

Review Article

Traditional ethnomedicinal practices for gynecological disorders among the Gond tribe of Chhattisgarh: a regional perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Gond tribe, one of the largest tribal communities in India, is predominantly concentrated in Chhattisgarh, particularly in forest villages. Known for their rich cultural heritage and deep connection to nature, the Gonds rely heavily on the forests for their livelihood, including food, medicine, and materials for daily use. Traditional knowledge plays a crucial role in their healthcare, especially in addressing women's health issues. The Gond community has preserved its ancient practices of folk medicine, using a variety of medicinal plants to treat gynecological disorders such as menstrual irregularities, reproductive health concerns, and postpartum issues. This study focuses on the ethno-medicinal plants used by the Gond tribe for women's health in regions like Bilaspur, Gariyaband, Korba, and Saraipali. Through field surveys and interviews with local healers and community members, information was gathered on 34 plant species traditionally used for gynecological problems. Detailed data was compiled, including botanical names, plant families, local names, parts used, and medicinal properties. The Gonds utilize a diverse range of plants, preparing specific remedies for different gynecological issues, including menstrual disorders, fertility challenges, and menopause symptoms. Despite the availability of modern healthcare, these traditional remedies continue to be highly valued for their effectiveness. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge and the need for conserving these valuable plant resources. It advocates for integrating traditional medicine with modern healthcare systems to improve women's health outcomes in the region and ensure the sustainability of this ethno-botanical knowledge.

Keywords: Ethno-medicine, Gynecological disorders, Gond tribe, Chhattisgarh, Traditional medicine, Medicinal plants

INTRODUCTION

Chhattisgarh is known for its tropical moist deciduous forests and tropical dry deciduous forests. It has unique biogeography and vast genetic plant diversity in the area of Protected forests (24036.100 sq.km.) and reserved forests (25782.167 sq.km.).¹ Chhattisgarh is endowed by nature with an abundance of healing plants. In the state of Chhattisgarh, forests covering 44% of its land area are home to a wide variety of plants with significant ethnomedicinal value. Since ancient times, many tribal people have lived in Chhattisgarh's forests, where the

forest's natural resources have provided for their medical needs.

A vast majority of the tribal populations in Chhattisgarh live in rural areas and mainly belong to Gond tribes. Gond is the dominant tribe of Chhattisgarh as well as of India. The Gonds are one of the largest non-Aryan and Dravidian forest tribe of India; they have been concentrated in almost all regions of Chhattisgarh.² Like other tribal communities of the world, the Gond tribe of Chhattisgarh, are totally dependent on the forest and its produce for their livelihood. Gond tribes have their own system of treatment or cure of any ailments. Their medical system consists of traditional

herbal remedies, magico-religious acst and modern medical facilities available from nearby village. Gonds approach traditional healers for their primary health care needs, due to ease of availability, accessibility and affordability.³ They have great faith towards traditional system of medicine and traditional healers. Gonds rely on medicine procured from plant. The Gond tribes of Chhattisgarh, possess a rich tradition of ethnobotany, particularly in the realm of treating various health issues, including gynecological disorders.⁴ Their knowledge of local plants and their medicinal properties has been passed down through generations, often forming the basis for traditional healing practices.⁵ The Gond tribe of Chhattisgarh, one of India's largest indigenous groups, has a rich cultural heritage that includes the use of local flora for treating a variety of ailments.

Gynecological problems have historically presented serious health risks, especially for rural and indigenous people with limited access to traditional medical care. Ethnomedicine, the study of traditional medicinal practices, offers valuable insights into the healing systems of various cultures, including gynecological issues. Ethnogynecology is a developing field that treats conditions such as abortion, menstruation issues, menopause syndrome, morning sickness, leucorrhoea, infertility, and delivery issues.⁶⁻⁸ Tribes have their own natural/spiritual therapies to treat a wide range of gynaecological problems from menstrual pain, to menopause and delivery.^{9,10} In many ethnic remedies, using whole plants as medication is a frequent practice. Traditional medical professionals think that this can increase the drug's effectiveness.¹¹

Indigenous ethano-botanical knowledge of tribal medicinal plants is a cultural heritage, an economically significant scientific resource that should be documented, protected, developed. Identification of these ethnomedical herbs and dissemination of this indigenous knowledge are crucial for the betterment of society as a whole.¹²

Ethnobotanical knowledge is currently in danger of disappearing. As the habitats of many valuable plants are destroyed by changes in land use brought on by urbanization and senior traditional healers pass away without passing on their knowledge. In a culture that is changing quickly, the loss of traditional medical knowledge is as irrevocable as the extinction of plant species. In order to prevent much of this from disappearing or before the locals give up using the plants for traditional medicine, efforts should be done to chronicle the therapeutic uses of the plants.

