

Editorial

Herbs of Northeast India: Whether explored?

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Northeast India (NE) comprising Assam and adjoining states is well known for the richness of floras and faunas. Different tribes of this region have their own social and cultural practices maintaining social integrity and uniqueness. This integral social process within and among tribes, diverseness of natural resources have converted this region to an attractive and comfortable place to live. The social practices of this region have always been appraised by people of other regions but, at the same time, many such practices have been termed as superstitions. Many “miracles” have been observed in the health sector contributed by traditional practices but, yet to have proper and convincing scientific explanations of such miracles. Educated people also still believe and accept such practices as an alternative method of treatment. There are still many such “Traditional experts” in this region continuing their practices as social service and retain their social identity.

Several researchers have documented traditional herbal medicines used by various tribes of NE India. In most of those studies, accessible areas, where one can go and interact with the traditional healers, have been included. In contrast, reports on remote, dense forest and not easily accessible area, are comparably less. Moreover, limited data is available on insects etc. used traditionally as medicine. Exploration of such remote area for herbs as well as for insects may provide important data on unidentified therapeutically important plant species or unexplored herbal compositions with potent medicinal activities. Another important aspect in this connection is that,

many such traditional healers do not want to share their knowledge and expertise in such explorative studies. Generally, the traditional healers feel the possibility of misuse, wrong use and adverse action of such medicinal plants. It has become a custom that they only share their knowledge with their competent, reliable disciples or family member(s); or else, the information is lost when the healer passes away. However, this is not applicable in case of healers, who consider this as a source of income. Many a times, these “commercial healers” share deviated information during interaction. In such studies, it is also necessary to consider documentation of information obtained from people, who are not established or known healers, as they may also provide important data. Accessibility should not be a constraint for such investigations. We get limited information, when we interact with one traditional healer for a specified period of time. Whatever they remember during the time of interaction, they share only those information and generally these include common diseases only. They also hesitate to share information or the method of treatment for complicated, rare or uncommon, unexplainable problems. Such information may be very important scientifically if properly interpreted and validated.

Such effective and proper documentation of therapeutically important biological species (floras and faunas) or their products can be done only by setting up collaborative study group(s) specifically for very remote areas comprising researchers from required fields under supervision of competent person(s). Researchers should come forward to constitute teams equipped with required tools and techniques.

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