

Traditional Reproductive Health Care Practices and Knowledge A Case of the Thadou of Manipur

Dr. Tonjam Joshila Chanu & Prof. MC Arunkumar

Abstract: *The paper broadly deals with the traditional knowledge regarding reproductive health care among the Thadou, a tribe of Manipur. Thadous believe in traditional method of care and treatment for reproductive illness like vaginal discharge and other “diseases” during pregnancy and post partum. Certain eatable items are restricted during pregnancy and breast feeding period. Various plants and plant products are used for treating certain reproductive health problems. Many elderly persons of the village and experienced women have and still guard their knowledge, transmitted orally down through ages. They still believe in such traditional practices. It is found from a study, done by the author recently, that, though the modern reproductive health services are generally affordable and easy to access, the traditional practices are still in vogue. Due to the process of urbanization and culture contact, wide spread western medicine services available in the State, a threat to the indigenous knowledge emerges gradually, giving rise to a situation of medical pluralism.*

Key words: *Thadou, Pregnancy, traditional, knowledge.*

I. Introduction

Reproductive health is a normal component of life such as sexual maturation and pregnancy surrounded by cultural, social, ethical and religious considerations. The status of reproductive health is widely varied depending on the prevailing practices of the individual and community at large. The environmental factors and usage of traditional knowledge, beliefs and taboos are also responsible for determining the reproductive health status of any society. The knowledge of intimate relationship between man and plants in his immediate surrounding has been passed mainly through tradition (Jain, 2004). This traditional knowledge about the use of naturally available herbs and their products has been transmitted through oral communication within the society and has been passed from generation to generation.

Tribes have their own culture and social practices to treat various illnesses. They have considered that the cause of illness or disease is related to his or her activities in society and to the environment where he or she is located. Disease cannot be seen as separate from its social-cultural-environmental context. It has been pointed out that in Rio Negro tribal society every event which occurs during the women's reproductive age is immediately inscribed in the totality of the socio-cultural environmental context.

Tribal communities possess a unique health care approach concerning the acceptance and rejection of modern medicine. They have retained much of their traditional health care during pregnancy and post delivery period. The relationship between a tribal woman and traditional health care is based on trust, responsibility, charity, power and respect from which she expects more than skill-based interventions as treatment (Ali, 1994). It is also observed that, reproductive health of tribal population is comprised of supernatural beliefs related to illness and treatment, strong role of traditional medicine men or shamans, community involvement in disease control and treatment, mixed interventions of traditional and modern health care (Chaudhuri, 1994).

It has been observed from recent study that there is a keen inclination among the tribal women towards modern medical facilities if accessible (Kumar,2007, Chanu,2010). WHO (1978) also recommends that some traditional medical resources, such as some medicinal plants could be used after an evaluation where the beneficial resources should be selected and those considered harmful to health should be discarded. Traditional tribal social-religious practices also can be adversely affected their women's reproductive health as well as tribal's general health, such as alcohol consumption during pregnancy (Salehin, 2012).

In recent times with the increase knowledge of life and culture of tribal communities, the social scientists are taking interest in ethno-medicinal studies. Many works have been reported, especially from among the rural and tribal communities of India. Dash and Dash (2003) have observed that although a large number plant species as traditional medicines are dominant in the entire tribal society. Ray and Sharma (2005) have given a description of ethno-medicinal beliefs and practices prevalent among the Savaras, a Tribal community of Andhra Pradesh. Kumari (2006), gave an account on the concept of illness and disease and the application of folk medicine among the Sauras of Jharkhand.

India has the largest concentration of tribal in the world perhaps in Africa. According to the census 2001 as many as 84.33 million are classified as schedule tribes (STs). North-East India is a land inhabited by more than 200 fascinating tribes. Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of northeast India.

They all have their own culture and tribal tradition and all speak their own tribal languages. Tribes of Manipur which represent a unique feature of the land include at least 33 communities that originated from Tibetan-Burman tribal group Mongoloids. The present study was carried among the Thadou tribes of Saikul of Manipur and it is one of the recognized tribes of India in Manipur. They have been classified as Kuki tribes that are subsumed under the broad Tibeto-Burman linguistic stock spread over the India's Northeastern region (Sitlou, 1982). The Thadou tribe has enriched their culture and tradition with its plethora of folktales, songs, dance and verses. Only a few studies (Sanglakpam et.al. 2012, Devi P, 2012) have carried out on the tribal of the state who utilizes a number of medicinal plants available in surrounding area as treatment of various diseases. But the information on traditional knowledge on herbs used for reproductive health is meager in these populations.

About the fieldsite

The present study broadly deals with the traditional knowledge regarding reproductive health among the Thadous, of Saikul town of Manipur. The study covered 12 Thadou villages of Saikul town. They are mostly Baptism in Christian religion and literacy rate is comparatively high among them. Looking at the ratio of literacy, female literacy rate is lesser than that of male. There are four private high schools and one secondary school in this small town. Communication and transportation system with other places and Capital of State is easily available. There is one Primary Health Centre at the heart of the town. People have well acquaintance with the services of Health Centre. Recent study done by author has found that 100% of the pregnant women visited for antenatal care in Health Centre. Rapport was established before data collection. The data was collected from the local knowledgeable elderly persons mostly old women, who conduct delivery. They do not undertake their medical service as vocation; they are mostly farmers and housewives. The medical service they have undertaken, though not free of charge but they performed on ethical grounds and non commercial nature. The old woman were interviewed for recording the local names of plants parts used, purpose of usage and the method of administration.

