A STUDY ON THE USE OF ETHNO MEDICINE AMONG THE ADI COMMUNITY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH IN THE AGE OF MODERN MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT

The Adi Community people of Arunachal Pradesh are concentrated in the East Siang district and traditionally purely based on the animism and naturalistic approach in their lifestyle. For centuries, the Adi Community people in regards to health issues for any ailment they have no any other alternative or substitute that can cure their ailments in the absence of modern medicine. Therefore, they had to depend on nature and its products such as plant and diet as well as super natural powers. Their thoughts are influenced naturally to belief on spirits and deities who were responsible for their ailments. So the Adi people are fully dependent on healing, worship, taboo. They envisage the use of plants, herbs, leafy vegetable diets, and other indigenous medicines to cure, heal and to keep themselves free from certain diseases or ailments. Through this paper an attempt is made to look into the extent of use of ethno medicine in the era of modern medicine and also their perception of modern medicine. Moreover, what are different aspects which are responsible for the reach of modern medicine in the study area? And finally how effective is Ethno medicine in curing of different diseases.

Keywords: Adi Community, East Siang, Ethno medicine, Modern medicine

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically Ethno medicine means medicines that are traditionally associated with specific ethnic groups. Ethno medicine has been used by our forefathers and is being used by the people living in any parts of the world. The influence of ethno medicine and its practice has been a popular or intended concept with the perspective of curing and enabling the people with the use of traditional medicinal plants and its way of preserving and continuing the use of it without any side effects. It is also known as Folk Medicine, Traditional Medicine, or Indigenous Medicine. Ethno medicine is based on ancient written sources along with the knowledge and practices that have been handed orally over the centuries. It is closely related to Ethno Botany and Ethno Pharmacology (Rai et.al 2011). Ethno medicine examines and translates health-related knowledge and theories that people inherit and learn by living in a culture. Each society has a particular medicinal culture or ethno medicine which forms the culture’s medicinal common sense or logic. An Ethno medical system has interrelated notions about the body, the causes and prevention of illness, diagnosis and treatment such that ethno physiology, ethno psychiatry, practitioner seeking behavior and ethno pharmacology are all ethno medical topics (Quinlan, Marsha, 2011).

The knowledge of ethno medicine has been known by the tribal people from their ancestors, its traditional use and the importance of medical plants has been passed orally through generation to generation though there is no any written document to store this traditional practice of ethno medicines. This is one of the drawbacks that enable people from knowing the importance of preserving different important medicinal plants and its traditional use to treat various ailments as well as there is no any updated information or change in treatment of various ailments. It is an unwritten body of knowledge. There is no systematic record to describe what it is, what it does, how it does it.

The most alluring and exciting part of Arunachal Pradesh is the Siang Valley. It is the home of Adis community and the place is famous for its scenic beauty. The Siang Valley has certain streams,
rivers and rivulets but Siang River is the mightiest river of Siang valley. The Adis is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They are also known as Abors. The Abors mainly concentrated in areas such as East Siang, Siang District, Upper Siang, East and Northern part of West Siang and Western part of Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

**STUDY AREA:**

East Siang district is mountainous region with varied topography. The Headquarter of East Siang district is the Pasighat town, which lies in an altitude of 155 meters above main sea level. Pasighat, in the East Siang district is the oldest town in the Arunachal Pradesh. The district covers an area of 4005 square kilometers with a total population of 87,397. The sex ratio of East Siang district is 983 females per thousand males and literacy rate of 80.05 % (Census, 2011). The name of the district is derived from the mighty Siang River which is the life line of East Siang district, which originated from Tibet (Tsangpo) which transcends down and flows through the entire length of the area until it flows down into the plains of Assam, south of Pasighat town, where it meets Dihang and Lohit and then becomes Brahmaputra.

The nature of Adi people residing in East Siang district is purely based on the animism and naturalistic approach. Earlier, without the advent of medical care, their use was unknown to them and also in accessible to them due to isolation. For any ailment for their health issues they have no any other alternative or substitute that can cure their ailments. Therefore, they had to depend on nature and its products such as plant and diet as well as supernatual powers.

