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Dr. Muthamma KK
Associate Professor,
Department of Sociology
Government First Grade College, T. Narasipura,
Mysuru, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Muthamma KK
Associate Professor,
Department of Sociology
Government First Grade College, T. Narasipura,
Mysuru, Karnataka, India

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge among the Yerava Tribal Women of Kodagu District

Muthamma KK

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Abstract
The Yerava tribe of Kodagu district, Karnataka, represents one of the region's most culturally distinct yet vulnerable indigenous communities. The Yerava tribes have developed a rich tradition of ethno-botanical knowledge and forest-based livelihoods over generations. This article explores the Yerava women's use of medicinal plants, their traditional subsistence strategies, and the challenges posed by land alienation and socio-economic marginalization. This study is based on primary and secondary data. The research design used for the proposed study is Descriptive Research Design. The area selected for the study is Kodagu District. A total of 390 respondents in the age groups of 18-49 years and above were selected as samples for the study. In the past, Yerava women practiced and relied on traditional medicines. But in recent years, only 3.1 percent of respondents have reported practising traditional medicine; they use different plants, leaves, roots, and bark of trees to prepare medicines. The study observes that 46.7 percent women use home remedies for minor ailments like headache, fever, cold stomach ache, body ache, diarrhea and post-natal period. Drawing from ethnographic studies and recent field data, the research highlights the importance of preserving Yerava indigenous practices for both cultural heritage and sustainable resource management.

Keywords: Women, Ethno-botanical, Medicine, Indigenous, Vulnerable, Knowledge

Introduction
The Yerava tribe of Kodagu district, Karnataka, represents one of the region's most culturally distinct yet vulnerable indigenous communities. These tribes have developed a rich tradition of ethno-botanical knowledge and forest-based livelihoods over generations. Traditionally forest dwellers and agricultural labourers; they have maintained close ties with the natural environment. Yerava women, in particular, play a pivotal role in sustaining traditional livelihoods through their understanding of forest ecology, medicinal plants, food security strategies, and ritual practices. According to the 2011 census, the Yerava population of the district was 26,533 persons, among them 12,967 are male and 13,566 are female.
Traditional Medicine Indigenous people have been using traditional medicines since time immemorial. In India among the rural folk traditional medicine plays a vital role. It is estimated that for their primary health care needs, 80 percent of the people in developing nations and 60 percent of the global population rely on traditional medicines, largely plant medicines Kala et.al (2006)[4]. It is estimated that the traditional healers in India use over 2500 plant species in the preparation of traditional medicine. According to WHO, over 21,000 plant species are being used for their medicinal properties. The tribal and indigenous communities of India were found to be using more than 10,000 species of wild plants for various purposes which include about 8,000 species for medicinal uses Katewa (2004) [5] .Tradition medicines for various diseases are discussed in the areas such as the practice of traditional medicine, home remedies for ailments, uses, botanical names, local names, plants part used and medicinal preparation along with dosages and preparation.

Review of Literature
The Botto people of Ladakh used 53 different species of plants for the treatment of cold, cough, and fever. Various parts of the plants are being used in the treatment of the illness Ballabh *et al*. (2007) [1]. Another study showed that 68 medicinal plants were used for the treatment of diseases such as kidney and urinary disorders among the tribes of Ladakh.

The medicines were used either in tablet or powder form Ballabh *et al*. (2008) [2] The Gaddi Tribes of Jammu& Kashmir have a vast knowledge of ethnomedicine. They used a total of 190 species of medicinal plants to cure of various ailments and diseases. The older Gaddi shepherds had vast knowledge of traditional medicine than the younger generation Dutt *et al*. (2015) [3]

An Ethnobotanical study was done among the tribes of Mysore and Coorg Districts. The 14 tribes used different plants and barks of trees to cure cough, cold, rickets, fever, vomiting, toothache, headache, giddiness and Dysentry Kshirsagar, (2001) [6] .The jenukuruba and kadukuruba tribal women (ethnomedicine such as herbs, leaves and roots) use indigenous medicines as contraceptives Mutharayyappa, (1994) [7] among the jenukuruba women, 40.6 percent used indigenous medicines for preventing pregnancies or postponing births. Only 13.2 percent of women use modern contraceptives. On the other hand, among the kadukuruba women, 24.8 percent used modern methods of contraceptives. Only 6.8 percent used indigenous medicines for preventing or postponing pregnancies. The Yeravas of Kodagu district gave importance to their health as ill health affected their day-to-day earnings. Their exposure to the urban environment has contributed to changing the attitude and practices among the tribes. However, these changes have not restricted them from using traditional methods of treatment. They begin with home remedies and move to traditional medicine, the use of herbal medicine and to resorting to religious practices. When they fail to get a cure by the traditional method, they resort to the modern method of treatment Prabhuswamy, (2012) [9].

