

Family planning practice: A message from indigenous world

**Nabakumar Duary
Vijay S. Sahay**

The traditional sterilization method exists among the tribal societies. Therefore, it is more important to study among them how they have been controlling, their population with the help of their traditional knowledge of an easy method of sterilization. The present article has been divided into two parts. In the first part the discussion is being made on the preponderance of witchcrafts, witch doctors and the medicinemen in Nicobar Islands. It deals with two villages of Konda Reddis of Bison Hill in Andhra Pradesh, besides a brief discussion of on Archipelago and the tribals of forested hill villages in mainland itself. The second part deals especially with the medicinemen of both the study areas in island and mainland of India with special emphasis on the sterilization of women.

Introduction

It is usually believed that the folk traditional medicines of the primitive people are always blended with superstitions having no scientific base. But our study in the Nicobar Archipelago and in Bison Hill area of Andhra Pradesh strongly support that from the primeval times the people of Nicobar Islands in general and its Teressa and Konda Reddis in Bison Hill in particular are believed and considered to be efficient medicinemen. The folk medicines are prepared by the witch doctors of both the areas for sterilizing a woman forever, without any surgical measure as also without any harmful side-effect. At the outset, the authors like to make it very clear that they do not claim to have discovered any particular folk medicine, but the intensive study of the indigenous medicine strongly suggests that a proper scientific investigations should be carried out in the pharmacopoea of Teressa and Bison Hill area.

Ecology and Tribes

The Nicobar [A] Archipelago consists of twelve islands namely Car Nicobar, Chowra, Teressa, Bompoka, Katchall, Kamorta, Non Cowrie, Kondul, Pulo-milo, Little Nicobar and Great Nicobar, and inhabited by a sizable population of 24,094 (1981 census). The people are referred to as the Nicobarese. The existence of Archipelago has been known to the world since antiquity for its characteristic location along a very ancient and major sea trade route from India to Burma and

the far east. The main food items that the Nicobarese receive from the forest are coconuts, arecanuts, pandanus and variety of fruits, vegetables, animals and birds. Major part of the Nicobarese forest is covered by coconut trees. Coconut is the mainstay of the Nicobarese and it is also the chief item of property. Coconut is also associated with all aspects of Nicobarese life and culture. Not a single part of a coconut tree is left unused.

The Konda Reddis are an important and one of the largest Primitive Tribal Groups (P.T.G) in India. They are mainly concentrated in Andhra Pradesh. Their total population, was 54,685 (1981 Census). They are distributed in the districts of East Godavari, West Godavari and Khamman in this State. The Konda Reddis are known as Pondava Reddi, it literally means Hill Headman. In practical sense these people are mainly forest dwellers and even today 98.94 percent of their population is living in remote, isolated hilly, forested areas. The villages under study, Urinka and Chintapaili are situated on the Bison Hill area and are placed about 20 km away from bus route and other modern amenities. The present tribal group largely occupies the forest region where they live in isolation since early times. And forest is the heart of their traditional life and culture. They possess a few portions of hilly sloped unfertile lands that are used for podu cultivation (slash and burn). Moreover, they depend on subsidiary occupation like daily labour and on forest based economy. These tribal people are isolated from the outside world due to lack of communication and inadequacy of modern educational facilities.

Witchdoctors and Medicinemen

Notwithstanding the vicissitude of times and turmoils of ages the people of the Archipelago have been able to preserve their pristine glory and culture. Owing to geographical isolation, the Nicobarese have always lived in constant fear for spirit (IVI). Despite the fact that a considerable number of them have adopted Christianity, received education and using modern means of communications, fear of IVI still guides all the ceremonies in Nicobars. Witches, of course, witch finders about there and the mind of the people is so largely occupied with superstitions that every man's fortune and sickness are supposed to be spiritually caused. They seek their remedies in special exorcism by means of witch-doctors (MINLUANA).

The witchdoctors are necessarily medicinemen too. They are supposed to possess some spirits at their command who offer proper propitiation and sacrifices and tell about certain specific plants and their whereabouts in the jungle for making folk medicines. The MINLUANA gets in touch with the spirit through the help of scare devils. Before and after the treatment of sick persons the MINLUANA offers a chicken or a pigling to the spirit and also before plucking any plant for

the purpose of folk medicine. In a way of apology the MINLUANA utters as follows, "O plant! I am plucking you for the cure of a person. Please don't be offended and cure the person to whom I apply the medicine"

The number of MINLUANAS is, however, gradually decreasing in all the islands. From the Table we find that maximum number of witchdoctors are found today in Teressa and Chowra. Owing to conversion to Christianity there is no witchdoctor in Car Nicobar. Nevertheless the Car Nicobarese pay high respect to MINLUANA of Teressa and Chowra.

