

## Health Belief and Healing Practices in Hill Korwa Tribes

Narendra Baxla<sup>1</sup>, Prafull Kumar Sahu<sup>2</sup>

### How to cite this article:

Narendra Baxla, Prafull Kumar Sahu/Health Belief and Healing Practices in Hill Korwa Tribes/Indian J Res Anthropol 2023;9(2):73-79.

### Abstract

Health is the primary basis of human origin and its development. Only a healthy person makes a healthy society. A healthy society continuously interacts with the environmental conditions for its development. Health and wellness depend on individual health conditions of each individual. There are many beliefs related to health in the hill Korwa tribes, in which their lifestyle, food habits, socio-cultural and religious beliefs etc. are included.

This study is based on health related beliefs of particularly backward "Hill Korwa" tribe located in Bagicha block of Chhattisgarh state. Two gram panchayats of Bagicha block, Pandrapath and Kamarima villages, have been selected on the basis of majority of tribals. The purpose of this study is to find out the beliefs system and treatment methods related to health in hill Korwa tribes. This study is based on primary data, in which qualitative research method has been used to collect the data. Unstructured interview, group interview and interview guide have been included under qualitative research. In the present study several causes of disease were seen in the hill Korwa tribes, in which witch craft, evil eye, wrath of ancestors, for the treatment of diseases related to these, the tribal people go to the Devair of the village ask them to do the exorcism, worship-recitation, special rituals etc. get done. If the cause of the disease is natural and other, then the diseases related to it are treated by using medicines collected from the forest.

**Keywords:** Ethno Medicine; Exorcism; Indigenous Knowledge; Traditional Healer; Worship.

## INTRODUCTION

Chhattisgarh is one of the fascinating ethnographic state of our Country fully identified with its tribal culture as it is the home

**Author's Affiliation:** <sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha 442001, Maharashtra, India.

**Corresponding Author:** Narendra Baxla, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha 442001, Maharashtra, India.

**E-mail:** nbaxla101296@gmail.com

**Received on:** 22.07.2023

**Accepted on:** 30.08.2023

land of 42 tribal communities. Chhattisgarh is the only state of the country where 44.2% of the total area was occupied by forest land.<sup>1</sup> It is considered as a tribal dominated state as it has a significant high proportion of tribal population. Tribals of the state account for around one third of the total population of the total population. The origin of medicine in India is believed to be thousands of years ago. In tribal areas, diseases are believed to be caused by ghosts, wandering spirits, witch craft, evil spirits, etc., In ancient times, the treatment of diseases was done by traditional healer (Baiga, Guniya, Ojha, Vaidh). Most of the people of that time believed in indigenous medicine and there was a lack of scientific knowledge at that time.<sup>2</sup> The beginning of science based knowledge in the field of medicine

started with the origin of human and the increase in human knowledge, which passed through various stages and reached the development of modern medical practice at present. But most of the tribals in India live in dense forests and mountains, valleys away from urban and rural areas, their social, economic, educational, and health status is backward as compared to other castes. The tribal population though they are economically backward but they are culturally and socially very rich. Commonly people address them by the names of tribal, primitive caste, tribe etc. In the tribal society, health is linked with the socio-cultural traditions of that society and with the social, economic, religious, customs, practices etc. of that society. According to the<sup>3</sup>, 87 percent of people worldwide use traditional medicine as a complementary medicine. The tribal understanding of health, disease, treatment and death varies according to their culture and tradition. Their health was influenced by a combination of Biological, cultural and environmental factor. They have their own cultural and social practices to treat various illness. Tribal people are self-reliant over the centuries developed their own health care system based on plants and other items collected from forest.<sup>4</sup> A person becomes unwell due to divine cope, witchcraft, biological imbalance of the body, wrong eating habits. In this way the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors of that society also play an important role in determining health in tribal societies.<sup>5</sup> Socio-cultural factors of the society also have an important role in the problem related to disease and its classification in each tribal society, there is variation in the concepts of disease in each tribe. Socio-cultural and ecological factors also play an important role in determining health and disease in tribes.

#### *Hill Korwa Tribe*

Hill korwa tribe is particularly backward group in the state of Chhattisgarh. The korwa tribe are found in Jashpur, Korba, Surajpur and Balrampur and are divided into two main territorial group Pahari Korwa (Hill) and plain korwa (Dihariya), located in the north-east of the state of Chhattisgarh, with a total population of 43,981.<sup>6</sup> They usually carry bow and arrow and they were practicing agriculture and collect forest product. Both men and women of korwa tribe are fond of ornament and they wear a lot. The British administrators have two opinions regarding the origin of the Korwa tribe, first this tribe is a sub group of the tribes found in Chhota Nagpur, which is also known as Barwah. And its second opinion is that this tribe is related to Mudai

branch. Dalton has written in the context of the Korwa tribe that the Korwa tribe is the only link in the Kolerian chain.<sup>7</sup> This tribe is a mixed form of the ancient inhabitants of Chhota Nagpur, these tribes also do the work of farming and iron smelting. In this way, this tribe got scattered over a long period of time. On this basis, it can be said that this tribe slowly moved from its place of residence and after a long time reached other places of Chhattisgarh like Surguja, Jashpur, Korba and Balrampur districts and started living in small groups.

