



Folk medicine and faith healing in Uttarakhand

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Abstract.

Beside classical medicine there are many types of folk medicine in the world. They are practised in different ways to different regions. India, especially the Himalayan region of India is rich in such types of practices. There are many Tibs, and rituals for the Himalayan region to cure disease. This article reviews folk medicine and faith healing in Uttarakhand.

Key words: Folk medicine, Faith healing, Mantra, Herbs

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I. Introduction

Folk medicine is significant source of Ayurvedic, Unani, Traditional Chinese medicine and Medical herbalism. Folk medicine incorporates crude medicinal herbs, decoctions and infusions and syrups. Folk medicine is still practiced by some vendors, hakims and vaidis in remote areas and some folk preparations are of surprisingly high curative value. A large proportion of the population in a number of developing countries still relies on local medicinal plants to satisfy their primary health care needs¹.

Traditional medicinal systems have become increasingly popular in recent years. It is very difficult to define such systems because of their diverse origins and different beliefs. A broad, generalizable definition of such system is widely accepted "Systems of medicine not taught in the medical schools". Traditional medicine has maintained its popularity in a number of Asian countries, such as China, Japan, India and Pakistan².

Medical plants are the oldest known health care products. Their importance is still growing although it varies depending on the ethnological, medical and historical background of each country. Ayurveda and Unani is well known traditional medicine systems of Indian sub-continent.

Ayurveda and Siddha are the oldest system of medicine in India. The antiquity of Ayurveda dates back to 3000 BCE and Siddha system of medicine had been dissemination or transmitted by nine Nath and eighty-four Siddhas all over the country. Unani system of medicine was introduced in India by Arab and Iranians around eleventh century. In these systems of medicine there is extensive use of physics, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, botany, and medical science. If we talk about medical practices in Uttarakhand, then all these medical systems are also in practice in Uttarakhand. Apart from all these medicinal systems, Uttarakhand has also had its own folk medicinal systems. This is still used by the people of rural areas and tribal area. Uttarakhand is the far northern part of India consists Kumaon and Garhwal region. This state has thirteen districts and it inhabited by five scheduled tribes and the other rural and urban people.

II. Methods

In folk medicine studies, the most reliable method is one involving field survey³. For the present study villages and information were select on random basis – interview, observation and case study were employed for data collection.

Study

The most important fact about folk medicine is the way in which it is integrated into a whole or a pattern and it is in such pattern that folk medicine differs from tribe to tribe and community to community⁴. In folk system of medicine, the general concept of treatment of diseases and the drugs used develop with the approval of particular community, no special training is required for this medicinal system rather it is transferred from generation to generation by customary agencies. Similarly, we can define folk medicinal practitioner or folk healer "a person who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care to community."

The tribes and other community residing in Garhwal and Kumaon in Uttarakhand have their own folk medicinal system, being oral tradition there is also a tinge of superstition in them. These practices are the community's own heritage.

There are two types of folk medicinal practice is observed in Uttarakhand. One in which treatment is done by herbal medicine. Such practitioners are called *Vaidyas*. In another way, disease is diagnosed with the help of Mantras and broomsticks. Such practitioners are called by different name in the local language. Like *Dhami*, *Jagari*, *Sabri* etc. KS Gulia in his book "Folk Medicine of the Himalaya" has called these practitioners 'Which Doctors' (KS Gulia, 2007). Whereas in different regions of Uttarakhand they are called by different names.

Written records of herbal plants which used to treat diseases are hard to get and most herbal lore has come orally. Details of some folk medicinal practitioner of Uttarakhand based on case study by the author given below.

Vaids

- Jeevan Candra Chaudhari lives in *Bageshwar- Kumaun* (Uttarakhand) and run a Ayurvedic medicine shop called Amarnath *Aushadhalaya*. He is a Folk and ayurvedic medicine practitioner. Chaudhari says this is his ancestral profession, and he has been doing it for seven generations. His grandfather, late Amarnath Chaudhary, was rewarded by the Kumaon commissioner in 1922 CE for his excellent work, and was given a copper plate. Chaudhary is originally a resident of *Lohaghat (Champawat)*. His grandfather had settled in *Bageshwar*. Chaudhary treats various ailments, and people from different region of Uttarakhand came to him for treatment. He has a good knowledge of various regional herbs and their applications to different diseases. Chaudhari also claims to cure first and second stages cancer. In the treatment of cancer, *Triamana* (Gentiana KurrooRoyal), *Talishpatra* (Yews or Taxaceae), Ban Kakari and *Sadafuli* (Periwinkles or Catharanthus) are used by him. He told the author that Koot (Buckwheat) is used as a painkiller and anthelmintic. Yellow oleander (*ThevetiaPeruviana*) is used in cardiac diseases and *Sharpagandha* (Snakeroot or Devil pepper or Rauwolfia serpentina) is used in high blood pressure.

