

# Traditional Heal Practices among Sonowal Kacharis Women (A sociological study in Dibrugarh district of Assam)

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## Abstract

*This paper attempts to explore the traditional heal practices related to various female health care system specifically the focus is on the various gynaecological problems such as menstruation disorder and pregnancy related issues among the Sonowal Kachari women. The study reveals that the Sonowal Kacharis women are used various locally available medicinal herbs to cure a host of diseases. The village traditional healers locally knew as 'bez' who have a good knowledge about the different herbal plants usually treat the patients and also many elderly women of the village treat the patients who have knowledge about the use of such herbal medicines.*

Key words: Healing, Sonowal Kacharis, Women, Assam

## Introduction

Traditional healing practices had its origin since time immemorial. People have been gathering knowledge about the nature and the environment from long observation and experiences which becomes an inevitable part of human society. The knowledge of traditional healing practices is found among all the tribal communities of India and they have strong belief in their native folklore medicine for remedies. The knowledge of traditional healing practices is transmitted orally from one generation to next generation which were elsewhere published in different headings like ethno-botanical studies related to women disease, gynaecological disorder, fertility related issue by different workers from different parts of India such as Borthakur (1993), Buragohain (2008), Das and Saikia (2002) Deka et al. (2011), Bora et al., (2016), Sonowal and Sonowal (2017), Sharma Thakur (1999), Das and Tag (2006), Sajem and Gosai (2006), Buragohain and Konwar (2007), Das *et al.* (2008), Kalita and Bora (2008), Sikdar and Dutta (2008), Saikia *et al.* (2010), Sarma and Sarma (2010), Barukial (2011), Buragohain (2011), Sonowal and Baruah (2011), Abujam and Shah (2012), Baruah *et al.* (2012), Deka *et al.* (2012), Gam (2013), Sarma *et al.* (2013), Nath (2014), Talukdar (2014), Bailung and Puzari (2016) etc among different tribes and indigenous communities. However, information on traditional healing practices related to various gynaecological problems among the study population is sporadic and scanty. In a study conducted by Bora et al., (2016) found that the female health/ gynaecological problems are major problem in rural societies of Assam and such diseases are treated by using of folklore medicinal plants which are a part of their folk life. Therefore, the study is an attempt to

explore the believes and traditional healing practices related to various female health care system specifically the focus is on the various gynaecological problems such as menstruation disorder and pregnancy related issues among the Sonowal Kacharis women of Dibrugarh district of Assam.

### **The Study Population**

The Sonowal Kacharis are one of the indigenous and a popular plain schedule tribe population of Assam inhabiting the land since time immemorial. They are a branch of the great Bodo Kacharis who in the unknown past migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from their original abode in Tibet and Western China. They trace their descent to the 'Badu- Hunoloy'n' group of Kachari people, who had established their territory in Sadiya in present Tinsukia district, Assam. The title 'Sonowal' is believed to have been derived from the word 'Hunoloy'n' (Sonowal, and Sonowal, 2017). Waddel (1901) says that the section of the Kacharis that live in Upper Assam is the Sonowal or Sadiola who were mostly goldwashers in erstwhile Lakhimpur district of Assam. At present they are mainly distributed in Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam. Racially they are mongoloid and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto- Burman linguistic family but at present they had adopted Assamese language. Agriculture is the main backbone economy of the people and rice is their traditional food. There society is patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal. Traditionally, they were in favour of joint family system but now both nuclear and joint families are found among them. They are devout followers of Hinduism and also the followers of Neo-Vaisnavism faith.

### **Field and Methodology**

The present study was conducted in one Sonowal Kacharis village namely Bhekulajan village under Tengakhat Development Block, located east of Dibrugarh district of Assam. This village is known as a Sonowal Kachari village because of predominance of Sonowal Kachari population. The Bhekulajan village is situated at a distance of 5 kilometres from the Tengakhat town. The village has population of 1461 of which 726 are males while 735 are females as per population census 2011. In 2011, literacy rate of Bhekulajan village was 91.43%. In Bhekulajan village male literacy stands at 95.82% while female literacy rate was 87.06%. Assamese is the local language in Bhekulajan village.

Data was collected from the selected village with the help of in dept discussions and extensive personal interview with the traditional healers and elderly men and women of the Sonowal Kachari community, who have got a good knowledge about indigenous herbal medicine in the month of November, 2018. First hand information about the local names of different ethno-medicinal plants, and parts used for treatment; their methods of medicine preparation and treatment; and their opinion towards the traditional healing practices against the particular disease were recorded. The data are includes the scientific and Assamese names of the medicinal plants. Those medicinal plant species which were recorded as used for

female health care practices were identified with the help of literature and by following earlier works of Dutta (1985), Satyavati et al., (1987), Vidyarthi (1989), Pandey (1993), and Kanjilal et al., (2005).

## Results and Discussion

The Sonowal Kacharis have their own traditional methods of healing practices in order to provide healing to their members from their suffering. Different kinds of locally available medicinal plants are used by them as medicine. Some of the female health/ gynaecological problems and their traditional healing practices used to cure are given below.

- (i). *Paederia foetida* (Bhadailota) are eaten as vegetable or *Heteropneustes fossilis* (Singhi maas or fish) with *Paederia foetida* (Bhadailota) are cooked as vegetable in order to accelerate healing of body pain after child birth.
- (ii). *Heteropneustes fossilis* (Singhi maas) with few dried black pepper are made into a curry to relieve body pain and providing strength to mother after child birth. Flower juice extract of *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* (Ronga joba ful) is also given orally to relieve labor pain.
- (iii). Tree bark of *Bombax Malabaricum* DC. (*Simolu*; Silk cotton tree) is paste and mixed with cold milk and given during vaginal discharge.
- (iv). Pain during menstruation is treated by taking leaf juice of *C. benghalensis* (Kona Simolu) with goat or cow milk and *Flemingia strobilifera* (Makhloti) boiled root extract is prescribed in empty stomach in the morning to treat irregular menstruation, also *Hydrocotyle rotundifolia* Roxb. (Haru manimuni) leaf juice is given orally for menstrual problem.
- (v). Leaves and young shoots of *H. Rotundifolia* (Horu Manimuni) are eaten as vegetable and as juice during pregnancy and to have smooth delivery.
- (vi). Juice extract of fresh *Bryophyllum pinnatum* (Dooportenga) is given regularly till cured in case of urine infection.
- (vii). *Musa balbisiana* colla (Bhim kol) and *Carica papaya* L. (Amita) is given orally in case of abortion.
- (viii). Juice extract of *Acoras calamus* L. (Boch) is given orally in case of miscarriage bleeding.
- (ix) Root extract of *Catharanthus roseus* (Nayan tora) is prescribed orally in case of reproductive health problems.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study prove that the Sonowal Kacharis have rich traditional healing practices related to various gynaecological problems. The study reveals that the Sonowal Kacharis women are used various locally available medicinal herbs to cure diseases. The study also reveals that the Sonowal Kacharis people have a strong belief of interference of supernatural powers and its impact on their health. It has also found that though majority of the people preferred for modern medical treatment but the traditional healing

practices in the treatment of various gynaecological problems still play an important role in their society and have immense faith on the effectiveness on their traditional healing practices.

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