ETHNOZOOLOGICAL PRACTICES AMONG THE KARBI TRIBE IN KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT OF ASSAM (INDIA)

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KEYWORDS

Ethnozoology
Karbis
Traditional practices
Zootherapy
Conservation
ABSTRACT

Ethnozoology focuses at direct relationship of animals to mankind. The present study investigate the way of treating various kind of ailments by using different animals and their products by the Karbis of Assam. Attention has been paid to identify the medicinal animals and their conservation. Fourteen species has been reported to use as zootherapy and are tabulated in local name with common English name followed by zoological name, family and medicinal uses. Field study was conducted from August 2011 to July 2012 through oral interview from the local healer, herbalist, folklore and direct observation during traditional practices. These animal are known to have a highly medicinal value and cure various kind of ailments. Ethnozoological practices may open the window for further development in medicinal science.

INTRODUCTION

The great association between animal and human being is popularly referred as “Ethnozoology” as a branch of science that deals with the study of total relationship between tribal or aboriginal people and animal. Ethnozoology focuses at direct relationship of animals to mankind (Jamir and Lal, 2005). Man relationship with animals may for various purposes like food, medicine, clothes and other material needs. Apart from this tribal communities widely use both domestic and wild animal in different worships. Animals are not only used in traditional medicines but also increasingly needed as raw materials in the preparation of modern medicines. The use of animal extracts, products and even secretions is a worldwide phenomenon, starting far back in prehistory. It co-evolved with human evolution, reached its peak in medieval medicine, and still exists in folk medicine across the globe. The beginnings of the medicinal uses of animals in human history are well defined; animals and their products were part of the primary resources that ancient peoples could use as food or for treating their illnesses (O’Hara, 1971). Ethnozoological practices among the Karbi tribe were practiced since the prehistoric life and it is still prevalence. Many animals are considered sacred while many other are regarded as taboo and symbol of evil; such practices are likely based on legend and folklore. Some animals are source of beauty and joy and therefore saved as pets, and while few are considered as having aesthetic value. The present paper deals with report of traditional knowledge of animal use among karbi tribe of NE with special reference to medicine. The ethnozoological knowledge of tribal communities ranges from edible, medicine and therapeutic use (Kato and Gopi, 2008). The traditional medical knowledge of indigenous people across the globe has played an important role in identifying living organisms which are important for treating human health problems and livestock (Yirga et al., 2011). The investigation for new pharmaceuticals from naturally occurring biological material has been guided by ethnological data (Blakeney, 1999).

The Karbis are the indigenous inhabitant of karbi Anglong, a hill district in Assam State of NE India. They are basically hill tribe, distinct in their identity and culture. They are totally dependent on forest and its product for their livelihood. In the light of this, an attempt has made by the author to study and document TK of animal use among the people, which is fast disappearing due to decline of forest cover, agricultural practices and other factors.

Ethnozoological reports from NE region including Assam State have been published from time to time in various research journals but the same has not been done in Karbi Anglong district. So a need was felt to undertake research in the district to document the ethnozoology among the Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong district. The objective of the present study was to elucidate the traditional knowledge of the Karbis in the treatment of various kind of ailments by using animals and their products.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area and ethnic population.
The Karbis are the indigenous inhabitant of Karbi Anglong, a hill district in Assam State of NE India. They are basically hill tribe, distinct in their identity and culture and are known as “Arleng” which means “man.” The district lies between 25º26’ to 26º36’ N L and 92º7’ to 93º54’ E L covering an area of 10,343 km². It supports a population of 8,12,820 (As per 2011 Govt. of India census) which makes up a density of 78 persons per square kilometer. The Karbis are ethnically Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman, more particularly belong to kuki-chin sub group of languages. This district comprises of two detached parts, each constituting a subdivision the eastern part with its head quarter at Diphu and western part with its head quarter at Hamren Karbi Anglong is home to many ethnic communities such as Karbi, Dimasa, Bodo, Mann (Tai Speaking), Kuki, Rengma Naga, Jaintia, Hmar, Garo, Chakma, Hajong, Thadou, Tiwa and Tea tribes.

Karbis are mainly agriculturists and practice shifting cultivation where they grow multiple crops. Rice is the staple food supplemented by wild vegetables while locally prepared rice beer is the common drink. Consumption of meat is common. Karbis practice patriarchal system of family and follow traditional animistic religion that preaches rebirth and immortality of souls. In the hills houses are built on raised platforms probably to protect themselves from wild animals. Marriage is strictly clan exogamy and violation of this social rule leads to excommunication.

