

Ethno-Colour Concept Among Some Tribals Inhabiting in Selected Villages of Ganjam District, Odisha, India

Pradipa Kumar Das

P.G. Department of Bio-Sciences, College of Pharmaceutical Sciences,
Mohuda, Berhampur-760002, Odisha, India
Pradipadas @ gmail.com

Issued: July 01, 2010

Abstract

The present communication reports on 13 ethno-botanically important plants belonging to 12 families being traditionally used by some tribals of Ganjam district, Odisha, for developing various aesthetic colours and their combinations used in household purposes like decoration, heritage rituals, functions, festivals, dye making and traditional health care .

Key words: Ethno-colour, Tribals, Ganjam district, Odisha.

Introduction

The life style of human beings in the present day society complements with two important aspects namely food and food habit which maintains the life ; and clothing, that helps to identify oneself in others vision. The famous Oriya proverb is outstanding in this regard as: “Ape ruchi bhojana, para ruchi bessa” which narrates: the intake of food (bhojana) is according to one’s own (individual) choice and the other ‘bessa’ (one’s set up) purely be based on other’s choice. By ‘others’ it is meant as “yugopojogi” which varies as the orientation is based on the cultural tradition/age. The tribal culture in this regard is very much adding to the subject. In both the items colour plays an important role for acceptance/ rejection of them.

A human culture is the direct reflection of the interactive environment of human society. Thus the ethnic communities (tribals) provide good clue on aspects like ‘colour’ which plays an important role in their every day society. Plants accepted by the ethnic communities is undoubtedly a practical aspect which thrusts upon the importance of them in human life as source for human existence ; two of which are already focused as food and clothing.

Although the knowledge of folk-medicines among the local priests cum Vaidyas (Jani kabirajas) in tribal areas accounts much contribution towards healthcare management, the application of the ethno-colour concept in life styles in this regard cannot be ruled out.

Scientifically colour can be defined as visual expression caused due to a definite wavelength or a group of wavelengths of

light reflected by an object through one or more optical phenomena. The concept of colour in the human mind is as old as the civilization; because the direct impact of colour on human beings can easily be comprehended which may be cognitive. Accordingly some colours induce states of energetic disposition whereas others ensures sink into gloom and degradable status. Colour affects various domains of our life like food, clothing, the domicile status, mobile disposition and recreation. Even, colour inspires one's emotion and structural behavior.

Odisha, a state of enriched tribal culture comprises many tribal habitations. Fortunately, College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Mohuda is situated in a tribal area of Ganjam district includes some indigenous tribal pockets like Kondh and Samuntia. Few excerpts of their cultural life style throw some light on the subject as described in this communication.

Methods

There are six distinct zones of tribals in Indian context (Danda 1996), out of which Odisha state comes under middle Indian zone along with other states like Bihar and West-Bengal which includes about 65 tribes and constitute the major tribal population for India. As per 1981 census, Odisha has about 62 scheduled tribes and sub-tribes (Dash & Padhy, 2006). For the present study, some tribal villages of Ganjam district have been selected.

Ganjam district in Odisha comprises its South-eastern part lies between 18⁰ 46' to 20⁰ 17' North latitude and 83⁰ 48' to 85⁰ 10' East longitude. It is bounded by land mass from three sides and the ocean Bay-of-Bengal on one side. The tribal peoples of this region mostly use indigenous plants along with other raw materials available in their surroundings to prepare different colours. Most of the information incorporated here are collected from Kondh and Samuntia tribe inhabiting in some villages of Kukudakhandi block encompasses Kerandimal hill ranges.

As per 2001 census, total population of this block is 11, 4,258 distributed in 99 villages which include 60% Kondhs and 10% Samuntia tribes. Field studies were conducted in tribal villages namely Chadheimara, Balarampalli, Baniamari, sanakaranjee, Burugaon, Mohuda, Narasinghpur, Vikasapur, Tamana, Kanheiput, Lunighara, Chakundajala and Kumarapura to collect information on the use of plants for colour production. Data on the preparation of different colours and their applications were gathered from indigenous experienced village folks. Local names of the plants and their method of preparation by mixing with other raw ingredients were recorded. The plants so collected, were processed for the herbarial preparation and the herbaria are deposited in herbarium of the Botany department of Berhampur University. The plants were properly identified with the help of floras. The various plant species so collected are arranged alphabetically along with their scientific and vernacular names, family and parts used for preparation of colour are given in a tabular form (Table-1).

