

TRIBAL MEDICINE OF ANDHRA PRADESH

S. VEDAVATHY, V. MRIDULA, A. MRIDULA, A. SUDHAKAR and T. SIDDHAMMA
Herbal folklore research centre, S.V Arts College, Tirupati – 517 502

Received: 28, March, 1998

Accepted: 4 April, 1998

ABSTRACT: *The study undertaken during 1994 – 1997 in Andhra Pradesh, India regarding folklore medicinal aspects, resulted in comparative account of the medicinal practices of different tribes. The information is given in brief to give an idea of their therapeutic knowledge and the use of various herbs.*

INTRODUCTION

In Andhra Pradesh there are about 33 tribal groups. The total population of the tribes who live in ill areas are more than 4.2 millions and are of 6.5 % in the total population. For the present study, six tribes are taken viz; Yanadi, yerukala, sugali or lambadi, Chenchu, Nakkala and Irula.

Yanadis are largest tribe of the area and they are primitive in their habits. They depend mainly on the NTFP collection. The Yanadi tongue is a tribal dialect similar to kannada, Telugu and Tamil in syntax. The Irula another jungle tribe ordinarily speak Tamil and the resemble the Yanadis in their habits etc, the sugalis or lambadis constitute the chief immigrant tribe. Their language is lambadi and the people are strong and rouse like yanadis. Most of them are nomadic. The Yerukalas speaking Yerukala, a polyglot dialect, are a seminomadic tribe. The emphasis in this paper is given to the ethnomedicinal information of the tribes leading to cross-cultural study.

Ethnomedical Uses

Hill tribes believe in superstitions and supernatural elements and they attribute the bodily disorders to them. They find out the different ailments of the body and treat them

basing on the suffering using medicine, Magico religious and tantric practices. Mixing all these methods is their speciality. They do not follow other procedures if they confirm the ailment is to the body i.e. physical. The first thing for the cure for pain is fomentation. The tribes like yanadis, chenchus, Nakkalas adopt heat therapy (thermo therapy). They pass heat to the affected part of the body like head-ache, sprain, (stiffness) and chest pain due to high temperature. They bring relief to the patients from such illness through fomentation, It is done by several media they take a clean piece of cloth, dip it in the hot water, they wring the cloth, and apply it to the affected part or expose the part to steam or they take heated brawn or salt in a piece of cloth and apply the same to the affected part. Some times they steam foment the part after massaging it with castor oil or gingilly oil. Rise of temperature for any illness is diagnosed as fever or over-heat. As a line of treatment, they first stop giving food to the patient, Yanadis treat the patient of fever by administering decoction of the rhizome of Sathavari, (*Asparagus racemosus*) or of tunga mustha (*Cyperus rotundus*); while sugalis treat fever with a decoction prepared from garlic, ginger, tippateega (*Tinospora cordifolia*); while

another tribe Nakkala prepares decoction with garlic, nelavemu (*Andrographis paniculata*); if nelavemu is not available the bark or root of maddi (*Morinda tinctoria*) with the roots of regu (*Zizyphus mauritiana*) are used in the decoction .

In the case of severe headache Yanadis prepare paste from 'sonthi' (*Zinziber officinale*) and on to the patients forehead. The grind managakaya (*Catuneregam spinosa*) into a fine paste and apply it to the eye instead of sonti therapy. For still severe head ache, leaves of chitti kesaram (*Delonix alata*) or leaves of vavili (*Vitex negundo*) are roasted light black and tied to the head while Nakkala tribe uses the roots of Uttareni (*Achyranthes aspera*), Earth worm, a little camphor, seeds of kammagaggi (*Ocimum basilicum*) together ground into paste for application on the fore head. If fever head ache and buring sensation in the eyes persist they grind ginger, onion, and garlic. The extract thus obtained is mixed with water and is given to the patient orally, Dyspepsia is cured with common salt and vamu (*Carum copticum*). When it becomes severe, castor oil or tamarind juice with powder of jeelakarra (*Cuminum cyminum*) is administered or the leaf powder of sunamuki (*Cassia senna*) is mixed with salt and two to there spoons of it is given to the patient on empty stomach only. For pain in the eye as first aid, the take a piece of cloth and put it in the mouth for some time to get it warmer and apply it to the eye till the patient gets relief. For redness or burning sensation in the eyes, lime juice or extract of curcuma longa or leaf cotton soaked in soap-nut juice and it is inserted into the vagina. They believe this practice ensures easy labour. Another herb called *Sphaeranthus indicus*, is dried, ground to powder which is missed in 'Cunji' (cooked rice water). Later it is administered orally. Yanadi folk hand – pound the root of *Tephrosia purpuria* and

prepare decoction which is orally administered to the young mother soon after the deliver, both yanadi and nakkala folk usually administer the young mother orally the neem leaf juice for the womb to resume its normal size.

