

CHAPTER 5

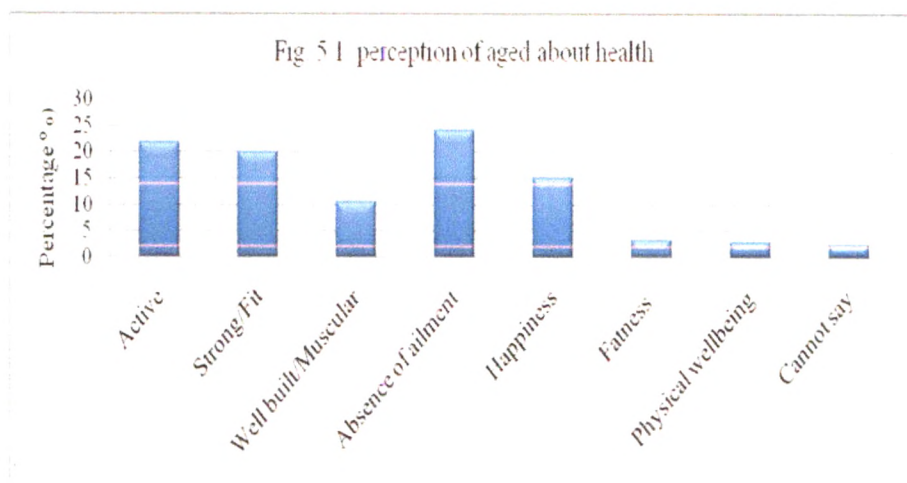
PERCEPTION OF HEALTH AND NATURE OF TREATMENT

Health is a prerequisite for human development and is an essential component for the well being of mankind. The health problems of any community are influenced by interplay of various factors including social, economic and political ones (Mojumdar et al., 2003). The common beliefs, customs, practices related to health and disease in turn influence the health seeking behavior of the community.

The definition of health underscores the important contributions to health that are made outside the formal medical care and public health systems. For both individuals and populations, health depends not only on medical care but also on other factors including individual's behavior and genetic makeup as well as social and economic conditions of individuals and communities. The belief, traditions and customs handed down through many generations usually play a major role in determining individual and community health care in most of the Indian societies. In many communities, health is a product of many factors and many segments of the community which can contribute to and share responsibility for its protection and improvement. The concept of health varies from one society to another, especially in case of less advanced societies where the concept of health does not necessarily depend on the clinical symptoms or afflictions but is a functional one (Roy, 1991).

Table 5.1**Perception of aged about health**

Perception of Health	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Active	70	28.0	39	15.6	109	21.8
Strong/Fit	59	23.6	41	16.4	100	20.0
Well built/Muscular	25	10.0	27	10.8	52	10.4
Absence of ailment	31	12.4	90	36.0	121	24.2
Happiness	39	15.6	37	14.8	76	15.2
Fatness	12	4.8	04	1.6	16	3.2
Physical wellbeing	09	3.6	05	2.0	14	2.8
Cannot say	05	2.0	07	2.8	12	2.4
Total	250		250		500	

