

Indigenous Health Care Practices among the Oraon Tribe of Bisra Block, Sundargarh

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Abstract: Indigenous health practices include the use of indigenous plants for healing purposes, which are the best practices that sustain the health of the community. The environmental factor and the uses of indigenous herbs, taboos and superstitions are responsible for determining the healthcare practices of any tribal group. The present study makes an humble attempt to explore the indigenous healthcare practices adopted by the Oraon, an agrarian tribe of Odisha, who basically inhabit in different parts of Sundargarh District. This is an empirical study, which is conducted in Sarubahal & Budeljor village of Bisra Block in Sundargarh District. Various Anthropological methods likes, observation, interview, case study, voice recording, still photography are used for data collection. The study tries to highlight the perceptions of Oraon Tribe towards health and illness, their health seeking behaviour, their indigenous methods of diagnosis of the diseases and their traditional healing practices. Further it also tries to explore the various ethno medicinal plants used by the Oraons for curing various common diseases. It is observed that the Oraons are gradually shifting towards modern healthcare system due to the effect of modernization. Finally the study attempts to document this local knowledge so as to pass it on to the next generation.

Keywords: Healthcare, Indigenous Knowledge, Ethno Medicine, Healing Practices.

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Introduction

Odisha is one of the fascinating ethnographic states of our country fully identified with its tribal culture as it is the homeland of 62 tribal communities. The Tribes of Odisha love to live in nature and maintain their livelihood with their own indigenous knowledge system (Mohanta & Lenka, 2017: 426). Primarily procured from their own indigenous knowledge stock, the tribal people have developed their own health care system which is naturally linked with culture, tradition and

environment. Indigenous health care practices are considered as an integral part of tribal culture generally related to ecology, forest and nature and has deep rooted linkage with their own culture, beliefs, superstition and religious faith. Indigenous system of medicine is still prevalent among tribals. Tribal people have their own system of medicine and health care which is based on their own knowledge of herbs and shrubs as well as their traditional practices like medicine man for diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

The tribal population though they are economically backward but they are culturally and socially very rich. The tribal understanding of health, disease, treatment, life and death varies according to their culture and tradition. They have their own cultural and social practices to treat various illnesses. Their health and sickness are influenced in general by a combination of biological, cultural and environmental factors. Tribal people, who are self-reliant and self-sufficient, have over the centuries developed their own health care system based on plants and other items collected from nature. Each tribe has its own system of indigenous health care practices based on local plant resources. Indigenous health practices include the use of indigenous plants for healing purposes, which are the best practices that sustain the health of the community. Tribal people's access to forest products and indigenous health care system contributes positively to the tribal health. The ecological factor and the uses of indigenous herbs, taboos and superstitions are responsible for determining the healthcare practices of any tribal group. They believe in taboos, spiritual power and faith healing. On the whole traditional health care practices, traditional medicine, ritual and supernatural methods of treatment are integral part of tribal community. It is deep rooted in their religious belief system and cultural life (Tirkey, 2009: 1). In the present era, the tribal indigenous health practices are on declining state. Thus this study has made a humble attempt to study, analyse & record the indigenous knowledge of Oraon regarding healthcare practices.

The Tribe

Oraons are one of the most prominent tribal community in the Sundergarh District of Odisha. Being the forest dweller for centuries, Oraons have developed rich tradition of indigenous health care system. They largely depend on herbs and plants for their various physical ailments. In their treatment plants, flowers, seeds and animals and other natural available products formed the major portions of their traditional health care system. Their knowledge and belief in the herbal plants or nature is being shared and transferred from one generation to another generation.

The present study makes a holistic approach to explain the indigenous health care practices adopted by Oraons from a cultural prospective.