- *InramaShaikh* lived in *TeetBazar, Vaidnath(Bageshwar)* and runs a herbal dispensary. This dispensary was established by his grandfather late Ikram Shaik. Who came from *Nagina (Dhampur)* in around 1857 CE. Sheikh says that this is their ancestral profession. His fore fathers were Unani medicinal practitioner. After their settlement in Vaidnath, the also learn folk medicinal prescriptions from a local practitioner. Sheikh claims that he can treat all types of diseases. He told to the author that. He use "*Kakarsinghi*" (*Pistacia integrerrima*), "*Vanshlochan*" (*Bambusaatundinacea*), the bark of "*Kafal*" (*Myrica esculenta* or box berry) tree, "*Thuner*" (*Texaswallichiana*), "*Giloy*" (*Tinospora cordifolia*) and "*Vach*" (*Acorus calamus linn.*) to prepare medicine for asthma. For gynae disease, "*lodhra*" (*Symplocosracemosa*) "*Majistha*" (*Rubia cordifolia*), "*Dasmool Syrup*", "*Ashok*" (*Saracaasoca*) and "*Giloy*" are commonly used by the folk medicinal practitioner.

Faith healer

Faith healers make use of prayers and touch to treat diseases. These healers are found in every community of Uttarakhand. They use some combination of prayers according to their religion. Hindu healers use Mantras and Muslim healers use verses from the Quran for healing. Eagle feathers and twigs of certain trees like *Padamkath* (*Prunus cerasoides D. Don.*) are also used by faith healers during healing process.

- *BishanSingh* lives in *Mallital, Nainital* and run a shop. He is a faith healer. He treats ears, eyes, toothache and Makara (shingles) disease with the help of "*Mantra*". He also prescribes charms, amulets and Mantra to neutralize or destroy the evil spirits influence and cure diseases. He said, there are different Mantras for different disease. These Mantras is in local dialects. The following Mantra he recites for shingles.

Om Namah Guruji Tumko Adesha,

Kala Kalwa Kala Mantra.

Thami Ghalo Veri Shatru ka Mantra,

YoJantraYo Mantra.

Jal Makaraye Namah, Thal Makaraye Namah,

Ang Makaraye Namah, Bhuj Makaraye Namah

Pair Makaraye Namah.

Ye Mandala Chori Par Mandala Jay,

Sir ka Makara, Kan Ka Makara, Nak Ka Makara

Gaal Ka Makara, Gala Ka makara, Jikuri Ka Makara

Pat Ka Makara, Peeth Ka Makara, Jangha ka Makara

Akash Ka Makara Jharu,

Pay Ka Makara Jharu,

Na Jhare to Mata Jalkumari ki Duhai,

Thal Bhataku Bhairav ki Duhai

AakashEru Baba Ki Duhai

Ye Jeev Ki Raksha Kar

*Yeka Sharir Ku Nirvan Kar,
Layun LagayonUkhel,
Chal ChidraUkhel
Ye Jeev ka Sharir ku Nirvan Kar de,
Tab Rayo Teru Bol Praman
For MantronIshwaro Vacha⁵.*

Bishan Singh cure disease like T.B. (Tuberculosis), snake bite, scorpion bite and fever by reciting Matras also.

• *Jamshed Ali* is well-known faith healer of Uttarakhand in *Nainital* region. He is a retired teacher and now at age of 80 years. He treats paralysis, infertility, epilepsy, stones, jaundice and various diseases of children by faith healing. Jamshed Ali learned this knowledge mainly from his mother-in-law. According to him, medical treatment has been discussed in *Soor-e- Sulaiman* of the Quran. He does all their treatment on the basis of the Quran. The water and oil anointed by him are used during the treatment, which is sprayed on the patient. During his government job, he was posted in different areas of Kumaon. At that time also he learned the remedies of many diseases from the local people. They consider this knowledge as gift of God. According to Jamshed Ali it is written in the Quran that there is no any disease which God can not cure:

“There is no disease that God Almighty has created, except that he also has created its treatment” (Quran 26:80). Seen thus, there are many methods of prevention from diseases in the folk life of Uttarakhand. They heal with Mantras, herbal medicines and various rituals. These healing methods have been present in folk life as a tradition for centuries.

¹ Sing, Amrit Pal (2005), *The Lost Glory of Folk Medicine, Ethnobotanical Leaflets*, Vol. 2005, Iss. 1, Article 29.

² Ibid.

³ Jain SK, Rao S, (1968), *Field and Herbarium Techniques*, Jodhpur: Scientific Publisher.

⁴ Gulia, Ks, (2007), *Folk Medicine of Himalaya*, ISHA Books, Delhi

⁵ This Mantra is in local dialects, Kumauni and Garhwali of Uttarakhand. It is exactly what was said by the practitioner to the author.