Ethnomedicinal plants used by Chorei tribes of Southern Assam, North Eastern India

Shuvasish Choudhury 1,2,*, Parul Sharma 1, 2, Manabendra Dutta Choudhury 2, Gauri Dutt Sharma 2

1 Natural Product Process Laboratory, Central Instrumentation Laboratory, Assam University, Silchar–788011, Assam, India
2 Ethnobotany and Medicinal Plants Research Laboratory, Department of Life Science and Bioinformatics, Assam University, Silchar – 788 011, Assam, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 15 June 2012
Received in revised form 27 June 2012
Accepted 18 October 2012
Available online 28 October 2012

Keywords:
Chorei
Ethnomedicine
Southern Assam
North East India

ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore and enumerate the medicinal plants used by the Chorei tribe residing in Southern Assam part of North Eastern India in the treatment of various ailments. Methods: Systematic and intensive field surveys were conducted in Chorei inhabited parts of Southern Assam part of North East India to collect information on medicinal plants used by them in treatment of various ailments. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and personal observations made during the field visit. Results: A total of 53 different medicinal plants were recorded along with their vernacular names, parts used and mode of utilization by the Chorei tribes. Each of the plants was categorized according to their use in treatment of particular disease. Conclusions: The present study revealed that the Chorei tribe is primarily dependent of medicinal plant for treatment of various ailments.

1. Introduction

The human use of plants as a source of medicine dates back to the middle Paleolithic age around 60,000 years ago and has learnt to identify and use plants according to its needs[1]. The herb or crude drug used in the traditional system medicine is a complex potpourri of compounds, some beneficial, some harmful and some toxic, but all integrated under certain natural rule to make the crude fraction into a single chemical agent. These crude drugs have components amalgamated in a fashion where one chemical counter balance the undesirable side effect of the other, ultimately aimed to provide beneficial effects. Plants have been used as a medicinal agent since ancient times, first only on a folkloric basis and later developed on a scientific way into a single agent drug [2]. It has been estimated that out of 4,22,000 of flowering plants available in this world, approximately 50000 are used for medicinal purpose of which India represents 43% [3–5]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 65% of the world population incorporates plants as medicine as a primary source of health care, where ethnomedicinal information plays a key role [6]. The value of such information is thus regarded far more than a significant anthropological or archeological finding [7].

In the North Eastern region of India, several workers have contributed significantly in documentation of ethnomedicinal information on plants and consequently many important research publications have emerged. Information on 37 antifertility plants belonging to 26 families used by ethnic communities of three districts of Assam was reported[8]. Other major work in the field of Ethnobotany of North East India includes several reports on Mao Naga tribes of Manipur [9], Zeme tribe North Cachar Hill district of Assam [10], Reang tribe of Tripura state [11] and the Thai–Khanyangs of Assam [12]. Other recent and worth mentioning works on the ethnobotany of North Eastern India include comprehensive report on ethnobotany of plant wealth of North East India and ethnobotany of pteridophytes of Assam [13–14]. Ethnomedicinal plants used by different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have also been reported recently [15].
The Southern Assam of North East India comprises of three districts viz., Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandhi is situated within 24.500N latitude and 92.510E longitude. The average climate of the region is tropical, warm and humid. Majority of the areas of Southern Assam consists of low lands and high hilly terrains and level plains. Heavy rainfall and high humidity in this region has made it rich in floral resources and prosperous in medicinal plant wealth. The Chorei tribe is among the small group of descendents of Mongolian community distributed in Southern Assam part of North Eastern India. They are mostly nomadic people living in hilly terrains under the rule of despotic chiefs. To our knowledge, there are no reports regarding the ethnomedicinal aspects of Chorei tribe of North East India. The present study aims to enumerate the ethnomedicinal aspects of the tribe, with an aim to add information to strengthen the resource on medicinal usefulness of plants. Such study may highlight important aspects on medicinal properties of plants used by the tribe and also to validate the same for future drug discovery process. The present investigation aims to explore the ethnomedicinal aspects of Chorei tribe residing in the parts of Southern Assam of North Eastern India.

