

Health problems and health care practices of Lambani women of Gulbarga district

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Abstract

Lambanis lead a gypsy life. Lambani community is characterized by distinct dress code and tattooing practice found among women. Women in this community contribute to family by accumulating needed resources especially from the forest. They often work in fields and in construction projects. Their active life style often disposes to some health problems apart from the forest. They often work in fields and in construction projects. Their active life style often disposes to some health problems apart from problems specific to women. With their close proximity to forest some health care practices involving herbs are commonly found among these women. These women are found to instinct tattoos on their skin to avoid some health problems is also common. A study involving Gulbarga district of Karnataka reveals that women belonging to Lambani community are following some herbal treatments to some common health problems. Toothaches, running nose, cough, cracked foot, stomach pain, white discharges are the main problems which were usually given herbal treatments. However, among the women about 32% to 52% belonging to different age groups are going to hospitals for treatments while others are depending on the herbal treatment. Even those who go to hospitals are found to follow certain herbal treatments which they think will bring cure. Further, strange practice of applying any crushed tablets sold in grocery shops for the treatment of headache and to treat eye troubles are also reported. A discussion has been made regarding the differences created with respect to effect increasing modern facilities on pertaining ethno-medical practices especially in tribes which depended on nature for the well being.

Keywords: Herbal Methods, Lambanis, Traditional Health Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a function, not only of medical care but of the overall integrated development of society-cultural, economic, education, social and political. Each of these aspects has a deep influence on health which in turn influences all these aspects. Hence, it is not possible to raise the health status and quality of life of people unless such efforts are integrated with the wider effort to bring about the overall transformation of a society. Good health and good society go together (Basu, 1992). This is possible only when supportive services such as nutrition, Environment and education reach a higher level. The common beliefs, customs and practices connected with health and disease have been found to be intimately related to the treatment of disease. It is necessary to make a holistic view of all the cultural dimensions of the health of a community. In most of the tribal communities, there is a wealth of folklore related to health. Documentation of this folklore available in different sociocultural systems may be very rewarding and could provide a model for appropriate health and sanitary practices in a given ecosystem. Maternal and child care is an important aspect of health seeking behaviour which is largely neglected among the tribal groups (Basu et al., 1990).

Health and treatment are closely interrelated with the environment, particularly the forest ecology. Many tribal groups use different parts of a plant not only for the treatment of diseases, but for population control as well (Chaudhari, 1990). There exists a definite nexus between forests and nutrition. It has been noted by many that tribal's living in remote areas have a better overall status and eat a more balanced diet than tribal's living in less remote, forest free areas. The mode of utilization of available natural resources often determines the long term impact on health.

In this land of cultural diversity, along with the general population, people belonging to unprivileged sections of society including schedule castes and tribes have contributed a lot for our national heritage by their unique style of performing certain jobs and festivals. Of the several such communities, Lambani community is the one, which is called by the different names in different parts of the country like banjara, lambhada, ghorbhai and so on.

Lambani was once known as the bee-keeping tribe. The Lambani women are found in groups throughout the central and southern parts of India, selling cloth at markets and beaches. Their work contributes considerably to the income of their families. The Lambani women embroider bright rainbow-colored fabrics covered with a mosaic of patchwork mirrors. The Lambani women commonly wear large, silver earrings laden with bells called Loila and a large silver torque around the neck to which two large silver pyramid forms are attached. Women of Lambani tribes wear decorated clothes or fabrics. Jewellery is also an essential part of these tribal women lifestyle. Women wear bones made finger rings, bangles and bracelets in addition, they adorn their hair with flowers and balls. These tribal women mostly wear thick aprons which are interwoven with cotton thread through needle work. The thick apron remains

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suspended from the west (downwards) while bodice makes up for the upper.

According to Havanur report of 1975, Lambani's have spread over most parts of Karnataka. The population of Lambani in Coorg (233), Mandy (219) and south Canara (11) districts is for lower than that found in Gulbarga (57,820), Shimoga (50,627), Bijapur (44,669), Chitradurga (38,138) and Bel Traditionally, the Lambani, or Banjara have worked as carriers of supplies and drivers of pack-bullocks (Enthoven,1922). They are known differently in different parts of the country, as Vanjari (wanderers in the jungle), Lambada, Lambani and Labban. All these words except the first are derived from the Sanskrit word "Lavana" meaning "salt", which is one of their principal items of trade (Nanjundayya and Iyer; 1928). The word banjara is said to be derived from the Sanskrit word "Vana Chara", meaning wanderers of the jungle. lary (35,780) districts.



