



3. Ethno-medicinal practices among the Women of Kandha Tribe of Koraput: A Case Study

Shiv Kumar

Assistant Professor,

Department of Anthropology,

Model Degree College Nuapada, Odisha

Affiliated to Maa Manikeswari University, Bhawanipatna

Email: shiv.anthro@gmail.com

Mobile No.: 9807119455

Abstract

According to the Botanical Survey of India, 46000 species of plants exist and 705 tribal communities reside here, who are rich in indigenous knowledge. These tribal communities living close to nature have unique indigenous knowledge of using and protecting the plants present around them (Jain, 1998). For centuries, the knowledge of indigenous medicine has been transferred orally to different generations (Ganasen, 2004). These medicines have been used indigenously by the tribal community for centuries, but due to the influence of modern medicine, the use of traditional medicine and traditional healing knowledge have declined to a great extent. Koraput district of Odisha is rich in natural wealth. Most of the Koraput district is filled with rivers, mountains, prehistoric places and natural resources. The Kandha tribe consisting of 195154 populations (2011 census) found living in Borigumma, Dasamantapur, Jeypore, and Koraput blocks. For a long time, the Kandha tribal community has been using this natural wealth for the treatment of various diseases on the basis of indigenous knowledge. The present research paper focuses on the use of ethno-medicinal practices among the women of Kandha tribe of Koraput district of Odisha. Following mixed method, data have been collected from 135 women and from 32 indigenous practitioners and Vaidyas through interview. Various plants and their usage for curing various diseases have been documented. An attempt has also been made to show the various methods of preparing ethno-medicines prevalent in the Kandha community and the importance of different plants. It has also been found that the Kandha tribe uses many types of healing methods for the same disease.

Key words: Ethno Medicine, Healing Practices, Kandha Tribe, Women, Koraput & Case Study.

Introduction:

Illness and health are common human experiences in primitive and folk communities and every society has a conceptual method of defining them. Since the 19th century, a lot of work



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has been done in the field of diseases. In this sequence, Rudolf Virchow (1848) tried to look at medicine from a socio-cultural perspective. He said that social conditions act as factors of disease. He published a journal 'Die Medizinische Reformen' (1848), in which medicine was completely described as a subject of social science. Since the 19th century, indigenous knowledge became a subject of enthusiasm, in which various social scientists propounded many theories from their study and research. Many different indigenous knowledge practices have been considered among rural and tribal communities. The study of indigenous or local knowledge has proved effective for the development of communities. Indigenous knowledge is closely related to the medical practices in the different tribal communities, which reflects the unique healing practices through their indigenous ethno-medicinal practices.

Ethno-medicine, which is the study of traditional medical methods, is concerned with how different cultures perceive health, illness, and disease as well as how people access healthcare and engage in healing rituals (Krippner, 2003). Since ancient times, people have found healing through the complex multi-disciplinary discipline of ethno-medicine, which incorporates the use of plants, spirituality, and the natural world (Lowe et al., 2000). The study of traditional medicine, or ethno-medicine, is concerned with how different cultures see health, illness, and disease as well as how people access healthcare and engage in healing rituals (Krippner, 2003). Since ancient times, people have found healing through the complex multi-disciplinary discipline of ethno-medicine, which incorporates the use of plants, spirituality, and the natural world (Lowe et al., 2000). Indigenous medicine practices are following by traditional healing method which has cultural importance. The cultural dimension of traditional healing practices indicates the fact that the continuing and socially accepted heritage contains both the material and non-material aspects used within the context of sickness.

