

Health Practices and Indigenous Knowledge of Jenukuruba Tribes of Mysore District

Nagendrakumar P

Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
Government First Grade College
KuvempuNagara, Mysore
pranathinm@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the Health practices acquired through indigenous knowledge among Jenukuruba tribes of Mysore district. The Jenukuruba tribal people in Mysore district have special relationship with nature and the traditional affluence of their distinctive customs is excellent. Karnataka is home to several tribal population and the tribal people follow several traditions loaded with health benefits. Their acquaintances of the forest resources are so rich that they are familiar with each flora and fauna of the forest and can tell about their medicinal values. The Jenukuruba Community follow several customary practices which are distinctively superior in supporting healthy practices. They have affluent traditional knowledge about healthy living. The Jenukuruba Community maintain a congenial relationship with local biological resources. But of late, there is a vehement change in the traditional outlook and younger generations have tilted towards junk food culture. This has resulted in recurring health disorders and increase in the frequencies of hospital visits. The rich long-established and time honoured health knowledge of the Jenukuruba tribe needs to be preserved.

Keywords; *Jenukuruba Tribes, Indigenous Knowledge, Health Practices, Benefits*

Introduction

The Jenukuruba Community are concentrated in the districts of Mysore and Chamarajanagara bordering the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Habitually Jenukuruba Community are traditional honey collectors by profession. In the early 20th century Jenukuruba Community lived in self made huts in and around forests bordering present day Bandipur and Nagarahole forests in Karnataka.

Generally The Jenukuruba Community people believe that Belief in god, deities, ghosts and malevolent and benevolent spirits, that pervades the space and inflicting pain and injury when they are angered. Their inter linking of nature with spiritual power is the widely popular tradition among the tribal locals. They believe that involvement of human agency which is manifested through sorcery, witchcraft, evil eyes and black tongue. They believe diseases spread through personal contact and spreads fast as an epidemic.

The Jenukuruba Community Conviction about nature

The Jenukuruba Community people believe that human life is governed by the sun god, rain god, wind god and other elements of nature. Any maladjustment with these natural elements make person liable to be affected by diseases or illness. Hence, the Jenukuruba Community believe that precautionary steps need to be taken to re-establish the equilibrium. Among tribes short term illness is supposed to be caused by some physical factors such as rain and climate, but long term poor health is believed to be caused by supernatural power.

The belief in nature and culture as curative approaches-

The Jenukuruba Community visualize a symbiotic association between man, animal, birds, and reptiles and disturbance in this relationship is considered disastrous. They believe that if forest rules are broken deliberately or unintentionally, diseases enter the village and spread vastly among communities. Most of the epidemics like small pox are seen within this context. Hence, illness and the consequent management of disease is not always an individual or familial affair with the Jenukuruba Community but sometimes the decision about the nature of treatment is taken at the community level. All the other families in the village are expected to observe certain rituals, taboos and norms related to intake of specific food. The non observance of such practices often calls for action by the tribal leaders. Anti forest attitude and immoral behaviour too leads to burden of misfortune and hardship in the form of famine, food crisis, epidemics, drought, forest fire, etc in the forest land. The Jenukuruba Community are identified within their physical world, food and environmental factors also influences the health of the tribal people. Thus, in diarrhoea and dysentery in rainy season is attributed to substituted food of jackfruit, seed processed mango kernel for lack of availability of cereals during the period. It is believed that malfunctioning or imbalance of the three doshas namely **vata, pitta, kafa**. Faulty diet, lack of harmony with the super natural world, activities of ghosts, Imbalance of forces which control health displeasure of deities, immoderation or in appropriate behaviour in physical social and economic matters.

Revered Forest Produces and their Healthy Benefits

Neem- The Jenukuruba tribal people use Bark, leaf and seed of the Neem tree for treating pandemics and skin diseases. The Neem is used to heal wounds, treat skin disorders, improve immunization and prevent spread of pandemics. They either drink churned Neem leaves with hot water or use powdered ingredient. They also use Neem water as pesticide and insect repellent. The seeds are covered with Neem leaves before sowing. The Neem water is also sprinkled on crop yield to maintain its freshness.

Rhizome of Turmeric-The Jenukuruba tribal people use Rhizome of Turmeric. This is considered natural herb with rich preventive elements. Rhizome of Turmeric is used as a folk medicine, it is also considered as the best supportive medicine for healing wounds, injuries and animal bites. The healthy components of Turmeric is a time tested food supplement and has become a most revered and accepted spice in the modern kitchens too.

Forest Mushrooms- The Jenukuruba tribal people use native Mushroom seeds and products for stomach infections, liver disorders. Now, western research shows that it is also experimented in treating cancer and cancer symptoms. The Jenukuruba tribal people identify nearly 120 types of mushrooms which have wide-ranging medicinal properties. The dried mushrooms and the sweet mushrooms are very much popular as a staple food.

The Jenukuruba tribal people use the leaves, fruits and seeds of the **Amla** for boosting immunity. The usage of **amla** is consumed as a direct medicinal herb.

Shatavari -The Jenukuruba tribal people use **Shatavari** or **asparagus** is used for helping reproduction and promoting fertility. The tribal believe that it is the best moderator in treating female reproduction disorders.

Alevera- The Jenukuruba tribal people use **Alevera** is used for treating wounds and skin ailments.

Forest Cinnamon- The Jenukuruba tribal people use Cinnamon. The bark of the tree, layered roots, the dried leaves and the damp roots are used for healing body disorders. Its use as a food and spicy ingredient is also significant.

Forest Lemon- The forest lemon is used for preparing drink against cough, cold and fever. The remedial ingredients are popular among all forest tribes. The forest lemon extract is consumed unprocessed as a direct medicine. The women and children are also adept in drinking the juice and powdered lemon peels are considered as pest control herb. The freshness of the lemon leaves is preserved in earthen pots and the moist lemons are used as a food supplement.

Bilwa patra- The leaves and the roots are used for healing inflammatory and respiratory disorders

Honey- the extracts of honey are considered heavenly ingredient by Jenukuruba tribes. The honey bee is worshipped a smother nature and the extracting of honey without injuring the bees is one of the greatest traditional expertise of the Jenukuruba tribes. The honey bees and their nests are properly managed and properly looked after tribes. They know the minutes details of honey bee from formation of the nest to collection of the nectar. The used bee nest is also preserved by the ancestors. The customary knowledge of honey extract safeguarding in rough dried wooden containers for decades without losing its original medicinal properties is also very exceptional.

Conclusion

Thus, the healthy the tribal people link health with nature and culture. For them there is no separate health devoid of nature. They strongly believe that all human physical ailments and disorders can be cured through natural herbs. The traditional way of consuming natural herb is also an important input of Jenukuruba customary knowledge. The strong conviction that each forest produce holds one or the other medicinal properties needs to be understood and identified as a long-established knowledge system. This time honoured ancestral knowledge of the jenukuruba tribe needs to be conserved and utilized in its original form, to exterminate improper exploitation of forest herbs.

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