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Indigenous Knowledge and Health Seeking Behavior Among Kattunayakan: A Tribe in Transition

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Indigenous Knowledge and Health Seeking Behavior Among Kattunayakan: A Tribe in Transition

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I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings in general and tribals in particular depend upon nature for their primary needs as they are born and brought up in forest. Their life long and trans generational interaction with nature was encapsulated with indigenous knowledge system which serves their mundane needs as well as crises situations of life including health. In India majority of tribes still rely upon their own indigenous health seeking practices in the event of disease and this indigenous knowledge commonly referred to as the strength or value of their society.

The early Human beings were the simple hunters and gatherers and depended upon nature for food, shelter and medicine. This gave a chance to study about the local plants and their effects in different situations. In India majority of tribal population still depend on the indigenous treatment. In every tribal group a particular family or individual is identified with the knowledge of ethno botanical recipes and as well function as magico-religious practitioner. These medicinal practices acquired and accumulated from generation to generation. This is commonly referred as the strength or value of the society (Samira Dasgupta: 2006) (S.Rajan:2007). But in the recent past, the ideology of this strength and value are gradually weakening due to so many different social contacts from outside, the kattunayakan are still observing those traditional practices to some extent. The present paper

deals with understanding the indigenous knowledge of health seeking behavior of kattunayakan related to their local environmental. Their health care practices have been merged with their daily life. The aim of this paper is to document the health seeking behavior of kattunayakan because they are fast vanishing.

Three South and North Arcot districts, namely Vellore, Thiruvannamalai, Villupuram have been covered for this study. Totally 61 settlements were visited, and five of them namely Panapakkam, Seshadrinagar, Kalasapakkam, Mugaiyur, Sitheripattu have been selected for the study.

The tribe is highly reserved and so the collection of information is a very difficult task. Hence the halt at the long time duration gave a pavement to score more data about their health seeking behavior. Systematic anthropological field explorations have been carried out with the help of elderly kattunayakan, medicine men (*Vaitheir*) who have knowledge of plants and remedies. Discussions with women have been held in various settlements to collect maximum information of health seeking behavior.

II. HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Health seeking behavior in relation to illness behavior refers to those activities commenced by individuals in response to a symptom experience (Keith: 2004:829-63). This symptom experience known as knowledge of illness causes and symptoms, Knowledge is generally reviewed in order to see how far community knowledge concurs to Ethno medical concepts (Susanna-Muela:2004:3). People reported knowledge, which derived from Ethno medical concepts, is usually termed 'beliefs'. This behavior among different populations, particularly in the tribal communities, is a complex outcome of many factors operating at an individual, family and community level (Lurie: 1995:539-46), including their Eco-social profile, their past experiences with the health services, influences at the community level, availability of alternative health care providers, including indigenous practitioners and last but not the least their perceptions regarding efficiency (Jain: 2006:140). Belief systems prevalent in the communities, i.e. how people

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conceptualize the etiology of a health problem and how symptoms are perceived is an important factor in deciding the first step of treatment seeking (Keith:2004: 829-63). Likewise, the perception of treating the individual biological changes with the knowledge of local ecological adaptation is termed as the natural way of living (Fikret Berkes: 1991). So the kattunayakan community still is following such a methodology.

III. METHOD OF DETECTING PREGNANCY

- The woman begins to sleep a lot.
- She begins to dislike the smell of cooking especially grams.
- She begins to vomit a lot.
- The lower abdomen begins to swell.
- The urine became more viscous.

a) Methods of counting the pregnant period

- They count the months by a bar code on the wall.
- They also use leaves for this purpose.
- Apart from this they put a *Sozhi* or *pebbles* in a small pot, for a month and then count them.
- They also begin to calculate the month from the period without menstruation by adding a knot for each month in a rope in the corner of the house.
- They calculate the possible date of fertilization the day after the husband left home.
- They also remember the date by marking land marks like festivals new moon day or full moon day and deduce the fertilization date before or after these important dates.

b) Husband caring wife during pregnancy

- ❖ The husband begins to grow beard, showing his affection to his wife.
- ❖ He also helps her cooking, bathing and feeding her with food.
- ❖ He also follows the instructions and medication given to him and follows which is given by *Kenche* (local medical women-Thai).
- ❖ He also abstains himself having sex with her first few months.

