



Research Article

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Emic Perspectives of Santal Healing Traditions in Odisha

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Abstract: The distinctive cultural and traditional approaches to health and well-being of the Santal community in Odisha, India, examine the perspectives of the indigenous people on healthcare practices. The paper entitled "Emic Perspectives of Santal Healing Traditions in Odisha" is relevant to contemporary anthropological wisdom. The study highlights the health perspectives of the expanding body of literature on indigenous healthcare practices in the Santal worldview. The study also highlights the difficulties that the Santal community faces in maintaining indigenous healthcare practices. The study promotes an inclusive healthcare system with culturally competent healthcare strategies that respect and incorporate indigenous knowledge. The Santal healthcare systems are essential for developing policies and interventions that honour their cultural practices while addressing contemporary health challenges. The book concludes with an emphasis on the importance of a multidimensional approach to tribal health research.

Keywords: Health, Well-being, Emic, Wisdom, Santal, & Culture

"If people can't acknowledge the wisdom of indigenous cultures, then that's their loss" -Jay Griffiths

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) declared 1993 as International Year of the World's Indigenous People with the goal of promoting and increasing worldwide awareness of the rights, cultures, and general well-being of indigenous populations. The United Nations created Sustainable Development Goal 3, i.e., "Good Health and Well-Being," in 2015 with aim of guaranteeing that everyone has access to high-quality healthcare, encouraging well-being, and tackling global health issues. The perspectives of indigenous knowledge systems have become a centre of academic discourse within the context of innovation and the commercialization of knowledge. Indigenous is originally from the specific region in which it is found. Knowledge understands about a subject. System is a way of functional mechanism (Mazonde & Thomas, 2007). The idea and practices of the indigenous knowledge system indicates indigenous people, but anthropologically the concept attached to an ethno-social and ethno-cultural entity (Sengupta, 2012). An integral part indigenous knowledge is tribal medicine which seems to be systematized. It is quite essential to give proper recognition and require resources also be allocated to give justice towards tribal medicine (Reddy, 2023). The author examines the importance of cultural identification for maintaining societal cohesion as well as individual worldviews regarding health. She arguing for a critical, social constructionist point of view, and highlights the importance of a global health strategy that respects diverse cultural beliefs (MacLachlan, 2006). The localized ideas that blend natural and supernatural aspects form the tribal worldview. Traditional healers provide spiritual security by bridging the gap. Tribes

continue to disagree about whether or not to accept contemporary healthcare because they feel that it lacks emotional and spiritual support. An investigation into the health beliefs of the Santhals in Orissa explores the harmony between conventional and contemporary medical systems (Sonowal & Prahara, 2007). The study looks into the Santals use of ethno-medicine in Orissa, with a particular emphasis on their traditional views on illness, recovery, and health. The Santals combine modern medical care with the use of natural medicines, notwithstanding their dependence on religious beliefs. This research investigates the source, procurement, and gathering practices for herbal medicine in a particular hamlet. Even though they are aware of contemporary medicine, some Santals have become experts in herbal remedies because of their proximity to forests (Chakrabarty, Kisku, & Dolai, 2012). Instead of institutional services and modern healthcare system, Santal people still practice and have faith on traditional healing practices. The traditional medicine symbiotic between man, nature and supernatural beings, medicinal practitioners, patients and traditional medicines play a major role in maintaining connection of all the stakeholders (Maharana, 2020). The author expounded the health care beliefs and practices of the Desia Kandha tribe. The practices, traditions, and ecology of the Desia Kandhas provide the foundation of their knowledge of health and illness. Diseases like malaria, chickenpox, measles, and jaundice are attributed by the Desia Kandhas to a number of things, such as breaking taboos, an improper diet, unhygienic living conditions, and the presence of bad spirits. Understanding the ethno-medical viewpoints of diverse health cultures is crucial to achieving the goal of health for all, especially among