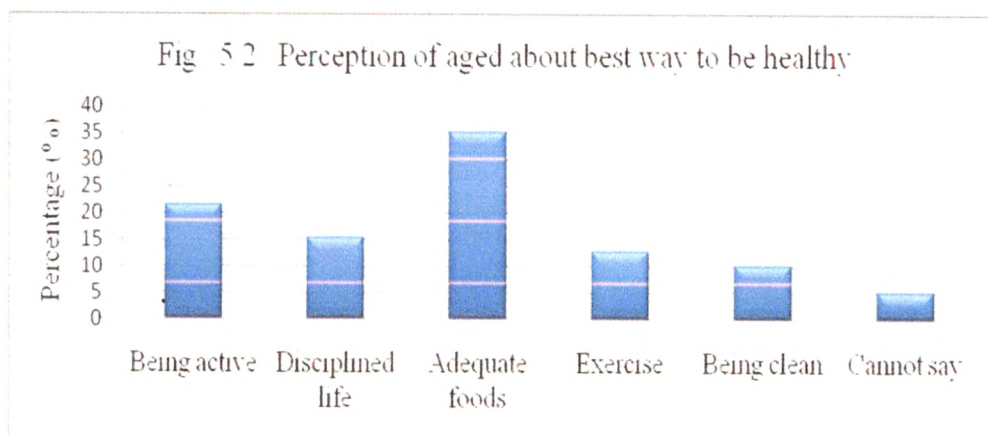


The table 5.1 shows the perception of health of the aged. Most of the aged Kaibartas think that the persons who have no disease are healthy. It is found that out 500 aged, 24.2% answered that health means the absence of disease. But according to

21.8% good health means to be active; 20.0% think that it is strong body; for 10.4% muscular body means good health, 15.2% think that those who are happy are healthy; according to 3.2% Kaibartas fat people are healthy; for 2.8% it is physical well-being and 2.4% have no idea about actual meaning of health. But sex wise the concept of health is different. Most of the aged males think that health or healthy persons are those who are always active (28.0%). On the other hand the aged females (36.0%) think that those who have no disease may be called healthy.

Table 5.2
Perception of aged about best way to be healthy

Ways to become healthy	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Being active	60	24.0	47	18.8	107	21.4
Disciplined life	44	17.6	33	13.2	77	15.4
Adequate foods	79	31.6	97	38.8	176	35.2
Exercise	39	15.6	25	10.0	64	12.8
Being clean	22	8.8	29	11.6	51	10.2
Cannot say	06	2.4	19	7.6	25	5.0
Total	250		250		500	



The table 5.2 shows the perception of the aged persons about the best way to be healthy. Most of the aged (35.2%) have the concept that the adequate and good foods keep a person more healthy. 21.4% think that the persons who are active in daily life are healthier than the others. For good health, a person should be active or otherwise a healthy person can live an active life. According to 15.4% a discipline life; for 12.8% regular exercises and for 10.2% neat and clean living conditions may keep a person healthy.

Table 5.3

Perception of illness and cause of illness of the aged

Illness refers to	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Presence of ailments	129	51.6	107	42.8	236	47.2
Weakness	43	17.2	75	30.0	118	23.6
Physical discomfort	28	11.2	33	13.2	61	12.2
Sadness/Mental discomfort	09	3.6	05	2.0	14	2.8
Laziness/Inactive	37	14.8	21	8.4	58	11.6
Don't know	04	1.6	09	3.6	13	2.6
Total	250		250		500	
Causes of Illness						
Laziness/Bad habits	06	2.4	02	0.8	08	1.6
Irregularity	20	8.0	17	6.8	37	7.4
Mental tension/Unhappy	07	2.8	04	1.6	11	2.2
Food habit/wrong food	143	57.2	149	59.6	292	58.4
Being dirty	46	18.4	55	22.0	101	20.2
Seasons change	15	6.0	10	4.0	25	5.0
Polluted water/air	06	2.4	03	1.2	09	1.8
Don't know	07	2.8	10	4.0	17	3.4
Total	250		250		500	

The table 5.3 shows the perception of illness and causes of illness of the aged persons. Most of the aged said that the presence of ailments (47.2%) causes illness. Among them 58.4% think that the main cause of suffering from different types of diseases of a person is the bad food habits. If a person does not take the right food in right time then he may suffer from different types of diseases. Some of them (1.6%) think that another cause of illness may be laziness or bad habits. For 7.4% irregular and lazy life may be the cause of disease; 2.2% think that mental tension and unhappiness may cause disease; for 20.2% dirty surroundings cause disease; for 5.0%, it is due to seasonal change and 1.8% think that polluted air and water may cause a disease condition of a person.

