

Healing Practices among Oraon people in Brambe Village

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Abstract

Oraon is the second largest tribe of Jharkhand. Knowledge related to healing practices is one of sphere where we find a close relation of these people with the environment. Oraon have their own folk knowledge of dealing with different dimensions of health whether it is physical dimension, mental dimension or spiritual dimension related to body, mind or soul. Even in the era of popular medical sector (Allopathic, Homeopathy or Ayurveda), folk medicine practices is quit famous and influential among the Oraon tribe of Brambe village in Ranchi District of Jharkhand. The use of traditional medicine was observed to be wide spread and prevalent over modern medicine in the study area.

This paper deals with the study of healing practices among Oraon people in Brambe village. In this context two domains of etiologies which are naturalistic and personalistic will be focused. Naturalistic domain will focus on medicinal plants, roots and herbs whereas personalistic domain will focus on super natural causes of illness and disease and ways of treating them through different traditional methods.

Key words: *Oraon, Health care, Healing practise and Brambe village.*

Introduction

Oraon is the second largest tribe of Chotanagpur plateau of Jharkhand India. *Kurukh* word is also use to denote Oraon. Along with Jharkhand they inhabits in various states across central and eastern India, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Oraon tribe are follower of Sarna Dharam which is mainly Animism, which is worshiping nature and some short of Animatism which is believe in supernatural power. Out of many sects among Oraon, Bishnu Bhagat, Bacchinda Bhagat, Karmu Bhagat and Tana Bhagat follow the Hindu style of Sarna religion. Along with the Hinduism, Christianity also influenced Oraon people. A large part of Oraon population got converted to Christianity.

Like other tribe Oraon also have great affinity with nature as Chotanagpur plateau is full of varieties of flora and fauna. So they depend upon forest for many minor forest produce like bamboo, leaves like Gangu, wild vegetables and herbal medicines. Freedom from pain and suffering has been a major preoccupation of Oraon society since antiquity, like many other traditional cultures. Based on a shared understanding of human nature and causes of suffering, Oraon has developed its own healing institutions and practices. In present day, a wide range of healing practices are found among them includes traditional practices and modern medical practices which evolved with time and development. The rapid progress in modern medicine has little affected the popularity of traditional system.

Thriving on folk wisdom and trusted by masses, these traditional healing systems are still an enigma for the health scientists. Interests in indigenous healing practices are increasing after seeing the side effects of modern healing practices. However there is need for a shift in emphasis towards developing an understanding and recognition for the value of traditional healing practices. The main objective of this

paper is to explore the traditional healing practices and to highlight the salience of socio-cultural belief system in triggering a healing mechanism within the suffering individual among Oraon community in Brambe village of Ranchi district in Jharkhand.

Methods

The research used qualitative methods including individual unstructured in-depth interviews, group discussions and participant observation. Different case studies were taken along with the biography of a traditional healer. Researcher visited places like Sarna Astha I (religious place for worshipping Sarna maa) where the traditional healer and people with super natural power use to heal patient. Brambe haat is also visited by the researcher in search to different types of healing practices used by the tribal people.

Patterns of Health Care in Brambe Village

Healing practises of Brambe village fall within three overlapping sectors – the biomedical sector (modern western medicine), the folk sector (traditional healing practices) and the popular sector (self medication and lay treatment). Along with formalize folk sector, lay practitioners of the popular sector also deserve attention as the repositories of indigenous knowledge. It is the popular sector where ill health is first recognised and health care activities initiates, beliefs are set about health maintenance and were acted upon.

In contemporary period tribal people who do not depend on others for anything also started depending upon different health sectors. Medical pluralism can be commonly seen among the Oraon of Brambe. Attached to Brambe village there are several clinic and medicine shop of both Allopathic and Homeopathic medicine. Even the Ayurvedic medicines are used by the villagers. These medicines are available in local market. These medicines were only used when the traditional medicine fails in healing the patient. People use to come to their traditional healing practises when the Modern medicine fails in healing them. So in simple words we can say that Oraon follow two sectors of healing practices – modern or professional medical sector (Allopathic, Homeopathy or Ayurveda) and folk medicine practices.

Traditional healing practices

Unlike in the biomedicines, which pays primary importance to germs or micro-organism, the therapy management group associate illness causation to natural and supernatural factors and forces. The human health among Oraon is considered to be a ritual balance between these natural and supernatural forces. In this context we can identify two domains of etiologies (causative theory) which are naturalistic and personalistic.

Naturalistic

In naturalistic explanation, disease theory assigns impersonal and known supernatural cause which is based on observation cause and effect relationships. It is more empirical based on usually observable and testable parameters. In this model the theory is based on empirically observed conditions. Like anybody is suffering from stomach upset or body turned yellowish in colour with yellow eyes, then it is identified as Jaundice and people use to give proper medicine to the patient which may be some herbs with precaution in eating habits. Oraon of Brambe is having different traditional herbs for different diseases which are known to them. For example for loose motion in children they use tree extract of *Gular* tree.

In village and forest areas of Brambe poisonous bites are a problem for people working in the fields and for children playing in the dense vegetation that surround houses. Traditional healer explains that if a patient comes for treatment within two hours after being bitten, application of a freshly prepared traditional medicine to the wound could save the patient's life and halt the accompanying muscles and skin injury. Their therapies were also reputed to cure chronic skin disorders not satisfactorily treated by modern medicine.