There are also medicinemen in the two villages of Konda Reddis under study. The medicineman is called Vejju, dispensing herbal medicines for village people. During the leisure time of the year the medicinemen collect all medicinal plants and its different part items from surrounding jungle and preserve in their house or under the earth of a courtyard. Sometimes they prepare tablets or/and dust of the plants and keep very safely for common diseases and other ailments also viz. wound, bum pox, sterilization, etc. Moreover, the Konda Reddi have strong belief in the existence of supernatural powers and they worship and sacrifice small domestic animals and birds to Gangamma deity to protect the villagers from the dreadful diseases like cholera, malaria, small pox, chicken pox, etc. (Duary, 1995; 1 4-17). In both the areas under study it is observed that the number of witch doctors or traditional medicineman is gradually decreasing but people's belief on their traditional folk medicines is as strong even today as it happened to be in olden days.

Folkmedicine and Sterilization

The aim of this paper is to highlight the folkmedicine used by the Teressa Islanders and forest dwellers, Konda Reddis. The Island of Teressa is 27 Sq. Kilometer in area and the population constitute approximately 500 souls. The thin density of population and the abundance of the food stuff in the island have made special impact on the islanders. Their every domestic work such as gardening, roof thatching etc. are done by the Chowrians. As a result the Teressans find a lot of leisure. Their time is mostly spent in celebrating reburial festival (Kindrak). Every Teressa tries to learn witchcraft and about their folk medicines.

It was observed that the Teressa women and Konda Reddis like least number of children. But in a few cases Teressa women like to have no child at all. Out of 31 cases in Teressa, it was examined that only four married couples had more than three children, seven had three children, nine had two, five had one child and eight couples had no child at all.

Table 2 indicates that the Teressans have little liking for producing children. It is very common fact that either before producing any child or after producing one or two children a Teressa and Konda Reddi woman gets herself sterilized by taking folk medicines received from the witchdoctors. And such medicine have surprising effect.

Table 2: Married Couples and Distribution of Children

Number of Married Couples	Number of Children
4	5
7	3
9	2
5	1
8	No child at all

The women informants of both the study areas reported that they wanted to get themselves sterilized with two views i 'e. small family and to preserve their beauty. Teressa women of the both community think that if they produce more children they would not be able to draw the attention of men during the festivals. Festivals are organized elaborately in Teressa. It continues for months together. During the festive time men and women consume liquor, sing and dance. On such occasions pre and extra marital relations are abundantly established.

In Teressa, matrimonial ties are found to be very loose. A kind of Oath marriage takes place there. A couple agrees to live together for a certain period without any stress and strain and get divorced especially when a new partner is found on a different occasion. If a child is born by them there is no problem of legitimacy. Teressa women have also right to property. The child may live with any of the partners, since there is no economic burden. The above account indicates why a Teressa woman does not want to have more children for which they get themselves sterilized by folk medicines.

But in case of the Konda Reddi society, sexual relation is more restricted than the Teressa people. Their divorce and remarriage is permissible. Both monogamy and polygamy are also found among them. They have no ceremony in divorce or separation cases. Due to their burning poverty they want to live in small and nuclear type of families. Women are taking folk medicines to sterilize themselves.

Conclusion

The local traditional knowledge in medicinal plants used by the Indian tribes has been getting obliterated gradually due to the growing pressures of population, deforestation and various developmental activities. So, it is high time to preserve the indigenous knowledge scientifically through proper research and promote the techniques of their traditional knowledge among the mass population in general and tribals in particular. Therefore, it is suggested that a proper scientific investigation is carried out regarding sterilization method. We may find a new light in the science of folkmedicines in Teressa and Bison Hill area of Andhra Pradesh.

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1. The location of the Nicobar Islands is at 8.00 N and 94.00 E.
2. The habitat of the Konda Reddy, the Andhra Pradesh is located in between 12°3' 8" and 19°- 55' Northern latitude and 76°- 15' and 84°-45' Eastern longitude in South- East India.