

## **A Study on the Traditional Remedies of Sonowal Kachari Tribe in Assam**

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### **Abstract**

Assam is a home to various tribes and ethnic groups. The Sonowal Kacharis are among the many tribes living in this north-eastern state of India. Like any other communities, they too possess some traditional remedies. It is being practiced by generations after generations. The Sonowal Kachari tribe uses medicinal plants. They also practice traditional remedies based on the indigenous knowledge, popular or religious beliefs. In this study, attempt has been made to explore the traditional remedies of the Sonowal Kachari tribe.

**Keywords:** Traditional remedies, Sonowal Kachari, Assam, Indigenous knowledge, medicinal plants

### **Introduction**

Most of the communities in India have been using medicinal plants and indigenous knowledge to cure various human diseases. They are known as traditional remedies. The use of Phytomedicines is predominant in most of the traditional societies. In spite of tremendous development in the medical science, a large section of people still use these traditional remedies.

The traditional remedies can largely be divided into two categories—

- (1) Natural remedies which use medicinal plants
- (2) Remedies based on religious or popular beliefs

The natural remedies are associated with herbs or other natural elements (Das, Angshuman, 390). This traditional treatment for various diseases has been largely used in many communities. Along with Assam, the practice of using medicinal plants is also predominant in other communities of India. On the other hand, some traditional ways to cure human and animal diseases are based on popular or religious beliefs. Various mantras are being traditionally used to cure illness. Among them, Neuli, Hanuman, Pashupatro, Rammul, Brahmakroti, Sogyni, Bayumantras are widely used in Assam.

Assam in North-East India is a home to multiple tribes. The Sonowal Kachari tribe in Assam has been practicing traditional remedies since time immemorial. This paper discusses their traditional remedies to cure different human illness.

### **Discussion of the topic:**

The Sonowal Kacharis are one of the aboriginals of Assam. They are a scheduled tribe (plains) under the constitution of India. They are mainly inhabitants of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Dhemaji of Upper Assam. They also live in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The folk remedies are one of the key elements of their culture and tradition. It is still used by the Sonowal Kachari people living in rural areas.

Assam is enriched with a rich bio-diversity. The availability of various medicinal herbs is abundant in this state of the north-east part of India. The Sonowal Kacharis have been using the traditional remedies since time immemorial. They firmly believe in their traditional methods for primary health care. Therefore, without going

much deeper into their scientific standards, these traditional remedies are being practiced generations after generations.

There are many restrictions for the selection of raw materials for the medicines. There are some restrictions in the process of preparation of the medicines and their usage also. The instructions to use the same medicine for the same disease vary from experts to experts.

The Sonowal Kacharis generally use the herbs or other natural resources from their gardens. For example, marigold (*Tagetes*) leaves are used to stop bleeding. Similarly, advice is given to drink water in empty stomach or to eat *Eclipta* (*Eclipta prostrata*) and leaves of guava (*Psidium guajava*) for abdominal issues. Madagascar Periwinkle and banana flowers are suggested for diabetes.

They believe in the use of traditional methods to cure different chronic diseases like—high blood pressure (hypertension), diabetes, arthritis, tuberculosis (TB) etc. When these chronic diseases are not cured through the means of modern medical science, they resort to traditional methods.

Primarily, there are three broad categories of traditional remedies prevalent among the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, a state in north-east India— (1) Remedies through medicinal plants

(2) Remedies through mantras

(3) Remedies based on popular beliefs

#### **Remedies through medicinal plants:**

Medicinal plants are abundant in Assam. The Sonowal Kacharis use roots, bark, flowers and leaves of the plants to cure various diseases. While some of the medicines are consumed, some others are used as pastes. They use these medicines to get relief from cough and cold, low back pain, itches, toothache, abdominal pain, skin diseases, piles, nyctalopia and paediatric medical conditions. These plants are available in their villages. Amla, a precious gift from nature, is a valuable folk medicine for Sonowal. Amla juice is beneficial for eyesight, hapani, all types of stomach problems etc. Sonowal prepare a mixer of 3 precious items. These precious items are Amla, xilikha and bhumura. All these together known as Trifala, which is beneficial for our body. Mahaneem also plays a significant role in Sonowal society. It is believed that if we keep Mahaneem under bed, we can be free from many air borne diseases. Banana is also beneficial for many diseases like roundworms, stomach ach, flatulence, loose motion etc. for Sonowal society. Star-fruit is a favourite food for every Sonowal people. It is a remedy for Cholera and diarrhoea, it is a blood purifier. They also put star fruit under bed for curing air borne disease.

#### **Remedies through mantras:**

The Sonowal Kacharis believe in the presence of evil spirits. In many cases, when a person falls ill, the reason is attributed to such evil powers. It is believed that making the superpowers unhappy result in such illness. Mantras are used to free the person from such spirits. Mantras are also used to get rid of other health related issues like dislodging the fish bones from the throat, to cure the inflammation of the zeis and moll glands of the eyes and burn injuries.

#### **Remedies based on popular beliefs:**

Sometimes, without resorting to medicines or mantras, the Sonowal Kacharis use some rituals based on the popular or traditional beliefs to cure a disease. In many cases, the expert keep a piece of a bamboo in the name of the patient above the fireplace of his/her home (Das, Angshuman, 456). This method is used to join broken bones. It is also used for rickety, snake bites, jaundice, nocturnal emission, diseases of cattle etc.

These are some unique ways of traditional remedies which are still prevalent among the Sonowal Kacharis, particularly those living in the rural areas.

### **Conclusion:**

Like Sonowal Kacharis, most of the tribes in Assam use traditional remedies. They are integral parts of the folk culture. But during the heyday of modern medical sciences, over-dependence on such traditional methods can have disastrous outcomes. Therefore, along with the preservation of traditional beliefs, the advancement of scientific temperament among the public are equally important.

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