c) Food during the pregnancy period

Kezhvaraghu - (Elesinecorocana), Thennai {Thinai-Setariaitalica} Rice, with this they prepare *Puttu* for pregnant women.

d) Food taboos

Black grapes and naval fruit are restricted because it causes *Sevapu* disease to child. Vegetables like Ash gourd, pumpkin, guva fruit, onion, cabbage, *seethapuli* and other grain-foods, raw rice, roasted rice and powdered tubers aspired. It affects

the growth of the child. *Eeasal* must not be taken because this are causes *Sevapu* disease to the child.

e) Sex & pregnancy

Sexual intercourse to be prevented for the first to 3rd or 4th month, sexual intercourse is continued from 5th to 9th month. The reason they say is it could result in normal child birth, they also believe sexual intercourse provides pleasure and relieves from anxiety. Sex during pregnancy is carried out cautiously that the body weight is not fully transfer to the female partner. Due to their drinking habit the husband forced his wife for sex in their drunken state. The women when drunk also oblige the husband. The first child birth takes place in the bride's house. The other child births will happen in the husband's house.

f) Role of the husband (father) during child birth

The father note down the time and date of the child birth, he also note down how many days after and before new moon day and full moon day. He also buys the necessary materials required for the child birth and provides food and salary for the people who help during the child birth. Finally he intimates the message to his relatives then the first child birth brides mothers house, the mother is not allow to the during the child birth. Other female members like her own sisters and her husband sisters, mother-in-law, elder women and *kenchey* are allowed.

g) Role of midwife after Child birth

After the child birth the mother is made to stand up and her belly is tightly wrapped with cloth, this prevents the accumulation of air inside the womb. When the child is born its nipple is squeezed to remove the first milk and washed. This is done to prevent the over growth of the nipple and abnormal breast for female.

h) Colostrums (Seemball)

The nipple of the mother's breast is cleaned and the baby is fed with the *Seemball*, it is highly nutrition. The baby don't drink the mother's milk due to some digestion problems, it results in clotting of milk inside the mothers breast. This causes huge pain in her breast and discomfort in her body, even slight disturbance causes by help from the husband and who suck the nipple slowly and spit on a green plant.

i) Removal of the first excretion

When the child takes a long time for defecation then it is done artificially. So they apply castor-oil at and around the anus of the baby then the *kenchy* of the grandma insert the finger in the anus and remove the feces by use of the left hand finger.

j) *Removal of amniotic fluid*

The child while in uterus will ingest amniotic fluid around it. When the child comes out of the womb, it is not desirable to health. The hay of the little millet is burned and the *Kodikalli*-(*Sarcosdema intermedium*) plant is shown in the flame of little millet hay. Now the *Kodikalli* is squeezed and the juice is fed to the baby through *thepaladai*, after drinking the plant juice they vomited the amniotic fluid in the baby stomach this makes the baby active and drink more milk.

k) *Treatment for delay child birth*

The juice prepared from the leaf extract *Murungai* (*Moringa oleifera*), which is added with *soombu*, and roasted *Seeragam* {*Seeragam-Cuminum cimini*) which is then heated and prepare a *Kashayam* this is induce the Child birth. Castor oil is applied from navel to lower belly this also induce the Child birth.

Types of abortion methods

- A mixer of black *Seeragam* (cumin) and jagger.
- The leaf twigs of the date palm are eaten.
- Eating of papaya ripe fruits and papaya fruit.
- Eating of sesame seeds with jagger.
- Infanticide is not practiced on sexual bias, female infanticide is not selectively practiced.

l) *Food habits of child*

Normally the child is fed with milk six to seven times at the day. After the fifth month they start to give the porridge, in the same time they also give the boiled *kezhangu* and fruits.

m) *Alternative food for the baby*

Kezhvaragu-(*Elesine corocana*) porridge prepared without sugar and given to the baby through the *sanghu* or *paladai*, then they give the boiled rice water with salt also given to the baby. The solid food other than the mother's milk is given after the sixth month; like idly, Rice, Grams. They should be smashed fully and then given to the baby.

n) *Food Restrictions on the nursing mother*

Fish, Grams, Pulses, Mango and Greens are disallowed. Banana, ground nut, coco nut, corn, millet, *Adhirasam* and jagger must be prevented. *Adhirasam* and mango fruit causes irritation of the anus. Millet causes *ouppoosam* for child.