This manuscript aims to identify and document the ethnomedicinal plants utilized by the Gond tribe for addressing gynecological disorders. By exploring the intersection of traditional knowledge and plant-based remedies, we seek to highlight the significance of these practices in promoting women's health within the community.¹³

METHODS

Study area

Data for this study was gathered at random from several regions of the state of Chhattisgarh. The geographical coordinates of Chhattisgarh are 8.40 to 83.33 east longitude and 17 to 23.7 degrees north latitude. Villages of different regions (Karsiwa, Lohari and Parasi, Tehsil of Marwhi, Bilaspur district); (Andora, Badmar and Chikhli, Tehsil of Bindranavagarh, Gariyaband district); (Botarada, Kalgamar and Mahora, Tehsil of Kartala, Korba district); (Gerra, Kalidarha and Konkadi, Tehsil of Sarapali, Mahasamund district) of Chhattisgarh State were covered. The present manuscript concentrates on the customary medicines used for gynecological conditions by the Gond women from different region of Chhattisgarh.

Data collection

The ethnomedical data was gathered from a number of sources, including, literature review, field survey, interview with the locals, and ethano botanical surveys in order to identify and document the different ancient folk medicinal plants and their preparations used by Gond tribes of different region of Chhattisgarh for treating gynaecological disorders. The data was analyzed by comparing the similarities and differences in the treatment methods. The investigation reveals the plant species' local name, the portion of the plant that traditional healers use, and the therapeutic approach used by various Gond tribes in Chhattisgarh. The botanical names of the species are used as a scientific means of identification.

RESULTS

We gathered and examined information on the medicinal plants that the Gond tribes of Chhattisgarh's diverse regions used to treat a range of gynecological problems. The utilization and enumeration of these have been described in Tables 1-4. According to the current research, indigenous women in the study area have a strong belief in traditional medicine. They appear to rely on plants to treat a wide range of illnesses and gynecological ailments that affect them, such as leucorrhea, sterility, menstruation problems, urinary disorders, conception disorders, and abortion.¹⁴ Traditionally, people rely on herbal remedies recommended by elderly women (chief trainers) or knowledgeable village medicine men instead of visiting a doctor or clinic.

It has been noted that Gond of Gariyaband used a decoction of Ashoka root, Arjuna bark, Rasna root, and giloy to treat irregular menstruation. The Gonds of Bilaspur use Nirgundi (Figure 1b) for menstrual disorders and restoration of fertility, Gonds of Korba region use dried rhizomes of Ratanjot, while Gonds of Saraipali use stems of Raktmahajaal during the menstrual period to treat sterility.

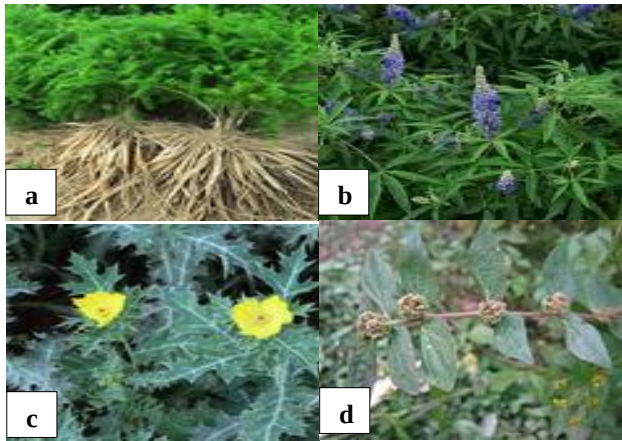


Figure 1: Images of a few common medicinal plants
(a) Satavar, (b) Nirgundi, (c) Bhatkatai, and (d) Dudhi.