Irula folk grind the root of *Caesalpinia crista* wit its bark and administer it in 'Gunji' to the woman after delivery. They sat is enables the womb become cleaned the plaenta easily passes from the womb and falls down after deliver, for few minutes, then the just born baby is laid on a plantain leaf smeared wit castor oil, yanadi folk make the baby lick the preparation made by grinding the dried maw of porcupine with mother's breast milk. They believe it is good for the baby because that porcupine daily grazes dozen types of herbs and other medicinal plants, they take the maw part of the dead animal, dry it and use it for medicinal use. The same preparation is administered to the child daily increasing the dose along wt the growth of the child, for one year.

Hill tribe women know the 'grandma medicines'. It is profession to some of these women. They keep their treatment of the patients secret other wise, they fear it ma effect them badly or their medicine may not act effectively, the elder women went e no longer continue the profession owing to old age confide these to the next kin or kith or at least their friends in order to continue it from becoming oblivion by their disuse. These people gather medicines from plants and herbs and use them for treatment or sell them in market, chenchus, koyas and yanadis are reputed in curing arthritis and chronic wounds and gastric ulcer and the like.

Some of them tattoo themselves for various reasons like religion, beauty or culture or a

cure against certain diseases yerukulas, sugalis and nakkalas are experts at puncturing holes on nose and on ear lobes for fitting ornaments like nose screws, lovelocks or ear studs. Yanadi folk make singe with fire on stomach and other affected part of the body for the cure of jaundice, internal tumours and ulcers.

For minor injuries, they treat such with ordinary clay or rub it with saliva and then leave the wound exposed to nature for cure, for major wounds Lambadies, yanadis and chenchus use different herbs, these people treat the wounds caused by knife or some other instrument, with banyan leaves warmed on live coals, every hill tribe person of the forest knows the cure. For bone fractures they make use of *Tamarindus indica*, *Cissus quadrangularis*, *Dodonaea* extract of acorus calamus or ginger and then administered. In the swollen liver (cirrhosis), *Cuscuta* plant is boiled and it is ground to fine paste and applied on the abdomen (poultice). Similarly sugali tribe mix gum of neem (resin) with a little bit of opium and administer. They have different cures for different illnesses like cough, cold, asthma, nakkala yanadi and other hill tribes use nuts of *Pongamia pinnata*, leaves of *Datura* metal root of *Solanum surattense* and the like.

For sexual potency hill tribes use in food different types of natural medicinal ingredients like/snail shells, doves, sparrows known for their sex invigorating ability. Regarding herbs and other medicinal plants, there are several of them – *Dichrostachys cinerea*, seeds of *Mucuna pruriens*, *Pedaliium murex*, *Asparagus*. For bad tooth, tooth aches, Yanadis and Nakkala folk apply the latex of *Calotropis* of *Acacia nilotica* bark mixed with alum.

Delivery is an important treatment among them. They seldom go to hospital for delivery unless it becomes a hard and complicated labour, in their 'gudem' (habitation) there may be a mid-wife or quack mid-wife or sometimes neighbour women or the mother of the labouring woman acts as mid-wife. They might know the treatment after facing a delivery. Generally these women physically work hard and they have easy delivery with fewer complications. Some times one or two hard labour cases become out of their control they take such cases to the towns. In fact the mid-wife has little to do except she presses abdomen of the delivering woman at the time of delivery, she goes on rubbing the abdomen with castor oil and decoction from the flowers of *Calotropis procera* fried with cow ghee is administered orally to the labouring woman, ever half-an hour. They dilate the vagina by applying castor oil while Yanadi folk administer the decoction prepared for fruit powder of *Coriandrum sativum*, in the case of Nakka folk, they administer a decoction prepared from bamboo leaves, in case of still born child, asafetida is pounded with common salt and mixed it with rice-washed – water or 'Cunji' and this preparation is orally administered to the labouring woman, within half – an hour, the still born child is hauled out manually for the mother's womb. Yerukula, Yanadi and other hill tribes and pond tie leaves of *Prosopis pilulifera*, garlic, millets, pepper and this preparation is administered orally to the woman. From this it is clear these aboriginal folk have their own proven herbal preparation for physically hauling or the still-born child from the womb of the labouring woman.

For easy delivery, Yanadi folk have their age old proven practice. They grind finely root of *Adhatoda zeylanica* and keep the paste on the navel and around the abdomen

and also in the vagina, Nakkala folk have a different process. The root of *Boerhaavia diffusa* is ground and is mixed in castor oil or *viscosa Cassia occidentalis* and *C. auriculata* and bind the affected part with bamboo sticks, in case of puss forming wounds and boils, the wash that wound first with urine or cow urine and apply medicine.