tribal groups (Naik, 2019). The traditional healers used different parts of the plant to prepare medicine like bark, flower, rhizome, root, leaves, seed, gum, and in some cases the whole plant for treatment of different ailments (Rout, Panda & Mishra, 2009). The different health problems are arising due to changes in environmental condition and due to carelessness. They also believe that malevolent and benevolent spirits also affect their condition. They are relying on magico-religious practices and rites to come from ailments (Sahoo, 2021). Tribal people of Odisha are preserving the information of medicinal plants and their unique means of practicing it since time immemorial. They have strong faith on traditional healing system have their own traditional physicians who use medicinal plants as their main ingredients (Joshi, 2006). Health care system needs to be locality oriented, population oriented and the health care services delivered in the tribal areas should be authenticate, appropriate, cost effective, affordable, feasible and trust worthy etc (Kanrar, Goswami, & Roy, 2023). Indigenous medicine being a social institution occupies a vital position in tribal culture. The medicine used, healing practices and beliefs of indigenous healthcare are eliminate through the ethno-scientific knowledge created by people as well as acquired by the people of indigenous community (Bulliyya, Nayak & Mallick, 2005). Ethno-medicinal practices and beliefs have direct relationships with culture and truly influenced by the culture. There is a close relationship exist in between disease, healing practice, ritual, medicine and culture. The understanding of health, sickness, diagnosis and treatment are also influenced to a great extent by the culture of a particular society (Brahma & Mudgal, 2019). Tribal believed that supernatural power and physical forces have the reason in one or other way in the health status of a human being. The poor health of an individual, evil spirit, ancestor spirit, and evil eye plays the major role. To maintain a good health tribal way to appear the spirits and deities this became the essential part of tribal health care system (Negi & Singh, 2018).

Relevance of the Study

The research question of the study is: How has the indigenous knowledge system of the Santal community influenced contemporary healthcare utilization?. The study attempted to explore the above research question, which is related to the indigenous viewpoints on healthcare practices within the Santal population of Odisha. The researchers also explained how the research helps to enhance cultural competence, enhance healthcare access, minimize health inequities, and conserve traditional knowledge.

Objectives of the Study

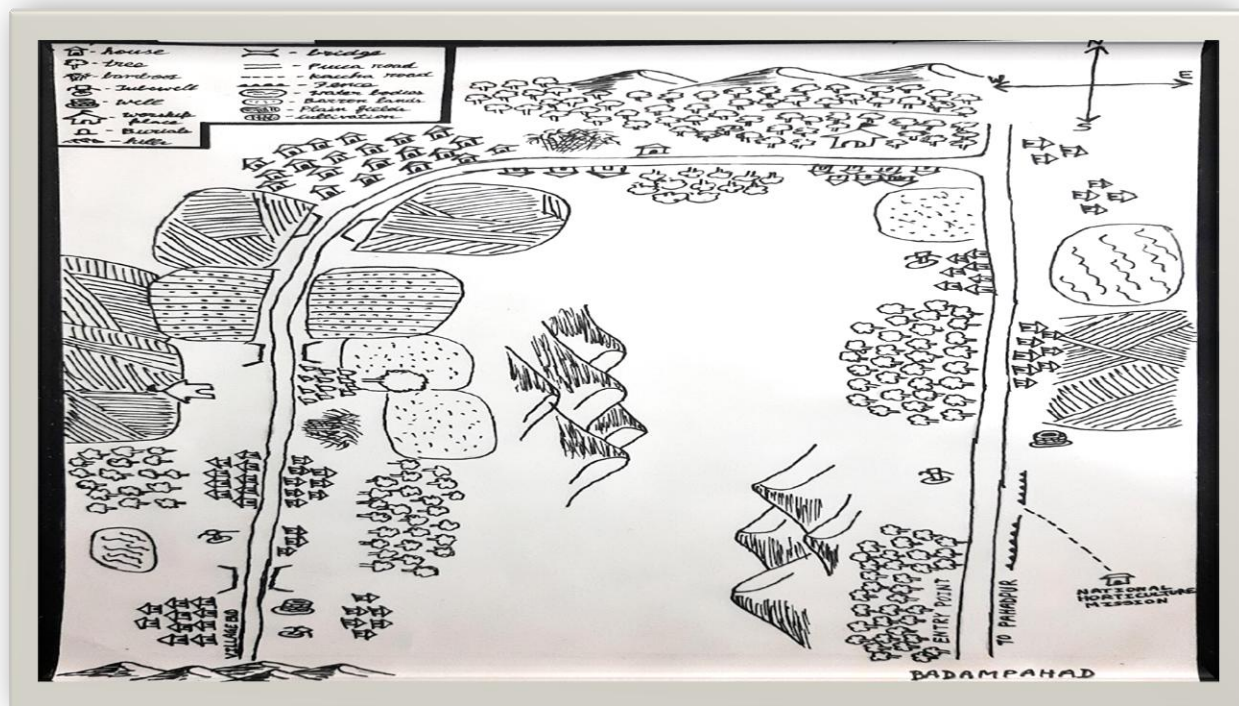
The key objective of the study is to explore the indigenous healthcare practices of the Santal community. The specific objectives of the study are to highlight the socio-cultural life of Santal and investigate the indigenous healthcare practices of Santal.