The study was carried out in Karbi Anglong, the largest district of Assam NE India. The district is inhabited by Karbi, Dimasa, Bodo, Assamese, Bengoli, Nepali, Kuki, Garo, etc. The Karbis are the dominating tribe with its distinct culture and language. The district lies between 25º26’ to 26º36’ N L and 92º7’ to 93º54’ E L covering an area of 10,343 km² and the temperature ranges from 14ºC to 20ºC in winter and 30ºC to 40ºC in summer. The preliminary information has been collected from the local healer, herbalist, folklore through oral interview and direct observation during traditional practices. Frequent visit to rural area of the entire district made easier in data formation. Data is presented as local name, common English name followed by their zoological name, family and medicinal uses. Field study was conducted from July 2011 to August 2012.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After investigation it has been found that ethnozoological practices among the Karbi tribe is still prevailing. Fourteen (14) number of species has been reported as a source of medicine. As the Karbis are dwelling in remote area and are deprived from education. Karbi Anglong is one the most backward district in NE region and the district itself could not provide sufficient health care centre till today. Therefore, the Karbis are bound to practice zootherapy as well as for food also. Ethnozoological practices among the karbis is really amazing and unbelievable. The present study reveal that ethnozoological practices open the window for further development of medical science as it indicates the medicinal sources. But on the other hand such type of practices may lead to extinction of the animal if continuously practiced. So the government and public has to frame out a strategies for long time used. The traditional medical knowledge of indigenous people across the globe has played an important role in identifying living organisms which are important for treating human health problems and livestock (Yirga et al., 2011). In ancient time, animals and their products have been used in preparation of traditional remedies in various cultures (Lev, 2003). Traditional medicines have been found to be an invaluable guide in present day to the screening of important modern drugs such as digitoxin, reserpine, tubocurarine, and ephedrine (Anyinam, 1995). Sixteen species have been reported as a source of medicine and used in 18 different human ailments (Yirga et al., 2011). Of the 252 essential chemicals selected by the world Health Organization, 8.7% came from animals (Dedeke et al., 2006). Loss of traditional knowledge has impact on the development of modern medicine (Alves and Rosa, 2005). It is important to document the tradi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Local Name</th>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Zoological Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Medicinal Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chikung</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Palaemon sp.</td>
<td>Palaemonidae</td>
<td>Prawn is used for corn disease. Prawn is first allowed to decay for 2-3 days and then applied in infected part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chupi</td>
<td>Land Snail</td>
<td>Helix pomatia</td>
<td>Helicidae</td>
<td>Saliva of land snail is used for eye disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chehe</td>
<td>Crab</td>
<td>Cancer sp.</td>
<td>Portunidae</td>
<td>The whole body is crushed into paste and boiled in water to prepare a drink which help in curing jaundice and other liver disorder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ingrar</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Elephas maximus</td>
<td>Elephantidae</td>
<td>The teeth of elephant are powdered and applied on itching portion of toe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Konmgurui</td>
<td>Cuchia</td>
<td>Amphipnous cuchia</td>
<td>Synbranchidae</td>
<td>Drinking of raw blood of cuchia cures TB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plavuk</td>
<td>Flying fox</td>
<td>Pteropus medius</td>
<td>Polipodiaceae</td>
<td>Meat is cooked and eaten and cure join pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Methan</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Canis familiaris</td>
<td>Canidae</td>
<td>Flesh soup improve the health and cure fever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vo-longkom</td>
<td>Crane</td>
<td>Grus grus</td>
<td>Guidae</td>
<td>The soft fibrous feather which is found only in the thyme and wing. The fibrous feather is applied in the injured region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pipli hantharva</td>
<td>Dragon fly</td>
<td>Anax sp.</td>
<td>Libellulidae</td>
<td>Dragon fly is eaten row and can recover urinary problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ok-hi</td>
<td>Barking deer</td>
<td>Cervulus muntjac</td>
<td>Cervidae</td>
<td>The legs soup relieves chest pain, rheumatic pain and fever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bi</td>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>Capra hircus</td>
<td>Bovidae</td>
<td>The legs soup cure TB and make stronger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Thokvam</td>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>Selenarticosp.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gall bladder and bile duct extracts are used for relieving stomach disorder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hijar</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Vulpes sp.</td>
<td>canidae</td>
<td>The flesh is cooked and eaten. It relieves joint pain and fever. Sometime fat also applied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ruipri</td>
<td>Python</td>
<td>Python molurus</td>
<td>Boidae</td>
<td>Fat is used to relieve headache and for the growth of hair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tional knowledge of human communities are losing their socioeconomic and cultural characteristics (Alves and Rosa, 2005). There has been increasing attention paid to animals as sources for new medicines (Jain et al., 2007). They have been methodically tested by pharmaceutical companies as sources of drugs for modern medical science (Jain et al., 2007). Medicinal folklore has proved to be an invaluable guide in present day to the screening of important modern drugs such as digitoxin, reserpine, tubocurarine and ephedrine (Anyinam, 1995). Traditional knowledge is eroding very rapidly, which calls for urgent action to document all related data before the traditional knowledge is lost forever (Yirga et al., 2011). The Knowledge with the traditional healing practices using animals is now fast disappearing due to modernization (jain et al., 2007). Loss of traditional knowledge has much impact on the development of modern medicine (Yirga et al., 2011). Most (56%) of the traditional medicinal animals were wild animals. Indigenous people have been collecting medicines from local plants and animals without threatening the population dynamics of the species because of the low level of harvesting (Jain et al., 2007). There is massive loss of wildlife across the globe due to over-hunting (Robinson and Bennett, 2000, 2002; Bennett et al., 2002) and over fishing (Boehlert, 1996; Steneck, 1998; Jennings and Kaiser, 1998; Jennings et al., 2001) which has been causing severe constraints on the availability and accessibility of plant and animal species used medicinal purposes (Anyinam, 1999).

The use of animal extracts, products and even secretions is a worldwide phenomenon, starting far back in prehistory. It co-evolved with human evolution, reached its peak in medieval medicine, and still exists in folk medicine across the globe. The beginnings of the medicinal uses of animals in human history are well defined; animals and their products were part of the primary resources that ancient peoples could use as food or for treating their illnesses (O’Hara, 1971). Ethnozoological practices among the Karbi tribe were practiced since the prehistoric life and it is still prevalence. Animals are being used as a food, medicine, ritual purposes and lots of significance in art and culture as well. Because of such a valuable supplement towards the Karbi society animal has to be used sustainably. Fourteen animals species were collected and identified which cure 17 different human ailments. The present study may reveal medicinal uses of animal, food or for treating their illnesses (O’Hara-May, 1971). The authors are greatly indebted to all informants for their never ending help and co-operation during field work. Special thanks to all the traditional healers, local herbalists, farmers for disclosing their valuable knowledge.

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