Traditional Medicine Among Missing Tribes Of Assam, India

Puspanjali Hazarika

Abstract: The Missing people are one of the important tribes living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of North East India. Enriched with indigenous cultural elements Missing is the second-highest populated tribe of Assam, which falls under the Tibeto Burman family of Mongoloid race. The highest populated tribe is Bodo. In Assam, Missing people are mainly living in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district. They are also found in Lohit, Dibang Valley and East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. In the distant past, in the rural society of Assam, various herbal medicines were abundant in the forests and surroundings. Using those, people could prevent and cure diseases and got remedies easily. The notable thing is that these medicines do not have any side effects. The Missing people also seemed to use herbal and folk medicine from the ancient days. These were prescribed by their traditional doctor Mibu or Miri. But in their prescriptions, treatment through worship and various prayers to God were preferred rather than the traditional medicines. After migrating to the plains, they adopted many cultures of the neighboring communities. But slowly, because of the decreasing popularity of their traditional doctors or priests Mibu, many changes took place in their religious practices and culture. So their mode of prescription of natural herbal medicine seems to be similar to the people of the plains.

Keywords: traditional, herbal, medicines, traditional food, Missing tribes, Assam, Identity. Plants.

1 INTRODUCTION

Health is wealth- people have been realizing this since ancient times. So, since then, when diseases took place, they thought of the ways to get rid of those. In the distant past, in rural society, various herbal medicines were abundant in the forests and surroundings. Using those, people could prevent and cure diseases and got remedies easily. The notable thing is that these medicines do not have any side effects. But being fascinated by the latest medicines which cure people instantly, invented by modern medical science and technology, people started to ignore the herbal medicines, because of its slowness in the result. On the other hand, because of the adulterated foods and several unrecognized diseases, nowadays, these medicines have lost their efficacy. The Missing people also seemed to use herbal and folk medicine from the ancient days. These were prescribed by their traditional doctor Mibu or Miri. But in their prescriptions, treatment through worship and various prayers to God were preferred rather than the traditional medicines. After migrating to the plains, they adopted many cultures of the neighboring communities. But slowly, because of the decreasing popularity of their traditional doctors or priests Mibu, many changes took place in their religious practices and culture. So their mode of prescription of natural herbal medicine seems to be similar to the people of the plains. In one word, in the past, living on the bank of rivers and natural environment, the Missing people did not need health practices and so any special health consciousness among them was not seen. But the daily activities of their lifestyle fueled health practices. The first condition of health care is nutritious and balanced food. While living in a natural environment, there were lots of lands and an abundance of products in the fertile lands. The habit of consuming oil and spice is adopted newly by the Missing from the neighbors. They cultivated mustard and the oil was used only to make medicines. They did not feel urgent to make a garden along with the home because they got enough fruits and herbs in the forests. There was an abundance of fishes in the ponds and rivers. Everything was eaten boiling. On the other hand, the regular hard work in cultivation worked like physical exercise. Such exercises made their body so strong that they did not need any other exercise. Among their busy work schedules, singing Oinitom loudly or playing a Dhol, they relaxed. They could sleep well because of their hard work. Thus, subconsciously, In the Missing society health practices were going on. It’s notable that though the Missing people did not need any special health practice, but they had to struggle against some diseases like malaria, fever, etc. while living ion the forest because of mosquito bites and deficiency of drinkable water. Such diseases were cured by natural medicines. To cure malaria, boiling Sirota leave, the patient was let to bath with the water. To cure pneumonia, the juice of Manimuni, Bhedialota, Noltenga, and Mosondori was given. The Missing people are one of the important tribes living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Enriched with indigenous cultural elements Missing is the second-highest populated tribe of Assam, which falls under the Tibeto Burman family of Mongoloid race. The highest populated tribe is Bodo. In Assam, Missing people are mainly living in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district. They are also found in Lohit, Dibang Valley and East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Before, Missing people were known as Miri. In Mising language, Mi means man and Yasing means white or good. In that sense, Missing means good or white people. (Ismail Hussain, ‘Mising Xomaj Itihax aaru Xongskritir Oitijyo’, Page 28). According to Professor Nahendra Paduni, Mi means man and Sing means the same clan- People from the same clan. According to Tarun Chandra Pamegam, the word Missing is derived from Mi and Asi. Mi means man and Asi means water. According to educationalist, litterateur Indreswar Pegu, Mi means man, Ansring means peaceful- mi+ansring=Mising.