Review of Literature

The studies associated with the traditional medical practices, indigenous medicine serve as an important theoretical background. Tribal medicine and their indigenous health care practices and its changing factor are now main area of interest among Anthropologists. The study of health care practices of tribal people is very relevant in modern times in the view of acquiring knowledge of health care practices. The present study tries to analyse the health seeking behaviour, indigenous methods of diagnosis and healing practices among the Oraon.

Sharma (2017) conducted an Ethno-botanical survey among the Oraon tribe of Jashpur District, Chhatisgarh, to explore the use of medicinal plants for piles, bone fracture, diarrhoea, respiratory problems, polio, body swelling, backache, delivery problems, fever, paralysis, rangbaj (skin discolouration), for shock due to lightning, veterinary fracture, oral diseases, blood purification, liver disorders and wounds by the aboriginals of the district and also as to when children become unconscious due to fear or shock. The tribals of Jaspur have developed vast knowledge of plants as observed by the Author during their field survey, which they have acquired through their traditional practices since time memorial.

Ebele N. Anyaoku, Obianuju E. Nwafor-Orizu & Ebere A. Eneh (2015) conducted a study on the Roles for Medical Libraries in Nigeria in the Collection and Preservation of Traditional Medical Knowledge (TMK) in Nigeria. The study recommended that as a duty to the people's collective indigenous knowledge heritage, medical libraries in Nigeria as a matter of priority, should develop inclusive policies that support collection development of TMK information resources. If this is done, medical libraries will help not just to preserve this knowledge but increase safe use of traditional medicine products. The study further revealed that traditional medicine in Nigeria covers a wide spectrum of indigenous medical practices which includes the use of medicinal plants, traditional birth attendants and bone setting.

Ekka Mary Kusum, Tiwari Priti and Prasad Harishankar (2016) conducted a study on the Traditional use of Medicinal plants Practiced by the Oraon Tribe of Jashpur District to explore the use of medicinal plants for various diseases. The study found out that the use of plants for the management and treatment of diseases has been in practice since ages and the study also documented ethno-medicinal

information on some important plant species used by the Oran Tribe of Jashpur District to cure various diseases.

Joshi (1988) studied the traditional medical system among 'Khos', the Central Himalayan community. The 'Khos' usually do not differentiate between individual illness and other form of suffering. However, they relate illness and sufferings to natural and supernatural forces. They manifest the supernatural world in 'dos' and the natural in 'bimari'. The 'dos' embraces all kinds of sufferings and misfortunes indicating illness of individuals and calamities of a larger group while 'bimari' is indicative of bodily disturbances only. The author classified the healers into several categories as per this specialization such as i. baman, ii. mali-diviner, iii. varyara, iv. female specialist and v. doctor (non-traditional healer).

Mahanta (2003) deals with folk treatment system of the tribal society in Eastern India. He observes that in the district of Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand tribal groups still lack education and communication facilities and modern allopathic system of medicine and so the tribal people still have strong faith in folk medicine available in the areas. The researcher has pointed out three methods of treatment given by 'ojhas' - medicinal method, sound method and divine method of treatment. Some tribals of these areas still prefer to use folk medicine prepared from herbs, plants, roots etc. by the 'ojha' and he is considered as a village doctor.

Guha (1986) made a study on the folk medicine among the Boro-Kachris, a plain tribe of Assam. He states that folk medicine is a common practice among all communities and relates further that causation and cure of diseases are associated with religion and morality. On the other hand good health is a result of an honest and pious life while diseases and sufferings are the result of dishonesty, immorality and incest. So the treatment of diseases is associated with religious rites. Boro-Kacharis have a strong faith in supernatural causes of diseases. Diagnosis of diseases follows divination and interrogation and treatment is sought accordingly, like prayers, propitiation, and sacrifices of animals to appease Gods and to ward off evil spirits.

Objectives

Against this backdrop, the study tries:

- To understand the health seeking behaviour of Oraons of Sundergarh District and to examine their perceptions towards health and illness.
- To analyse the indigenous health care practices among the Oraons of Sundergarh District

- To discuss the changes observed in the health care practices among the Oraons due to the impact of industrialization
- To document the ethno medical plants used by Oraons for the treatment of various diseases.