The main objective of the study is to find out the rate of influence of Ethno Medicine among the Adi Community in the age of modern medicine.

**ETHNO MEDICINE AMONG THE ADI COMMUNITY**

The concept of Ethno medicine among Adi community has been long rooted back within the early centuries when life existed on earth. The accessibility of medicinal plants around the community and the need for curing certain ailments or diseases led to the adoption of such practices among the people. The tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh mostly practice the tradition of using Ethno medicinal plants which have been continuing with the phase of modern medicines at present time too. As the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh believed in an animistic and naturalistic approach, they depend on nature, supernatural powers. Adi community as such also believed in using nature’s resources in which their thoughts are influenced to belief on spirits and deities who were responsible for many ailments, therefore the people are directly dependent on worship, healing, taboo as well as the use of herbs, plants and leafy vegetables and other indigenous medicines to treat and cure themselves of diseases. With the need for medicinal practices, knowledge of medicinal properties of herbs and plants over the centuries has accumulated vast experiences for the people to treat them. These experiences and knowledge which are termed as traditional knowledge is still being practiced by the Adis of their day to day life along with modern medicine. Ethno medicine practices are being associated with spiritual practices as attached to rites and rituals which are predominant with psychological effects among the tribal people and it formed as customs and tradition. From the psychic point of point, they developed some foreshocks behind some diseases and epidemics.

The Adis of Siang belts, to conscious the people for taking precautionary measures, build a village gate known as Pator (Koley, 2017). Similarly, **Ongin Leaves** commonly known as East Indian Glory (Clerodendrum colebrookianum) are consumed to normalize high pressure or hypertension, **Bamboos** (Bambusa spinosa) and its products are also used as medicines for different purposes such as blood clotting, or skin burns, **opium** is used for stomach ache and to cure joint pains by the Adi community. **Takang leaves** or vegetable fern (Diplazium esculentum) are consumed and
used as medicine to treat indigestion as well as the Marsang or toothache plant leaves (Spilanthes acmella) is used in toothache, gum infection and also believes to cure stammering. Oyik leaves (Pouzolzia hirta) are used for treating boils and abscesses, abdominal cramps in females and leucorrhoea. It is also used for bone dislocations and fractures. It has also properties to cure acidity in the stomach. The Adi people also consume and used Oko mamang leaves commonly known as black nightshade (Solanum nigrum) for skin diseases, ulcers, asthma, ringworms as well as for piles. Olap leaves commonly known as Common Wire Weed (Sida acuta) has medicinal properties and is used for curing malaria, heart disease, piles, kidney stone etc. The Indian Prickly Ash or Indian Pepper or Onger leaves (Zanthoxylum rhetsa) are used for treating asthma, rheumatism, bronchitis, cholera, toothache and piles. Take mare or the Basil Lemon (Ocimum basilicum) is used for treating cough. Gham commonly known as Chekkurmanis (Sauropus androgynus) is used to improve digestion as well as to treat bronchitis diseases. Iile or commonly known as Hill gynura (Gynura cusimbua), the juice of stem and leaves are applied to fresh wounds for stopping bleeding and for fast healing and also the leaf paste is applied to the forehead to relieve headache and sedative drug by local people. The chameleon plant/fish mint (Houttuynia cordata), locally known as Tufo leaf is used to treat pneumonia. The Ori commonly known as false coriander (Eryngium foetidum) used to treat burns, fevers, carache, hypertension, constipation, asthma, stomachache, worms, diarrhea etc. Engeh or Taro (Colocasia esculenta), the young and yellow spathe of Engeh is used for treating earache; the juice of corm used for alopecia as well as the leaf is used for internal haemorrhages, otalgia as well as piles. The leaves and petiole of Shetafay or Centella/Gotu kola (Centella asiatica) is used for wound healing and is anti-rheumatic.

All these medicinal plants are consumed with the knowledge of their medicinal properties which are known to the Adi community from the very beginning. It is being passed down to their generation and these medicinal plants are commonly available and being cultivated by the Adis in their gardens or chiefly available in the near environment. The practice of ethno medicine by the Adi people is known from the very generation with the knowledge of important and valuable medicinal plants passed down from the ancestors through orally.

