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Research Article

HERBAL MEDICINES USED BY MEITEIS IN TREATMENT OF URINARY TRACT AND STONE CASES

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Meitei Cultures addresses forces in both the natural and the spiritual world to maintain the health and vitality of human beings. The use and practice of medicinal plants for treatment of various kinds of illness and ailments is as old as human civilization. It was practiced even before the existence of specialized institutions of health practitioner. The paper highlights some of the medicinal plants with high medicinal values used for medical and curative therapy of Urinary tract infections and stone cases. A large number of such plants, herbs and trees with high medicinal values remained unexplored. Joint efforts must be made to identify and explore all such plant biodiversity resources and reserves of high medicinal values. Before the existence of professional medical practitioners and institutional treatment Meiteis have been using a variety of locally available herbs/shrubs/trees for the treatment of Urinary tract ailments and stone case diseases. The use of medicinal plants is very prevalent in treatment of urinary tract ailment and stone case diseases as it is less expensive, affordable by all sections and easily available. Proper identification, preservation and documentation of these medicinally valued plants and Traditional Health Care Systems is recommended for validation of indigenous wisdoms of Meiteis.

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INTRODUCTION

Meiteis are the biggest indigenous population in Manipur. Traditionally Meiteis practices different healing methods. The healing system consisted of two major elements that were often used: the application of plants, animals, minerals and an appeal to spiritual forces. These practices are still very common in Meitei society. Traditional medicine has been defined by WHO as "diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and/or mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises applied singularly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose or prevent illness". Meitei cultures have a holistic perception of health and vitality. Vitality is the energy to sustain life. It is the essence of health (Darshan and Bertus 2000). The use and practice of herbal medicines for treating various kinds of illness and ailments is as old as human civilization. Meiteis used and practiced plant based medicines even before the existence of specialized institutions of health practitioner in the state. The manuscript "Poireiton Khunthokpa" (a travelogue of Poireiton) narrates the experience of Poireiton during his search for "Poirei Sita Hei, Wangamnatahei" ('Poirei means Manipur, 'Sitahei' means fruit which can save life.). The story of Kabui Salang Maiba mentioned in Manipuri epic "Khamba Thoibi" reveals the use

of 'NongnangKoir' (*Syzygiumjambas*) as elixir. KhambaThoibi episode took place in 12th Century A.D. In Manipur.Meiteis have specialized health practitioners known as Maiba/Maibi who have well knowledge and experienced in treatment of ailments.

Meiteis have been using medicinal plants for remedial and curative therapy of Urinary tract infections and stone case diseases. A large number of such plants, herbs and trees with high medicinal values remain unexplored. Concerted efforts must be made to identify and explore all such plant biodiversity resources and reserves of high medicinal values. It can help in curing several diseases. Even before the existence of professional medical practitioners and institutionalized treatment in the state Meiteis have been using many locally available herbs for the treatment of different kinds of ailments and illness like Urinary tract ailment and stone case diseases. Renowned traditional health practitioners are still continuing their work though there were strong influence of modern health care systems. The paper investigates the functioning of the traditional health care system of Meiteis, its strengths and weaknesses, its link with the modern health care system and the scope for preservation and documentation. There is huge potential for research work in Traditional Health Care "Maiba-Maibi system of treatment" (N. Tombiraj).

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THE STUDY AREA

Manipur is located between 23.83° N and 25.68°N latitude and 93.03° E and 94.78° E longitudes. It comprises 1820 Sq. Km. of valley and 20,507Sq. Km. of Hill areas. The Meitei, Meitei Pangal (Muslim) and Tribal communities are located in the valley and Hills of Manipur. The Meiteis are located in the Hill based and valley Districts of Manipur. Land under natural forest including degraded forest is covered with valuable plants. The state is lying in the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Mega Hot-Spot rank in the 8th amongst the 34 Biodiversity Hot-Spots of the world (Meyer et. al. 2000). The rich culture and indigenous knowledge system of Meiteis have been based on learning from and adapting civilization to the environment.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Culturally, the ethnic peoples in Manipur are outside of the dominant cultures of mainstream society in India, they provide an opportunity for an understanding of the functioning of the traditional health care system and its ethno pharmacological resources. Most of the villages in valley as well as in the Hills bases have long been known as experience of traditional healing. People travel over several kilometres to receive treatment. Nowadays, traditional medicine in the area has been the focus of several recent studies. Studies have focused more on the ethno botanical studies of the plant resources of the area. Further work is necessary on scientific identification and inventory of medicinal plant species and their medicinal value.