#### *Research Objective*

- To find out the beliefs system and treatment methods related to health in hill Korwa tribes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Present study was trying to know the health related beliefs in the hill Korwa tribe, were primary and secondary sources of data was used. Qualitative methodology has been used under the primary source, in which unstructured interview, group interview, semi-participant observation and interview guide have been used in the study. Through unstructured interview, semi-participant observation was used to collect data related to forest medicine, witch craft, beliefs related to ghosts, religious beliefs, exorcism, etc. were collected. The informants were selected based on their ethno medicinal knowledge and practices. Direct plant observed were done with the help of local healers. Through unstructured interviews, data was collected from people associated with various diseases in the village regarding their disease experience, forest medicine.

#### *Study Area*

The state of Chhattisgarh is located in the middle of India, the total geographical area of this state is spread up to 1,37,898.36 square kilometers, it is 4.47 percent of the total area of India, in terms of area it is the 10th largest state in the country. The state of Chhattisgarh was formed on 1 November 2000.<sup>8</sup> The state of Chhattisgarh is a state that is bounded by Odisha, Jharkhand to the east and Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra to the west, Uttar Pradesh to the north and Andhra Pradesh to the south.<sup>9</sup> According to the 2011 census, the total population of the newly formed Chhattisgarh state is 2,55,40,196 crores, out of which the population of males is 25,540,196 and females population is 12,827,915. There are 42 scheduled tribes living in

the state of Chhattisgarh, thus 11.6 percent of the scheduled tribes are in this state. Out of which Chhattisgarh state has five particularly backward tribes namely Kamar, Abujhmadia, Pahadi Korwa, Birhor and Baiga which have been included under specially backward tribes by the Government of India. According to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Survey,<sup>10</sup> the population of Particularly Backward Tribes in the state of Chhattisgarh is 1,87,056, of which the hill Korwa tribes account for 43,981. These tribes are mainly found in four districts of Chhattisgarh, in which Balrampur district (15,633), Jashpur (15,256), Korba (2,471) and Surguja district (10,017).

### **Health Related Beliefs in Hill Korwa Tribes**

In modern medicine, efforts are made to find the scientific reasons behind any disease or health related problem and its solution, but on the contrary, in tribal society and rural areas, supernatural powers such as ghosts, magic are behind the health problems. Sorcery, evil eye etc. are considered responsible. Some similar belief was seen in the hill Korwa tribes coming under Bagicha block of Chhattisgarh state. These concepts and beliefs can be clearly seen in his behaviour during his illness. Traditional healing practices play an important role in tribal health care system particularly in hill Korwa where less medical facilities. The ethno medicine plant have no side effects and easily available in tribal area in low cost.

*Smallpox Disease:* When there is smallpox in the tribal area, people believe that Mother Goddess has come on the patient. To cure this disease traditional healer (Devair) does exorcism using mantras. To reduce fever, he is given water made of powdered neem and jaggery every morning and evening. It takes 5-7 days to cure small pox, Devair comes to that person's house every evening to exorcize the patient. For exorcism, a one forth of rice and bamboo basket (Supa) are used and while chanting mantras, the whole body of the patient is swept from head to toe with neem leaves, almost every minute is spent in sweeping the patient. Every day it takes half an hour, in which the names of various Gods and Goddesses are taken. On the last day of treatment, flowers, incense sticks and coconut are offered in the name of those gods and goddesses, after which those things are kept in a path or a place near a river. The cause of this disease is believed to be the anger of the goddess in the tribal areas, and the people of the village during this time are less similar to the sick person and the sick person is forbidden to do any work. Until the smallpox is

cured, the sick person is given food and vegetables without turmeric oil. In this way, in case of smallpox disease, the diseased person is cured in the tribal area by using herbs.

*Fever:* If any person suffer from fever in the hill Korwa tribes, they go to the village Devair. Onion, Bhui Neem and Parhiplant were grinded separately and make a syrup. Healer gives them to the sick person to drink three times in a day. If the fever does not get cured in two to three days, then those people believe that somewhere there is an outbreak of evil spirits or ancestors, due to which this disease is not getting cured. They also go to the village Devair to cure diseases caused by the wrath of evil spirits or ancestors and they do exorcism while chanting various mantras. This exorcism is doing three to five times every evening. On the last day, they are given a cock or chick (Chengna) as a gift, in which if the disease is caused by evil spirits, then a black cock is given as a gift and if the disease is caused by ancestors, then a saffron colored cock is given to them as a gift. format is given. If even this does not cure the disease, then in the end they go to the hospital, but the economic condition of the hill Korwa tribes is not good, due to which few people are able to go to the hospital.