2. Materials and methods

Intensive field work has been undertaken for a period of two years covering different seasons so as to gather information on each of the plant species found to be used in traditional healing practices of Chorei tribe of Southern Assam of India. Information was gathered by taking interview of local medicine men using structured questionnaires in some cases and documentation of verbal information and personal observations. Medicine men were selected on the report of local informant. Before the interview, the respondent was explained with the aim of the study, followed by verbal consent. Each of the healers was selected based on their previous experience of using medicinal plants in treatment and the data obtained from one healer was crossed verified with the other. The vernacular name, mode of preparation and also disease treated were recorded. In certain cases, where the healers do not know the name of the disease, the names of the diseases were given on the basis of symptoms described by them. The collected specimens were tagged and herbarium sheets were prepared for each of the species. The specimens were identified consulting flora and monographs. Finally specimen identification was authenticated consulting Assam University Herbarium, Assam University, Silehar, India. Set of herbarium sheets were deposited in the herbarium for future reference. The alphabetic arrangement of all the plant species were made along with information on vernacular names, place of collection, parts used, mode of uses and disease classification.

3. Results

The ethnomedicinal aspect of Chorei tribe of Southern Assam of North Eastern India has been thoroughly studied for the first time. The present study reveals 53 different medicinal plants belonging to 33 families of angiosperms (Table 1) were reported to be used by the Chorei tribes in treatment of various ailments, which includes skin infections, boils, eczema, constipation, kidney stone, etc. The number of traditional healers consulted was six as majority of the population of the tribe have shifted to cities in search of livelihood. In course of the study, the average age group of healer was 65–70 years, with only male informers. Of all the 53 plant species collected, 18 species of plants are being used for treatment of skin related infections, 7 plants for constipation and jaundice, 4 plants are being used to cure cough and cold and 4 plants for diabetes (Fig. 1). Among all the families, Verbenaceae was the most dominant family with 5 species of plants. For most of the plants crude drug is prepared as aqueous extracts. It was also interesting to note that in most of the parts used, leaf is used in majority of the cases.

![Fig. 1. Disease wise classification of number of plants used by the Chorei tribe](image)

4. Discussion

The North Eastern India is one of the mega biodiversity hot spots of the world and houses rich floral diversity. Moreover, there are several ethnic communities, which are rich in their ethic traditions to use plants as a source of medicine. Ethnomedicine broadly defines the use of plants as a source of medicine by humans has provided us with immense information on medicine properties of plants and based on such information, several plants were taken up for drug discovery efforts. However, with rapid change in human life style resulting in loss of the ethnic culture, many of such information will disappear. Many of such information on traditional uses of plants by different tribes are yet to be reported or complied in suitable form. Collection of ethnomedicinal information thus remains primary and important endeavor in enlisting plants with their specific medicinal use, which can be further utilized in discovery
Table 1