o) *Breast feeding*

The head side should be up and leg portion should be lower. They give milk while weaving the basket, and even while they are selling the basket roaming in the street. They also give milk whenever the child cries irrespective of the weather.

p) *To increase the lactation*

Garlic is added in the food in large amount. Non-vegetarian foods are prepared. They are rabbits, squirrels, *Madayan*, *vaka*, *nari*, *kaadi*, *kowthare*, and *myna*.

q) *To decrease the lactation*

The *thuvare dhal* is immersed water in one hour and then made a paste then the paste is applied over the breast this decreases the lactation. The jasmine flower tied around a cloth at the breast this also decrease the milk.

r) *Cure for Nipple Pain*

Leaves of *meghendi* (*maruthane*) and turmeric are made into a paste and applied over nipple; *Kadukkai*-(*Terminalia chebula*) is made into a paste and applied over the breast.

s) *Sex after pregnancy*

Sexes advocated (avoided) at least after three months of child birth, because they find the differently in calculating the date of insemination. The first child also gets sick, Became very weak. It may begin to vomits, have Dysentery and develop other illnesses. As a medication in the cause a *Pungam kai*-(*Pongamia pinnata*) tied around the tread trough a hole of the seed and then tied around the waist of the baby.

t) *Thickening of semen*

The flower of *moringa* is mildly roasted with ghee, boiled with milk and drunk which thickens the semen. The *maruthani*-(*lawsonia inermis*) paste with lemon juice is placed on *padai* in genitals for few hours and bath is taken remove the scars. The *magandi* is applied over *ven-padai* for cure.

u) *Ealumburiki kassam*

The leaves of *Kanchankorai*(*Ocimum canum*) ten grams nutmeg one gram is ground to powder and is taken with hot water. The leaf juice of *thuthuvali* is heated with ghee and a teaspoon is taken twice a day. *Thuthi* flower is made into paste taken with sugar amounting to half a teaspoon. Panchanga sooranam of neem is taken with one gm of ghee, honey, milk or butter for 90 days.

v) *Cold Affected Lungs*

Adathoda and *manapagu* juice about 10ml is taken thrice a day with hot water. Leaf juice of *kanjankorai* about 30 days with milk is given for infants. 5 ml of *Thoothuvelai* heated with ghee is taken twice a day. The leaf juice of *Thazhuthazhai* is sucked through the nose which gradually reduces the symptoms of cold. The leaves of *Leppia* with ginger, *podina*, *coriandrum*, *murunga* is made into paste and taken with rice and ghee. The dried *Sundai* and amla with dried

ginger, *methi*, *carumcarvi*, shell of ponegavate, seeds of mango, *karivembujiera* are made into powder and two teaspoons are taken twice a day.

IV. DIARRHOEA

The leaf juice of *Adathoda* is taken with buffalo's milk. The leaf juice of tamarind is boiled and it is taken with milk (30ml). Flowers of *asoka* tree, mango seed is taken in equal amounts and taken with milk. *Murunga* leaves with *chilly* is fried in ghee and then added with old tamarind fruit and salt made into a paste and eaten with rice. The leaf twigs of *noval* and mango are taken in equal proportions and made into paste. It is then consumed with curd. The seeds of mango fruit are roasted, powdered and about 5 gms are added with buttermilk for consumption. The leaves of *Lippia* with nutmeg, *Seeragam* is heated with ghee and taken to a void bloody diarrhea. The young fruits of *vilvam* is grounded and given with curd for infants. Onion is fried with ghee and consumed. *Nathai Soori* seeds are powdered and added with sugar crystal and taken thrice a day. *Maasikai* is roasted, powdered and about 1 gm of powder is taken with honey.

a) Removal of Stomach Worms

The root of *Uttamani* is powdered and 2-4 grams are taken with milk. The problem related to digestion, diarrhea and worm infestation in stomach of children are solved. The leaf juice of Erukku and honey in ratio of 3:10 is taken to get rid of worms. Taking a slice of papaya daily also helps in getting rid of worms. Sundai with boiled milk also get rid of worms. Leaf juice of bitter gourd (30ml) kills the worms in stomach. 10 gms of boiled garlic is consumed to get rid of worms.

b) Blood with Urine

A decoction is prepared with 50 gms of flower buds boiled in 500ml of water and it is consumed twice a day solves the problem. Roots of Ponnankanni is ground to paste and added with curd. The butter extracted from this curd is taken in morning for 3 days.