The word 'Kandha' is derived from the Telugu word Konda which means a small hill as well as the hill men. Originally they were hill dwellers. Kandha is the name the non-tribal people have given them and in course of time, the tribesmen have accepted the name. But they identify themselves as 'Kui loku' "Kui enju" or "Kuinga" because they speak 'Kui' or 'Kuvi' language belonging to Dravidian linguistic group. 'Kui' and 'Kuvi' are two regional linguistic variations. While 'Kuvi' is spoken by a majority of the Kandha of undivided Koraput, Kalahandi and Bolangir districts, 'Kui', is spoken by the Kandha of Phulbani district. Kuvi appears to have original structural composition while Kui, an acculturated and transformed form of Kuvi language. (SCSTRTI, 2013)

On the basis of the socio-cultural characteristics, the Kandha may be divided into several sections such as; Desia Kandha, Dongria Kandha, Kutia Kandha, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, Malua Kandha, etc. Among the several sections of the Kandha communities, two sub-sections such as Kutia Kandha and Dongria Kandha have been identified as Particularly



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Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs). Family is the smallest social unit in Kandha society. Nuclear family is common and joint family is rarely found. The members of the partilineage help their head of family during birth, marriage and death rituals etc. They use surname like Kanhar, Mallick, Pradhan, Majhi etc. The Kandhas are agriculturists. They practice both shifting cultivation (dahi) on the hill tops and hill-slopes and plough cultivation (nela) in valleys and low lands. They cultivate on three types of lands namely dhipa -upper land (depa keta), Berena (jodi keta) and Sarada (suruda keta) for paddy cultivation and they cultivate Kandala (kanga), Jununga (judungaga), Biri (masangaga) etc in their hilly areas. In the Kandha community, exorcism, tantra-mantra, divine worship of gods and goddesses, animal and bird sacrifices, and ritualistic rituals are a form of psychological traditional indigenous healing. While this practice sometimes yields positive results, it often lacks any scientific basis or logic. However, the traditional indigenous healing practices practiced by Kandha communities, based on traditional indigenous knowledge and using herbs obtained from the surrounding forests, are certainly a reliable source of knowledge. The Kandha tribe also possesses traditional indigenous knowledge of herbs, passed down from their ancestors. Very few individuals within the Kandha community possess such traditional indigenous knowledge. (SCSTRTI, 2013)

Even today, these herbal, tribal, and folk remedies are being used extensively by modern societies. This quality of tribal healers, their traditional indigenous knowledge and their medical competence can be confirmed by the following verse from the Chanakya Sutra-

*“Amanyabhakshan naasti, naasti moolana naushadh
Ayogyah: Purusho naasti, jojak strat durlabh”*

This means that no letter is invalid or powerless; no root (traditional herb) is devoid of herbal, i.e., medicinal properties. Similarly, no human is incompetent; those who use them properly are often unavailable. This statement makes it clear that even if a practitioner of tribal medicine, folk medicine, or herbal medicine is illiterate or lacks knowledge of the scriptures, there is no logical reason to distrust their medicinal knowledge and medical abilities. Tribal medicine, the traditional system of medicine, is the oldest in the medical field. It is considered eternal and prevalent since time immemorial. This system of medicine was first discovered in India and then popularized in other parts of the country. History bears witness to the fact that India has disseminated knowledge to many countries. Traditional medicine began at the dawn of creation, and even today, the practice of traditional medicine using herbs based on traditional indigenous knowledge continues to be prevalent and influential.

The present research paper focuses on the use of ethno-medicinal practices among the women of Kandha tribe of Koraput district of Odisha. Following mixed method, data have been collected from 135 women and from 32 indigenous practitioners and Vaidyas through



interview method. Various plants and their usage for curing various diseases have been documented. An attempt has also been made to show the various methods of preparing ethno-medicines prevalent in the Kandha community and the importance of different plants. It has also been found that the Kandha tribe uses many types of healing methods for the same disease.

Indigenous ethno-medicinal practices are the traditional and ritualistic method which the tribal society associates with its socio-cultural beliefs and values. The Kandha tribe has also been transferring this belief from generation to generation. This research paper investigates these values and beliefs. This research paper is also important because in today's changing times, all forms of society are being influenced directly and indirectly by modernization and westernization, but the Indigenous traditional medicinal practice prevalent in the Kandha society in the form of Indigenous knowledge system still holds its place. Direct evidence of this was seen when all allopathic medicines failed during the period of Covid-19, then the traditional medical system protected the values of life in the local society.