| Botanical name | Family       | Vernacular name | Specimen examined                  | Parts used | Mode of use | Disease classification                  |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Adhatoda vasica Ness. | Acanthaceae | Vasak Pata (Bengali, Chorei) | Magura and Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaves     | Crude extract of leaf is taken orally to cure severe cough problems | Cough and cold |
| Aegle marmelos (Linn.) Correa | Rutaceae | Bel (Bengali, Chorei) | Magura, Manikbond in Karinganj district and Tripurapunji and Chotasalanga in Cachar district | Fruit      | The fruit pulp is mixed with cold milk and taken regularly empty stomach to cure the problem of constipation. Raw pulp is given in cases of acute dysentery for 6–7d. | Constipation and acute dysentery |
| Alocasia indica Schott. | Araceae | Bar (Chorei), Kochu (Bengali) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Tuber      | The tuber is boiled in water and taken as food for 4–5days during jaundice | Jaundice |
| Alpinia nigra (Gaertn.) Burtt. | Zingiberaceae | Nari (Chorei) | Magura in Karinganj district | Rhizome    | The rhizome is shade dried, powdered and taken orally to control high blood sugar. The fresh roots are used as additive in preparation of rice beer | Diabetes |
| Alstonia scholaris (L.) R. Br. | Apocynaceae | Letiwang (Chorei) | Magura, Manikbond and Rongpur in Karinganj district | Bark leaves | The bark latex is used against snake bite. The latex is applied locally to the affected part. The latex of leaves is applied on breast nipples to induce lactation in mothers after child birth | Snake bite and as lactation inducer |
| Areca catechu Linn. | Araceae | Tambul (Chorei and Assamese) | Manikbond and Charagi in Karinganj district and Chotasalanga in Cachar district | Nuts       | The nuts are used as diuretic. The nuts are soaked in water overnight and used for bathing to cure skin rashes and boils. | Skin rashes and boils |
| Azadirachta indica Juss | Meliaceae | Inkbow (Chorei), Neem (Hindi, Bengali and Assamese) | Magura, Cheragi and Baruatilla in Karinganj district | Leaves | The crude extract of the leaves is applied locally for 4–5 days to cure skin infections. | Skin disease |
| Begonia thomsonii A. DC. | Begoniaceae | Shekhuk (Chorei) | Baruatilla in Karinganj district | Roots | The crude root extract is applied locally for 3–4 days and bandaged to prevent infections that may result due to metal wounds. It is occasionally used in the treatment of skin infections. | Skin disease |
| Callicarpa arborea Roxb. | Verbanaceae | Buordop (Chorei) | Magura in Karinganj district, Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves     | The dried seed powder is taken with hot water during bed time to cure tape worm infection. One teaspoon of seed powder is mixed with hot water and taken orally for 7 days | Tape worm infection |
| Carica papaya L. | Cariaceae | Thinfolma, Kofol (Chorei) | Magura in Karinganj district, Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Seeds      | The crude extracts of the leaves is applied locally for healing deep wounds | Wounds |
| Cassia siamea Lamk. Caesalpinaceae | Bandolath (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karinganj district | | Leaf       | | |
| **Scientific Name** | **Family** | **Local Name** | **Districts** | **Part Used** | **Uses** |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
| *Cassia occidentalis* Linn | Caesalpinaceae | Moithari (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karinganj district | Ripe fruit | The dried fruit is powdered and mixed with garlic, taken once daily for 7 days to cure stomach and digestive problems. |
| *Cassia tora* Linn | Caesalpinaceae | Moitharni (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaves | Crude extract of leaves is used to cure itching. |
| *Centella asiatica* L. | Apiaceae | Parup (Chorei) | Magura in Karinganj district and Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves | The fresh leaves are applied over affected areas to cure skin boils. |
| *Chromolaena odorata* L. | Asteraceae | Gingthaithuk (Chorei) | Magura and Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaves | 10–15 young leaves are crushed to yield fresh juice and applied instantly to cuts and wounds by metal weapons to stop bleeding and prevent further infection. |
| *Cleome gynandra* Linn. | Capparidaceae | Chekhloitaboi | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves | Crude extract of the leaves is used to treat ulcers and ring worm infection. The extracts is applied locally to the affected area for 3–5 days. |