ADI BELIEF SYSTEM ASSOCIATE WITH ETHNO MEDICINE

The Adi society is imbied with religious belief and faith which possess a vibrating cultural heritage of arts and crafts, folklore, folk songs and dances representing their living style, traditional wisdom as well as a custom which have been impacted them in their philosophy, their temperament and psychological perception. The Adi community has proximity to nature. The economic and social fabrics of indigenous people, their attitude, living style, food habits, house patterns, characters, music, arts, tradition, customs, society, religious faith, culture are dependent on nature. Nature plays a predominant role in the life of Adi society; it determines their thought and philosophy. Animalism is the basic feature of religious faith among the Adi community. They worship rivers, lakes, trees, stones, etc, to fulfill their ritualistic needs. They believed that there are lives and presence of spirit in every object which nature has created, the life of people is simple, custom bound yet unique. Traditional myths also play an important role in forming religious perception which explains the origin of the world, the origin of God and the origin of living things including human beings. All ritualistic activities are performed by the priests known as the Miris among Adi community which performs magico-religious practices along with the indigenous faith. Taboo or Nyonam is also considered as a part of the religious practices observed by the people as ethical code of conduct (Koley, 2017).

The Miris or Priest holds an important place in the religious belief of the Adis. They perform various ritualistic activities, people believed them with full faith as well as gain respect within the Adi community. The Adis attributes their misfortunes and miseries including diseases to be the actions of
malevolent spirits which the Adis believed that the Miris has great powers that protect people from evil spirits. Usually, the Miris deals with the worship and sacrifice of animals to please the evil spirits. Some Miris such as Ayit –Miris are known as Ethno- medical specialist, who collects and extracts traditional raw medicines from the jungles and prepare medicines for the needy person. Though with due course of time, these Ethno- Medical Specialist is declining, people are more inclined to other opportunities which are being opted in the modern phase. **Ayit Miris or Ethno Medical Specialist** has the ability to use indigenous medicinal practices along with the sacrifice of animals, chanting and worship. They have a vast knowledge regarding the use of traditional medicines, while some have the ability to heal bone fracture known as Ngutkyon or Loona- Looset. Ngutkyon is the treatment of any type of fracture treated with the help of bee wax extracted from the jungle by the Ayit Miris. It is said that all Ayit Miris does not have the quality to treat fractures or Ngutkyon, the very few gifted ones are able to do this practice of heeling along with magico- religious belief. Apart from Ngutkyon as ayurvedic treatment mostly Ayit Miris performed rituals, give offerings to evil spirits in the form of sacrifice of animals to relieve the sick men from certain serious ailments, this practice is known as Ipaks. Ipaks are offerings done to please the evil spirit which has cause the person to suffer from serious ailments. They cure certain ailments with their magico-religious chants and knowledge and also enable people in knowing what the cause of their sufferings is. Treatments of ailments such as jaundice by using various indigenous medicinal plants available in the locality are also used by some traditional healers to cure the people. Knowledge of indigenous medicinal plants are well known and passed down as in the form of oral tradition by ancestors of Adi community in which mass population especially living in rural areas or villages have abrupt knowledge of treating their ailments apart from major diseases or ailments. Headache, diarrhea, cold and cough, ulcers, skin disease, stomachache, fever, nausea, gastritis, skin burns, high pressure, dysentery, pneumonia, throat sore, sinus, menstrual cramps, toothache, boil and abscesses, ring worms, piles, malaria, etc are being treated with the use of this locally available traditional medicines. They are culturally imbibed with the practice of traditional medicines through ages. As the Adi community is mostly dependent on subsistence type of agriculture while doing their manual work when they accidently injure themselves, for first-aid purposes various traditional medicinal plants are used. For instance, Iile or Hill gynura and Oyik or Pouzalzia hirta leaves are commonly applied on fresh wounds and for stopping bleeding for emergency purposes.