Objectives:

The objective of this article was to observe the various indigenous ethno-medicinal practices prevalent in the women of Kandha tribal society, who lives their lives through indigenous medical system based on their indigenous knowledge system in the natural environment in a tribal district of Odisha know as Koraput and to document the methods of use.

Methodology:

For a long time, the Kandha tribal community has been using this natural resource for the treatment of various diseases on the basis of indigenous knowledge. For this, a structured schedule was prepared by the author, which included questions related to the indigenous medicinal practice and healing techniques of their use. This schedule was asked to various women, men and indigenous medicinal practitioners of the Kandha tribe. In this article, information and evidence have been collected through interview method from 135 women and 32 indigenous Kandha practitioners and *Vaidyas*.

Ethno-medicinal practices among the Women of Kandha Tribe

1. Long menstrual cycle

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Indian Kino Tree or Malabar Kino Tree</i>	<i>Pterocarpus marsupium</i>	
<i>Indian Laurel (Maida lakri)</i>	<i>Litsaea Sebifera</i>	<i>Root & Bark</i>



Method/Suggestion: Grind its root and bark thoroughly with a mortar and pestle and drink it with water (about 100g of Mahua liquor) in the morning on an empty stomach before sunrise. This medicine should be taken for about 3-5 days, only then will this herb have any effect on the sick woman or girl.

2. After Delivery

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Shatavari</i>	<i>Asparagus recemosus</i>	<i>Root</i>

Method/Suggestion: Its root should be thoroughly crushed with a mortar and pestle, after that this medicine should be taken with about 100g of water or Mahua liquor. This medicine should be taken every morning and evening for about 3-21 days, only then this herb/root will have effect on the woman.

Avoided: Should not consume any type of oil, black gram, lentils, Brinjal, cucurbit, chili, spices etc.

3. Mother's milk does not come

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Indian Spurge Tree (Hedge Euphorbia)</i>	<i>Euphorbia neriifolia</i>	<i>Leaf and stem</i>
<i>Asthma weed (Garden spurge)</i>	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i>	
<i>Devil's backbone</i>	<i>Pedilanthus eithymaloides</i>	

Method/Source: 2 or 3 leaves of Indian Spurge and Asthma weed should be sealed and crushed properly with a mortar and pestle, after that this medicine should be given with water and Mahua liquor about 100g. This medicine should be taken by those women whose breasts do not produce milk, those women should be allowed to bloom 2 or 4 leaves of these plants. If those women do this for 3-5 days, then after some time milk starts coming from their breasts.

4. Abortion

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Chaff flower</i>	<i>Achyronthes aspera</i>	
<i>Mountain Knot Grass</i>	<i>Aerva lanata</i>	<i>Root</i>

Method/Suggestion: The root should be thoroughly crushed into a mortar and pestle, and then the medicine should be consumed on an empty stomach. If a woman follows this for 2-5 days continuously, she can definitely find relief, even if she is 2-6 months pregnant. The root of the mountain knot grass should be thoroughly crushed with a mortar and pestle. Then, drink this herb with pure cow's milk on an empty stomach in the morning. Only then will this herb be effective for women.



Avoided: Should not consume any type of oil, black gram, lentils, Brinjal, cucurbit, chilli, spices etc.

5. Menstrual cycle stop

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>White Teak or Gamhar</i>	<i>Gmelina arborea</i>	
<i>Madhuca longifolia (Indian Butter Tree)</i>	<i>Raxb. Bassialatifolia</i>	
<i>Almondette Tree (Chirinji)</i>	<i>Buchanania cochinchinesis</i>	<i>Root, Fruit, leaf</i>
<i>Velvet Leaf</i>	<i>Cissampelos Pareira</i>	
<i>Maloo Creeper</i>	<i>Bauhinia Vahllii</i>	

Method/Suggestion: Its root and bark should be crushed well with a mortar and pestle, after that it should be consumed with water, this medicine should be consumed in the morning on an empty stomach, and only then this medicine will be effective on the sick women and girls.

