



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ETHNOMEDICINE AND HEALING TRADITIONS AMONG THE ORAON TRIBE OF JHARKHAND: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Traditional healing knowledge encompasses a holistic view of health, encompassing not only physical illness but also mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Traditional healing knowledge is valuable for its affordability, cultural values, and accessibility. Ethno-medicine is the study of traditional medical practices and knowledge systems of different indigenous groups or tribal communities. Ethno-medicine often includes herbal remedies, spiritual healing, and the role of community healers. Tribal communities have dependent on ethno-medicine for healthcare, using resources available, particularly plants, herbs, and minerals. It often includes spiritual beliefs, along with health. The Oraon tribe balances traditional and modern health systems. They use various plants and natural resources for treatment, reflecting their strong connection to nature. Their health system is based on two main causes of illness: naturalistic (environmental) and personalistic (supernatural). Their spiritual healers perform rituals and restore balance when illness is thought to be caused by supernatural forces or ancestors. These healers face social isolation due to fear of perceived supernatural powers. As a result of rising globalization and modernity, the traditional knowledge of the Oraon tribal is threatened with loss. There is an immediate need to documented and safeguard their Ethno-medical practicing knowledge to ensure their cultural heritage will be preserved for future generations.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing practices performed by tribal people for a long time. Every group has its own way to practice these healing processes. These traditional healing processes are deeply connected in their own history, beliefs, culture, and nature. These practices holistically understand health not only physical also mental, social, emotional, spiritual well-being. Ethno-medicine refers to the study of traditional medical practices and the knowledge system of different tribal community. It involves understanding how these communities use natural resources for healing, as well as their own ritual, beliefs, and social systems that shape their medical practices. Ethno-medicine includes herbal remedies, spiritual healing, and the role of community healers. Tribal groups have practiced ethno-medicine for healthcare for a long time, using resources available in their natural environment. Many times, ethno-medicines are deeply connected to the spiritual beliefs of the community. Healing practices also involve rituals or prayers. The Oraon tribe practices animism, a belief system deeply rooted in nature worship and the reverence of supernatural forces. Their spiritual practices are connected to natural elements, such as trees, rivers, and animals, which are seen as embodying spirits or supernatural forces. This

also their approach to health and healing. Historically, the

ancestors of the Oraon community lived in forests, where they developed a profound connection with nature. This environment provided them with extensive knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, herbs, and trees. The Oraon people utilize these natural resources for various health-related purposes, making traditional herbal medicine an integral part of their healing practices. Their knowledge of plants and herbs is passed down through generations and is deeply connected to their spiritual worldview. They believe that the healing properties of plants are not only physical but also spiritual, as nature is seen as a powerful force that can restore balance in the body and soul. This bond with the forest and its resources continues to be an essential aspect of their health practices, enabling them to treat a variety of ailments using natural remedies.

Objectives: The objectives of this present study are, to acquire knowledge as to the plants, trees, roots, and different forest products being used by then in curing the peopleand try to understand that even in the modern scientific era of the medical system, they are still relying upon traditional health seeking practices.

Study area: For the present study selected Brambe village, located in the Mandar block of Ranchi, Jharkhand. Brambe village is an example of a tribal settlement with a blend of modern and traditional elements. The village is divided into multiple tolas (neighborhoods), such as Oraon Tola, Upper Tola, Neecha Tola, and Mahli Tola, and these communities have rich cultural traditions passed down through generations.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather comprehensive ethno-medicinal data. The primary data was collected through interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, group discussion, case study particularly elderly individuals who possess significant traditional knowledge about medicinal plants. Information was gathered using interview method from senior tribal people in the villages, including Ojhas, Kabiraj, and local medicinal plant sellers. These participants provided valuable insights into the use of medicinal plants in their community. The semi-structured questionnaires were specifically designed to gather detailed information about various medicinal plants, such as their local names, the plant parts used, the ailments they treat, and the modes of preparation. This method enabled a deep understanding of the community's knowledge and practices related to medicinal plant use.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Oraon population of studied area mainly follows Sarna Dharma. The villagers worship the Sun (referred to as "Biri Kurukahr") and practice animism and animatism, believing in supernatural powers. They also worship the moon as "Chando." They offer prayers and rituals under the Sun, which they revere, and consider the Earth ("Aayo") as their motherland. Handiya, a traditional rice-based drink made with herbs, is offered to deities during festivals and pious occasions, and is consumed as prasad. The Gusain, a sacred place in the village, remains central to rituals conducted by the chief priest (Pahan). The villagers have been influenced by Hinduism and Christianity, with many Oraon people converting to Christianity. The Oraon tribe's traditional healing system, which has been practiced for centuries, continues to be an essential part of their cultural heritage. They followed this traditional system even today. The following is a description of the remedies used for the treatment.

