

Study of Traditional Medicinal Practices among the Raj-Gonds of Korba District of Chhattisgarh

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ABSTRACT This paper documents the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants that are in use by the Raj-Gond tribes residing in Korba district of Chhattisgarh. The information was collected from community members as well as from traditional healers. Raj-Gonds believe that any disease is caused due to magico-religious elements, malnutrition and environmental imbalance. Raj-Gonds usually approach *Baiga* and *Vaidhraj*, who are the traditional healers. These healers also diagnose the disease through magico-religious methods. They identify the involvement of spirit, demons or deities. Raj-Gonds are pluralistic in seeking treatment for various illnesses and diseases. However, they prefer the traditional healers. The present study documented the information on various herbs including the derivatives or parts of the herbs they use, preparation of the drug for use, dosage, etc. The study warrants evaluating medical efficacy of these traditional medicines and documenting oral traditional knowledge, which persists among tribal communities.

INTRODUCTION

People of rural India are pluralistic and by and large, still dependent on traditional medicines for their health care and treatment of diseases (Bhasin and Bhasin 1994; Babu 1998). Traditional medicine includes a holistic knowledge and practices, oral and written, functional and diagnosis, preventive and curative aspects of illness and disease to promote total well-being (Behura 2003). Tribals have deep belief in their native folklore medicine for remedies and they rely exclusively on their own herbal cure (Sajem and Gosai 2006). The traditional knowledge developed over a period of time has passed from one generation to another with observations, experimentations, trial and error and has become a valuable legacy in this modern civilization (Rai et al. 2004). Traditional medicines might also be considered as solid amalgamation of dynamic medical knowledge and ancestral experiences (Gupta 1998). The traditional medicine of tribal communities (tribal medicine) has two aetiological aspects to illnesses and diseases they experience. They are: supernatural and physical. The supernatural causative agents of disease form a part of the belief system of the people and they adopt magico-religious practices of healing (Behura 2003). Also, they link cause of an illness/disease to some physical forces and elements. These illnesses are treated by traditional medicines

available with local traditional healers. The principal ingredients of these tribal medicines are derivatives of plants and animals (Bhattacharya 1995; Gupta 1998; Rai et al. 2003; Mishra et al. 2006). The knowledge of these medicines attained significance in recent times due to establishment of several therapeutic values of these products as well as using these products in modern medicine (Sajem and Gosai 2006). The present study documents the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants that are in use by the Raj-Gond tribe inhabiting the Katghora block of Korba district, Chhattisgarh.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper is based on extensive fieldworks carried out among Raj-Gond tribal population living in villages of Katghora block, Korba district of Chhattisgarh. The data were collected from community members and medicinal men/traditional healers. Information from 117 Raj-Gonds community members was collected by using a pre-tested interview schedule. The incidence of diseases/illnesses that occurred during the past one year among their family members and the treatment details were collected. The details of various medicinal plants used for treating common diseases, their properties, methods of use, etc. were collected from thirty-five traditional healers practising in the study area. The identification of

herbs, local and botanical names and medicinal use of each herb were documented. During these field works, standard anthropological techniques of data collection were employed (Pelto and Pelto 1978).

RESULTS

Concept of Disease

Raj-Gonds believe that health depends on food, nutritional status, cleanliness and hygiene, and drinking pure water. People of this area relate health to their physical labour and behaviour. Their experience is that the cause of any disease is due to magico-religious elements, malnutrition and environmental misbalance. *Baiga* and *Vaidhraj* are the traditional medicinal practitioners of the community. And usually, Raj-Gonds approach these people regarding diagnosis and cure of illnesses.

Cause of Illness

The Raj-Gonds believe that the important causal factor for disease is either cultural (magico-religious) or natural (physical). Many culturally-caused diseases are related with deities, supernatural powers, evil eyes and black magic. The natural causes of diseases are disfunctioning of organs, bites of mosquitoes and other animals and environmental factors like heat and cold.

Diagnosis of Disease

The diagnosis of disease among Raj-Gonds occurs in two ways. They are: (i) through modern medical diagnostics and (ii) traditional diagnosis. Local traditional healers of Raj-Gonds who adopt in diagnosing illness, injury or disease and resorts to magico-religious methods for diagnosing the physical malady indicate the cause being evil designs with involvement of spirit, demons or deities. *Baiga* use rice to identify any black magic underlies the cause of disease by addition, subtraction, or multiplication and some other magical formulae.