Chirchira is used for easy delivery by the Gond of Gariyaband whereas leaves of Satavar (Figure 1a) and

Sitaphal and seedlings of Charota are used by Gond of Bilaspur. For the treatment of Leucorrhoea, Gonds of the Korba region use Bans (leaves), Gonds of Gariyaband use Dudhi (leaves) and Ashoka (bark), Gonds of Bilaspur use Dudhi and Bhatkatai (Figure 1c and d) (leaves) along with Kulthi (seed) while Gonds of Korba use Ramdatun (root) for the same. However, the root of Ramdatun is used for treating gonorrhoea disease (STD) by the Gonds of Saraipali region. Impotency is treated using Kali musli (root) and (tuber) by the Gonds of Bilaspur and Korba, while Kismis (fruit) is used by Gonds of Saraipali. Anantmool (root) is used for treating urinary disorders by Gond tribe of Bilaspur region whereas Gond tribe of Korba preferred Lajwanti (whole plant) for treatment of the same.

Masbandhi (root) is used for abortion by Gond tribe of Gariyaband while Sitaphal (leaves) is used for treating abortion by Gonds in Bilaspur region while Chirayata (whole plant) is used by Gonds of Saraipali region for treating similar conditions.

Table 1: Medicinal flora of Bilaspur: Gond tribe applications and uses.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
1	Easy delivery	Common name - Chir-chira, Family – Amaranthaceae, botanical name – <i>Achyranthus aspera</i> Linn, used – root	Pregnant women who experience difficult deliveries can benefit from a decoction made with water and ground roots, both fresh and dried.
2	Menstrual disorders	Common name – Nirgundi, Family – Verbenaceae, botanical name – <i>Vitex negundo</i> , used – root	Taking one teaspoon of powdered young root mixed with milk is suggested to potentially support fertility.
3	Impotency	Common name – Kali musli, Family – Amaryllidaceae, botanical name – <i>Curculigo orchioides</i> , used – root	The powdered tuberous roots of the plant are traditionally consumed with milk as a tonic to support impotence.
4	Leucorrhoea	Common name – Dudhi, Family – Euphorbiaceae, botanical name – <i>Euphorbia hirta</i> , used – leaves	To cure leucorrhea, an extract made from crushed leaves is taken orally once daily in the morning together with honey for a duration of one month.
		Common name – Bhatkatai and Satyanasi, Family – Papaveraceae, botanical name – <i>Argemone Mexicana</i> , used – leaves	Juice of leaves is given in leucorrhoea.
		Common name – Kulthi, Family – Leguminosae, botanical name – <i>Dolichos biflorum</i> , used – seeds	For leucorrhoea, decoction of seeds is taken orally.
5	Easy delivery	Common name – Satavar, Family – Liliaceae, botanical name – <i>Asparagus racemosus</i> , used – leaves	Antioxidant properties are excellent. ¹⁵ For a smooth delivery, two teaspoons of leaf juice each day are administered during pregnancy.
		Common name – Sitaphal, Family – Annonaceae, botanical name – <i>Annona squamosa</i> , used – leaves	Leaf decoction is consumed for easy delivery.
		Common name – Charota, Pawar, Chaparwa, Family – Caesalpiniaceae, botanical name – <i>Cassia tora</i> , used – seedling	Pregnant women chew the young seedlings of the plants after washing them to facilitate a quick and smooth delivery.
6	Abortion	Common name – Sitaphal, Family – Annonaceae, botanical name – <i>Annona squamosa</i> , used – leaves	Drinking leaf decoction facilitates delivery. For 3–4 days, take one spoonful of seed powder with a cup of water to induce an abortion.
7	Urinary disorders	Common name – Anantmool, Family – Asclepiadaceae, botanical name – <i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> , used – root	Root juice is administered to treat urinary tract issues.

Continued.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
8	Prevent miscarriage	Common name – Neem, Family – Meliaceae, botanical name – <i>Azadirachta indica</i> , used – leaf	For seven days, before breakfast, 10 milliliters of leaf juice combined with a cup of water are taken orally to prevent miscarriage.
9	Infertility	Common name – Anar, Family – Meliaceae, botanical name – <i>Punica granatum</i> , used – seed, leaf	The dry seeds are soaked and consumed twice daily, or the fresh seeds can be directly consumed the seeds. The leaves can be prepared for infusion, which is consumed for a month by soaking them overnight. ^{16,17}
10	Cure bleeding during pregnancy	Common name – Doobi, Family – Poaceae, botanical name – <i>Cynodon dactylon</i> , used – whole plant	Thirty milliliters of whole plant juice and a glass of cow's milk are taken orally once a night for three days in order to manage bleeding during pregnancy.