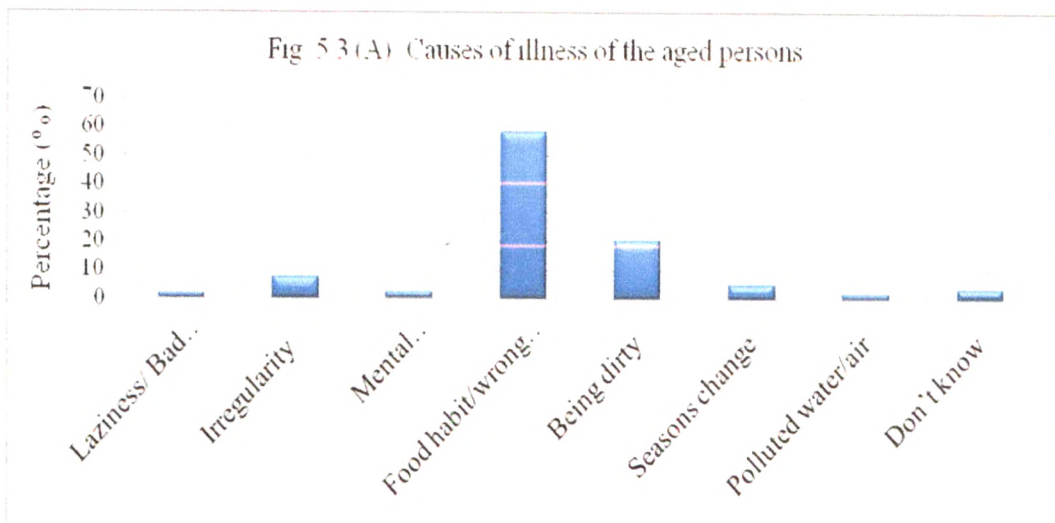
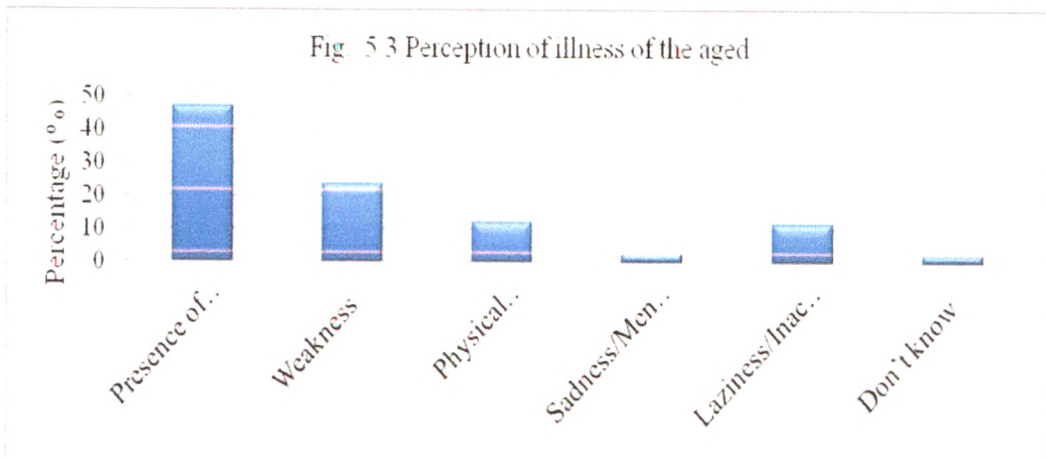
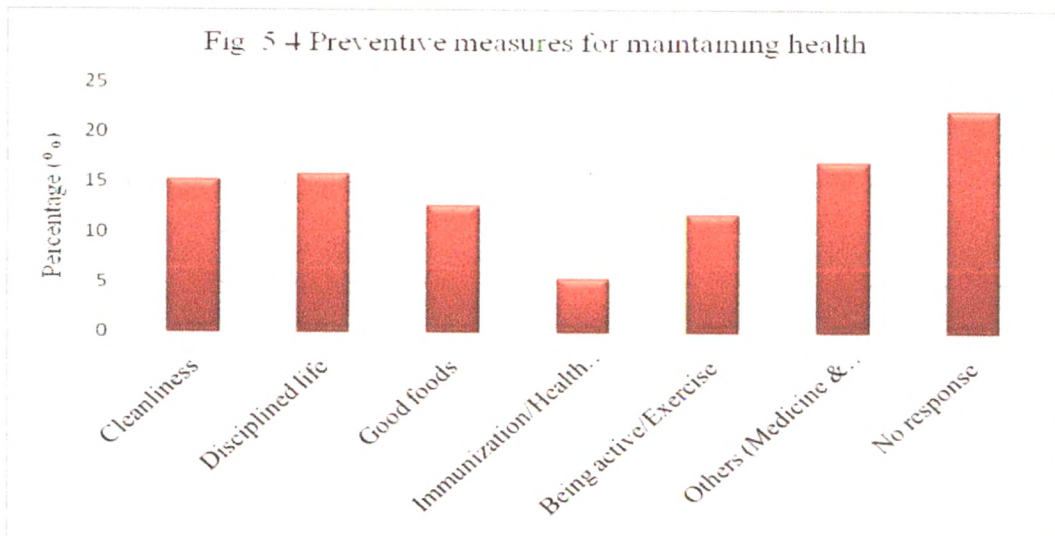