Hyderabad Karnataka was chosen for the present study as the Lambani population is more in this area. This covers the districts like Bidar, Gulbarga, Bellary, Koppal, Yadagir and Raichur. Among these Gulbarga district has more number of Lambani communities. (According to C. V. NarshimaNaik, all India Banjara seva sangh,1997 and Akil Karnatak Banjara Vedhyarhi Vedike, Karnataka Banjara kaipidi.1996-97).

A woman belonging to this community seems to be very particular about their traditional dress and adoration. They are found to have tattoo drawing on their skin. Since they are following certain specific code of their tribe it is quite obvious that may be following certain health care practices which are passed from generation to generation. Usually tribes which live in vicinity of forest follow certain herbal treatments are time tested and usually have simple methods to follow.

Since present day lambani women in Karnataka is facing the pressures of modern situation it may yield to the pressure and long history of traditional health practices may disappear if they were not recorded. Lambani women and in general mankind may get devoid of sometime tested practices. Thus it was felt to collect the data regarding health care practices among the lambani women. Present study has been done with concentration on the practices which need no experts outside the family and no items other than those which are encountered daily.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of randomly selected households belonging to the tribal habitats in Gulbarga district of Karnataka were surveyed for the health practices followed. Information regarding the practices

followed to care the common health troubles occurring to women and children were collected. The traditional practices for the common health problem includes headache, common cold, skin diseases, cracks in feet, and women specific problem after puberty, pain during periods, abnormal cycles of period and infections of genital organs. In order to avoid the treatments by experts of community and treatments at health centers concentration has been given to the treatments involving the utilization of materials used in daily life have been collected separately and used for analysis.

OBSERVATION

It was observed that more than 50% of family which is not having any visit to nearly hospital. Despite of some family access to hospital many families were reported to practice certain treatment methods for some common health problems.

Skin diseases and wounds are common among children and even adults suffer from these troubles quite often. Application of neem leaves paste prepared along with turmeric powder is used to cure many of the skin troubles. While paste of sandal wood and turmeric is used to control the pimples. Boils on the body were told to be cured by application of heat from warm cooked rice tied in heat the cloth. To provide wet heat for the boil cooked ragi flour is also used. Wet heat seems to provide comfortable heat for boil to get mature and ooze out the contents. Application of garlic paste at early stage of boil has been reported to suppress the boil without much complication.

It has been reported that any tablets usually those which are kept unused are crushed and applied along with coconut oil for wounds practice of storing the unused tablets to treat wounds is common among many houses. Considerable number of respondents reported that they got successfully treated the wounds by following this method. Probably these people are thinking that all tablets are having wound curing property. In early days of utilization of penicillin to cure wounds was having procedure of crushing penicillin tablets in oil and application to wounds.

Cracks in feet are common during winter and sometime they remains for long time even after winter passes away. For this it has been reported that gum obtained from the mango tree is utilized. Semi solid fresh germ is filled in the cracks and feet wormed on the hot charcoal for few minutes before going to bed at night. For the same problem application of juice of onion along with turmeric powder has been reported to have good results.

Headache is usual problem, sometimes it occurs along with cold usually adults are found to suffer and were found to feel discomfort due to headache. For this treatment involves binding the fore head with strong rope or cloth band and tightening the band to bearable extent. Another method involves inhaling the smell of fresh lemon fruit. Eating of soup of chicken and then sleeping by covering the body with thick blanket was reported to cure head ache due to cold. Though alcohol consumption has been reported to cure the most of the troubles due to cold and usually preferred by majority, its effect seems to be intoxication rather than cure. Alcohol may provide temporary relief from suffering. However utilization of alcohol in cold related problems is more wide spread and even children were reported to consume little alcohol to get rid of cold related problems. Those who does not want to consume alcohol use the eucalyptus leaves ("Neela giri") to get rid of cold problems. Method involves boiling the water and placing the fresh leaves in boiling water and inhaling the vapors. Sometimes paste prepared out of eucalyptus

leaves is applied to forehead and chest.

Fever, body pain, running nose and cough are also some the problems due to common cold. For this brew prepared out of boiling the powder of ginger, coriander and pepper is used. Elders inhale the smoke coming out after sprinkling the turmeric powder on the burning coal or flour of ragi on the burning coal. Soup of chicken or soup prepared by sprouted horse gram is considered to cure the common cold.

There are few case where these cold balms which are meant for external application are swallowed along with beetle leaves and beetle nuts or little of this balm is added to tea or coffee while consuming. These type of peculiar use of available medicines clearly indicate that people want to experiment with available products and try to establish their utilization. These type of utilization will not affect the health seriously at the movement but in long run they may have adverse effect. Since these products are not prepared for internal use ingredients in these products are not screened for human consumption. These type of behaviors may have got influence from the traditional methods where user is having wide range of liberty to change the procedure of utilization.

