>Capparis sepiaria</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply u

49		Kavetari		Leaves	Apply pase of leaves on affected parts
50		Morvel	<i>Clematis triloba</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
51		Tulasi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Leaves	Apply leaf juice
52	Draj	Upakanta	<i>Echinops echinata</i>	Whole plant	Apply juice prepared from whole plant
53	Eczema	Chodharo	<i>Anisomelous malaberica</i>	Flower	Grind with water and apply
54		Jal agiyo	<i>Ammania beccifera</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on effected parts
55		Jal jaman	<i>Cocculus hirsutus</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
56		Sag	<i>Tectona granids</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leveas on affected parts
57		Naffatiyo	<i>Ipomoea</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
58		Dhaturo	<i>Datura metal</i>	Fruits	Grind with tuver dal and apply on the affected parts
59		Chitrak	<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i>	Roots	Prepare paste of roots and apply
60		Unhali	<i>Tephrosia purpuria</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
61		Gunja	<i>Abrus pricatorius</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts
62		Kavach	<i>Muecun prurita</i>	Leaves	Apply paste of leaves on affected parts

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