Table 5.4**Preventive measures for maintaining health of the aged**

Preventive measures	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Cleanliness	29	11.6	47	18.8	76	15.2
Discipline life	49	19.6	30	12.0	79	15.8
Good food	37	14.8	26	10.4	63	12.6
Immunization/Health programme	22	8.8	05	2.0	27	5.4
Being active/Exercise	44	17.6	15	6.0	59	11.8
Others (Medicine & proper rest)	30	12.0	55	22.0	85	17.0
No response	39	15.6	72	28.8	111	22.2
Total	250	100	250	100	500	100



The table 5.4 shows the preventive measures of the aged persons for maintaining their health. From the table it is seen that according to the male Kaibartas a disciplined life may prevent from all types of diseases or it is the best way to keep a person healthy. But most of the aged females have no idea about preventive measures for maintaining their health.

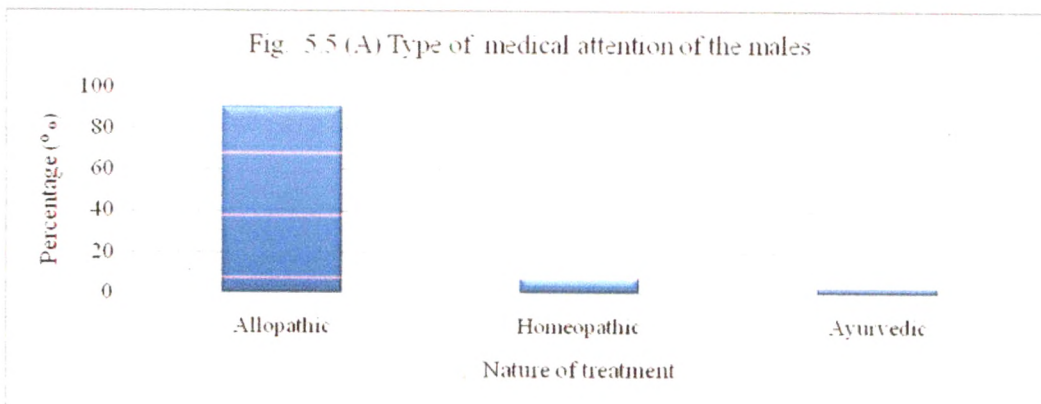
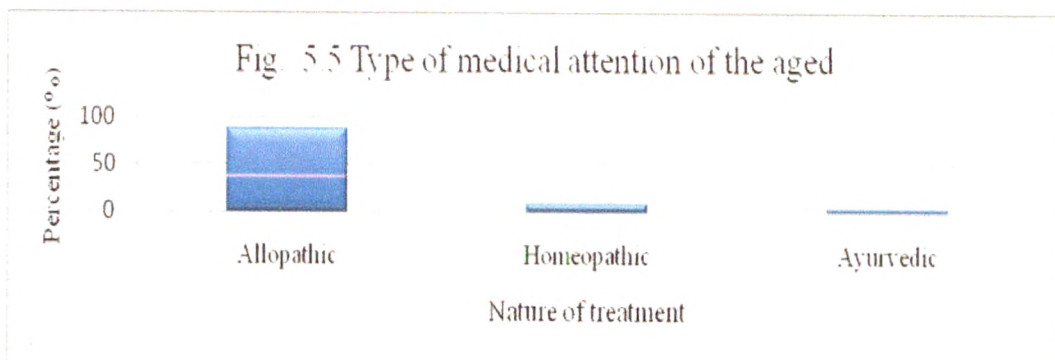
Nature of treatment