Women have specific problems which usually accompany them during their life once they reach puberty, pain during the periods abnormal cycles of period and infection of genital organs are common problems. Women recognize these problems with different names.

In this community women keep away from activities which involve preparation of food for others during the period and not allowed to collect the water. Apart from not participating in worship they were made to sleep quite away from other family members. This type of restriction may provide some rest for the individual concerned and might have helped the elders to know the fertility status of the women in the family. But certain amount of liberty has been provided in few families at present and number of baths per days has been increased wherever such liberties are given. Usual traditional system involves bath after five days. Some families are strictly following the procedures which allow the women to take rest during the monthly period.

Despite good food and sufficient cleaning habits pain during monthly period is common among the women. For this, prepared out of curry banana flower buds is used. Tender banana at the tip which were hidden in red hood are cooked and consumed along with food was reported to cure the pains during periods. Another method were involves eating of sesamum seeds along with sugar crystals. One of the older women in reported that sleeping on the bed with pillow below the belly will relieve the pain during the periods.

Infection of genital region and secretion of fluids with abnormal smell has been considered as serious problem (white discharge) among women throughout the history and space of the world. Since it robs off the attention of men towards the women, usually women seriously try to get rid of this problem. In the survey it has been reported that beetle leaves along with jaggery mixed with lime will cure this problem. The three beetle leaves along with lime and jiggery each about the size of chick pea has to be taken in empty stomach in the morning and strictly taken for 3 days with food involving only cured rice. Another treatment involves eating of two white hibiscus flowers in empty stomach for 3 days with food involving only curd rice.

There are occasions when any spine or piece of stones will pierce through the skin of feet and create trouble, if efforts were failed to remove the foreign object then these foreign bodies in the

feet corns and corns are very difficult to cure once they establish. Being actively moving tribe they take every preparation to remove the foreign body whenever they establish in the feet. They treat corns if they developed in feet applying lemon pieces to corns for 5-6 days. Lemon pieces should be placed on the corns and tied with cloth to maintain the intact position. The contact of lemon piece and corn soaked in lemon juice is rubbed with stone to remove the corn peeling which detach easily. Similar procedure is followed for 5-6 days and stopped. If corn still continues to grow then another 5 days of trail is followed in similar fashion, till it stops giving troubles by growing.

DISCUSSION

It has been observed that there are some health care practices followed by the Lambani community which provide relief from some troubles. Since these people are living in close proximity and share the knowledge, any particular procedure followed is made available to those who are in need. Present study involves only those procedures which need no specific skill or materials.

Lambani community like any other community is facing the pressure of transformations. However, women belonging to this community those who follow traditional dress code and adoration practices can predispose their health to problems which arise out of using the clothes which are not easy to wash regularly and to certain skin diseases which may result due to exposure of skin to polluted atmosphere.

While discussing the health status of tribal women in India Basu (1993) emphasizes that health plans should be based on the needs specific to specific tribal groups. Further, he stresses the need of discouraging the consumption of alcohol and drugs (intoxicant) during pregnancy.

Lambani women are known to have their skin adored by tattoos. Some women believe that tattoos help to provide good health. There are beliefs that specific tattoos toward off certain specific diseases (Naik and Girji 2004). However their role as curing any disease or preventing the disease needs further study. Women belonging to this community are conditioned to follow traditional methods is obvious by their dress code and adoration specifics. A systematic study of their health care practices may provide some easy methods to cure certain troubles. Such studies should be made at the earliest before they were replaced by modern day methods without realizing potentiality of traditional methods.

And also some of the traditional practices may be dangerous or may have side effects in long run. Like use of alcohol for common cold related problems. And use of the tablets without knowing the content of tablet for wound healing. For these people simplicity of procedure and easy availability of material seems to motivate to take such action. Any tablets with dangerous content may create lot of damage to body if such practices are encouraged. Therefore these peoples should be made to get aware about the consequences of taking liberty while dealing with modern day medicines.

Present study reveals that about 23% to 52% of the women belonging to different age groups go to hospitals for their troubles without preferring to traditional methods, about 27% to 40% women belonging to different age groups go to hospitals when traditional methods fail to provide relief. Though these statistical data's are specific for the habitats under study it reveals that there exists wide range of difference in following the traditional methods preference for traditional methods is found obviously less among the younger

people. But about 47% of the traditional method followers were following these methods because they are not getting time to visit hospitals which open and close at particular period during which these people are busy in their struggle to earn the livelihood. Thus it can be concluded that 50% of the people who follow traditional methods really interested in these methods and know the real value of these methods.

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