The Raji people of Kumaon Himalaya depended on 50 different species of herbal plants to cure physical ailments. Their knowledge and belief in the herbal plants or nature or surroundings are shared and transferred from one generation to another to maintain ethnobiological knowledge Negi *et al* (2002) [8]. Their belief in herbal treatment for centuries is due to the unavailability of health care services in the nearby areas or villages. A similar study was done by Uniyal *et al* (2006) [10] reported that the tribal communities in Chhota Bhangal used 35 different plants for curing diseases. The roots, leaves and aerial parts of the plant (almost 21 diseases). Diseases like stomach ache jaundice and kidney stones were treated using these plants. Due to the absence of a modern healthcare system, these tribes had to depend on medicinal plants to treat diseases.

Objectives

To assess the indigenous knowledge of Yerava Women.

Methodology

This study is based on primary and secondary data. The research design used for the proposed study is Descriptive Research Design. A field survey was done in the villages of Virajpet and Somwarpet taluks, a total of 390 respondents were selected as samples. The respondents in the age groups of 18-49 years and above were selected for the study. Fifteen hamlets/colonies were selected and selections of the hamlets/colonies were chosen using a simple random method.

Research Gap

There are no studies and documentation on indigenous knowledge among the Yerava tribal women. However, systematic social research and documentation regarding the indigenous knowledge and traditional livelihood of Yerava women are needed who are the microscopic minority community in Kodagu. Hence this study aims at filling this gap in social research.

Practice of Traditional Medicine

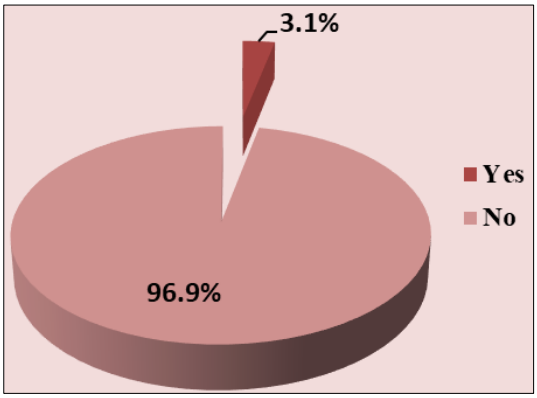

Fig 1: Practice of Traditional Medicine among the respondents N= 390

Study shows that only 3.1 percent practice traditional medicines. These are in the age group of 50 and above. They are of the opinion that traditional medicine is slowly being replaced by modern medicine, the time taken to prepare traditional medicines and the difficulty in gathering ingredients necessary to make these medicines and the lack of interest shown in preparing these medicines by the present generation have contributed to the disappearing of this practice.

Home remedies for ailments

Herbal Medicine is the use of plants. Home Remedies are commonly practiced by most for fever, cold, cough and other small ailments; the medicinal plants for these remedies are mostly available in their surroundings. If these sicknesses are not cured by home remedies they prefer to go to primary health centres for treatment.

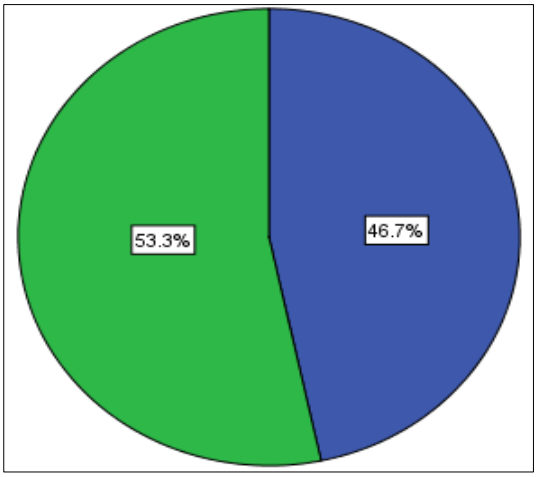

Fig 2: Home Remedies for ailments by the respondents N= 390

The study observes that 46.7 percent of women use home remedies for minor ailments like headache, fever, cold stomach ache, body ache, diarrhea and post-natal period. This medicinal knowledge is gathered orally from word of

mouth from the elderly tribal women. Most of these women have taken these concoctions for a few days and if not cured they have visited the doctors for modern medicine. On the other hand, 53.3 percent of women do not use home remedies for ailments, they prefer modern medicines.