2 FOLK-CULTURE, FOLK FOOD, AND MISSING FOLK-FOOD:
Folk culture includes beginning from social rules to custom, worshipping, traditional religious belief, folklore, folksongs, folk-art, folk dance, folk instrument, traditional dress, traditional cuisine etc. Mainly, depending on climate, the foods and food habits become an unavoidable part of a community. The traditional cuisines of various tribes contribute a lot to the colourful cultural history of Assam. The folk foods of the culturally rich Mising tribe reflect their colourful folk culture. Generally, the non-vegetarian Mising people’s traditional folk foods are collected from nature. The Mising can also be called gourmet, they enjoy food and know a lot about food. Because of that, in Mising society, some proverbs like ‘khai torim’, ‘khai jam giri jam’, ‘khai-boi bokti’, ‘apong khai tapong ulai’ etc. are created. In Mising society, having a massive love for meat and fish, people dry fishes and keep in a bamboo cylinder. It is called Namsing. Among the Mising foods, Namsing, Purang and Po:ro Apong are foods, having special characteristics and these folk foods help in enriching Mising folk culture.

3 PO:RO APONG AS AN IMPORTANT DRINK OF MISING TRADITIONAL FOODS:
Rice beer or wine holds an important position among the traditional foods of almost every community living in Assam. Community wise the names are different. The Karbis call it Horleng, Horop, or Hor, Bodos call it Jumai Jou, Sirni Jou, Rouzi; Dimasas call it Judima, Tiwas call it Jyu, Pohon Mod, Dhoraburi Mod, Rabha people call it tsako, Garos call Sut, Tai Ahom call it Xaaj, Luklao, Namlaa, Khasis call Ka-Wain, Misings call Apong, Sonowal Chakiris call Madhav Puruxor, Hajo people call Rohi, Ghamani, Sarania Chakiris call Mera, Tea Tribe people call Serem, Potika, Mech Chakiris call Laopani, Xaajpani or Mod, Deuris call it Suje. Mising traditional rice beer Apong is of two types-Po:ro Apong and Nogin Apong. Here, we will discuss Po:ro Apong only. The famous name of Po:ro Apong is Saai Mod. Po:ro Apong or Saai Mod can not be seen among other tribes of Assam. This famous and exceptional drink is prevalent among only the Mising tribe. Po:ro Apong or Saai Mod, which is usable in any social or religious purpose, can be called an integral part of their socio-cultural life. An essential part of some holy festivals like Ali Aye Ligang, Dobur Puja, Po:rag etc. is Po:ro Apong. They also welcome guests with Saai Mod. It is regarded as shame if they can not welcome guests with Saai Mod. In the Mising villages, in every morning and evening, Saai Mod is used as a tea. In Mising festivals like Dobgang, Dobur Puja (Indra Puja), Rokpong Uyo (Siva Puja) etc. Po:ro Apng is used enthusiastically. Although, the Misings use Boga Mod or Nogin Apong, but among them, Po:ro Apong is more famous.

The most important ingredient to make Saai Mod or Po:ro Apong is medicated Bakhor or medicated mod pitha. In Assamese it is called Xaajpitha. Community wise this is called differently. Mising people call it Apour. To make Apour, Aroi rice and various medicated plants are used. The making of this is a lengthy process. Leaves and roots of various plants are grinded dryly and these are mixed with Aroi rice powder. From this mixture, many small Pitha are made and these are dried in sunshine or in the vapour of stove in a kitchen. One should be careful in doing this. The mixture is kept away from sour because sour ruins all the qualities to make liquor. The microbes living in the leaves and roots help to ferment. The process of making Po:ro Apong is a process of scientifically fermentation. The medicated quality of Xaajpitha keeps the Yeast Fungus and it helps in making liquor by causing chemical reactions. This chemical reaction is shown symbolically like this-

\[ \text{C6H12O6+ Est - C2H5OH}_2CO2 + \text{Energy, that is} \ \text{Glucose} + \text{Fungus} - \text{Carbon dioxide} + \text{Energy.} \]

**Plants used to make Apour:**
To make Po:ro Apong, Apour is the main ingredient, which is a mixture of Aroi rice and branches, leaves and roots of various plants. A list of these plants is given here-

**The Process of Making Po:ro Apong**
Po:ro Apong is a mixture of rice, the dry stalk of rice plant, and burnt rice husk powder with Apour. For this on a dry yard, the stalk of rice plant and rice husk powder are burnt a little. In a big utensil, the rice is boiled. Then burnt rice husk powder and dry stalk of rice plant are mixed. Then this mixture is again mixed with Apour. Then it is kept for almost a week. After that, this mixture is covered by a bamboo made tool which is the size of a cone, named Ta:suk. The mixture keeping in the Ta:suk water is poured and from the blown water the Saaimod or Po:ro Apong is gotten.