Study Area & Methods Used

The study was conducted in two villages namely, “Sarubahal” & “Budeljor”, inhabited by the Oraons in Bisra Block of Sundergarh District. Information was collected with the help of interviews schedule, focus group discussions, participant observations, voice recording and still photography. The present study gives us an understanding about the Oraon’s beliefs and practices related to their health seeking behaviour and healing practices. Information on indigenous knowledge for treating different health problems was collected by from the local doctors (*Baidya*), older persons, experienced people of the village etc. Information regarding plants was gathered through the oral interviews of local medicine man and from some elderly persons. The local plant names is mentioned in Kudukh language.

Findings & Discussion

Health Seeking Behaviour of Oraon

The health seeking behaviour of tribal people is based on the processes by which the tribal population recognizes the sickness and the ways to counteract it. Health seeking behaviour among tribal groups is determined by their socio-cultural and magico-religious beliefs. Health seeking behaviour is heterogeneous in nature, which depends on various factors such as socio-cultural life, beliefs, norms, traditions, economic life, awareness, availability and accessibility of health services (Raj and Nayak, 2019: 19). Considering all these factors, the study explores patterns, opinion and attitudes affecting the health seeking behaviours of Oraon.

Oraon, like other tribal, consider health problems as a condition of incapacity to follow their routine life. Major health problems are those which results in restricting of daily chores, while minor health problems which are not hampered every day activities. The Oraons have a belief that the major health issues are caused due to the intervention of a supernatural being, which as they believed may be a deity or a dead ancestor or a witch/wizard who possess some special power. Major health problems are paid more attention among Oraons as it disturbs their daily life. Chicken Pox,

Typhoid, Jaundice, Malaria, Piles, Tuberculosis, Anemia are considered as major health problems. Whereas cold, cough, fever, headache, toothache, vomiting, skin infection, diarrhoea are considered as minor health problems by the Oraons and they believe that such health problems occurred due to seasonal changes in the environment and due to their own carelessness. They also have a belief in benevolent and malevolent spirits which control their daily routine activities of life and these beliefs also affect their health practices. They largely depend and believe on magico-religious rites and custom for treatment of any ailments. Traditional medicine is also an important aspect of health seeking behaviour of Oraon. They are dependent on traditional medicine for their health care and treatment of diseases. Further their health seeking behaviour is also guided and determined by traditional healer known as “*Baidya*”. They do believe and prefer to visit local medicine man. Baidya uses some traditional methods of diagnosis for both identification of which spirit possesses the patient and what kind of disease is affecting the patient and thereafter recommend treatment accordingly. But due to industrialization the health seeking behaviour of Oraon is taking gradual change. Now Oraon seem to be taking a turn towards modern system of medicine though they still believe in their indigenous medicinal system. The younger generation are more inclined towards modern system of medicine.

Perception towards Health and Illness

Every society has its own belief, custom, tradition, knowledge and practices related to health and illness. According to WHO, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity”. The concept of illness may refer to certain biological conditions of the disturbed function of the body parts or the system of body. This may be manifested in the form of various symptoms. The concept of illness among tribe is defined as a short term phenomenon and a body condition that requires rest and fruit supplements greater than the usual intake (Lenka & Mohapatra, 2015: 1753).

A striking perception of health among Oraon is the belief that one will remain healthy by doing some work and that is the reason they do hard work in their daily life to remain healthy. When they suffer from minor health problems, they never refrain themselves from doing their domestic works and outside works as well. Oraon have a unique way to perceive ill health and seek health care services. Their beliefs regarding health are firmly shaped by the values and custom prevailing in their community. They have a belief that they have a close relationship with the

nature and any imbalance between the two would result to ill health. They also believe that few diseases are the result of evil agencies, but that does not mean they completely ignore natural cause of diseases. (Joshi, Kaushal, Katewa and Devi, 2006: 148) Oraons believe that some malignant spirits cause disease and death to a family or to a village and these are sought to be expelled by magical methods and offerings which required sacrifices.