The Miris while performing certain rituals, they are believed to use certain plants to cure human being as well as animals. For example, **Bangko (Solanum spirale)** leaves are used in performing rituals and chanting prayers by the priest. They are used in the Gangging (worship place) and during at Ipak (sacrifice). It is cultivated in all the Adi houses as a believe that it will protect the people form evil spirits. The leaves are dip in water and are believed that it has certain properties to heal the impure substances in and around the surroundings, in short Adi community considered this as Ganga Jal, pure and pious like the mainlanders believed in holy Ganges water. Toti – Bangko is considered as goddess who protects the people from evil spirits as believed by the local people. These Bangko leaves are also use as traditional medicine to normalize high pressures and are commonly used in deworming to get rid of helminthes parasites inside the human body. Like Bangko leaves, **Kekir or Zinger rhizome** is used in traditional and religious practices by the Miris and the Adi people. It is also believed that Kekir has the potential to get rid of evil spirits or supernatural powers that exist. It has certain properties to heal cuts and wounds from becoming septic, stops bleeding, also used in curing a cold and cough as well as helps in relieving vomiting tendency.

Earlier the remote Adi villages which do not have the access to modern medicine, they continue to survive their various diseases and ailments with the help of available plant and animal resources existed in nature and also even apply supernatural powers to drive out evil spirits which are being passed down to the generation to generation. Adi community along with the religious belief,
they have good knowledge of plant origin of folk medicines and their use and treatment of some common ailments. The medicinal value and its usage are mostly known to the head of the family passed down through their generation. Mostly rural mass of Adi villages is keen to use this practice of using the traditional medicines locally available as they have less though some of the villages got the access to medical advances it is believed that people till now are using indigenous medicinal plants for treating their ailments as this practice of traditional medicines is believed to be effective. The medicinal plants which are being used by them are also believed that it has no side effects since it is nature-based and being test and used by the past generations either in the form of vegetables or by use of indigenous medicine only. However, the Adis are more into rituals, worship and religious belief, the professional practice of traditional knowledge of medicinal plants is very few among the Adi community, and it is mostly practice by Mishing dominated villages of East Siang district. Adis has a strong base in the oral traditional knowledge of traditional medicines and nowadays this practice is being considered as an important factor in socio-cultural aspects for treating various ailments as this traditional medicinal practice has got many properties to heal even serious ailments without any side effects.

The Adis have a rich knowledge of using traditional medicines. The traditional medicine has been used and the knowledge of curing ailments or diseases has been known to the people especially people living in village areas because there is a need of medicines if there is any emergency and the use of traditional medicine is probably the only option when there is no any health care nearly. So with the knowledge and precise use of indigenous medicine is very essential and helpful for smaller ailments which the Adi people use for treating their ailments. The following are the some important medicinal plants used for the treatment of various diseases or ailments of Adi community with precise knowledge of it and these are as follows:

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

Ethno medicine and its importance have been an important aspect in the life of people especially people living in rural areas. The unavailability of medical facilities or say improper inadequate supply of medicinal supplies have been a hindrance in the quality of health care in the rural areas. If there is a proper health care center or medical facilities, it is obvious that there is a less chance of using ethno medicines by the people. It may also be mentioned that there is also a chance that people will use ethno medicines where proper medical care is also there. The use of ethno medicines which is locally available is culturally passed down since time immemorial by the ancestors has been an important ways of treating their ailments or diseases. The use of ethno medicine is also correlated with the income of the individual. If there is higher income level, there is chance of using less ethno medicines because the people will definitely opt for modern medicine because there is believe that the modern medicines are more efficient than ethno medicines as they are scientifically proven. There is misconception that the practitioners of ethno medicines are less efficient than professional medics. Thus, leads to less use of ethno medicines. The educational level is other an important factor for the use of ethno medicines. As the educated people are more rational and has a belief that the practice of scientifically proven pharmacological medicines and modern techniques has much advance and proven techniques that can cure the diseases or ailments in a more efficient ways. Income level also leads to the use of modern medicines as they will not hesitate to spent money to treat their ailments or diseases. In contrast to this, the rural people who are economically weak depended on subsistence form of agriculture especially tribal society will obviously opt for the use of ethno medicines. Due to availability of medicinal plants locally and also the traditional medicines is cost effective as the ethno medicines are way cheaper as compared to modern medicines for the treatment of their ailments.
• Use of ethno medicine is related with the income of an individual.