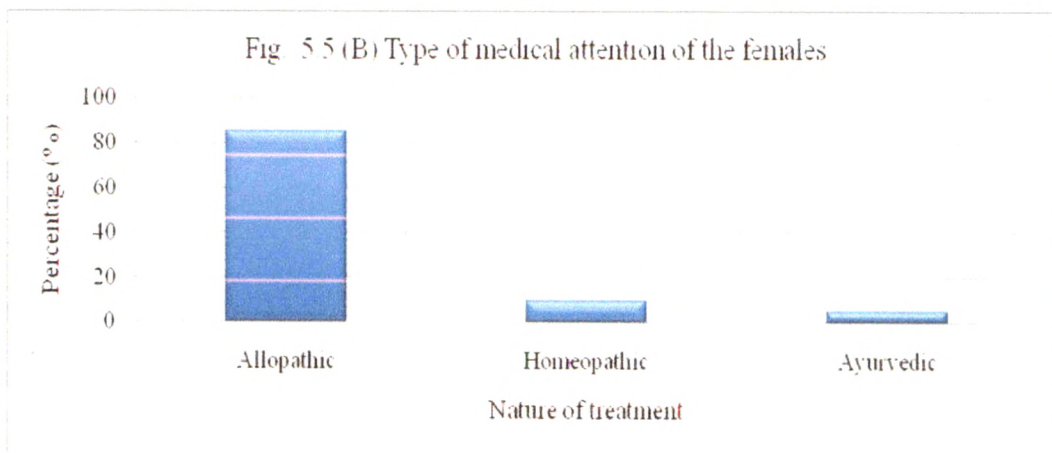
Disease is regarded as an important factor in the adjustment process of the old people. In case of a diseased person, ageing produces a wide range of handicaps. Thus

to get rid of these disease one must undergo medical attention. Regarding nature of treatment it is found that out of 500 (male & female) individuals, 87.6% persons consult allopathic doctors and use allopathic medicines; 8.6% use homeopathic medicines and 3.8% persons consult ayurvedic doctors and use ayurvedic medicines for their various types of diseases (Table 5.5). It is also recorded that for major diseases they consult allopathic, homeopathic or ayurvedic doctors but for minor diseases like digestive disorder, arthritis, skin diseases etc. they use the traditional herbal medicines.

Table 5.5
Type of medical attention of the aged

Nature of treatment	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Allopathic	226	90.4	212	84.8	438	87.6
Homeopathic	18	7.2	25	10.0	43	8.6
Ayurvedic	06	2.4	13	5.2	19	3.8
Total	250	100	250	100	500	100





Use of traditional medicine

Traditional medicine is the knowledge, skills and practice of holistic health care, recognized and accepted for its role in the maintenance of health and the treatment of diseases. It is based on indigenous theories, beliefs and experiences that are handed down from generation to generation (WHO, 2000)

Cultural and philosophical background of traditional medicine

Traditional medicine is a part of the cultural heritage of each society. Most traditional systems of medicine have evolved as part of particular culture and life style.

However, many traditional systems of medicine share common characteristics,

- ❑ The belief that life is the union of body, emotions, mind and soul or spirit, and health is a state of balance of several opposing aspects within the human body as well as between the human body and the environment. Illness occurs when an individual falls out of balance, physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually.
- ❑ Traditional medicine applies a holistic approach to diagnosis and treatment. It considers a person in his or her totality within an ecological context and usually will not simply look after the sick part of the body as well as providing treatment, practitioners of traditional medicine often give advice on lifestyles and healthy behaviour.
- ❑ Traditional medicine is based on the needs of individuals. Different people may receive different treatment even if they suffer from the same disease according to

modern medicine. Traditional medicine believes that each individual has his or her own constitution and social circumstances which result in different reactions to the “causes of diseases” and treatment.