Traditional Healer

Baidya is the traditional healer or medicine man of Oraon for general ailment and for special diseases. Oraon believe that the Baidya has the power to cure every type of diseases, because he is connected with supernatural power in the healing process and he is the first choice of treatment for them. He is considered as the medium between God and Men. He has the knowledge of medicinal plants and their uses. He uses plants and mantras for treatment of various diseases. He is the most respectable person in the society. Baidya's post is not hereditary. Baidya also play an imperative role in diagnosis the diseases. In fact he is the one who decides whether an individual have a minor health problem or not. Hence the role of Baidya is prominent in establishing and reinforcing cultural beliefs related to health practices.

Indigenous Method of Diagnosis

The Baidya uses indigenous method to diagnosis different diseases. Some of diagnosis methods are described as thus:

- When a person falls sick and his family member think that the disease caused by any supernatural agency, they call the Baidya, who first asks very general question like for how long the patient has been ill etc. and then he diagnoses the illness by feeling pulse of the patient. After this he asks patient or his family members to bring arua rice (dehusked rice). He puts the rice on a saal leaf marked with vermilion and turmeric and then with continuous chanting of specific hymns, he tried to read the rice on saal leaf to know whether a bisahi or any other malevolent agency causes the illness. Once it is identified, then sacrifices are made accordingly.
- Further, in some cases urine of the patient is collected in a pot and taken to Baidya. He adds three drops of mustard oil to it. By observing the changing colour he is able to determine the cause of disease.

- In case of evil eyes of a bisahi, baidya takes a roof-tile (khapper) containing burning coal (“dhoop- dhoan”). He circulates the khapper around the patient’s body with one hand and during this process, he recites many mantras. As a result of inherent magical power of mantras, evil drives away.
- If the disease is serious, offering and sacrifices of sweets, rice beer, fowl, goat are made at home or nearby river stream.

Apart from consulting Baidya, Oraons have developed different methods to protect themselves from evil powers by mimetic magic. Magic and magical beliefs seem to play a significant role in the life of the Oraons. When a child falls ill and illness is believed to be caused by evil eye of a witch, the mother takes few mustard seeds and 3 peppers in the right hand, then revolves it around the head of the ill child which is placed on a khapper containing burning coals, mustard seeds and peppers. This marks the departure of the evil spirit. Oraons call this rite as **Neochhan**.

Indigenous Healing Practices

Tribal culture develops its own pattern to heal and cure health problems in peculiar way. Their treatment for health problems is based on cultural practices, experiences and traditional knowledge. Oraons have vast knowledge of indigenous methods of treatment of diseases. Some of indigenous healing methods practised by Oraon tribe are mentioned below :

Sl. No.	Name of the Diseases	Local Name of the Diseases in 'Kudukh' Language	Symptoms	Treatment	Dosage
1	Fever	Nadi	High Body Temperature, Unable to do work	Drink the Juice of 'Bhuin Neem' Leaves	Once in a day before Food for seven days
2	Cold	Payanlakirai	Sneezing, droplets from nose, feeling fever	I-Drink the Grinded Crab Curry after adding Black Pepper and Cumin Seeds Or II-Apply hot mustard oil and garlic on chest area and navel	1-Once in a day after food until recovery. Or II- Once in a day until recovery.
3	Cough	Khukhi	Coughing rigorously and feeling weakness	Take the paste of Tudak Leaves, Honey and Black Pepper	Once in a day after meal.
4	Headache	Kukunujali	Severe Pain in Head	Apply of Caster/Jada Oil on the head for cooling effect	Once in a day upto five days.
5	Stomach Pain	Kulluzali	Severe Pain in Stomach	Juice of Nagbain Shrub's Root taken orally	Once in a day before food upto 3 to 5 days.