Table 2: Medicinal flora of Gariyaband: Gond tribe applications and uses.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
1	Easy delivery	Common name – Punarnava, Family – Nyctaginaceae, botanical name – <i>Boehavia diffusa</i> Linn, used – whole plant	Extract the <i>Boehavia diffusa</i> (Punarnava) roots and combine them with a small amount of til oil. Using this treatment in the vagina guarantees a painless birth.
2	Irregularity in menstruation	Common name – Ashoka, Family – Caesalpiniaceae, botanical name – <i>Saraca asoca</i> , used – root	The following ingredients are prepared and filtered: Ashoka root, Arjuna (<i>Terminalia arjuna</i>) bark, Rasna (<i>Blepharispermum subsessile</i>) root, and Giloy (<i>Tinospora malabarica</i>) stem. The filtrate is taken twice day for a month.
3	Easy delivery	Common name – Chirchira, Family – Amaranthaceae, botanical name – <i>Achyranthus aspera</i> , used – root	Pregnant women who experience difficult deliveries can benefit from a decoction made with water and ground roots, both fresh and dried. A half-cup decoction is administered once or twice during delivery.
4	Leucorrhoea (white discharge menorrhoea)	Common name – Dudhi, Family – Euphorbiaceae, botanical name – <i>Euphorbia hirta</i> , used – leaf	For two to four days, one cup of the decoction made with milk is drank in the morning and evening.
		Common name – Ashoka, Family – Caesalpiniaceae, botanical name – <i>Saraca asoca</i> , used – bark	Ashoka bark is powdered after being sun-dried. and combined in a 1:1:1 ratio with dried Kachnar bark (<i>Bauhinia variegata</i>) and Rhiman bark. One glass gruel of rice and one spoon powder are combined. It is consumed twice a day for a period of two to five days.
5	Menorrhoea	Common name – Kusha, Family – Poaceae, botanical name – <i>Desmotachya Biponnata</i> , used – root	Root is used in diuretic, dysentery and dymenorrhoea.
6	Abortion	Common name – Masbandhi, Family – Convolvulaceae, botanical name – <i>Porana paniculata</i> , used – root	Take one teaspoon of root paste with one cup of milk once a day for five days to end a three- to four-month pregnancy.
7	Post-delivery vitality	Common name – Kusum, Family – Sapindaceae, botanical name – <i>Schleichera oleosa</i> , used – oil	The women were given half a cup of oil twice a day as a tonic for three days following delivery.
8	Dysmenorrhoea	Common name – Pudina, Family – Lamiaceae, botanical name – <i>Mentha arvensis</i> , used – leaves	Powder is created by crushing the fresh leaves. The powder is ingested for two to four days.

Table 3: Medicinal flora of Korba: Gond tribe applications and uses.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
1	Dysmenorrhoea	Common name – Arandi, Family – Euphorbiaceae, botanical name – <i>Ricinus communis</i> Linn, used – leaves	The leaves can be prepared for infusion, which is consumed for two to seven days, by soaking them overnight. ¹⁸