Table – 1: List of Plants used in ethno - colour production.

Sl.No	Botanical name	Family	Vernacular name (Oriya)	Parts used
1.	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Fabaceae	Palasa	Flower

2.	<i>Curcuma longa</i> Linn.	Zingiberaceae	Haladi	Stem
3.	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> Linn.	Umbelliferae	Dhania	Leaf
4.	<i>Chrysanthemum coronarium</i> Linn.	Compositae	Sebati	Flower
5.	<i>Delonix regia</i> (Boj. ex Hook) Raf.	Caesalpinaceae	Krushnachuda	Flower
6.	<i>Emblica officinalis</i> Gaertn.	Euphorbiaceae	Aanla	Fruit
7.	<i>Lawsonia inermis</i> Linn.	Lythraceae	Manjuati	Leaf
8.	<i>Lathyrus sativus</i> Linn.	Fabaceae	Bilachana	Fruit
9.	<i>Mentha piperita</i> Linn.	Lamiaceae	Podina	Leaf
10.	<i>Oryza sativa</i> Linn.	Poaceae	Dhana	Seed
11.	<i>Punica granatum</i> Linn.	Puniaceae	Dalimba	Fruit
12.	<i>Spinacia oleracea</i> Linn.	Chenopodiaceae	Palanga	Leaf
13.	<i>Tagetes patula</i> Linn.	Compositae	Gendu/Makamali	Flower

Results

The various methods for different colour production using different plant parts with other ingredients along with their applications as undertaken by the aboriginal tribals of these localities are described as follows:

1. Grey / Cement colour (O- Paunsha barna)

i. Fresh cow dung is mixed well with burnt charcoal ash in adequate proportion upto requirement manually to produce grey or cement colour. Amount of the ash depends on the choice of the user to get desired intensity of it.

ii. Fresh cow dung mixed with incompletely burnt paddy straw ash to produce blackish green or deep grayish green colour.

Concentrated pastes so resulted as above are diluted with water and applied on the walls of the houses by a wrapped cloth comparable with white washings in urban dwellings. Usually performed by the tribal woman folk to

give good look to their houses, aided by folk hand arts using limestone liquid paste.

2. Black colour (O-Kala ranga)

Dried fruits of *Aanla (Embllica officinalis)* boiled with water in an iron vessel container and left overnight, sieved through a cotton cloth to get the black colour extract. As per their desire, the concentrate may be diluted with water and applied over particular sites on walls for wall decorative purpose.

3. Orange colour (O-Kamala ranga)

Equal quantities of dried flower petals of *Palasa (Butea monosperma)* and powdered seed (flour) of *Bilachana (Lathyrus sativus)* mixed thoroughly to get the orange colour, used for decorating interior of houses especially walls of temple spot in the dwellings.

4. Saffron colour (O-Jhilapi ranga barna)

250 gm of dried petals of *Palasa (Butea monosperma)* soaked in half litre of water overnight, sieved through a fine cloth to get saffron colour. Used for decorative during festivals and interior of houses to draw arts / back ground colours.

5. Red colour (O-Lal ranga)

i) About 250 gm of peeled pericarp of *Dalimba (Punica granatum)* boiled in one litre of water for half an hour; kept overnight and filtered by a fine cloth to get red colour extract.

ii) About 200 gm of *Krushnachuda (Delonix regia)* flower petals are soaked in half litre of water overnight, sieved through a fine cloth to get red coloured liquid used for decoration of houses and to impart good look to pulses for easy selling.

6. Bright Orange-red colour (O-Narangi barna)

Two spoonful of *Haldi (Curcuma longa)* powder was mixed with a pinch of lime and few drops of water to get a paste of bright orangish-red colour. It was diluted with water as per requirement before use for decoration of wooden furnitures and interior of houses.

7. Green colour (O-Sagua ranga)

i) Equal volumes of *Mehendi (Lawsonia inermis)* leaf powder and powdered seed (flour) of *Bilachana (Lathyrus sativus)* are mixed together to get green colour, used in marriage ceremonies and other festivals as colour powder.

ii) Equal volumes of *Palanga (Spinacia oleracea)*, *Dhania (Coriandrum sativum)* and *Podina (Mentha piperita)* leaves mixed together and made into a paste with water to get green colour paste or diluted with required quantity of water and filtered through a fine cloth to get deep green colour liquid used for decorating interiors of houses, marriage pendals, and on forehead of females as dots instead of sindur as the symbol of married Hindu females.