Mode of Treatment

Raj-Gonds are pluralistic in seeking treatment for various illnesses and diseases. They prefer the traditional healers. However, when the

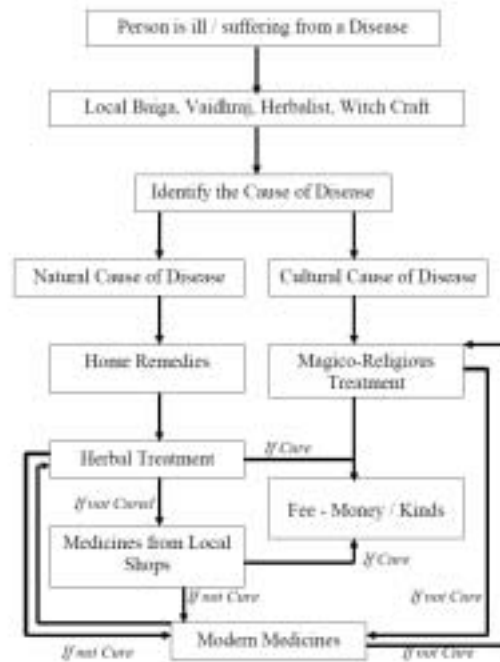


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of treatment seeking behaviour among Raj-Gonds

condition becomes serious, they approach modern medical practitioners. A conceptual model of treatment seeking behaviour amongst the Raj-Gonds is illustrated in Figure 1. After classifying the disease into naturally/culturally caused, the *Baiga* starts treating the disease accordingly. *Baiga* use more powerful magical formulae to lessen the effect of black magic. *Baiga* and *Vaidhraj* treat ill persons for both naturally and culturally caused diseases. For magico-religious treatment, they sacrifice animals also. Besides, *Arjanidhayan*, *Jantar-mantar*, *Jhad-phook*, etc. are practiced by *Baigas*. Among the Raj-Gonds, treatment is done by indigenous methods by observing the severity of disease. The herbalists enchant mantras, though they believe in the magical action of herbal medicines also. This can be observed amongst traditional birth attendants, bone setters, herbal healers, witch doctors and wondering monks. Raj-Gond women also practice traditional herbal remedies. *Baiga* perform rituals, offerings and magico-spiritual performances to the deity because they think that diseases are also caused by unsatisfied souls of dead ancestors and deities.

Table 1: Medicines use for the treatment of various diseases by the Raj-Gonds

S. Disease No.	Name of plants	Botanical name	Part used	Method of preparation	Dosage
<i>Stomach Related Disorders</i>					
1	Blood dysentery Semhar	<i>Salmalia malabarica</i>	Flower	Flower is grind with water (dry/wet) and sugar is added to it. The mixture is boiled till the quantity becomes half of the original mixture. It is taken in the form of tablets. Dried flower can be stored. Dried root is grinded and diluted with water and taken orally.	Thrice daily or if severe, more doses are given. Twice daily until relief for 2-3 days Twice daily until relief.
2	Dysentery	Shankarjata	Root	Wet or fresh root is grinded and mixed with water. 1-2 flowers are grinded for a single dose.	Twice daily until relief for 2-3 days Twice daily until relief.
3	Dysentery	Kumhi ka jhar	Flower	10 gms. of methi seed is mixed with ghee and heated and cooled. The seeds are grinded and taken orally with 1 spoon of honey	Single dose daily for 10-20 days
4	Stomachic	Methi	Seed	Dried flower is grinded and made in form of tablets with milk.	Twice daily one or two tablets up to relief.
5	Stomach -ache	Satavar	Root	Fresh leaf of bamboo is grinded and mixed with hing. This mixture is added with water and taken orally	Twice only single day
6	Worms	Nangarmoth Hing	Root Leaf	Root (Fresh/dried) is grinded with water and filter the mixture. Filtrate can be taken orally.	Twice daily up to seven days
7	Indigestion	Bans Chit-chita	Root	Dried root is boiled with 1 glass of water till the quantity becomes 1/4, then it is taken orally in morning.	Three to four tablets for 3-4 days up to relief.
8	Indigestion	Palas	Root	Dried part is grinded and mixed with sugar it is taken in the form of tablets.	Not fixed. Dose taken up to relief, 1-2 times daily
9	Fever (malaria)	Bhui-neem	Leaf	Stem is burnt in fire the ash is used as drug, ash is added with milk and taken orally.	2-3 times daily 4-5 days
10	Fever	Neem	Stem, bark	Leaf is heated and applied with bandage on affected area.	2-3 times daily for 4-5 days
<i>Gynecological Disorder</i>					
11	Hydrocele	Dhatura	Leaf	Leaf is heated and applied with bandage on affected area.	2-3 times daily for 4-5 days
12	Hydrocele	Arandi	Leaf	Two pieces of flower is mixed with local soil and made in tablet form and taken in the empty stomach	
13	Piles	White palas	Flower & Root		

Table 1: Contd...