Continued.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
2	Menstrual disorders	Common name – Ashoka, Family – Caesalpiniaceae, botanical name – <i>Saraca asoca</i> , used – root	<i>Saraca asoca</i> root decoction; strain the mixture. For a month, the filtrate is taken twice a day.
		Common name – Ratanjot, Family – Adiantaceae, botanical name – <i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i> , used – whole plant	For sterility, women are given dried rhizome mixed with water orally once during their menstrual cycle.
3	Leucorrhoea (white discharge)	Common name – Ramdatun, Family – Smilacaceae, botanical name – <i>Smilax mecrophylla</i> , used – root	Once menstruation is finished, an oral decoction is prepared with water and consumed.
4	Male impotency	Common name – Kali musli, Family – Amaryllidaceae, botanical name – <i>Curculigo orchoides</i> , used – root, tuber	Powdered Kali musli, Kalimirch, and Illaichi are used to make tablets. Two capsules are taken in the morning and evening after meals.
5	Urinary problem	Common name – Lajwanti, botanical name – <i>Mimosa pudica</i> , Family – Mimosaceae, used – root	For seven days in the morning, a tea spoonful of root paste combined with honey is provided to treat uterine and vaginal symptoms.
6	Contraceptive	Common name – Gular, Family – Moraceae, botanical name – <i>Ficus glomarata</i> , used – fruit	After performing rituals, such as offering Gangajal, coconut, flower, and agarbatti, the blossom is collected. Use fresh fruit subsequent to birth control. only ever taken once.
7	Delivery complications	Common name – Bans, Family – Gramineae, botanical name – <i>Bambusa angustifolia</i> , used – leaves	Leaves are decocted with water and consumed orally.
8	Fertility	Common name – Badaam, Family – Rosaceae, botanical name – <i>Prunus amygdalus</i> , used – leaves	Boiling for ten to twenty minutes is the prelude to the decoction of fresh leaves. For two to three weeks, the extract is taken orally. ¹⁹

Table 4: Medicinal flora of Saraipali: Gond tribe applications and uses.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
1	Menorrhagia	Common name – Bel, Family – Rutaceae, botanical name – <i>Aegle marmelos</i> Linn, used – leaves	By soaking the leaves overnight, one can prepare the infusion of leaves which is ingested for two to seven days.
2	Menstrual disorders	Common name – Ashoka, Family – Caesalpiniaceae, botanical name – <i>Saraca asoca</i> , used – bark	The bark of Ashoka is sun-dried, powdered, and combined in a 1:1:1 ratio with the dried powder of Kachnar (<i>Bauhinia variegata</i>) and Rhiman bark. One glass gruel of rice and one soon powder is combined. Twice a day is when it is consumed for a period of two to five days.
3	Impotency	Common name – Kismis (raisin), Family – Vitaceae, botanical name – <i>Vitis vinifera</i> , used – fruit	Fruit soaked in water used for fertility.
		Common name – Kaju (Cashewnut), Family – Anacardiaceae, botanical name – <i>Anacardium occidentale</i> , used – fruit	Fresh fruit in powder form is used for fertility.
		Common name – Nageshwar, Family – Calophyllaceae, botanical name – <i>Mesua ferrea</i> , used – flower	Flower bud dried and powdered is used orally.
4	For postnatal conditions	Common name – Kharhar, Family – Rubiaceae, botanical name – <i>Gardenia turgida</i> , used – root	The root is ground into a fine paste and combined with the leaf juice.
		Common name – Girhul, Family – Fabaceae, botanical name – <i>Indigofera pulchella</i> , used – root	Powdered dried root is applied topically to treat pain
5	Postnatal stage	Common name – Tilli/Til (sesame), Family – Pedaliaceae, botanical name	Seed powder or decoction is utilized.

Continued.

S. no.	Disease name	Plant details	Preparation
		– <i>Sesamum indicum</i> , used – fruit (seed)	
6	Abortion	Common name – Chirayata, Family – Gentianaceae, botanical name – <i>Swertia Chirata</i> , used – whole plant	Whole plant extract is taken orally for four to five days.
7	Leucorrhoea (white discharge)	Common name – Ramdatun, Family – Smilacaceae, botanical name – <i>Smilex mecropphylla</i> , used – root	One teaspoon of mishri is administered orally with 20 grams of powdered root.
8	Oligomenorrhea	Common name – Onion, Family – Liliaceae, botanical name – <i>Allium cepa</i> , used – bulb	Drink two spoonful of fresh juice every two to seven days. ²⁰
9	Weakness during pregnancy, growth of fetus	Common name – Khash-khash, Family – Papaveraceae, botanical name – <i>Papaver somniferum</i> , used – bulb	The seed is crushed to make powder. The powder is taken with one cup of milk in the morning.
10	Menorrhagia contraceptive	Common name – Coriander, Family – Apiaceae, botanical name – <i>Coriandrum sativum</i> , used – leaves and seed	Early in the morning, 2 grams of the seed dust decoction are consumed with milk. By soaking the leaves overnight, one can prepare the infusion of leaves which is ingested for two to seven days. ²¹