Traditional knowledge in Thadou community

Earlier, the Thadou society, the use of traditional medicines was predominant. But with time advent of modern medicinal facilities, the traditional medicine is losing its efficacy. Available evidences (table 1) and (Table 2) indicates that traditional medicines are involved in providing reproductive health care. The use of traditional medicines for reproductive health care is due to subsisting mutual beliefs, they considered pregnancy and pregnancy related problems as a natural occurrence. In the present study, some plants species are being used for different reproductive health problems. The version of the villagers revealed that people have been shifting from traditional medicine from modern medicine system. This is due to the effectiveness or quick action and easy availability of modern medicines. Restriction and uses of certain plants and plants products for reproductive health has been highlighted in this paper.

Table 1: Accepted items used by Thadou for Reproductive Health:

Table 2: Restricted items by the Thadou from Reproductive health:

In spite of easily accessible of modern facility, Thadou are still practicing some indigenous knowledge during menstruation and pregnancy period. They are keeping restriction of sex for three months after delivery. They kept straight legs while sitting during delivery time so that it will heal the wounded portion very fast and keep the body in right future in the later stage. Heavy things are not carried in the early stage of pregnancy but they are doing floor moping in later stage as it will help in easy delivery. A pregnant woman is not allowed to attend a funeral because it causes the miscarriage. It is also belief that during menstruation girls should not mingle with boys or men because it will cause illness in the womb. At the time of delivery the woman take bath with very hot water. This is continuing for about a week. After taking bath, hot boiled chicken soup is given to the woman. So that it will help the body for quick recovery. In olden days women were serving with black hen but now a day hen or cock is given. During the delivery time women are given only the boil food without any chillies.

The present study is based on the data collection from the different villages around the Saikul Town. The local uses of plants/herbs and plant production are used in family were elder women or experienced women stayed. But these people are easily avail the modern medicines nearby town or from capital town of the State and it is also observed that new generations or young people are not interested this kind of treatment of traditional methods or indigenous practices. They did not know the social social classes including the poor are giving up traditional health practices and turning to western bio-medicine (Shanker, 2009). However, restriction of certain indigenous practices is still guard among the Thadou society irrespective of family income or status. Unfortunately, they do not keep any written records or books for this indigeous knowledge but transmitted orally down through the ages.

The observation reveals that the Thadou use leaves, roots, stem and seed as medicinal preparation to use different reproductive health problems. On other hand, they are also restricted to use some of the plants and plants products in order to prevent from the causes of reproductive health problems. Although the information collected from the elders and experienced women is not comparable with the modern medicines but their efficacy is claimed to be high among the Thadous. Despite all factors the Thadou are still using traditional medicines and indigenous practices, though the prevalence of this knowledge is wanning.

II. Conclusion

The study reveals that the Thadou has vast knowledge about the ethno medicinal uses of plants growing in their vicinity. It has been well reveal in this study that the Thadou community has been changing at a certain pace along with their health seeking behavior. The growing disinterest in the use of traditional medicines or indigenous knowledge among the younger generation will lead to disappearance of this practice. Due to the process of urbanization and cultural contact, wide spread of western medicines available in the State, there is threat to the indigenous knowledge emerges gradually giving rise to a situation of medicinal pluralism. However, the study certainly points out that the traditional reproductive health care system still finds its meaning of survival in Thadou community. Therefore there is urgent need to implement a revitalization strategy for protecting the indigenous from complete desertion.

Table 1: Accepted items used by Thadou for reproductive health:

Sl. No.	English Name	Local name/locality	Purpose of use	Mode of use
1.	Ash guard	Torbot/Maipung	To reduce white discharge	Soaked with cow milk and drink dialy
2.	Amla	Heikru	To reduce vaginal discharge	Mix with red sugar and drink it before food
3.		Shundari mana	To reduce vaginal itching	Boil with water and frequently
4.	Banana plant	Laphu	To initiate lactation	Banana stem boil with water and make it as side dish food
5.	Edible taro	Yendem	To initiate lactation and blood increase	Cook it as food curry
6.		Pan	For easy delivery	Cook it as food curry
7.	Ginger	Shing	To regulate menstrual disorder	Boil with water or cooked with other vegetables
8.		Yebum mana	To initiate lactation	Cook it as food curry without oil
9.	Pig/Cow tail	Oak/Shan mamei	Good for womb and increase blood after delivery	Cook it as food curry without oil.
10.	Honey	Khoihee	Good for initiate lactation	Applying it in nipples just after delivery
11.	Water rice	Chenghee/Chabon	Good for womb	Drink it before food

Table 2: Restricted items by the Thadou for reproductive health:

Sl. No.	English name	Local name/ locality	Restricted period	Purpose for restriction
1.	Black rice	Chakhou	During Menstruation	Helps in skin darkening
2.	Fruits	Hei	During Menstruation	Causes abdomen pain and disorder
3.	Banana flower	Laphou tharou/Naga	During Menstruation	Causes less blood
4.	Red meat	Sha	During Menstruation	Causes body pain and itching vaginal
5.	Crab	Waikhu	During pregnancy	Causes miscarriage
6.		Vaihu	During early stage of pregancy	Causes miscarriage and vaginal discharge
7.	Bee-hives	Khoira	During pregnancy	Causes fever during delivery time
8.	Pumkin	Mairen	During breast feeding	Causes less lactation

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