Various plants used by Oraon people for the healing practices

1. Medical Name: Hyper

Description: Jaundice

Local term: *Peeliya*

Symptoms: Yellow body reading, yellow urine

Material used: Ingredients to use Chiranji Grass, Sugar, Kadari Jadi

Method of use: After mixing it together of grinding it and mixing it in water. Drink a glass of water every day.

2. Medical Name: Osteoporosis

Description: Joint pain

Local term: *Jodon ka dard*

Symptoms: It is my weakness that they break easily, body due to calcium deficiency

Material used: Kada Tand Maharaj Grass, Crow Fruit, Harjodi and Kaita

Method of use: All the ingredients are dried and packed with mustard oil. After the oil is filtered and cooled, it is applied every night before sleep.

3. Medical Name: Otalgia

Description: Ear pain

Local term: *Kan dard*

Symptoms: Ear pain all the time

Material used: Kundarileaf

Method of use: Warm the water coming out of it and put it in the ear 2-3 times a day.

4. Medical Name: Nyctalopia

Description: Night blindness

Local term: *Rataundhee*

Symptoms: Not in low light to be seen.

Material used: Bhaga Jogni (Firefly)

Method of use: Mix 2-3 fireflies with jiggery and consume it for a month.

5. Medical Name: Agalactia

Description: There is no milk in the breast

Local term: *Doodhnautarana*

Symptoms: No milk release

Material used: Tentils, papaya, any rice.

Method of use: The urad dal papaya was used to make rice khichdi and feed the woman for two-three days in the morning

6. Medical Name: Hematuria

Description: Blood in urine

Local term: *Peshaab mein khoon*

Symptoms: When patient urinate, urine comes with blood and it's painful.

Material used: The root of Samar bhanj, the root of Ishwarjat and the root of Eri Beriya

Method of use: Mix these three and after boiling it in a pitcher, sprinkle mustard oil and garlic and take it on an empty stomach for 3 days.

7. Medical Name: Tonsillitis

Description: Swelling in tonsil area

Local term: *Galatundikaashoth*

Symptoms: Itching Swelling due to infection in tonsils and cough some time with high fever

Material used: Antrithi Kanda, Maharaj grass, mustard oil.

Method of use: Cook the Antrithi Kanda, Maharaj grass in dry mustard oil, then filter it after the oil cools down and rub the oil in the throat when the cough does not subside.

8. Medical Name: Onycholysis

Description: When nails separated from nail bed.

Local term: *Naakhoonon ka baar-baartootana*

Symptoms: Break nails without pain.

Material used: Saptemu herb and Nirbis herb

Method of use: After grinding those herbs together, apply the paste on the affected fingers for 3-4 days

9. Medical Name: Small Pox

Description: Painful rashes on the body.

Local term: *Chechak*

Symptoms: The whole-body fill with painful rashes, body heat, and redness also found.

Material used: Neem leaf, Dula grass, Neem peel, Sarto.

Method of use: Cook all these with mustard oil, then take it in the morning and evening till it get better.

10. Medical Name: Cholelithiasis

Description: Stones in pelvis

Local term: *Pittaashmarata*

Symptoms: Mild itchy pelvis and abdominal pain.

Material used: Jag's Cardamom, Small Cardamom, Cinnamon, Turmeric, Lemon, Bhaghurang

Method of use: Cardamom, small cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric to form a ball, then drinking or pressing honey and lemon water together in the morning and evening on the empty stomach.

11. Medical Name: Thermoplegia

Description: Heat stock

Local Name: *Dhoop se bimar*

Symptoms: Fever, vomiting, not clears vision; Pain in back side of head

Material used: Raw mangos, ghee

Method of use: Cook raw mango and consumes it with sugar candy and massage. Grind the leaves with ghee to cure.

12. Medical Name: Malaria

Symptoms: Fever and cold

Material used: Dhanbuda, Neem, Koil khamma, Guddaber, Siharjadi, Pendhoi leaves

Method of use: All grinding together with water after that filter it and consume in every morning in empty stomach.

13. Medical Name: Pruritus

Description: Dry itchy skin

Local Term: *Khujalee*

Symptoms: Rashes in body and very itching sensation

Material used: Aloe Vera, coconut oil

Method of use: Grind aloe Vera and mixed with coconut oil and apply on effected area.

14. Medical Name: Otitis externa

Description: Ear infection

Local term: *Kaan ki baharisujan*

Symptoms: Loss of hearing

Material used: Mustard oil, lean grass, dry mustard

Method of use: Cooking all of these and filter it. This oil use on ear in morning and evening time.