Geo-Ethnic Profile of Santal

The Santal people are mostly inhabited in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. After Kandha tribe, Santal is the second-largest tribal population found in Odisha. Santal people speak Santali language. They have their own script, "Ol Chiki" which developed by Pandit Raghunath Murmu. The "Bonga" or "Marangburu" is the highest divinity among the Santal people. The Santal sacred grove, known as "Jaher" is located beyond the hamlet. On both sides of a broad street with beautiful design, the residences are organized in a linear style. The majority of the Santal people are settled farmers. Santal people eat three times a day, and one of their favourite drinks is handia or rice beer. Both joint and nuclear family are prevalent among them. Cross-cousin marriage and marriage (Bapla) within the same clan are forbidden. The Santal kinship system is composed of 164 sub-clans (Khut) and 12 clans (Paris). The clans are Murmu, Kisku, Marandi, Besra, Hansda, Hembrom, Puria, Soren, Bedea, Chonre, Tudu, and Baske. The chief of the village, known as "Majhi," is the most powerful figure in the political structure.

Maps of Fieldwork Site





METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The 21st-century anthropologists are deeply concerned with preserving and promoting the diversity of human expression and culture. Anthropology is also well-known for its holistic approach, which involves gathering empirical data using a variety of methods and instruments. The study was carried out in the rural Mayurbhanj district in northern Odisha, India. The study's sampling techniques were simple random sampling and cluster/area sampling. The study population is Santal. The study sample consists of 118 households (524 populations; 266 males and 258 females). The primary data were collected with the help of these methods such as case study, in-depth interview, observation, and household schedule. The secondary data sources are public and private sector official papers, books, journals, articles, and the internet.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Santal community's health culture emphasizes the relationship between community, environment, and health by drawing on traditional healing practices, spirituality, and cultural beliefs. The Santal community emphasizes a close relationship between the community, environment, and general well-being, which is reflected in its health culture, which is influenced by their faith, cultural beliefs, and use of traditional healing techniques. In Santal culture, a

healthy individual is defined as someone who engages in hard physical work, maintains proper dietary habits, abstains from alcohol, and embodies a happy way of life. The Santal community holds a distinctive perspective on illness, characterizing it as individuals who 'don't work properly,' 'talk to themselves all the time,' 'don't eat properly,' and those who exhibit aggressive and violent behaviour when unable to perform basic activities such as eating, moving around, and taking a bath.

How Practitioners Recognize Illness and Disease

Symptoms: The practitioner examines the patient's symptoms to diagnose the illness. The symptoms of a variety of illnesses typically include behavioural abnormalities, fever or an unusually high body temperature, jaundice (yellow eyes, urine, palm, and body colour), and in the case of malaria, severe fever, headache, and body discomfort. The diagnostic procedure looks for answers to the following questions: who or what caused the disease (efficient cause), why it has harmed this specific person at this moment (ultimate cause), and how the sickness started (immediate causes).

Urine Test: The Ojha use urine tests to diagnose their illnesses. The patient's urine is first collected on an earthen plate or Saal leaves, and a few drops of Kusum oil are added. When the patient has joint pain, an image like a snake will display. If an image in the shape of a circle can be seen in it, the patient has a white discharge.



Vein Analysis: The shamans and traditional healers identify the diseases through vein analysis by holding the hand and just tracking the blood flow rate in the vein. They are also analyzing the diseases by feeling the temperature in the body.

Disease frequency in the Santal community

The children in the Santal community often have health issues related to malnourishment, worm infections, cold, cough, fever, and vulnerability to the evil eye. Male adult difficulties include joint discomfort, muscular disorders, stomach issues; piles, TB, and chest pain are common. In the meantime, adult females frequently suffered from difficulties such as have joint discomfort, cold, cough, back pain, as well as leucorrhea, menstruation-related problems, and malnutrition.

Various Causes of Disease

The Santals of Pahadpur village consider supernatural forces have significant influences on health and they attribute that the overall prosperity and well-being of their hamlet is maintained by keeping positive ties with supernatural power and ancestor spirits. The Santal people also believe in the power of sorcery, witchcraft, evil eye, and breaching taboos, believe that illness may cause due to this. In addition to this the study population also recognize that illnesses may have natural causes other than human and spiritual forces. People often believe that common ailments like fever, headaches, coughing, and stomach-aches have natural causes.