**Ingredients to make Po:ro Apong:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mising</th>
<th>Assames</th>
<th>Scientific</th>
<th>Family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brikom</td>
<td>Tejmuie</td>
<td>Zynthoxylam</td>
<td>Rutaceae</td>
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<td>Drun Bon</td>
<td>Drun Bon</td>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>Lamiace or</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lajibori</td>
<td>Lajibori</td>
<td>Drymaria</td>
<td>Caryophyllace</td>
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<td>Marsang</td>
<td>Jibhaguri</td>
<td>Splenthmus</td>
<td>Asteraceae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talrning</td>
<td>Torapay</td>
<td>Alpinia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korpur</td>
<td>Korpur</td>
<td>Cinnonomu</td>
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<td>Bihlongon</td>
<td>Poligom</td>
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<td>Silajinela</td>
<td>Silajinja</td>
<td>Sellaginella</td>
<td>Selaginellacea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laikopodi</td>
<td>Laipodia</td>
<td>Lycopodium</td>
<td>Lycopodiaceae</td>
</tr>
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Usage of Po:ro Apong

Po:ro Apong is a famous drink of Misn people and it is used in every social event. After childbirth, the mother is given Po:ro Apong to drink for reviving the natural strength of her. And also, if a girl escapes with a boy to marry, the parents should seek forgiveness from the society giving them Po:ro Apong to drink. Po:ro Apong or Saai Mod is regarded as the ‘liquor of God’ in the Mising society.

Qualities of Po:ro Apong:

Although Po:ro Apong is an alcoholic popular drink, it is exceptional from other drinks. The medical benefits and nutritional qualities of Po:ro Apong is notable. It cures gastric. It is used as a medicine to cure Jaundice in Mising society. Moderate consumption of Po:ro Apong helps in blood cleansing. Mising people use it as a source of strength. Because, in Po:ro Apong there are large quantities of vitamin, mineral salt, protein and alcohol. In a chemical laboratory, 5461 ml Po:ro Apong was examined and the number of elements among every tribe of Assam traditionally liquor is prevalent from the past. Liquor is an integral part of the traditional foods of the tribes in their daily lifestyle. Po:ro Apong of Mising tribe is not exceptional. Mising people prefer Po:ro Apong to Nogin Apong, and so it is produced and consumed more than the latter. Nowadays, it is popularized in the local food festivals among people of other tribes and communities. There is a possibility of the Mising people to be economically sound by commercializing of this nutritious and energetic liquor.

4 TRADITIONAL FOOD AS MEDICINE:

Various wild herbs and leaves of trees are used in the traditional foods of the Mising people. These wild herbs and leaves of trees are used as folk medicine also, among them. A list of the elements of foods which are used as medicine is given-

- Ge:yag (Khutora): Root of this herb is used to cure pneumonia. This herb is used to cure the retention of urine.
- Jigja Lopang: Used to cure body ache, pneumonia.
- Rugji (Bihlongoni): Used to reduce body pain.
- Pipoli: Used to cure body pain, diarrhea, gastric, fistula, paralyses, toothache etc.
- Marsang (Malkathi): Used as medicine of body pain.
- Yiptali: Used as medicine of body pain.
- Lotang (Moromi Lota): Used as medicine of stomach pain.
- Gurban: Used to cure diarrhea.
- Pakkom: Used to cure high blood pressure.
- Pa:tang Oying (Matikaduri): Used to cure diarrhea.
- Mosondori (Musondori): Used to cure diarrhea.
- Takuk: Used to cure diarrhea.
- Bungki Repug (Bhedailota): Used as medicine for allergy and various stomach diseases.

Sengmora (Kukur Kaitia): Used as medicine in menstrual troubles.
- Enge Nesur (Kosur Thur): Used as medicine for piles, chills.
- Dermi: Used to cure diarrhea.
- Takpiang: Used to cure diarrhea.
- Se:mang: Used to cure pneumonia.
- Ombe (Mesaki Paat): Used to cure diarrhea.
- Tajek (Dimoru Paat): Used to cure diarrhea.
- Yored (Tikoni Borua): Used in cancer, jaundice, stomach diseases.
- Nogapan: Used as medicine in any skin diseases.
- Tabung Nesur (Torapanor Kuhi): Used as medicine for diabetes.
- Bhenkuri (Bhekuri): Used in treatment nephrolithiasis (kidney stone)

5 CONCLUSION:

It can be called that, even in the contemporary Mising society, demand for these folk medicines can be seen. In rural area, these are used in large quantities. But in urban society, it is not seen. Along with the spread of education, these folk medicines are being thrown away. From various field studies, it is known that these folk medicines cure various diseases. Hence, observing these aspects, there are many scopes of experiments of these folk medicines.

REFERENCES