Sl. No.	Name of the Diseases	Local Name of the Diseases in 'Kudukh' Language	Symptoms	Treatment	Dosage
6	Chicken Pox	Mainmata	Dizziness, Feeling Fever	First boil the Rangainkata shrub in the water and then the Patient will take bath in that water. And Neem Branches are spread on the patient's bed.	Take bath for five days.
7	Dysentery	Putrali	Frequent loose motion and severe pain in stomach	Drink the juice made from Two leaves of Masania Plant	Twice in a day before food
8	Jaundice	Kuthigaram	Loss of appetite, Nausea, Yellow colouration in body, Yellow colour urine and nail	Drink the juice of Ranu Root and also apply the paste of Gokul Kanta Leaves on the body	Twice in a day
9	Tuberculosis	Patha	Continuous coughing from 2-3 months and blood in Sputum	Drink the blood of Duck	Once in a Week before Food.
10	Piles	Sambi	Getting pain in anus and spilling of blood	Drink juice of Kochilakhai Leaves, Onion and root of Akalabindhi	Twice in a day before food for 7 days
11	Malaria	Ghodanadi	Fever	Chewing of seven Gangasiuli leaves along with Seven Black Pepper And Wear the milk of Ghodabansha Grass in a thread on the neck of the Patient.	Until Recovery.
12	Toothache	Palenujali	Pain in Tooth	Apply the paste of Bijiache Plant's fruit on the affected area. And cover the Bijiache Plant in a Sal Leave and then burn it and then take the smoke of the same in the mouth.	Once in a day
13	Earache	Khebadanujali	Feeling of Pain in the Ear and not audible in the ear clearly	First place the fruit of Nadinar Tree above the affected ear and then blow air from mouth to the fruit from one side so that the milky juice of the fruit will flow from the other side into the ear.	--
14	Waist Pain	Kadma nujali	Severe Pain in Waist	Kick to affected waist area by a person, who has born by legside	Once in a day until recovery.
15	Throat Pain	Khesar Nujali	Severe Pain in throat	Apply the paste of Khaini on the neck 2-Drink the juice of Tulsi/Basil Leaves and Goggling by Salt Water	1-Apply the paste twice in a day.
16	Joint Pain	Baad Nujali	Severe Pain on the Joint Area of the Knee	Apply the paste of Tuber of Satawar Plant on the affected area	Once in a day.

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of the Diseases</i>	<i>Local Name of the Diseases in 'Kudukh' Language</i>	<i>Symptoms</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Dosage</i>
17	Burn Injury	Ulia	Severe Pain on the burnt part of the body	Apply the paste of Stale Rice, Potato and egg yolk on the burnt part of the body	Once in a day until recovery.
18	Minor Cuts	Khandra	Spilling of blood from the cut area	Keep a stone named Pathara Koila on the injured area and it helps in clotting the blood and thereby reduced the spilling of blood	--
19	Scorpion Bite	Bichhichaba	Severe pain at bite area	First scrub the Tamarind Seeds with a stone and then apply it on the bite area	Once in a day
20	Dog Bite	Allachaba	Pain at the bite area	The Patient will be taken to the Baidya, who will prepare one Ragi (Millet) Ball by adding some water to the Ragi Powder. Then the Baidya place the Ragi Ball on his left palm and turn it continuously with the help of his right hand and simultaneously he recites some particular hymns. And by this process, the poison come out in the from of hair from the Ragi Ball and then the Patient recovers.	--