Case Study-I: Traditional Healer

Sukulal, a 48-year-old male traditional healer, inhabited in the study village. He is a practitioner who provides traditional medicines to the villages. It took ten years to acquire these skills orally and knowledge about medicinal plants. To acquire the knowledge he had sacrifice a cock in the name of deities. After that, he extends his service to the needy without charging for it. He told me about an instance where he treated a patient who had suffered from jaundice. In order to stave off bad luck, he also utters a few mantras while administering the ethno-medicines. An adult from neighbour village had suffered from jaundice, but the patient had doubt about the effectiveness of allopathic medication. The young men learned that someone in Pahadpur is well-known for providing traditional remedies for jaundice. Then he



approached me to treat him with traditional medication. After taking the medication he healed in few days.



Traditional Healer Collect Bark of Tree

Case Study-II: Shaman

He is a shaman who gives ethno-medicine to the villagers. He also has the power to assail evil spirits. He does not take money from the people for the medicines. However, when people give him something with love, he accepts it as a present. Many people come to him with the problem of evil spirits, and he treats them well with his magico-religious power. People praise him for this service. He shared with me an incident of an evil spirit on a woman whom he treated with the following process: First, the woman was seated before him, and then he treated her with a peacock feather bunch for two to three times; three fowl were sacrificed and uttered some lines of mantras. In addition, he also gave Deunria, that contains Saparum (roots), Danduki (kadal roots), Sandhaini, Dhikupatala, and Sausabandha inside it.



Shaman Showing different Herbs

Case Study-III: Patient

Jamuna Bari, a 35-year-old woman, has struggled with leucorrhoea after getting married. She was the only woman in her house and was initially experience of weakness, headache, and exhaustion. When a visiting local medicine man offered her traditional medication, she sought solace from him. She recovered after using it consistently for a month, but a few months later, the illness reappeared. She keeps using the same conventional medication in spite of the recurrence. She takes the medication three times a day while following specific dietary guidelines, such as avoiding fatty foods and non-vegetarian items, until she fully recovers. Her timidity has prevented her from seeing a doctor, and prefers using ethno-medicine, a choice supported by the community's belief that it is more effective than modern medicine for treating this particular ailment.

Santal's Treatment Protocol

One of India's indigenous populations is the Santal people, who are primarily located in the states of

West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, and Assam. Here, the researchers focus on the Odisha Santal population. Their customary therapy regimens frequently combine herbal treatments, spiritual exercises, and group support. The Santal people frequently possess extensive knowledge of the regional plants and their therapeutic qualities. To produce treatments for various ailments, they may employ a variety of herbs, roots, leaves, and other natural substances. The Santal healing methods include spiritual components because they consider mental and spiritual well-being to be as important as bodily well-being. The healing process may be greatly aided by rituals, ceremonies, prayers, and the participation of spiritual leaders or healers. Santal healing frequently takes place in a communal setting, with the support of the community being crucial to the healing process. Santal medicine typically approaches health from a holistic perspective, taking into account how the environment, mind, body, and spirit are all interconnected.

Types of Disease	Local Term	Treatment Pattern of Santal Botanical Name	Parts are Used	Process of Treatment
Jaundice	Saparam/Mishri/Chini	Night Jasmine/ Rock Sugar	Leaf	Its juice is used to cure jaundice. Taken once daily in the morning for 3 days.
Joint Pain	Dikupatla/Kusum Tela	Rhizome Noda/ Kusum Oil	Leaf	Heat with oil and massage the area of joint pain for 20 days.
Typhoid	Hemi Jaadi/ Gaai Khira	Night Jasmine/ Ineolamarckia	Leaf	Leaf paste with milk is given for typhoid. Twice a day for 2-3 days.
Malaria	Saparam Kalibohu		Leaf	It's taken twice per day, for 5-6 days.
Aczima	Kusum Oil/Kankada	Kusum Oil Crab	Fruit	Heat the crab with oil and apply it to the skin with the fur of a hen.
Spirit	Saparam, Dandukit/ Sandhaini/ Dikupatla	Night Jasmine/ Tridax Procumbens	Leaf	Juice taken twice in a day

Source: Fieldwork

CONCLUSION

This study has clearly shown that the Santal societies have been changing perspectives on health and health-seeking behaviour. The study of indigenous views on healthcare practices in the Santal Community of Odisha highlights the complex interplay between healthcare treatment and cultural values. The study also shows that the Santal people use a variety of plant parts, including roots, stems, bark, flowers, rhizomes, leaves, and seeds, for medicinal preparations aimed at treating many prevalent health issues.

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