In this study the Traditional Folk Healers (Maiba/Maibi) who are renowned experts in diagnosing and treatment illness practices by using plants and other ingredients were selected as informants. The study was carried out for qualitative participatory documentation of the traditional healers of Meitei in Manipur. Ten traditional health practitioners of different villages were selected. Close ended schedule type questioner is prepared and semi-structured interviews of these practitioners were taken visiting their home for each professional traditional healer. The method of collection of such information follows Martin 1995, Haile *et al* 2007 and Isilet *al* 2004 with some modifications under the local context. The plant species collected so far, which were used by the valley peoples of Manipur, were identified by comparing with the available literature (Tombiraj, 2009; Nabakishor, 2002; Dhanapati, 1998; Sinha, 1996) and for the authentic identification flora of the region recorded in the Departmental Library of Botany, Flora of Assam, Flora of India (Balakrishnan, 1993; Kanjilal et al, 1934; Hooker, 1872) and Herbarium of Botanical Survey of India, Shillong are consulted for confirmation. Methods to cure kidney stones (Prachi et al., 2009) by employing plants are also reported in India. Some of the criteria included in the questioner for statistical analysis are age of the informant, gender, status, traditional medicinal system, method of diagnosis of ailment (urinary tract & stone case diseases), classification of traditional medicinal system, nomenclature of medicinal plants, prefer ability/hesitation to treatment, outcome, effectiveness, self-confidence, doses, source of knowledge, mode of preparation, was questioned which is common to all the different communities.

Data on stone case treatment, local name of medicinal plants, parts used, growth form, availability of plants (wild/cultivated), method of preparation, route of

administration and application, threats to medicinal plant species and indigenous knowledge transfer were recorded.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Traditional Medicine for urinary tract and stone case: Traditionally, health practitioners used herbal and animal products as medicines, intoxicants, and poisons in their struggle for survival and in their quest for religious experiences. A traditional healer's power is not determined by the number of medicinal plants he knows but by the ability to apply an understanding of the intricate relationship between the patient and the world around him. The traditional healers demonstrate outstanding ability and wisdom. All ten traditional healers reported specialized and renowned knowledge of herbs/shrubs and treatment for special type of illness. Unlike a Doctor trained in modern medicine, the traditional healer looks for the cause of the patient's misfortune in the relationship between the patient and his social, natural and environment. The diagnosis of diseases by a traditional healer is based on an understanding of the concepts that, it is not limited to direct observation tests (Bossard 1996). There are no schools or other formal training centres for learning traditional healing practices. Preventive and Curative measures are in line with the holistic view of health and disease (Pottier 1993). They combine the use of herbs/shrubs with certain symbolic and mystical activities.

Plant decoctions are used to eliminate or cure kidney stones by the traditional health practitioners of valley districts of Manipur since time immemorial. Duration of treatment depends on the size of the stone or seriousness of the disease. Application of plant decoctions are carried out at least two times per day for one to two months. Small stones in the crystal form or in pieces are passing out while urination. Most of the herbal medicines used for stone diseases are having very less side effect and affordable by all sections of people in comparison to modern medicines. Maiba/Maibi (Traditional Health Practitioners) are popular for their cost effective treatment of stone cases and kidney diseases. Many plant species are used for kidney stone treatment by the traditional health practitioners. Among them 35 plants (Table 1) are selected for studying their properties, method of use in treatment, plant parts used etc. While examining the age groups of the most reported patients, 35 to 50 age group is mostly affected by the stone diseases. Maibas/Maibis experienced that kidney stones are gradually dissolved and crystals of stones are passing out through urinal. Cross checking of the herbal medicines used by the Maibas/Maibis and the techniques used for kidney stone treatment in the literature are not found in similar uses by others.