Use of Indigenous Medicine Related to Reproductive Health

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Causes</i>	<i>Treatment</i>
1	For better milk secretion	Intake of Massi Dali (Biri Dal)
2	Smooth Delivery	Root Paste of Salperni Mixed with water in which rice has been washed and paste is applied on Umbilicus, genital and stomach for easy smooth delivery
3	Post Natal Breast Pain	Ash of inflorescence (Gathiwan) mixed with mustard oil and applied on breast
4	For Fair Baby	Taking the powder of Babul leaves during the pregnancy by the mother

Ethno-Medicinal Plants used by Oraons

Oraons of Sundergarh have developed vast knowledge of plants used for management and treatment of diseases which they have acquired through their traditional practices since time immemorial. This indigenous knowledge about

plants was composed verbally and passed orally from generation to generation in Oraon community. Oraon tribe has utilized various plants and species for their medicinal purposes. The diseases are treated with medicine based on leaves, roots and bark of plants which grow wild in jungle. The following plants which are being used by Oraons in curing different diseases are mentioned with their botanical name, vernacular name:-

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Disease</i>	<i>Vernacular name of the Plant</i>	<i>Botanical name of the Plant</i>	<i>Plants parts used in the process</i>
1	Fever	Bhuin Neem	Andrographis Paniculata	Leaves
2	Cough	Tudak	--	Leaves
3	Cold	Muniga Saaga	Moringa oleifera	Leaves
4	Chicken Pox	Rangiankata	--	All parts
5	Diarrhea	Masania	--	Leaves
6	Jaundice	Gokulkanta	Hygrophila auriculata	Leaves
7	Piles	1-Kochilakhai 2-Akalabindhi	1- -- 2- --	1-Leaves 2-Root
8	Malaria	1-Gangasiuli 2-Ghodabansa Shrub	1-Nyctanthes arbour-tristic 2- --	1-Leaves 2-Leaves
9	Toothache	Biji-ache	--	Fruit
10	Earache	Nadinar	--	Fruit
11	Stomach Pain	Nagbain Shrub	--	Root
12	Throat Pain	Tulsi	Ocimum Tenuiflorum	Leaves
13	Joint Pain	Satawar	Asparagus Racemosus Wild	Tuber
14	Scorpion Bite	Tamarind	Tamarindus Indica	Seeds
15	Smooth Delivery	Salperni	Phyllodium Pulchellum	Root

Changes due to Industrialization

Due to Industrialization the fast disappearance of traditional cultures and natural resources have arisen in Oraon community. Oraon's traditional health care practices are gradually getting replaced by the modern health care practices. Their own system of health care is being replaced by state-sponsored Hospitals, primary health care centres. Now a days, Oraons are preferring to go to the hospital for any type of sickness. Due to industrialization a modern era has started. They have begun to accept modern medicine for their common ailment. The Government-run health delivery system is introduced among Oraon community and also preferred by Oraon lady. Now the Oraons preferred to consult the Doctor to diagnose their problems

and the Oraon youth tend to undermine their cultural beliefs and knowledge based on traditional care. The traditional values, faith and indigenous knowledge of health care system of Oraon society are facing serious challenges due to industrialization and migration of youth to the cities.

Concluding Remarks

Oraons of Sundergarh district have unique indigenous health care practices which they have acquired through their traditional practices since the time immemorial. The Oraons know how to cure diseases by making medicine from plants & their leaves, roots, fruits, grass and so on. But due to modernisation and industrialization these people are losing their taste in cultural activities and other religious rituals and their indigenous knowledge which are their identity. The indigenous practice of curing diseases is also getting lost. The loss of these practices is a great loss. The names of medicinal plants and the trees cannot be recognised by the young generation. Finding reveal that only few old people have knowledge of use of plants for curing some particular diseases. There is an urgent need of documentation because older people are usually the only custodians of such information. It may be lost when traditional cultures collapse with advent of modernisation. Documentation of plant material used in traditional medicine, could well benefit general health care and promote forest conservation and ecological research. Such medical plants could also be incorporated into primary health care as people generally feel safer with indigenous cures and the cost of medicine would be much less.

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