Traditional health practices

Table 1: Traditional medicine used to cure different health ailments

Name(Local/Scientific)	Part Used	Traditional Use/ Aliment Treated
Tulsi (Ocimum sanctum) Thumbe (Leucas aspera)	Leaves	Decoction for coughs, colds and fever
Fever Nut (Guilandinabonduc)	Leaves and Nuts	The leaves and seeds are boiled and the concoction is consumed for high fever thrice daily.
Mango (Mangiferaindica)	Bark	Ground the bark with jeera and curd, is consumed orally in empty stomach thrice a day
Aloe vera	Leaf Inner Gel	Leaf inner gel is consumed for one month to cure ulcers in the stomach or intestine
Indra Pushpa (Thunbergiafragrans) White Florido Vine Flower	Flower	Grind the flower with castor oil and apply externally on sprain
Black Tortoise Shell	Shell	Scabies- Burn tortoise shell powder it, grind garlic and mustard add coconut oil and boil the mixture. Apply on the skin thrice daily.
Nela Nelli (Phyllanthus niruri)	Whole Plant	Used for Jaundice, Liver disorders, Urinary tract stones.

Source: Primary Data

Effectiveness of Traditional Medicines

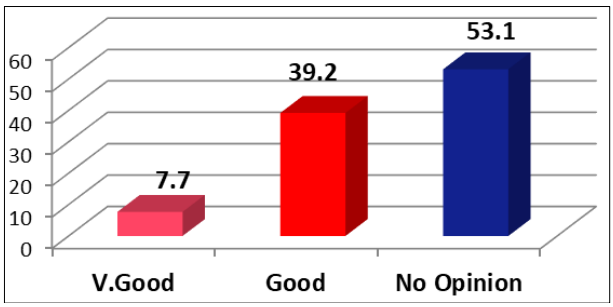

Fig 3: Effectiveness of traditional medicines of the respondents N =390

Traditional Medicines which are practiced by some of the Yerava respondents have good acceptance by most of them. Some women prefer to consume these preparations. There are these respondents who will vouch for the effectiveness of these traditional medicines. Study shows that 7.7 percent of respondents who used traditional medicines opined that it is very effective and 39.2 percent claimed that the traditional medicines are good, but 53.1 percent of respondents have no opinion regarding the effectiveness of traditional medicine as they do not use traditional medicines for sickness.

Findings

- Among Yerava women 93.4 percent were farm labourers
- In recent years only 3.1 per cent practice traditional medicine, they use different plants, leaves, roots, and barks of trees to prepare medicines, these respondents are in the age group of 60 and above.
- 53.3 percent respondents prefer modern medicines.
- 46.7 percent of women use home remedies for minor ailments.
- If the ailments are not cured by traditional method, they resort to modern method of treatment.

Challenges

- Displacement due to forest conservation
- Impact of Modern Education and Migration
- Most of this knowledge is oral and at risk of disappearing without ethno botanical preservation.
- Traditional medicine is slowly being replaced by modern medicine.
- Lacks of interest shown in preparing these medicines by the present generation have contributed to the disappearing of this practice.
- Government health intervention had led to a decline in traditional healing.

Recommendations

- Implementation of Forest Rights Act (2006) for land and resource security.
- Indigenous knowledge systems should be documented and preserved.
- Women's Cooperatives - Support SHGs for herbal medicine, forest produce or eco-tourism.
- Create spaces for cultural education, storytelling and skill sharing.

Conclusion

Yerava tribal women are repositories of valuable indigenous knowledge that forms the foundation of traditional livelihoods in Kodagu. Their practices—ranging from herbal medicine, subsistence agriculture, forest foraging, to craft making—are rooted in centuries of ecological wisdom, cultural resilience, and community solidarity. However, modernization, displacement, and loss of forest access pose serious threats to the continuity of these practices. Many younger Yerava women are adopting modern lifestyles, distancing themselves from traditional occupations and beliefs. To preserve their heritage and empower the Yerava women, it is essential to document, recognize, and integrate their knowledge systems into broader development and conservation policies. Promoting indigenous knowledge through education, local governance, and women-led initiatives can ensure that these traditions remain a vibrant part of cultural landscape, also supporting sustainable livelihoods in a changing world.

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