| *Clerodendrum viscosum* Vent. | Verbenaceae | Jutherpeny | Magura and Baruatilla in Karinganj district, Pali, Tripurapunji and Chotosalanganga in Cachar district | Young leaves | 2–3 leaves are given mixed with coconut and taken orally to cure dysentery in children. |
| *Datura stramonium* Linn. | Solanaceae | Dutra (Chorei) | Magura and Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaf and Fruit | Crude extract of leaves and fruit are mixed together and applied locally to treat skin infection. |
| *Duranta repens* Linn. | Verbanaceae | Hena Pata (Chorei) | Magura and Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaves | The crude extract of the leaves are applied externally to remove skin scar marks. |
| *Dellinia indica* Linn. | Dilleniaceae | Daliphok (Chorei) | Magura and Cheragi in Karinganj district | Fruit | The fruit are edible and taken as laxative. |
| *Docynia indica* DC. | Rosaceae | Giron (Chorei) | Magura in Karinganj district | Leaves | The dried leaf powder is added as Skin breaver during preparation of rice beer. Fresh crude extract is used as antiseptic and applied locally for 2–3 days to cure skin infection due to wounds. |
| *Dracaena angustifolia* Roxb. | Agavaceae | Linsir (Chorei) | Baruatilla in Karinganj district | Leaves | Used in the treatment of diabetes, Diabetes the crude leaf extract is diluted with water and taken once daily to control diabetes. |
| *Eclipta prostrata* Linn. | Asteraceae | Kheraj (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karinganj district | Leaves and roots | The crude leaf extract is given 2–3 time daily to cure jaundice. |
| *Ehretia acuminata* R. Br. | Boraginaceae | Taijan (Chorei) | Baruatilla in Karinganj district | Leaves | The extract of the leaves mixed with water and taken orally occasionally to cure diarrhoea. |
| *Ensete glaucum* (Roxb.) Cheesm. | Musaceae | Junterpy (Chorei) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Inflorescence | The inflorescence in boiled with fresh water crab to yield an extract, which is than given for 20–30 days regularly to persons suffering from jaundice. |
| Eriobotrya bengalensis Ilk. | Rosaceae | Oiyamoni | Magura in Karimganj district | 4–5 fresh leaves are boiled in water and the extract is filtered through clean cloth. It is than applied externally for 5–7 days to cure eczema and skin boils. |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Euphorbia hitra Linn.     | Euphorbiaceae | Hektuk (Chorei) | Magura, Manikbond and Cheragi in Karimganj district | The crude extract of the leaves is used as antiseptic against wounds infections arising from metal weapons, nails, etc. |
| Euphorbia ligularia Rob.  | Euphorbiaceae | Sairopal (Chorei) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves White latex obtained from the leaves is applied directly to cure skin infections |
| Ficus benghalensis Linn.  | Moraceae  | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves Skin infections |
| Ficus glomerata Rob.      | Moraceae  | Chumruthikung | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Roots and Fruit The crude extracts of the roots and fruit mixed together are diluted with water to cure dysentery |
| Gmelina arborea Rob.      | Verbanaceae | Gamair gach (Chorei) | Cheragi in Karimganj district | Leaf and Fruit The crude extract of the leaf is taken once daily to control diabetes. The extract of the fruit is mixed with sugar and water and once daily for 7 days to cure urinary pain and kidney stones |
| Ipomoea aquatica Forsk.   | Convolvulaceae | Kalmou (Chorei) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves The crude extracts of the leaves is applied locally to wounds and boils until recovery The rhizome is boiled with water and garlic, applied locally to get relief from arthritis and rheumatic pains |
| Lasia spinosa (Linn.) Thumb. | Araceae | Kantha (Chorei) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Rhizome |
| Leucas aspera (Willd.) Link. | Lamiaceae | Pawtagaitay (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karimganj district | Leaves The crushed leaves is applied locally and bandaged to cure wounds |
| Litsea glutinosa Lour.    | Lauraceae  | Khairabul (Chorie) | Magura in Karimganj district | Leaves The aqueous extracts is taken orally for 5–7 days to cure jaundice |
| Mangifera indica Linn.    | Anacardiaceae | Am (Chorei, Bengali, Assamese, Hindi) | Cheragi in Karimganj district | Fruit The fruit is eaten raw to relieve constipation. The unripe fruit is also eaten as vegetable |
| Melastoma malabathricum L. | Melastomaceae | Damchui (Chorei) | Tripurapunji in Cachar district | Leaves 2–3 fresh leaves are crushed to yield crude juice and given orally 2–3 times a day for 4–5 days to cure dysentery |
| Meyna spinosa Roxb. Rubiaceae Ex. Link. | | Marin (Chorei) | Manikbond in Karimganj district | Leaves The aqueous extracts of the leaves is taken orally once daily for 5–7 days to cure jaundice |