8. Yellow colour (O- *Haladia ranga*)

i) Equal volumes of *Haladi* (*Curcuma longa*) powder and *Rice* (*Oryza sativa*) powder mixed in water to give a yellow coloured paste. Used in marriage ceremonies for colouring newly wedded couples.

ii) Dry powdered petals of *Gendu* (*Tegetes patula*) and *Sebati* (*Chrysanthemum coronarium*) are mixed with equal volume of powdered seed (flour) of *Bilachana* (*Lathyrus sativus*), boiled for half an hour and left overnight for use in the morning as yellow colour paste during festivals and marriage ceremonies for pendal and wall decoration.

Discussion

The study revealed that, within the preview of knowledge on ethno-colour concept, there are 13 plant species belonging to 12 families are used in these areas for production of eight described colours. Single plant / plant part or a combination of plants/plant parts along with some common household raw materials are described for production of different colours. Techniques of developing colours from natural sources are quite interesting as these are ecofriendly, non-toxic, aesthetic, and durable. While survey it is noticed that, most of the houses of villages including *Kotha ghora* are externally painted with grayish black colour decorated by hand arts drawn from white colour paste of lime stone. Interior of houses are painted with light green colour. Use of these cow dung based colours keeps the environment sacred hygienic and free from mosquitoes and other insects. Naturally green colour conveys vitality, tranquility, hope, freshness balance, and harmony, which are quite observed. It is seen that in various festivals, marriage ceremonies, rituals etc they use their own prepared colours from natural sources instead of synthetic colours.

From ancient times to the present the colour of nature have provided a calming and invigorating stimulates to our bodies and minds, enhancing our emotions, speech and nervous system, the reds, blues, greens, yellows and whites of trees, flowers and earth help to inspire and regenerate our energy. All colours of nature are highly evocative. Today, life is complicated and confusing and our minds can become unsettled and weighed down by work, daily activities and struggles. So we take vacations each year to rest and travel, to go to the mountains or seashore to regenerate ourselves. It brings balance to our minds. Tribals being the inhabitants of natural forests by birth, this concept of colour are reflected well in every sphere of their life activities. For this indigenous knowledge of colour concept coupled with ethno-medicines, tribals who live far away from the so called civilized society are fortunate enough they do not have acquired infectious diseases, oftenly suffer from water borne diseases, and malnutrition due to lack of proper sanitation and poverty. However, application of these natural colours in their normal life activities forces them to conserve nature by maintaining those useful plants within their vicinity either as live boundaries around their houses, as orchards or at village periphery, which gives natural protection to all villagers from the attack of many epidemics, mosquito borne diseases, skin infections etc. this is one of the reason for which the prevalence of many acute diseases like diabetes, anxiety, hypertension, tuberculosis, bronchitis, neuritis etc. in tribal communities is very low than the urbans. Tribals are also very much happy and satisfied to be in harmony with the natural colours.

So, this traditional knowledge of tribals on colour concept is of immense useful for the betterment of urban communities by proper application in their day to day life activities, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, beverages, heritage rituals, functions, celebrations etc by avoiding toxic and harmful chemical colours as far as possible in order to

establish a healthy society. Further survey in this line dealing with other community will definitely reveal a quite good amount of information on use of many other plants for colour production, which can be implemented in colour industries, cosmetic industries and pharmaceutical industries to substitute toxic synthetic colours.

Acknowledgement

The author is extremely thankful to Prof. S.K. Dash, Head, P.G.Dept. of Biosciences, C.P.S., Mohuda for critical evaluation of the manuscript and the tribal priests & resource persons for providing valuable information during the course of investigation.

References

Brahmam, M. & Saxena, H.D. 1994,1995,1996. *The Flora of Orissa*, Vol. I – IV, R.R.L. &

Orissa Forest Development Corporation Ltd.Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

Danda, A.K. 1996. *Tribal Ethnography, Monograph 5*, I.C.S.S.R, India.

Dash, S.K. & Padhy, S.N., 2006. Review on ethnomedicines for diarrhoea diseases from Orissa:

Prevalence versus culture, *J. Hum. Ecol.*, 20 (1): 59-64.