DISCUSSION

The medicinal practices of the Gond tribes of Chhattisgarh, particularly their reliance on medicinal plants to treat gynecological ailments, provide significant insights into traditional healthcare systems. This study demonstrates the depth of knowledge regarding indigenous plant species used to treat a wide range of gynecological conditions, including menstrual disorders, infertility, urinary problems, and complications related to pregnancy. The findings align with global ethnobotanical research that highlights the extensive use of plant-based medicines in indigenous communities and their potential to contribute to modern medical knowledge.^{22,23}

The study clearly shows that the Gond tribes have developed an intricate understanding of plant properties over generations. These tribes rely on a range of botanical remedies for common gynecological issues. Leucorrhea, a condition characterized by abnormal vaginal discharge, is treated with various plant materials, such as Bans (bamboo leaves), Dudhi (bottle gourd leaves), Ashoka (*Saraca asoca* bark), and Ramdatun (root). These plants have well-documented medicinal properties in various parts of the world. For example, *Saraca asoca* has been traditionally used to treat gynecological issues such as leucorrhea, dysmenorrhea, and uterine disorders, with studies confirming its anti-inflammatory and astringent properties.²⁴ Similarly, *Vitex negundo* (Nirgundi), another plant used by the Gonds for menstrual disorders, has demonstrated therapeutic potential in regulating menstrual cycles and treating conditions like dysmenorrhea.²⁵

The use of Kali musli (*Curculigo orchioides*) and Ratanjot (*Heterophyllum ramosissimum*) to treat infertility and impotence is also noteworthy. These plants are well-known in traditional medicine for their adaptogenic and aphrodisiac properties. *Curculigo orchioides*, for instance,

is reported to enhance fertility and treat sexual dysfunction due to its effect on hormone regulation and its ability to improve blood circulation.²⁶ *Heterophyllum ramosissimum*, although less studied, is cited in traditional pharmacopoeias for its use in promoting reproductive health and enhancing sexual vitality.²⁷ These examples underscore the significant potential of these plants as candidates for scientific validation and therapeutic development.

The Gonds utilize diverse methods of preparing medicinal plant materials, including decoctions, powders, and infusions. For instance, the Gonds of Gariyaband use a decoction made from a mixture of Ashoka root, Arjuna bark, Rasna root, and Giloy to treat irregular menstruation, which reflects the common practice of combining multiple plant species to create synergistic effects. This is consistent with ethnobotanical research which suggests that polyherbal remedies are often preferred in traditional medicine because they may offer a broader spectrum of activity with reduced side effects compared to single plant extracts.²⁸

The use of Chirchira (whole plant) by the Gonds of Gariyaband for facilitating labor highlights another interesting aspect of plant-based treatment. While the clinical efficacy of such plants needs further exploration, similar plant species have shown oxytocic properties, which could explain their traditional use in easing childbirth.²⁹

The medicinal plants used by the Gond tribes of Chhattisgarh represent a rich source of bioactive compounds that could be explored for modern pharmacological applications. For instance, *Saraca asoca* has been the subject of various studies that confirm its therapeutic potential in treating menstrual disorders and regulating reproductive health.²⁴ *Vitex negundo*, widely

used for menstrual irregularities, has been reported to exert effects on the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis, influencing hormonal balance and improving reproductive health outcomes.²⁵ Similarly, compounds from *Curculigo orchoides* have been found to possess anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and aphrodisiac properties, suggesting that it could be a valuable therapeutic agent for both infertility and general reproductive health.³⁰

Further studies on the bioactive compounds present in these plants could reveal novel therapeutic agents for gynecological issues, such as menstrual disorders, infertility, and sexually transmitted diseases. Collaborations between ethnobotanists, pharmacologists, and local communities will be crucial for validating and expanding the medicinal use of these plants.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the rich ethnobotanical knowledge of the Gond tribe in Chhattisgarh, specifically regarding the use of medicinal plants for addressing gynecological disorders. The findings reveal a diverse array of plants traditionally employed to manage issues such as menstrual irregularities, infections, and fertility challenges. The integration of traditional practices with modern health perspectives can enhance healthcare options for women in these communities. Preserving this indigenous knowledge is crucial, not only for the cultural heritage of the Gond tribe but also for potential contributions to modern medicine. Finally, this study underscores the significance of ethno medicine and its role in promoting women's health within indigenous populations.

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