| Mikania micrantha Kunth.  | Asteraceae | Chektherpa (Chorei) | Magura in Karimganj district | Tender leaves Used for recovery of cuts and wounds. The tender leaves are crushed with hand and applied to affected area instantly.
| Plant Name                              | Family            | Common Name       | Location                        | Part Used                  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mimosa pudica Linn.                    | Minosaceae        | Choitaymora       | Tripurapunji in Cachar district  | Whole plant                | The crude extract of the whole plant is mixed with soil enriched in urine and applied externally over skin eruptions and boils.                                                                              |
| Michelia champaca L.                   | Magnoliaceae      | Champa            | Tripurapunji in Cachar district  | Leaves                     | Fresh leaves are soaked in water for 1–2 hours and the water is used for bath to cure skin rashes due to sweating.                                                                                               |
| Ocimum basilicum Linn.                 | Lamiaceae         | Tulsi             | Tripurapunji in Cachar district  | Leaves                     | The crude extract of leaf is mixed with freshly collected honey, given 2–3 times daily for 7 days to treat cough and throat infections                                                                       |
| Pajanelia longifolia (Willd.) K. Schuman | Begoniaceae       | Honurgach         | Magura in Karimganj district    | Leaves and Bark            | The young tender leaves are applied locally to cure nail infections. The dried bark are soaked in water overnight and taken empty stomach to cure jaundice for 4–5 days                                                   |
| Phyllanthus emblica Linn.              | Euphorbiaceae     | Amluki            | Manikbond in Karimganj district | Fruit                      | The crude extract of the fruit is applied 2–3 times daily for 4–5 days to cure oral ulcers. The raw fruit is taken as laxative.                                                                               |
| Premna latifolia Roxb.                 | Verbanaceae       | Malifak           | Cheragi in Karimganj district   | Leaves                     | The crude extract of the leaves is mixed with ginger and taken orally for 2–3 days to cure acute dysentery.                                                                                                 |
| Psidium guajava Linn.                  | Myrtaceae         | Mouram / Sopripata | Magura and Manikbond in         | Leaves                     | 3–4 fresh leaves are extracted with water to yield a dilute crude extract. The extract is given 2–3 times a day in case of jaundice for 7–10 days. The extract is also given empty stomach in case of acute cough.                                     |
| Tamarindus indica Linn.                | Caesalpinaceae    | Teltu             | Tripurapunji in Cachar district  | Fruit                      | The fruit is boiled in water by adding little salt. The hot water is used to take heap bath for 10–20 min to relieve from constipation.                                                                 |
| Terminalia arjuna (Roxb.) Wight. et. Am. | Combretaceae      | Arjun             | Manikbond in Karimganj district | Bark                       | The crude extract of the bark is obtained after crushing and applied in case of poisonous bites.                                                                                                              |
| Tinospora cordifolia (Willd.) Hook. f. & Th. | Menispermaceae    | Vannui            | Cheragi in Karimganj district   | Leaf and Bark              | The extract of the leaf or bark is diluted with water to cure stomach ailments. The bark of the plant is chewed to control diabetes. The extract is occasionally to cure skin infections                                  |
| Tinospora sinensis (Lour.) Metr.       | Menispermaceae    | Amgrush           | Baruatilla in Karimganj district| Bark                       | The bark extract of the plant is given 2–3 times a day for 5–7 days to cure malaria.                                                                                                                      |
| Zingiber rubens Roxb.                  | Zingiberaceae     | Pauphok/ Naukapata| Tripurapunji in Cachar district  | Leaves                     | The leaves are torn into thin strips and rope is made, which is used to tie up parts of snake bite to prevent flow of venom in blood.                                                                     |