S. Disease No.	Name of plants	Botanical name	Part used	Method of preparation	Dosage
14	Impotency in men	Tejrai	Root	Dried root are grinded and mixture of all these are taken orally with milk or in the form of tablets.	Only once daily in morning for seven days
15	Menstrual problems in women	Bhojrai Balrai Karghie	Root Root Root, stem	Root is kept in water for one hour and boiled with one glass water and boil till the quantity becomes half. It can be taken orally before tea.	Once daily for 2-3 days
<i>Skin Diseases</i>					
16	Antiseptic	Karanj	Seed	Dried seed is grinded and mixed with oil and applied on affected area.	Once daily for 3 days
17	Pata (Stomach ulcer)	Dumar	Whole plant	Any part of the plant is boiled with 1 cup of water and filtered. Mixture and filtrate are be taken	Thrice daily for 3 days
18	Kastuti	Chhipi	Whole plant	Any part (according to availability) is grinded and applied on affected part.	Once daily for seven days or up to relief.
<i>Bone related Disorder</i>					
19	Fracture	Harjori	Bark	Bark is grinded and is applied on fractured area and stem is also grinded ad taken orally with water.	Up to relief
20	Fracture	Harsanghari	Stem	Stem is grinded and juice can be taken orally	Single dose daily up to relief.
21	Fracture	Gurud	Stem	Juice is applied inside the fractured area by cutting the skin only applied once just after fracture.	For single application
<i>Nervous System Related Disorders</i>					
22	Paralysis	White semhar	Flower	Two flowers are grinded and local soil is added and tablets are prepared by mixing it with water. Taken before breakfast.	Once daily upto seven days
<i>Bite</i>					
23	Dog bite	Dudhia	Whole plant	Any part is grinded with water in wet/dry and taken orally	Three Sundays only orally with water.
24	Poison (insect and other)	Lajvanti	Root	Three roots are grinded and taken	Once only
<i>Lung Related Disorders</i>					
25	Asthma	Champa	Root	Dried root is grinded with milk (fresh) and taken orally. Dried root can be stored.	Twice daily taken up to relief.

Table 1: Contd...

S. No.	Disease	Name of plants	Botanical name	Part used	Method of preparation	Dosage
26	Asthma	Latgira	<i>Achyranthes aspera</i>	Seed	Seed is burnt on fire and grinded. Powder is mixed with honey and only a drop of it is taken as dose	Thrice daily up to one month.
27	Tuberculosis	Satavar	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>	Tuber	Dried or wet root is grinded and mixed with 1/2 glass of water.	Once daily up to 40 days.
28	Cough and cold	Peli-Kateri	<i>Argemone mexicana</i>	Flower	These mixtures are taken orally. Flower is grinded and mixed with cane-sugar and it is taken in the form of tablets	Twice daily up to relief
29	Chest pain	Aak	<i>Calatropis procera</i>	Root	Dried root is grinded and converted into powdered form and mixed with sugar. The mixture is made in the form of chocolate and 1 tablet is given to adults and 1/2 tablet to children.	Once in morning for 3 days
30	Respiratory problem	Ginger	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Tuber	Fresh or dry root is grinded and mixed with honey in equal quantity. Taken orally one or two drops only in night.	Single dose for 3 days
31	Cough and cold	Aaithi	<i>Helicteres isora</i>	Fruit	Dried fruit is grinded and mixed with honey. A pinch of mixture can be taken orally.	Twice daily for 2-3 days.
<i>Other Diseases</i>						
32	Jaundice	Van-Haldi	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	Flower	Dried flower is boiled with oil. After cooling the mixture extract is applied on body and baked in and the substrate part can be taken directly.	Twice daily up to relief.
33	Throat congestion	Kali-mirechi	<i>Piper nigrum</i>	Seed	Grinded seed is mixed with honey and taken (only one drop).	Taken up to relief.
34	Stone	Papita	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Root	Root is grinded and juice can be taken orally. Dried root can be used as a medicine when boiled	Once daily up to 15 days
35	Ear-ache	Lahsun	<i>Allium sativum</i>	Fruit	Fruit is fried with mustard oil and after cooling 2-3 days of mixture is put on ear.	Once only
36	Tooth-ache	Madar	<i>Calatropis procera</i>	Latex (stem)	Milky latex of stem is applied on affected teeth with cotton	Only once
37	Hair-loss	Aonla	<i>Embllica officinalis</i>	Fruit	Juice is added with citrus (nimbu) juice and applied on hair.	Once daily for 20-30 days
38	Vomiting	Dauna	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Leaf	Three leaves (fresh) are grinded and mixed with water, taken orally after every three hours.	Taken up to relief

As mentioned the herbs and their derivatives are used by different types of practitioners, including *Baiga*, herbal healers and people (particularly women) themselves. The information on identifying the plant, the derivative or part of the herb they use, preparation of the drug for use, dosage and other details of each herb was collected. In addition, these herbs were identified and their botanical names were noted. These details are presented by disease, for which these herbs have been used (Table 1).

CONCLUSION

The indigenous ethno-medical system of Raj-Gonds is a complex one in the sense that it encompasses a variety of practices that employ magic, plant and animal products and even the allopathic medicines. It represents medical pluralism among this tribe. The horizon of ethno-medical knowledge of Raj-Gond is appreciably high, as they have recognized a variety of diseases and correspondingly origin through magico-religious causes are attributed to them. They have identified diseases due to infection, malnutrition and functional anomalies of various organ systems.

An attempt has been made to explore the possible aspect of traditional medicines for the cure of general fever, cough, cold, headache, fracture, arthritis, paralysis, epilepsy, animal bite etc. among the Raj-Gonds. The government health services are not accessible to Raj-Gonds due to ignorance and lack of awareness toward modern medical system. It is interesting to note that when both traditional and modern health facilities are available, people often prefer traditional medicines. On the basis of present study, it was suggested that the evaluation of medical efficacy of these traditional medicines and herbs is very

important and warrants documenting such oral traditional knowledge that persists among tribal communities.

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