15. Medical Name: Venomous snake

Description: Snake bite

Local Name: *Sap katna*

Symptoms: Body turning pale not feeling pain, feeling sleepy

Material used: Satgethi, battle leaf, kramar, Agni jhari flower

Method of use: Grind all of these and apply this paste on effected area and cover with clothes.

16. Medical Name: Dystonia disorder

Description: A disorder characterized by muscle contractions

Local term: *Asisthirta*

Symptoms: Involuntary muscle contraction

Material used: Neem leaves, neem bark, mustard oil

Method of use: Cooking these and massage twice a day.

17. Medical Name: Aphthous ulcers

Description: Mouth ulcer

Local term: *Muh pe ghau*

Symptoms: Pimples or sores inside, the mouth feeling pain.

Material used: Cinnamon leaves and roots, ghee

Method of use: Grind and apply the paste on effected area twice in a day.

18. Medical Name: Oligomenorrhea

Description: Menstrual disturbances

Local term: *Aniyamitmaasik*

Symptoms: Late more than time, having menstruation with white urine.

Material used: Vitex (Chasteberry), Shatavari, Ginger, Fennel

Method of use: Boil all of ingredients and drink this water twice in day for month.

19. Medical Name: Oligomenorrhea

Description: Irregular menstruation

Local term: *Maasik bandh*

Symptoms: Delayed menstruation

Material used: Jaggery, turmeric, ginger

Method of use: Consume it every day in morning.

20. Medical Name: Diabetes

Local Term: *Madhumeh*

Symptoms: Urinate frequently, blurry vision, thirsty, Feel very tired.

Material used: Jamun, Maya kanda, bhattha grass, Bhui cha, Karela

Method of use: Grind all these and dissolve in water and consume on empty stomach every day.

21. Medical Name: Anemia

Description: Low levels of healthy blood

Local term: *Khun kam*

Symptoms: Feeling tired, dizziness.

Material used: Cumin seeds, Bhag saag, Kulkhara

Method of use: Grind these and bowl it. Then consume this juice on empty stomach.

22. Medical Name: Diarrhea

Symptoms: Vomiting, Mucus in the stool. Frequently pass stool.

Material used: Khal, root of kendu tree and guava leaf, Banana

Method of use: Grind all these and mix them with sugar, then consume juice in morning and evening during a day. Eat banana also.

23. Medical Name: Osteoporosis

Description: Weak bone

Local term: *Kamjorhaddi*

Symptoms: Weak bone, body pain, feeling tired

Material used: Harjhora roots, Satar fruit

Method of use: Grind and consume it twice a day.

24. Medical Name: Allergy

Description: Itchy eyes

Symptoms: Red eyes water coming from eyes, itching

Material used: Lean grass

Method of use: Apply it on the eyes by grinding grass, twice a day.

25. Medical Name: Vitiligo

Description: White black spot-on body

Local term: *Safad dhabba*

Material used: Paddy water

Method of use: Bath with this water till cured.

Supernatural Healing in the Oraon Tribe: The Oraon tribe's practices of supernatural healing, led by their healers. They are deeply embedded in their cultural beliefs and provide an alternative form of treatment. These healers are revered for their connection to the divine and supernatural, yet are also marginalized by society due to fear and misunderstanding of their powers. The practice remains an essential part of the Oraon tribe's medical system, despite modern advancements in healthcare. When people fall ill and traditional methods fail, they believe that evil forces or malevolent spirits might be responsible. Spiritual healers who possess knowledge of supernatural powers. These individuals are deeply devoted to gods and goddesses, and their powers are believed to be conferred through rituals, mantras, and prayers. They perform healing rituals that involve invoking deities, offering water, rice, and food to gods, and using sacred objects like agarbatti and vermilion. Their primary goal is to identify the source of the illness, which may involve divine punishment or the influence of evil spirits, and to perform rituals that restore the patient's health. A healer's day begins with devotion and worship of deities. They follow a strict routine, which includes offering water to the deities and ensuring that no one touches it, as they believe the deities are thirsty and require the purest form of water. After their morning rituals, they prepare for the healing rituals, which may involve chanting mantras, offering rice, and making sacrifices (such as chickens) to appease spirits. The healer then proceeds to treat the patient, often by diagnosing the illness as caused by supernatural forces. The payment for their services is variable and depends on the type of treatment required. Fees can range from modest sums to larger amounts, especially if the healer is required to visit the patient at home or if the illness is particularly severe. In addition to the payments for healing services, they may also sell homemade remedies and sacred objects.