**Skin infections**

**Skin infections**

**Cough and throat infections**

**Nail infection and jaundice**

**Oral ulcers and constipation.**

**Dysentery**

**Jaundice and Cough**

**Constipation**

**Poisonous bites**

**Stomach problems, diabetes and skin infections**

**Malaria**

**Snake bite precaution**
The present work has highlighted the potential medicinal plants with diverse array of biological activities used by the Chorei tribe of Southern Assam part of North Eastern India. A total of 53 plants were recorded to be used by the tribe in the treatment of several ailments. The use of ethnomedicinal information has contributed significantly in drug discovery efforts and thus mass screening of plants will provide immense scope in finding new drugs and lead compounds.

### Conflict of interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest

### Acknowledgements

Authors acknowledge University Grants Commission, New Delhi for providing research support in the form of Major Research Project [Grant No.: 39–228/2010 (SR)] to Dr. S. Choudhury to carry out this work. The authors are grateful to all medicine men and people of Chorei tribe residing in Southern Assam of North Eastern India for sharing the valuable information on medicinal uses plants.

### References

[1] Solecki R, Shanidar IV. A Neanderthal flower burial in northern Iraq. *Science* 1975; 190: 880–881.

[2] Lee K–H. Current developments in the drug discovery and design of new drug candidates from plant natural leads. *J Nat Prod* 2004; 67(2): 273–283.

[3] Govaerts R. How many species of seed plants are there? *Taxon* 2000; 50: 1085–1090.

[4] Schipmann U, Leaman DJ, Cunningham AB. Impact of cultivation and gathering of medicinal plants on biodiversity: Global trends and issues. In: FAO (eds.) Biodiversity and ecosystem approach in agriculture, forestry and fishery. Satellite event on the occasion of the ninth regular session and commission on genetic resources for food and agriculture, Rome 2002.

[5] Pushpangadan P. Ethnobiology in India: A status report. Govt. of India, New Delhi 1996.

[6] Farnsworth NR, Akerele O, Bngel AS, Serjarto DD, Guo Z. Medicinal plants in therapy. *Bull WHO* 1985; 63: 956–981.

[7] Fabricant DS, Farnsworth NR. The value of plants used in traditional medicine for drug discovery. *Eiw Health Presp* 2001; 109(S1): 69–75.

[8] Kalita JC, Chakrabarty A, Tanti B. Assesment of antifertility activity of some traditionally used plants by different ethnic communities in three district of Assam, India. *J Herb Med Toxicol* 2011; 5(2): 65–72.

[9] Lokho A. The folk medicinal plants of the Mao Naga in Manipur, North East India. *Int J Sci Res Publ* 2012; 2(6): 1–8.

[10] Rout J, Sanjem Al, Nath M. Traditional medicinal knowledge of the Zeme (Naga) tribe of North Cachar Hill District, Assam on the treatment of Diarrhoea. *Assam Univ J Sci Tech Biol Env Sci* 2010; 5(1): 63–69.

[11] Shil S, Dutta Choudhury M. Ethnomedicinal importance of pteridophytes used by Reang tribe of Tripura. *J Ethnobot Leaflet* 2009; 13: 634–643.

[12] Sonwal R, Barua I. Ethnomedicinal practices among Thai-Khamyangs of Assam, India. *J Ethno Med* 2011; 5(1): 41–50.

[13] Mao AA, Hynniewta TM, Sanjappa M. Plant wealth of North East India with reference t ethnobotant. *Ind J Trad Knowldg* 2009; 8(1): 96–103.

[14] Sen A, Ghosh PD. A note on the ethnobotanical studeis of some pteridophytes in Assam. *Ind J Trad Knowldg* 2011; 10(2): 292–295.

[15] Khongsai M, Saikia SP, Kayang H. Ethnomedicinal plants used by different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. *Ind J Trad Knowldg* 2011; 10(3): 541–546.