ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Home remedies of the Teli clan of the Telegu tribe of Maulvibazar district, Bangladesh


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ABSTRACT

The Teli clan is one of the several clans of the Telegu tribe, which is a small indigenous community in Bangladesh. The clan members mainly work in a tea estate in Kamalganj of Maulvibazar district. The total number of clan members is about twenty. The Teli clan has lost most of its traditional medicinal practices, and whatever remains is surviving in the form of home remedies. An ethnomedicinal survey was carried out among the Teli clan members to document the home remedies used and the diseases treated. A total of seven plants were observed to be used in the various households of the Teli clan, which plants were used in four different medicinal formulations. The various plant species belonged to seven different families. These formulations were used for treatment of diabetes, jaundice, coughs, mucus, diarrhea, and dysentery. The ethnomedicinal survey points to the importance of carrying out such surveys among particularly the small indigenous communities, whose traditional medicinal practices are rapidly getting lost or have almost totally disappeared.

Key words: Medicinal plants, home remedies, Teli, Bangladesh

Introduction

Although more than 100 indigenous communities or tribes are said to be present in Bangladesh, practically nothing is known about their traditional medicinal practices. However, documentation of traditional medicinal practices is important, for such observations of traditional medicinal practices followed by documentation has led to the discovery of many important allopathic drugs (Balick and Cox, 1996; Cotton, 1996; Gilani and Rahman, 2005). Besides tribal medicinal practices (which can vary considerably between tribes or even different clans of the same tribe), various other forms of traditional medicinal practices exist in Bangladesh, including Ayurveda, Unani, homeopathy, and folk medicine. Folk medicinal practitioners (otherwise known as Kavirajes or Vaidyas) and tribal medicinal practitioners (TMPs) have a lot of things in common. Both groups rely mainly on medicinal plants for treatment and use simple formulations of medicinal plants, which may occasionally include animal parts and minerals.

The medicinal plants used by both Kavirajes and TMPs are important valuable resources of the country. They have been used as such for centuries, for both Kavirajes’ and TMPs’ medicinal formulations are preserved (in memory) and passed from one generation to the next generation. As a result, any given folk or tribal medicinal practitioner possesses quite extensive knowledge about the medicinal plants found in the area of their habitat. Proper documentation of this knowledge can not only lead to discovery of new drugs but also spur conservation efforts of the medicinal plants, many of which are rapidly becoming endangered because of deforestation or because of over-exploitation. If documentation is not done rapidly, many traditional medicinal practices will be erased from memory.

Towards preparing a comprehensive database on the medicinal plants of the country, we had been conducting ethnomedicinal surveys among the traditional medicinal practitioners as well as the tribal medicinal practitioners for a number of years (Nawaz et al., 2009; Rahmatullah et al., 2009a-c; Chowdhury et al., 2010; Hasan et al., 2010; Hossan et al., 2010; Mollik et al., 2010a,b; Rahmatullah et al., 2010a-g; Akber et al., 2011; Biswas et al., 2011a-c; Haque et al., 2011; Islam et al., 2011; Jahan et al., 2011; Rahmatullah et al., 2011a,b; Sarker et al., 2011; Shaheen et al., 2011; Das et al., 2012; Hasan et al., 2012; Hossan et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2012; Rahmatullah et al., 2012a-d; Sarker et al., 2012). These ethnomedicinal surveys have included small tribes, and we had been concentrating on most of these forgotten small tribes and trying to document their medicinal practices before they became irretrievably lost.

The Telegu tribe is a small indigenous community in Bangladesh and practically on the verge of disappearance. The tribe has several clans, the Teli clan being one of the clans. Various members of the clans of
the Telegu tribe now work in the tea estates present in Sylhet division of the country. The Teli clan, presently numbering only about twenty members, currently works in one such tea estate, which is known as Kamalganj tea estate and is located in Shamsernagar, Kamalgang in Maulvibazar district in Sylhet division of Bangladesh. In a preliminary survey, it was observed that the Teli clan no longer have their own TMPs, but instead relies on some home remedies for treatment of a few ailments. These home remedies possibly are the remnants of previous Teli traditional practices. The objective of the present survey was to document these home remedies before they also get lost.

Materials and Methods

Information was collected from every household of the Teli clan, the total household members numbering around twenty. The head of each household was told as to the nature of our visit and informed consent obtained to publish any information given both nationally or internationally. Interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire and the guided field-walk method of Martin (1995) and Maundu (1995). In this method, the head of a household or any other informant took the interviewers on guided field-walks through areas from where he or she collected medicinal plants, pointed out the plants, and described their uses. The Telis could speak and understand Bengali, and interviews were conducted in Bengali, which was also the language of the interviewers. Plant specimens as pointed out by the Teli informants were collected on the spot, photographed, dried, and brought back to Dhaka for complete identification at the Bangladesh National Herbarium. Voucher specimens were deposited with the Medicinal Plant Collection Wing of the University of Development Alternative.

Results and Discussion

The Teli informants could provide the names of only seven plants that they used in their home remedies. The seven plants were distributed into seven families. Only four formulations could be obtained from the Teli informants, these four formulations being used for treatment of diabetes, jaundice, coughs and mucus, and diarrhea and dysentery. Two of the formulations were simple, as for instance Leaves of *Colocasia esculenta* were used to treat diabetes, and the unripe fruits of *Carica papaya* used to treat jaundice. Two other formulations were a little more complex. For instance, three plants, namely, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, and *Justicia adhatoda* were used in combination to treat coughs and mucus. A combination of leaves of *Centella asiatica* and rhizomes of *Curcuma longa* was used to treat diarrhea and dysentery. The results are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Local Name</th>
<th>Parts used</th>
<th>Disease, Symptoms, Formulations, and Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Justicia adhatoda L.</td>
<td>Acanthaceae</td>
<td>Bashok pata</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>See Serial Number 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott</td>
<td>Araceae</td>
<td>Kochu shak</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Diabetes. Leaves are cooked and eaten as vegetable daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carica papaya L.</td>
<td>Caricaceae</td>
<td>Koi fol, Pepe</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Jaundice. Unripe fruits are taken orally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Euphorbia pulcherrima Wild. ex Klotzsch</td>
<td>Euphorbiaceae</td>
<td>Sid pata</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>See Serial Number 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ocimum sanctum L.</td>
<td>Lamiaceae</td>
<td>Tulsi pata</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Coughs, mucus. Juice obtained from crushed leaves of <em>Ocimum sanctum</em> is mixed with juice obtained from crushed leaves of <em>Euphorbia pulcherrima</em> and crushed leaves of <em>Justicia adhatoda</em> and taken orally with a little bit of table salt for 3-4 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Centella asiatica (L.) Urb.</td>
<td>Umbelliferae</td>
<td>Bang pata</td>
<td>Leaf</td>
<td>Diarrhea, dysentery. Juice obtained from crushed leaves of <em>Centella asiatica</em> is mixed with crushed rhizomes of <em>Curcuma longa</em> and orally taken for 1-3 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Curcuma longa L.</td>
<td>Zingiberaceae</td>
<td>Holud</td>
<td>Rhizome</td>
<td>See Serial Number 6.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The anti-diabetic activity of ethanol extract of *Colocasia esculenta* leaves in alloxan induced diabetic rats has been shown (Kumawat et al., 2010). The tubers of this plant also contains constituents with alpha-amylase inhibitory activity (McEwan et al., 2010), and thus could be beneficial to diabetic patients. The flowers of *Carica papaya* are used in traditional medicines of Ghana to treat jaundice (Ocloo et al., 2012). Treatment of
coughs, mucus and other respiratory ailments in traditional medicine by *Justicia adhatoda* and their scientific validation has been reviewed (Dhankar et al., 2011). The anti-tussive effects of *Ocimum sanctum* have also been reported (Nadig and Laxmi, 2005). *Centella asiatica* is reportedly effective against enteric pathogens, and so could be useful in treatment of diarrhea and dysentery (Mamtha et al., 2004). *Curcuma longa* is known to contain curcumin; sodium curcuminate has been shown to demonstrate anti-diarrheal activity in castor oil-induced diarrhea in rats (Gnanasekar and Perianayagam, 2004). Taken together, most of the plants used as home remedies are justified in their uses based on scientific evidences.

It is unfortunate that the Teli clan has declined to merely a few people, and in the process of declination, has lost most of their traditional remedies. However, the few remedies that they have, can possibly after more scientific studies, form the basis for cheaper and alternative sources for treatment of diabetes, jaundice, respiratory disorders, and gastrointestinal disorders. These diseases are common throughout the world, and a cheaper and effective medicinal formulation can benefit all human beings.

References