The traditional healing system which was very commonly used by every people seems to be in the verge of extinction. Due to the influence of the western civilization and technological enhancement, indigenous peoples give up their traditional culture and also neglected the traditional wisdom. Preservation of traditional knowledge and proper documentation are a great challenge. Many valuable medicinal plants are disappearing due to over exploitation and rooted out for business and deforestation. Extensive used of forest products for timber, firewood and other purposes catalysed in extinction of valuable plant species. A great initiative for proper preservation of traditional knowledge system is need of the hour otherwise the

Scientific Name	Local Name	Form	Plant Part	Uses
<i>Blumeabalsamifera</i>	Langthrei	Shrub	Leaves	Medicine/ Ritual
<i>Tamarindusindica L.</i>	Mange Hei	Tree	Leaves	Medicine
<i>Oxalis corniculata l.</i>	Yensil	Herb	Whole Plant	Medicine
<i>Allium odorosum L.</i>	YennamNakuppi	Herb	Whole plant	Medicine/ Spice
<i>Piper nigrumL.</i>	Gul	Herb	Fruits	Medicine/ Spices
<i>Azadirachtaindica</i>	Neem	Tree	Root	Medicine
<i>Centellaasiatica</i>	Peruk	Herb	Leaves	Medicine
<i>AverrhoecacarambolaL.</i>	Heinoujom	Tree	Fruit	Medicine
<i>TamarindusindicaL.</i>	Mange Hei	Tree	Fruit	Medicine
<i>Menthaarvensis</i>	Nungsihidak	Herb	Leaves	Medicine
<i>Desmodiummicrophyllum</i>	NungaiYensil	Herb	Leaves	Medicine
<i>Rhus succedanea L.</i>	Heimang	Tree	Fruit	Medicine
<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Tulsi	Shrub	Leaves	Ritual/ Medicine
<i>Rubusniveus</i>	Heijampet	Shrub	Leaves	Medicine
<i>Phyllanthusemblica</i>	Heikru	Tree	Fruit	Medicine
<i>Solanumnigrum</i>	LeipungNgangkha	Shrub	Fruit	Medicine
<i>CuminumcyminumL.</i>	Jeera		Fruit	Medicine/ Spice
<i>Aeschynomeneindica</i>	Chigonglei	Tree	Young tender Leaves	Medicine
<i>Trigonellafoenum-graecumLinn.</i>	Methi	Shrub		Medicine
<i>CeltisaustralisLinn.</i>	Heikreng	Tree	Leaves	Medicine
<i>Hibiscus sabdariffaLinn.</i>	SilotSougri	Shrub	Leaves	Medicine
<i>AbbusprecatoriusLinn.</i>	ChaningAngouba	Shrub	Fruit	Medicine
<i>Duchesneaindica</i>	Heirungkaklaba		Whole Plant	Medicine
<i>Hedychiumcoronarum</i>	Takhelleiangangba	Shrub	Rhizome	Medicine
<i>Myriogyneminuta</i>	Hakthikhanbi		Whole plant	Medicine
<i>Actinodaphneangustifolia</i>	Takara	Tree	Leave/ Fruit	Medicine
<i>Benincosahispida</i>	Torbot	Creepor	Fruit	Medicine
<i>Asparagus racemosusWild</i>	Nunggareiangouba	Shrub	Root	Medicine
<i>Cinnamomumtamala</i>	Tejpata	Tree	Tree	Medicine/Spice
<i>Citrus latipes</i>	Heiri-bob	Tree	Tree	Medicine/Spice
<i>Citrus limonLinn.</i>	Champra	Tree	Tree	Medicine
<i>LinariamosissimaLinn.</i>	Nungai-Peruk	Herb	Herb	Medicine
<i>Piper longamLinn.</i>	Taboppi	Shrub	Leaves	Medicine/Spice
<i>Abutilon indicumLinn.</i>	Kanghi	Herb	Whole plant	Medicine
<i>Sidaacuta</i>	Uhal	Shrub	Root	Medicine

vast knowledge bank will be wiped out from future generations with death of traditional healers.

CONCLUSION

The medicinal plants are very effective for the treatment of Kidney stone and urinary infectious diseases. Local health care tradition particularly that of Meitei community is of self reliant and their knowledge has been inherited and transmitted from generation to generation without a written documentation. There is need to proper documentation, research for methods of testing, refining and validating indigenous knowledge in traditional medicine. The study recommends working within a basic framework of education involving local individuals chosen from among the local healers (Maibas/Maibis) or from relatives. This counteracts the suspicion of intellectual piracy. Such studies will help in reviving our traditional knowledge system for welfare of mankind.

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