The different philosophical backgrounds and origins of traditional and modern medicine are still an obstacle to mutual respect and understanding and can lead to reluctance to initiate activities that support the use of traditional medicine. The potential of traditional medicine to improve health and health services, as well as its possible role in social and economic development, is neglected in many countries.

Social and cultural anthropology are mainly concerned with the way of life of indigenous communities. However, such studies are seldom integrated into the orthodox health care curriculum. Medical schools often consider the culture of indigenous communities to be based on mythology and folklore. The lack of understanding of indigenous ways of life by health practitioners may result in health interventions that are not accepted by indigenous communities and hence to poor public health care compliance. It may also lead to the adulteration or virtual eradication of health-related cultural heritage. The integration of traditional medicine into the mainstream health care delivery system is a challenge to countries and areas where modern forms of healing predominate. Nevertheless, it is critical that mainstream health care providers be aware of the culture of indigenous people and respect their beliefs and practices (www.wpro.who.int/internet/resources.ashx/RCM/Rc52-07.pdf).

Different types of herbs and plants used by the Kaibartas

1. Neem

Local name: Neem

English name: Neem

Botanical name: *Azadirachta indica*

Use of parts: Leaves and stem

- (i) Neem leaves are fried and taken with rice for curing malaria.

- (ii) For skin diseases like prickly heat, fungal infections etc., the neem leaves are boiled in water and that water is mixed with cold water and is used for bath.
- (iii) Smoke of neem leaves is used as mosquito repellent.
- (iv) The tender stems of neem are used for cleaning teeth and to get relief from problems related to gum and teeth.

2. Brahmi

Local name: Brahmi

English name: Thyme-leaved Gratiola

Botanical name: *Bacopa monnieri*

Use of parts: Leaves, stem

- (i) It is taken for strengthening the nerves.
- (ii) Juice of Brahmi leaves is consumed to sharp memory and to get relief from headache and rheumatism.

3. Tulsi

Local name: Tulsi

English name: Sacred basil

Botanical name: *Ocimum sanctum*

Use of parts: Leaves

- (i) Tulsi leaves mixed with honey is taken to get relief from cough.

4. Chirata

Local name: Chirata

English name: Indian wormwood

Botanical name: *Swertis chirata*

Use of parts: Leaves

- (i) A paste of chirata and ginger is taken with a little salt to get relief from stomach pain, diarrhea and weakness.
- (ii) The paste of leaves are applied to get relief from itching.

5. Morapat

Local name: Morapat

English name: Jute

Botanical name: *Corchorus capsularis*

Use of parts: Leaves

- (i) Tender leaves of jute is smashed and mixed with hot ghee and applied over the affected area to get relief from strain and muscular pain.
- (ii) Dry leaves are soaked in cold water for a while and after that leaves are mixed with a little salt and mustard oil and is taken with rice to prevent malaria.

6. Pudina

Local name: Pudina

English name: Mint

Botanical name: *Mentha spearmint*

Use of parts: Leaves

- (i) Leaves are consumed to get relief from stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhoea.
- (ii) To get relief from acidity and indigestion a paste of mint leaves is taken with rice.

7. Bhimkol

Local name: Bhimkol

English name: Giant banana

Botanical name: *Musa gigantea*

Use of parts: Fruits and flowers

- (i) The fruits (banana) are consumed to get relief from diarrhea and dysentery. It is also used when a person feels weak.
- (ii) The pulp of ripe banana is soaked in cold water for a while and that water is consumed to get relief from acidity or stomach pain.
- (iii) The curry of banana flower is consumed and it is full of iron.

8. Narshing

Local name: Narshing

English name: Curry leaf

Botanical name: *Murraya koeningii*

Use of parts: Leaves

- (i) A curry is prepared from narshing leaves and it is used for curing stomach problem, loose motion etc.
- (ii) Soup of narshing leaves is consumed with rice for stamina and vigor.