Personalistic

In personalistic system of thought illness is believed to be caused by an active, purposeful intervention of a sensate agent which may be a spirit or an idea of malevolent force. It includes a believer in agents such as (i) supernatural being – a God or a deity, (ii) non-human being or entity – for instance ghost, ancestors, evil eye and astrological entity and (iii) a human being – a witch or a sorcerer.

In this model the belief is that illness is caused due to divine anger or punishment, forceful interaction or simply magical manipulation. In this context the treatment is carried out in forms of acts of appeasement for sins and revival rituals.

Oraon of Brambe village have a belief that even if you are medicated by modern medical system then also patient is suppose to take help of the traditional medical system which is sacred. They believe that only taking help from modern medical system will not help till the time it will be blessed by their sacred entity. The sacred may be evoked in many forms, such as the ancestral spirit, Sarna maa, supreme God, deities and bad spirits. Different healing practices use different forms of the sacred but for most of them the physical and metaphysical world overlaps. Demons, spirits and deities are part of both the world from physical to metaphysical.

Oraon society has healers who use altered states of consciousness in community rituals to interact with the spirit world. These spiritual healing typically occurs in a community context. Community participation facilitates therapeutic effect derived from psycho-social influences which is positive expectation and social support. These collective rituals strengthen group identity and commitment enhancing community cohesion by reintegrating patients in to the group. In the outskirts of Brambe village there is a Sarna Asthal were tribal people from different places use to visit every Thursday to worship Chala Mata or Sarna Mata. Here many Oraon healers or Ojha use to come and worship Goddess for enhancing their power. Patients along with their family member use to visit this place from many surrounding and even from far villages. They seek help of these traditional healers for knowing the actual cause of the suffering and ask them to cure them from their problem and diseases. They use to charge Rs 10 to every patient and in some special case they charge Rs 100. For serious disease or problem they ask for mustard oil and turmeric which is powered by enchanting Mantras and given back to the patient. Use of this oil for massage and turmeric in daily food helps in curing the disease. They don't only use to treat problem and disease but they also provide precaution from any type of disease, problem and evil eye by empowering rice by enchanting Mantras which could be mixed with other rice used for cooking. Empowering rice with mantras also costs Rs 10.



Figure 1 Traditional Healer trying to heal a patient by chanting Mantras

Biography of traditional healer – Mangal Deva

Mangal Deva is a traditional healer who lives in Mandar District, Jharkhand, India. He was born in the year 1956 in the same village in which he is now living. He visits Brambe Hat (market) frequently to sell traditional medicine. According to him when he took born it was the Amawasya night (new moon night) and he came out of her mother womb not from the head side, which is very common but he came out from the leg side. Due to this abnormality which took place in his birth his parents started considering him as a curse. As he was born on new moon day which is considered as a bad day according to tribal philosophy, his parents were worried about him. But as the time passed people started coming to him to get treated from a disease called *Chora*, in which people suffer from back pain and having problems in breathing. *Chora* traditionally is treated by person who took birth from leg side as Mangal Deva took. So with the time he became famous among the nearby area for treating some of diseases in a traditional way. According to him in starting days he was just praying God to cure the disease of the respective person and use to give blessings to them and people get cured. Because of these he himself started filling blessed with some super natural power and his parent's thinking also get changed.

Mangal Deva when grew up, he developed interest in traditional medicine, so he wanted to learn more thing about the traditional medical system. So he went to a traditional medical healer of another village who was very famous and was considered as the best traditional healer and asked him to teach him the knowledge. The healer took exam of the Mangal Deva in many ways and also asked him to do fasting for 14 days. At last he taught him many *Mantras* to connect with God and other spirits. He also gave him knowledge about various traditional medicines which is collected from plant, trees and animals. Even after learning the whole process, Mangal Deva till date use to visit his teacher every week on Thursday to learn new things from him.

In his personal life Mangal Deva failed to provide basic necessities to his family due to this, his parents and his wife with his children left him and were living separately. So now he is spending his life alone. According to him he is living for the well-being of the society. He knows around five different languages spoken around in his areas. He uses be on fast for 3 days in a week and he is fully vegetarian.

Case study of a treatment

A woman visited to Magal Deva with a problem of body swelling and problem in urination. She told that she already consulted many doctors in Ranchi but her problem was not resolved. At last she was advised by her mother to seek help of Magal Deva as he is able to identify the evil eye. So the woman met him. Mangal Deva asked her to bring some mustard oil and few red colour flowers with her. He chanted some Mantras and offered the mustard oil and flowers to any unknown spirit and asked him/her to cure the woman and then took the oil and gave it back to the woman and told her to put the oil on her body every night before sleeping. In this way the traditional healer, Mangal Deva treated the woman problem.

According to western medical system Mangal Deva is a fake person who use to cheat people on the name of God and spirit but for the people who got treated by him and also got cured, Magal Deva is a saint who came on earth for the well-being of society and for the whole humanity.

Conclusion

The above study of Brambe village shows the strength of traditional healing practices. But the young generation are moving towards the modern medical system due to modernization of the society, leaving their Indigenous knowledge of healing practises due to which it is on the verge of extinction. It is observed that the system of traditional healing is not neither organized nor streamlined and still it is practised as an assortment of medicine collected from nature, superstition and religion belief. Therefore, the exploration of this traditional knowledge system, recognition in the system of medicine and its popularization is urgently required for upholding this highly potential knowledge system of Oraon tribe. Recognition is necessary along with the copyright of the particular herbs on the name of community so that its popularity benefits the community.

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