• The rate of use of ethno medicine is directly proportional to the income as it is clear that the cost of ethno medicines is cheap as they are locally available as compared to the modern medicine. It is cost effective as well as available mostly in the rural areas of the Adi villages.

• If there is high income of an individual, there is a chance of living in a more meaning way. It means that higher the income, more prosperous the living style of an individual. Most of the village of Adi community of selected villages is literate but it does not mean that people are living high as compared to other areas. Most of people are rural people, their income is considered average. So less economy means there is high chance of using ethno medicines in the Adi villages of East Siang.

• It is observed that the villages with better economic status use less ethno medicine. People of that area use modern health care facilities. People opt for the modern health care facility, but it is also observed that they believe in the use of ethno medicines. Though less but use of ethno medicines for basic ailments or disease is being practiced.

• Influence on ethno medicine is there where the village dependency ratio is more. Less working class and more dependency rate means more burden on the society which means the area will be economically deprived which implies less economy status of the rural people, which indicates that there will be more chance of using ethno medicines.

• Rate of influence of ethno medicine will be much higher in the areas where there is no intervention of modern health care facility. More access to modern medicine means less use of traditional ethno medicine.

• Availability of locally available medicinal plants and knowledge of use of medicinal properties by the rural people enables the use of ethno medicines. Their knowledge and use of ethno medicines by the rural people tends to have firm believe and use in the ethno practices.

Adi community and the traditional use of ethno medicines have been studied and research in various fields. Adi people mostly lived in a community based society where the traditional knowledge of ethno medicines has been passed down from the early generation. Use of ethno medicines is higher where the people have adequate knowledge of medicinal properties which is available locally. Use of ethno medicines is used for the treatment of common diseases or ailments of the Adi people such as stomachache, diarrhea, cold and cough, for first aid purposes, bone fractures etc. Practitioners and knowledge of ethno medicines is there in Adi belt but in less numbers. It may be due to following reasons

• Due to introduction of modern health care facilities in the remote areas in the study area.

• Modernization and introduction of educational reforms in the study area which enables them to opt for other occupational activity rather than just engaging themselves in the agricultural sector.

• Disinterest in the practice of ethno medicinal knowledge by the young generations and lack of knowledge of important medicinal plants by younger generation which is locally available and its less value to important herbs and medicinal plants properties by the people.

• Lack of advertisement of traditional ethno medicine as the modern medicine is nowadays available quickly when in need.

Though nowadays the rate of influence of ethno medicine is less as compared to modern medicine but believes and faith in ethno medicine is still observed in the surveyed villages. It can be
said that though the modern medicine is influence is there but the perception of people towards the use of ethno medicine is still there. The use of ethno medicine and believe in ethno medicine is there in the Adi community. The extent of believe of ethno medicine is high as it is deep rooted in the socio cultural aspect of the life of Adi people. It has been passed down from the fore fathers who have influenced psychologically in the minds of Adi community. Use of ethno medicines is much higher in the villages where there is no option for treating their ailments. It may be also mentioned that the Adi villages where there is access to modern health care also use this old method of traditional medicines.

The accessibility of certain health care centers in the remote villages of East Siang district has increased the attention of rural people over the use of ethno medicines. The process of treating and use of ethno medicines is sometimes considered as a slow process for the treatment of ailments as compared to the use of modern medicines. The use of modern medicine has certain properties to cure the ailments of people very quickly. Modern health care can be considered as responsible factor for the better health care of the study area but it can also be mentioned that as mentioned earlier though the use of modern medicine is there but the dietary practices of Adi community and the inclusion of medicinal plants in their diet also adds in the better health care status in the study area. As the ethno medicines has certain medicinal values and their use is more efficient. It is evident that the use of ethno medicine when its dose is used properly, has the property to cure the ailments or diseases for life time and its use has no side effects as compared to the modern medicine.

REFERENCE: