

# Future Prospects of Ethno-Medicine



Edited by  
Lohit Hazarika  
Mridul Buragohain

## Ethno Medicine and their Practices among the Kaibartas of Assam

*Jyoti Hazarika and S Sengupta*

---

### **Abstract**

Studies on ethno medicines have long been recognised as an important field of anthropological research. Due to urbanisation and modernisation, the traditional use of the medicinal plants is rapidly decreasing. However, the present study shows that the Kaibarta population of Assam still strongly depends on ethno medicine.

The present paper attempts to provide a descriptive account about various ethno medicines and their uses among the Kaibarta population of *Sutimukh gaon*, a rural Kaibarta village of Lakhimpur district, Assam. Especial attention was given on their traditional beliefs and healing systems particularly on the diseases related to reproductive health of women and how they are treated with the help of ethno medicines.

The data were collected through ethnographic field work. Knowledge of many important medicinal plants is recorded from among the population under study. Among them 22 medicinal plants are used especially for diseases related to reproductive health such as menstrual pain, abortion, over bleeding, white discharge, vaginal itching etc. Infertility can also be treated by these ethno medicines. For adequate breast feeding, most of the mother in the village use

to eat these medicinal plants which are advised by the aged women. The Kaibarta people usually prefer the ethno medicine while in severe condition only they consult with allopathic doctors.

**Key words:** *Ethno Medicine, Reproductive Health, Infertility.*

### **Introduction**

Ethno medicine can be defined as the sum total of all knowledge and practices whether they can be explained or not, used in the prevention, diagnosis and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalances and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation. It is a purely empirical oral tradition and a diverse stream, which is eco-specific and ethno-specific in nature. Thus ethno medicine consists of those beliefs and practices relating to disease, which are products of indigenous cultural development and are not explicitly derived from the conceptual framework of modern medicine. It includes a holistic knowledge and practice, oral and written, function and diagnosis, preventive and curative knowledge of illness and disease to promote total well-beings. From time immemorial, human being used the plant species for the treatment of different types of diseases. The history of use of plants and animals as a source of medicine dates back perhaps to the origin of human race (Chopra *et al.*, 1956; Kirtikar and Basu, 1975). Ethno medicine has profoundly influenced the culture and civilization of man. The life style of human being is well acquainted with indigenous system of knowledge. In all regions of the developing world, ethno medicine has maintained its popularity. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 80 per cent of the population of developing countries relies on traditional medicines, mostly plant drugs, for their primary health care needs. Every society has its own system of indigenous health care practices based on locally available plant resources. Nature provided plants for every ailment and there is a

cure for every diseases, man has to find out it (Pal and Jain, 1998). Man took help from natural plants whenever they faced problems. Quite a large number of studies have been carried out by different scholars on indigenous knowledge and traditional health care practices such as Jain (1983), Jain and Dubey (2000), Sharma and Sharma (2000), Gharami and Sharma (2001), Dwivedi (2003), and many others. In India, studies on ethno medicine were first initiated by Bodding (1925).

In the present paper an attempt has been made to provide a descriptive account about various ethno medicines and their uses among the Kaibarta population, a populous scheduled caste community of Assam. They are the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam and one of the sixteen scheduled castes of the State. The origin and migration of the Kaibartas are still shrouded with a mystery. Kaibartas are believed to be the descendants of the first Dravidian immigrants. The exact meaning of the word Kaibarta is not clearly known, but the term is generally used to indicate the people whose main profession is fishing. The term 'Kaibarta' is derived from the Sanskrit word '*Ke*' meaning water and '*barta*' meaning depending upon. The Dharma Shastras enlisted them as a fishing community. They are called as Kevartta in the Jatakas (*Ke* means water, and *varta* - livelihood). This means that the Kaibartas derive their livelihood from water. The Kaibarta were also known as '*Nadial or Jali*'. At present, Kaibartas are mainly found in Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Sibsagarh and Jorhat district in the Brahmaputta valley of Assam.

In the present study, special attention is given on the traditional beliefs and healing systems of Kaibartas, particularly on the diseases related to reproductive health of women and how they treated with the help of ethno medicines. The data were collected through ethnographic field work from a rural Kaibarta village of Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district, Assam. Interview

method was used to collect information from the respondents. Knowledgeable aged men and women having acquaintance on traditional medicine have been selected for interview.

### Result and Discussion

The Kaibarta population living in the Sutimukh *gaon*, a typical rural Kaibarta village of Dhakuakhana *mouza* of Lakhimpur district has an age-old custom of using different medicinal plants to treat various types of diseases. A number of medicinal plants are recorded from the population under study. Among them 22 medicinal plants are used especially for diseases related to reproductive health. Different types of ailments and how they are treated with the help of ethno medicine are as follows:

**1) Mahekia Petor Bikh or Pet Kamuroni** (stomach pain during menstruation) : *Terminalia chebula* (*Chebulic myrobalan*) or *Silikha* in Assamese is a medicinal plant which is especially used to treat stomach pain during menstruation. Mixed juice extracted by pounding six numbers of *Silikha* seeds and one inch of its bark is given to cure stomach pain during menstruation. This juice has to take in empty stomach during the first three days of menstruation by staying at the middle position of the main door of the house. It is advised to take seeds and bark from a mature *Terminalia chebula* tree.

*Leucus aspera spreng* or *Drunban* in Assamese and *Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides* or locally called *Saru-manimuni*: One cup mixed juice of *Drunban* and *Saru-manimuni* is given in first three days of menstruation to take in empty stomach to cure *Mahekia Pet bikh* (stomach pain during menstruation).

**2) Gaa Sola** (over bleeding) : The mixed paste of seven tender leaf of *Rubus alcerifolius* / *Rubus moluccans* (Indian raspberry) or *Jetulipoka*, 21 number of fleshy sections or cloves of *Allium sativum* (garlic greens) and seven numbers of *Piper nigrum* or *Jaluk* have to fry with little amount of *Brassica campestris*

(mustard oil). When the paste became dry then it has to divide into 21 tablets (*bori*) and these are given to eat in empty stomach to cure over bleeding.

3) **Aokhos loga bikh or Suwakamuroni** (stomach pain after delivery or pain after birth of a baby): The juice of three tender leaf of *Lagernaria siceraria* (bottle gourd) or *Jatilaou* is mixed with a little cow dung, is given to the mother to eat in empty stomach to get relief from the pain.

4) **Boga chaps jua / Dhatu durbal hua** (white discharge): A cup of *Mentha arvensis* or *padina* juice mixed with three spoon of palm candy (*talmichiri*) is given to the patient for seven days in empty stomach to cure the problem.

The juice of 15-20 young leaf of *Murraya koenigi* or *Narasingha* in Assamese, with one cup of milk and some amount of palm candy or *talmichiri* is given to eat in empty stomach for three consecutive days.

The juice extracted by pounding the root of *Cynodon dactylon* or *Duboribon* with a cup of milk and *talmichiri* is given to eat in empty stomach for 3-5 days.

The whole plant juice of *Oldenlandia corymbosa* (wild pepper) or *banjaluk* in Assamese, with two teaspoon of *talmichiri* is taken in the empty stomach for seven days.

The roots of *Asparagus recemosus* (garden asparagus) or *Satmul* in Assamese and one spoon of *talmichiri* are boiled with ½ liter milk for 10 minutes. When the juice becomes cold is given to the patient to take in empty stomach once daily until the patient is fully cured.

5) **Khajuati** (vaginal itching): Fresh leafs of *Azadirachta indica* / *Media margosat* (Margosa leaves) or *Mahaneem* are boiled with water, after some time washes the itching place with that water. The boil water can also be taken orally in the empty stomach for three days for better results.

6) **To get rid of unwanted pregnancy** : Dried roots of *Datura stramonium* (*Datura*) is given to eat in empty stomach for abortion.

A small piece of *Paederia scandens* root (*Bhedailata* in Assamese) is advised to insert over night in the vagina for induced abortion.

7) **Kesuwa nuhuwa** (infertility) : Mixed paste of five tender leaf of *Mimosa pudica* or *Keya kaite* (*Lajukilata* in Assamese) , one tender leaf of bamboo (*bhaluka banh*) and three leaf of *Citrus paradise* Macb (*Gul Nemu* in Assamese) boiled with a little amount of water for about ½ an hour then the paste is given in a copper bowl (*kahor bati*) on the third days of menstruation in seating position facing towards the sun early in the morning. After taking the medicine, it is advised to avoid milk, lemon, onion, chilly etc., to be followed for seven more days.

8) **Ghakhikotia or ghakhinulua huwa** (inadequate breast feeding): The mixed juice prepared with the materials collected from inner surface of three fully ripen *Musa gigantean* or *Bhimkal* bark and the root of *Artocarpus heterophyllus* (Jackfruit; *Kathal* in Assamese) is given to eat to the mother in the empty stomach for three days for adequate breast feeding.

Juice extracted from *Euphorbia prostrata* / *Pouzolzia zeylanica* (creeping sand mat / milk purslane) or *Gaakhiroti gos* is also prescribed to eat in empty stomach consecutively for seven days for adequate breast feeding.

9) **Pesaab grohoni** (urine infection): Five fresh flower of *Hibiscus rosa sinensis* (*joba phul*) and five fresh leaf of *Cynodon dactylon* (*duboriban*) first have to properly grind, then this mixed paste with one cup of starch containing rice cleaning water is given to eat for 5-7 days or till the patient gets cured.

The plant juice of *Scopariadulcir* (sweet leaf plant) or *Chenigos* with some amount of *talmichiri* is taken in the empty stomach for seven days.

Leaf juice of *Bryophyllum calycinum* Salish or *Dupartenga* is given to eat in empty stomach for 5-7 days. This juice can also be taken with some amount of *talmichiri* in the early morning to get relief from kidney stone.

**10) Petchala (dysentery) :** A cup of fruit decoction of *Spondias pinnate* or *Amora* is taken in empty stomach for three days.

Mixed juice of five tender leaf of *Psidium guajava* or *Madhuriam*, three entire plants of *Centella asiatica* (Asiatic pennywort) or *Bor-manimuni* and three complete plants of *Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides* or *Saru-manimuni* with a little amount of salt is given to eat in the empty stomach for 3-5 day.

Ten to fifteen pieces of dry *Garcinia cowa* Rox or *Kuji thekera* are kept in a cup of water for about 15-20 minutes, and then the juice is mixed with a little amount of salt is given to the patient to eat in empty stomach for three days.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the present study indicate that Kaibarta populations under study have deep faith on traditional medicine. They seem to depend upon the plants for curing various diseases including menstrual troubles, over bleeding, vaginal itching, abortion etc. Maximum village people usually prefer the ethno medicine while in severe condition they consult with allopathic doctors. The Kaibarta populations of Sutimukh gaon have great experience about their traditional medicine and there are many important and astonishing things to learn from the people. Spreading and preserving this knowledge on medicinal plants and their use has become important for human existence and welfare. Thus a detailed scientific study is very much necessary.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors are grateful to the inhabitants of Sutimukh Gaon, Lakhimpur district, Assam for their cooperation and unavailing help

during our study. We are heartily thankful to all the respondents for giving their time and co-operation

### **References**

Chopra, R.N., Nayar, S.L. and Chopra, I. C . (1956), *Glossary of Medicinal Plants of India*. CSIR, New Delhi.

Dwivedi, P. (2003) *Demographic Profile and Health Care Practices among the Baigas of Samnapur Block of Dindori District, M.P.* Unpublished M.Sc. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Dr. H. S Gour University, Sagar (M.P.)

Gharami, Ajay and Sharma A. N. (2001) An appraisal of traditional medicines and treatment among Nicobar of Little Andaman, *Vanyajati*, : 5-10.

Jain, Manoj Kumar and Dubey A.C. (2000) A study of traditional medicines in the Saur Tribe of Tikamgarh District, M.P. *Tribal Health Bulletin*, 6, 2: 11-13.

Jain, S. K. (1983), *Ethno Botany and Traditional Medicines*, Keynote address. Asian Conference on Traditional Asian Medicines, Bombay; March 6-9.

Jain, S.K. (1998), *Tribal Medicine*, Naya Prokash, Calcutta.

Kirtikar, K.R. and Basu, B.D. (1975). *Indian Medicinal Plants*. Periodical Express Book Co.

Sharma, A.N. and Sharma N.M. (2000), Indigenous health practices related to fever among Bharias of Patalkot, M.P. *Tribal Health Bulletin*, 6, 1: 6-8.