9. Bhadeilata

Local name: Bhadeilata

English name: Slender shurb

Botanical name: *Pacderia foetida*

Use of parts: Leaves and stem

- (i) Juice as well as curry of tender leaves and stem are consumed to get relief from diarrhea and dysentery

10. Jesthamadhu

Local name: Jesthamadhu

English name:

Botanical name: *Glycyrrhiza glabra*

Use of parts: stem (bark)

- (i) The small pieces of bark of jesthsmadhu are consumed for getting relief from cough.

11. Ada

Local name: Ada

English name: Ginger

Botanical name: *Zingiber officinale*

Use of parts: stem

- (i) Ginger is used in common cough.
- (ii) Ginger with a little salt is used to get relief from stomach pain.

12. Haldhi

Local name: Haldhi

English name: Turmeric

Botanical name: *Curcuma longa*

Use of parts:

- (i) Juice of raw haldi is consumed to get relief from stomach pain

- (ii) Haldhi paste is applied in cuts and burn injuries.
- (iii) Juice of haldhi is consumed every morning in empty stomach for curing liver problem.

13. Akon

Local name: Akon

English name: Akonda

Botanical name: *Calotropis gigantea*

Use of parts: leaves

- (i) In back pain or muscles pain, the akon leaf is heated on fire and hot fomentation is given in the affected area.

14. Jetuka

Local name: Jetuka

English name: Henna

Botanical name: *Lawsonia inermis*

Use of parts: leaves

- (i) Parts of henna leaves is applied locally to get relief from boils, burns and skin diseases.
- (ii) The paste of henna leaves is applied for relief in headache, burning sensation in feet etc.
- (iii) The paste of henna is used in hair to control hair fall.

**A list of some important medicinal plants & herbs used the aged persons with
their botanical name and use**

Sl.No	Local/ Assamese name	English Name	Botanical Name	Use of parts	Diseases
1	Ada	Ginger	<i>Zinger officinale</i>	stem	Common cold, Cough, liver problem, indigestion etc
2	Tulasi	Holly Basil	<i>Ocimum Sanctum</i>	leaves	Common cold, Cough,
3	Pachatiya	Indian privet	<i>Vitex negundo</i>	leaves	To get relief from stomach pain.
4	Doranbon	Black wheat	<i>Fagopyum esculantum</i>	leaves	Liver problem,
5	Amlakhi	Indian gooseberry	<i>Emblica officinalis</i>	fruit	Stomach problem, liver problem, hair falling
6	Dalim	Pomegranate	<i>Punica grantum</i>	fruits	Dysentery,
7	Padina	Mint	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	leaves	Dysentery, liver problem, anemia,
8	Manimuni	Indian pennywort	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	leaves	Dysentery, loss of memory,
9	Bhedailota	King tonic	<i>Paederia foetida</i>	leaves	Liver problem, indigestion
10	Brahmi	Brahmi	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i>	Leaves. stem	Loss of memory, headache
11	Pategaja	Acid plant	<i>Bryophyllum pinnatum</i>	leaves	Kidney problem, urinary problem,
12	Chirayata	Chirayata	<i>Swertia coirata</i>	leaves	Itching, malaria,
13	Akangach	Madar plant	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	leaves	Joint pain,
14	Narasingha	Curry leaves	<i>Murraya koenigii</i>	leaves	Chronic ulcers, liver problem,
15	Jetuka	Henna	<i>Howsania innimiolin</i>	leaves	Hair falling,
16	Bhimkol	Bhimkal	<i>Musa sapientun</i>	Fruit	Weakness, liver problem
17	Arjun gach	Arjun tree	<i>Terminalia arjun</i>	Bark	High blood pressure, anemia,
18	Dobariban	Scutch grass	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	leaves	Bleeding, cuts
19	Amita	Papaya	<i>Carica papaya</i>	fruit	Acidity, heart burn, constipation, liver problem
20	Mahanim	Margosa	<i>Azadiracta indica</i>	leaves	Malaria, itching