6. Family planning

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Spiny gourd</i>	<i>Momordica dioxica</i>	<i>Fruit</i>

Method/Suggestion: The root and bark should be thoroughly ground with a mortar and pestle, then consumed with water. This medicine should be taken in the morning on an empty stomach. Only then will this medicine be effective for the sick woman.

Avoided: Should not consume any type of oil, black gram, lentils, Brinjal, cucurbit, chilli, spices, Pumpkin, Tamarind etc.

7. Mother milk does not come

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Asthma weed</i>	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i>	<i>Fruit</i>

Method/Suggestion: The root/bulb of the milkweed should first be dried thoroughly in the sun, then ground into a fine powder using a mortar and pestle. This powder should be given to women with water or milk. This medicine should be taken for approximately 21 days before it will be effective.

8. Long Time Menstrual cycle

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Nagbala Crossberry</i>	<i>Grewia hirsute</i>	<i>Root</i>



Method/Suggestion: The root of the Nagbala plant should be thoroughly crushed and ground with a mortar and pestle. The medicine should be taken with water. This medicine should be taken every morning on an empty stomach for 3-5 days. Only then will this herb be effective for sick women and girls.

9. Labour Pain

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Coromandel ebony (tendu)</i>	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i>	<i>Fruit and root</i>

Method/Suggestion: The root of the tendu plant should be sealed and ground thoroughly with a mortar and pestle, after that this medicine should be taken with water. This medicine should be taken every day in the morning on an empty stomach for about 3-5 days, only then this herb will be effective on the sick women.

10. Pregnancy

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Shivlingi</i>	<i>Bryonia Laciniosa</i>	<i>Fruit and root</i>

Method/Suggestion: Its root should be dried well in the sun and prepared in the form of powder, after that the old herb should be about 5-6 years old, about 21 tablets should be tied together with the same old herb and this medicine should be consumed on an empty stomach. If any women does this then there is a possibility of that woman getting pregnant within 3/5 days. If those women are under the influence of any black magic then only these herbs will not have any effect on them, if those women are not under the influence of black magic then the medicine will have any effect on them. This medicine is consumed by another method, like- if a woman wants a boy then she should consume this medicine with black cow's ghee and if a woman wants a girl then that woman should consume those herbs with red cow's ghee.

Avoided: Should not consume any type of oil, black gram, lentils, Brinjal, cucurbit, chilli, spices, Pumpkin, Tamarind etc.

11. White Discharge

<i>Indigenous Name of Plant</i>	<i>Scientific Name of Plant</i>	<i>Part of Plant used</i>
<i>Marvel of Peru (four O'clock flower) Gulabash</i>	<i>Mirabilis Jalapa</i>	<i>Fruit, root, stem</i>



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Method/Suggestion: First, cook the Gulbans over a fire, then mix it with water and drink the medicine made on an empty stomach.

Avoided: Should not consume any type of oil, black gram, lentils, Brinjal, cucurbit, chilli, spices, Pumpkin, Tamarind etc.

Conclusion:

Since prehistoric times, humans have been using various plants present in their local environment for medicinal purposes. The Kandha tribe has a close relationship with their local forests. The Kandha community living in Borigumma, Dasamantpur, Jeypore, and Koraput blocks has indigenous ethno-medicinal knowledge of various plants, which they use in various indigenous healing methods. There is a need to collect the various indigenous methods present in the Kandha tribe and get them recognized by indigenous practitioners like *Gunia*. The Kandha tribe has also been transferring this belief from generation to generation. This research paper is also important because in today's changing times, all forms of society are being influenced directly and indirectly by modernization and westernization, but the Indigenous traditional medicinal practice among women of Kandha prevalent in the Kandha society in the form of Indigenous knowledge system still holds its place.



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