c) Karappan

The juice of *Aaduthinnapalai* and *samoolam* is boiled withgingili oil and applied over the infected area. The leaves of *Uthamani* is fried in neem oil and gently applied over the infected area. *Poovarasam* flower is dried and mixed with coconut oil and applied over infected areas. Latex of papaya is mixed with *padikaram* and applied over infected area. Consuming leaf juice (15ml) of *Karujempai* cures *karappan* physiologically. Applying leaves of *piramathandu* is made into paste and applied over infected areas.

d) Muscle Strain

Vaathamadakki leaf is heated in castor oil and gently applied over the affected area.

e) Sleeplessness

Scenting *thiruneetm pachilai* and sleeping with *mehndi* flowers near bed act as sleep inducers.

f) Increasing Lactation

The leaves of castor or *kattamanakku* are placed over the breasts increase lactation. The leaves are boiled and immersed in a cloth which is gently applied over breast. Later the leaves are tied over breast which increase lactation. Illuppai leaf is tied around breasts which also increase lactation.

g) Kaal Aani

Amman pacharisi latex is applied over *kaal aani* and root barks of *mehandi* is powdered and applied over *aani* in foot. Turmeric (2 pieces), *mehandi* leaf (10gm), *vasambu* (1 piece), camphor (5 gm) are powdered and applied for 10 days on *kaal aani*.

h) Itches and Itching Wound

Leaf extract of *kanjaankorai*, *thumbai* and *punail* flower extract, *keezhanelli* extract with salt, *adathoda* and *samula* extract heated with gingili oil, any one of these are applied over the body and taken bath. This cures itches & scabies.

i) Removal of Unwanted Hair

Applying turmeric at night and washing it in the morning. Feathers of peacock are charred and mixed with coconut oil and applied over unwanted hair.

j) Saitrupun

Arueampul- (*Cynodon doctylon*) with turmeric is mixed and grounded to paste

k) Burns

Venthayam (methi) in paste form is applied over the wounds to ease pain. The banana fruit juice is applied over fire wounds for cure. The young leaves are tied around wounds to enable faster cure.

l) Nachukatru

Neem with turmeric in paste form is applied for 10 days around the infected place. The lemon fruit is lightly cut and inserted into the finger for cure. *Silanthi nayagam* leaf extract is applied to the nail and it breaks the wound to release blood and pus and cure the wound. *Kiranthi nayagam* leaf extract is applied over wounds.

m) Kakkuvan

Inflorescence of *tulsi*, *thippili*, *vasambu* in equal proportions are powdered, mixed with sugar and *intaken* with a spoon of honey. Kathiri leaf juice is mixed with rice powder and *dosa* is prepared with ghee and consumed. *Nancharuppan* leaf powder (150 mg) is mixed with honey and consumed.

n) Fits

Vasambu *asafetida*, *thirikadugum*, skin of

kadukkai, *athividayam*, black salt in equal proportions are powdered and a teaspoon is consumed twice a day.

n) Menstrual bleeding

The bark of trees such as *Arasamaram*-(*Ficus religiosa*), *Alia maram*-(*Ficus benghalensis*), *Atthi maram*-(*Ficus glomerata*), *Marutham maram*-(*Terminalia arjuna*), and *Thennam palai* (*Thennai-Cocos nucifera*) are boiled in a vessel containing two liters of water. It is boiled until the water gets reduced to one liter forming tick decoction. The people suffering from menstrual bleeding are made to drink this decoction for three days.

V. CONCLUSION

Documentation of health seeking behavior of kattunayakan gives us a glimpse of their rich indigenous knowledge in protecting their health by both preventive and curative measures which are culturally nurtured and environmentally supported. They follow their own distinct ways of predicting and diagnosing the health conditions and trying to meet the demand in a very casual way that would not differentiate much from day to day activities. Much curiosity is exhibited in the matters of child birth and sexuality as pointed out by Levy and Fallers (1959: 647-51) that reproduction and sexuality were two primary or essential activities of any human beings life.

Kattunayakans use a variety of plant products like leaves, barks, roots, fruits etc in different combination to cure various diseases. They use two or more remedies for the same disease indicating that one is superior to the other. As the local environment is subjected to degradation the non-availability of certain species also force them to find an alternative. It is also observed that almost every grownup individual try on their own for any kind of ailment in initial stages. However in the changing situation kattunayakan are gradually accepting modern health care systems subjected to their economic conditions.

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