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Herbal treatment of skin diseases by ethnic communities of Gumla district

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ABSTRACT

Tribal communities of Gumla district are mainly concerned with agriculture and animal husbandry. Therefore, they are frequently exposed to dermatological infections. Tribes of this locality treat skin diseases with the help of medicinal herbs. They have a good knowledge of different medicinal herbs for the treatment of different skin diseases like Scabies, Leprosy, Abscess, Eczema, etc.. This knowledge passes among them from generation to generation. During the present work, informants of different tribes reported 26 herbs used for the treatment of skin diseases. Out of 26 herbs, 5 belong to monocot and 21 belong to dicot. These 26 herbs belong to 16 families. Generally, juice or paste of most of the herbs is applied singly to infected skin, but in some cases, juice of more than one herb is mixed and applied to the infected part of the skin. In some other cases, powder/paste or juice is mixed with ghee, curd, or sugar and then applied to skin.

Key Words - Ethnobotany, Tribes, Medicinal herbs, Skin disease.

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INTRODUCTION

Gumla district is the southern part of Jharkhand carved out of the old Ranchi district on May 18, 1983. The district is bounded by Latehar and Lohardaga to the north, Simdega to the south, Ranchi and Khunti to the east, and Chhattisgarh state to the west. The district is located at 23°N latitude and 84°50'E longitude with an area of 5327 km². It is the home of many tribal communities including Oraon, Munda, Kharia, and Asur. Due to close association with forest, the tribes possess vast knowledge of medicinal herbs which was passed from generation to generation. They mostly depend upon medicinal plants for the treatment of different diseases. Several ethnobotanical works were published by several ethnobotanists regarding ethnomedicinal plants and their use by local tribes viz. Islam and Jha (2003), Jaipuriar (2003), Bondya *et al.* (2004), Hembrom and Goel (2005), Saren *et al.* (2006). Ethnic people of this locality are involved in agriculture and animal husbandry, so they are frequently exposed to dermatological infections. Skin disease is a common ailment of this locality. People of this region have developed many herbal preparations to cure skin diseases.

MATERIAL & METHODS

An extensive survey was conducted in villages of all 12 blocks under Gumla district from April 2025 to March 2026. Local folk healers and people of various communities including Munda, Oraon, Kharia, and Asur were consulted. Altogether, 75

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informants were accepted to assist in the present work. Among 75 informants, 3 were folk healers. Herbs used for skin treatment were collected. Methods of drug preparation and local names of herbs were acknowledged from informants.

RESULT

Altogether, 26 herbs belonging to 16 families were reported by informants which are used for skin diseases (Table 1). Out of 26 herbs, dicot families Fabaceae, Apiaceae, Asteraceae, and Labiatae dominated. From each of these families, 3 plants were reported for skin disease treatment. From Solanaceae and Poaceae, two plants of medicinal importance were reported which are used in curing skin diseases (Table 2). Altogether, 12 diseases of skin were reported by informants for which these 26 plants are used. For several skin diseases, more than one plant was reported by different informants. For scabies, eleven medicinal plants were reported, while for measles and cellulitis only one plant for each disease was reported (Table 3). In the majority of skin diseases, juice of leaves of a particular herb is applied directly to the infected skin, but in some cases, combined herbal drugs are used where more than one plant is used or mixed with ghee, curd, or sugar (Table 4).

Table 1- Herbal treatment of skin diseases.

Herbs	Family	Part of the plant used	Diseases
Allium cepa	Liliaceae	Bulb	Leprosy, Ringworm, Scabies, Pediculosis, Urticaria, Abscess
Aloe barbadensis	Aloaceae	Leaves	Skin burn
Amaranthus spinosus	Amaranthaceae	Plant extract	Eczema
Boerhavia diffusa	Nyctaginaceae	Leaves	Carbuncle
Brassica juncea	Brassicaceae	Seed	Scabies, Pimples
Bryophyllum pinnatum	Crassulaceae	Leaves	Abscess, Pediculosis
Cajanus cajan	Fabaceae	Seed	Scabies
Capsicum annuum	Solanaceae	Fruit	Scabies
Centella asiatica	Apiaceae	Whole plant	Carbuncle
Centratherum anthelminticum	Asteraceae	Seed	Leprosy
Ageratum conyzoides	Asteraceae	Leaf	Leprosy / Skin disease
Cassia tora	Fabaceae	Seed	Scabies
Commelina benghalensis	Commelinaceae	Leaf	Scabies
Ocimum basilicum	Labiatae	Inflorescence	Scabies
Cymbopogon nardus	Poaceae	Oil	Pediculosis
Cynodon dactylon	Poaceae	Leaves	Urticaria
Daucus carota	Apiaceae	Root	Scabies, Skin burn
Desmodium gangeticum	Papilionaceae	Leaves	Eczema
Euphorbia neriifolia	Euphorbiaceae	Branch	Carbuncle, Abscess
Foeniculum vulgare	Apiaceae	Seed	Scabies
Lens esculenta	Fabaceae	Seed	Pimple
Mentha arvensis	Labiatae	Leaves	Measles, Pediculosis
Ocimum sanctum	Labiatae	Leaves	Urticaria, Ringworm
Oxalis corniculata	Oxalidaceae	Leaves	Eczema
Solanum tuberosum	Solanaceae	Tuber	Skin burn
Tridax procumbens	Asteraceae	Leaves	Cellulitis

Table 2- No. of plants in different families

Family	No. of herbs
Amaranthaceae	1
Nyctaginaceae	1
Brassicaceae	1
Fabaceae	3
Solanaceae	2
Apiaceae	3
Crassulaceae	1
Asteraceae	3
Labiatae	3
Papilionaceae	1
Euphorbiaceae	1
Oxalidaceae	1
Liliaceae	1
Aloaceae	1
Commelinaceae	1
Poaceae	2

Table 3- No. of plants for different diseases

Skin Disease	No. of herbs
Scabies	11
Leprosy	2
Ringworm	2
Pediculosis	4
Abscess	3
Skin burn	3
Eczema	3
Carbuncle	3
Pimples	2
Urticaria	3
Measles	1
Cellulitis	1

Table 4- Combined herbal drug

Combined herbal drug	Disease
Oil of *Brassica juncea* + Juice of *Cynodon dactylon*	Scabies
Crushed *Cajanas cajan* mixed with curd	Scabies
Centratherum anthelminticum powder mixed with *Sesamum indicum*	Leprosy
Cynodon dactylon + *Curcuma longa* crushed and paste is applied on skin	Urticaria
Gum of *Euphorbia neriifolia* + Gum of *Calotropis gigantea*	Carbuncle
Foeniculum vulgare + *Coriandrum sativum* now crushed together and mixed with ghee and sugar	Scabies
Lens esculenta fried with ghee then crushed and mixed with milk	Pimple
Ocimum sanctum juice + *Curcuma longa* juice	Urticaria

CONCLUSION

Skin diseases are a major problem among tribes of Gumla district. They are involved in agriculture and animal husbandry where dermatological infections are common. Informants of Gumla district reported 26 herbs for the treatment of different skin diseases like Scabies, Leprosy, Urticaria, Carbuncle, Abscess, etc.. Out of 26 herbs, 5 belong to monocot and 21 belong to dicot. Reported 26 herbs belong to 16 families and are utilized for the treatment of 12 skin diseases. For the treatment of Scabies, 11 plants were reported by different informants, while for Cellulitis and Measles only one plant for each disease was reported. In most of the cases, leaf juice of a single plant is applied to the infected area, but in some cases, a combination of two plants is used. Juice of some medicinal herbs is used along with ghee, curd, or sugar.

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