CONCLUSION

Modernization, particularly through technology, facilitates faster and wider communication, allowing for the exchange of ideas and cultural practices across borders. Modernization can lead to economic growth, job creation, and improved living standards, potentially benefiting cultural institutions. It can lead to greater access to education and information, empowering individuals and fostering a sense of national identity. But as traditional ways of life are replaced by modern ones, there is a risk of losing cultural heritage and traditions. Modernization, particularly industrialization, can lead to environmental problems like pollution and deforestation, which can negatively impact cultural landscapes and natural resources. Brambe village blends traditional tribal customs with modern influences. While it may appear as a tribal settlement with kuccha houses, mud paintings, and bright decorations, the village also embraces modern culture. An Anganwadi center was built in the village for children's benefit, and there is also a playground in an open field. In this village the literacy rate 65.39%, with male literacy at 71.51% and female literacy at 59.16%. The village has a primary school, established in 2010, and a government middle school. The primary sources of income are daily wages, agriculture and selling forest produce at the weekly market. Most workers are male, though some females also participate. In the village, females engage in activities such as grass cutting, grazing

cattle, picking and selling wood, and making plates (*Pattal and Donas*) from Sal tree leaves. The village has forest land, and each household owns agricultural land, but poor irrigation, low fertility, and a lack of farming awareness hinder its potential as a reliable source of livelihood. The main crop is paddy, with some seasonal crops like maize, potatoes, and green vegetables grown in smaller quantities. Women are primarily involved in making and selling local beer (*Handiya*) at the street side or in the weekly market. The haat bazar is held twice a week on Wednesdays and Fridays, where locals sell daily goods like vegetables, clothes, meat, fish, and *Handiya*. People from outside the village also visit for employment. Many youths from Brambe migrate to cities like Ranchi, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai in search of work, while others remain engaged in farming, using tractors and animals. The village has a mix of kuccha (temporary) and pukka (permanent) houses, mainly along the road. In the modern era of globalization and modernization, societies worldwide are increasingly adopting modern medical systems. Allopathic medicine has become a common treatment option for many, with people often turning to it for quick relief in times of illness. Despite this shift, traditional healing practices rooted in Ethno-medicine continue to play an important role in the lives of many, particularly in tribal communities like the Oraon. In the Oraon community, there is a clear coexistence of overlapping health systems. The community still relies on traditional medicine, but they also make use of modern medical practices, including Allopathic, homeopathic, and Ayurvedic treatments. While modern medicine is more commonly used by wealthier individuals who can afford its cost, traditional healing is often sought when modern treatments fail. Despite the growing influence of the modern medical system, Ethno-medicine holds significant importance among the Oraon, particularly in terms of the causation theories for illness. In contrast to modern medicine's focus on germs and microorganisms, Oraon healing practices are based on a balance between natural and supernatural forces. They categorize causes of illness into two domains: naturalistic (related to the environment) and personalistic (related to spiritual or supernatural factors). The Oraon tribe uses a variety of herbs, plants, trees, and forest products in their healing practices, reflecting their deep connection with nature. This knowledge is passed down through generations, and while it is becoming endangered due to the influence of modernity, it is still vital to the community's health and well-being. In Jharkhand, the Oraon community practices Ethno-medicine as part of their traditional way of life. Although this group is often considered economically and educationally backward, their traditional healing knowledge is rich and valuable. This knowledge, however, is largely unwritten and is at risk of extinction due to modern influences. There is a need to document and preserve this cultural heritage for future generations. While modern medicine focuses on scientific reasons for diseases, the Oraon and other tribal communities often attribute illness to supernatural forces or imbalances between spiritual and natural realms. This difference in worldview underscores the diversity in healing practices, with the Oraon using a combination of both modern and traditional treatments based on their beliefs and experiences. The Oraon tribe's traditional healing system, which has been practiced for centuries, continues to be an essential part of their cultural heritage, and documenting it is crucial to preserving their unique medical knowledge. The Oraon tribe believes in the existence of supernatural beings, such as gods, spirits, and ancestors, which can influence health and well-being. These spirits are thought to reside in various natural elements like

rocks, rivers, and forests. The tribe believes that illness occurs when these spirits are angered or disturbed. When a person becomes ill, it is often attributed to these spirits or deities, and spiritual healers perform rituals to restore balance. They also believe that souls of ancestors can influence the health of the living, and worship is offered to maintain this connection. The presence of supernatural forces is evident in their daily life, from their connection to nature to their practices around illness and death. The belief in these spirits and their influence is integral to their understanding of health and illness. These traditional spiritual healers are often socially isolated due to their perceived connection with the supernatural. They are considered to possess special powers that can either heal or harm, and this causes fear and misconceptions among the general population. As a result, they are often treated as untouchable, and people believe that interacting with them may lead to misfortune or illness. This social stigma is a significant part of their lives, even though their roles are essential in healing practices.

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