These people rinse their teeth with a twig of *Azadirachta indica*, *Pongamia pinnata* or root of *Tephrosia purpurea* or root of *Achyranthes aspera* or any other twig with in reach. They do not have their break – fast without rinsing their teeth. Of course, it is a health habit. They bathe when water is available and use oil on head once in a week. For snake bite they use magic incantations. They bathe when water is available and use oil on head one in a week. For snake bite they use magic incantations. The first singe the bitten part with a burning stick. Yanadi folk crush the root of *Aristolochia indica*, with the bark of *Alangium salvifolium* and rhizome of *Corallocarpus epigaeus* and administer it orally to the snake bitten victim. The hill people attribute those things which are above their comprehension to supernatural and other mysterious forces. The illness is attributed to spirits, demons and wrath village deities Poleramma, Saramma, Seethamma and gangamma whose wrath causes the spread of epidemics and punish the people. There is a kind of interdependence between man and animal and tree. So they do not kill a snake first as they believe the snakes should curse them and as a result of it they do not get children. They get skin diseases if they incur thus the wrath of nagadevathas. Yanadis believe if any one kills a snake, pus oozes from the ears of their children. For cure they take the mud from snake pit (ant – hill) and drive the evil eye away from the affected ear by gesticulating it around the victim clockwise and anti-clockwise three times and this

mud is mixed in water and few drops of it are instilled in the affected ear of the victim. As the people worship snakes, they name their child after the snakes. In some cases, there is a practice that those who are killed by snake bite are buried separately. They worship the snake pits in which the snakes live. They do not destroy the trees. They treat some of them as the reflections of certain gods and they venerate them. The recent incident the marriage between banyan and Neem trees took place on a grand scale in Trivandrum, Kerala shows how trees are venerated. They believe in the 'Evil-Eye'. It will have bad effect upon them. So as a remedy they use *Elucine coracana*, salt and pepper with some hair and burn the mixture to flames.

If any epidemic like cholera breaks, they believe, it is caused by the wrath of village deities like Ammavaru, Poleramma, Gangamma, Seethamma Maramma. There are specific deities for specific epidemics like cholera, which is caused by Maremma, plague is by Gavadalamma. Exorcists travel from one place to the other announcing they will cure such epidemics. Animal sacrifice is also practiced for relief of the victim from the ailment. They kill fowls, goats and young calves, buffaloes as sacrifice to propitiate the wrath of the deities upon their family and the village as a whole. When an epidemic breaks, native doctors, exorcists, perform pujas and enchanting mantras, prescribe the patients some type of food and these in turn make the tribal people aware of the intensity of the epidemic and the live in hygienic way as a precautionary measure, when epidemic is contained as every one tries his best every thing for the control of epidemic, is carried out on the basis of trial and error, as soon as normalcy is attained in the place, they again perform pujas to appease the village deities by killing animals and fowls as sacrifice.

Wide research into the treatment of the ailment, illness and other disease in the hill tribes in Andhra Pradesh is imperative besides it being an urgent need, these people are still groping in the old methods without knowing the relative significance to modernity. Therefore, their lore of medicine of ages must be brought into light of modern knowledge that will make them free from shackles in the age old methods which must be studied with relative relevance to the present needs. It is unfortunate to deprive these people (backed with much lore of forest medicine) of their home forest which is alive in their vitals and blood as well. The

very tough of depriving them of their ancestral home – forest which has become part and parcel of their life shudders us let alone the feelings and sufferings of the deprived.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are thankful to the International development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, for providing financial assistance to Ethnomedico botanical investigations. The authors are also grateful to the hill tribes of Andhra Pradesh, India for their co-operation.

REFERENCES

1. Moan Rao, K. (1994) **Girijan Samskriti**, Tribal cultural research and training Institute, tribal welfare department. Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad. India.
2. Hemadri, K., (1987) Andhra **Pradesh Vanamulikal**, Chemiloids, vijayawada. India.
3. Hemadri, K., Sarma, C.R.R., and Rao, S.S., (1967) Medicinal plant wealth of Andhra Pradesh, part I. **Ancient Science of Life**, 6(3): 167 – 186.
4. Jain, S.K., (1981) **Glimpses of Indian Ethnobotany**. Oxford and IBH publications. New Delhi; 1-334.
5. Jaggi. O.P., (1973b) **Indian System of Medicine**, Atmaram & Sons, New Delhi; IV.
6. Jaggi. O.P., (1973c) **Yogic and Tantric Medicine**, Atmaram & Sons, New Delhi; V.
7. Jain, S.K., (1991) **Contribution to Indian Ethnobotany**, Scientific publishers, Jodhpur.
8. Vedavathy, S., Mrudula, V., Sudhakar, A., (1997). **Tribal Medicine of Chittoor District, A.P. India**. Herbal Folklore Research centre, Department of Botany, S.V. Arts College, Tirupati India.