*Diabetes:* Diabetes disease is known by the name of sugar disease in hill Korwa tribes. Very few of these tribal people go to the government hospital for treatment of this disease. Most of the hill Korwa tribes believe that this disease is the result of the karma of the patient's previous birth, which he is suffering in this birth. The sick person is taken to the village doctor (Vaidya) for treatment, and he makes powder from the bark of Charai Godva and gives it to sick person to drink with water, along with amla and bael fruit to the sick person. And the sick person is prohibited to eat rice, potatoes and sweets etc.

*Pain:* When a person having pain in tribal area he goes to Devair. Healer sees the sick person and then touches the place of pain and finds out what is the cause of the pain. If the cause of the disease is natural, then it is treated with forest medicine. Snake dembu tuber and root of Bhuiparsa were grinded separately and mixed with two tea spoon of mustard oil. Massage it for three to four day morning and evening. If the pain does not subside in four to five days, then the cause of the pain is attributed to witch craft, evil spirits, evil eyes. Diseases such as witch craft, evil spirits, pain caused by evil eye are cured by exorcism by the diviner. Exorcism takes three to five time by Devair, after that black or colored cock is given as a gift to those

ghosts, evil spirits.

*Menstruation:* If a woman's menstruation continues for two-three months in the village and does not stop, then in the tribal area it is considered as the wrath of the gods and goddesses of the house. These people believe that the Kuldevi of the house is unhappy with the woman due to which she is facing such problems.

For the treatment of this type of disease, Devair gives powder of the Kunj Banroot. Mix it with water and drink half cup every morning on an empty stomach for 7 days. After the seventh day they do ritual name Kunjmarna that process is end of the disease. In the ritual Black cock, dub grass, Dhuvan, and vermilion, and rice bear (Hadiya) are used to Kunj Marna. All these things are used while reciting mantras, in which rice and incense are put into the fire little by little, after which rice is fed to the cock smeared with vermilion. Then that cock is sacrificed in the name of the gods and goddesses of the house. After this grinding the roots of Kunj Ban, mixing three spoons with half a cup of Mahua wine and less than half a cup of water is given to the woman patient.

*Wounds or Ear discharge:* In case of wounds or discharge in the ear, the people of this place consider it to be a natural cause and go to the Devair of the village for the treatment of such diseases. Devair suggest the sick person to use Karonj oil, and recites the mantra in that oil and gives it to the patient to apply in the ear. If the situation worsens, then advises to do exorcism.

*Indigestion and Acidity:* On coming of Indigestion and acidity, the villagers believe that a person has got evil eye. Due to which the food taken by him has not been digested properly. Apart

from the evil eye, sometimes people associate it with the changing weather and the changing weather is considered responsible for it. It is best to ignore such situations for two-three days, after that if similar situations continue. Then, taking it seriously, the village godman is called and the medicine for these diseases is taken from him. If the cause of the disease is due to evil eyes, then Devair tries to cure the disease by exorcising it. Similarly other diseases such as jaundice, itching, vomiting, bleeding in urine or white urine are also seen by people associating it with evil eye reasons.

In the hill Korva tribes of Chhattisgarh, it becomes clear to a great extent from the concepts related to disease and ill health that they denote as evil eye, evil spirit, wrath of witch, displeasure of the gods and goddesses of the house, for their physical and mental sufferings. Defiance of the soul or God is considered responsible for various diseases. There is also a belief among the tribes that if they do not follow any prohibition socially, religiously, then they believe that their gods and goddesses will get angry and they may have to undergo physical or mental suffering as a punishment. For this reason, in tribal areas, disease is also seen as a punishment from the gods and goddesses.

#### *Forest based Medical System*

The Pahari Korwas are a particularly backward tribe. This tribe lives in dense forests and hilly areas. To go to the habitat of this tribe, one has to pass through in accessible roads through dense forests. Due to which health facilities have not reached fully among these people. That's why most of the people use herbal medicine and forest medicine for treatment in these areas.

**Table 1:** Ethno medicinal plant and their use in traditional healing practices

Sr. No.	Disease	Local name of Illness Sadri	Local name of medicinal plant	Useful part	Preparation of medicine	Botanical name
1	Fever	(Jar)	"Bhui Neem"	Bark and leaf	Grinding the Leaf of BhuiNeem and make a juice. Half cup of juice is giving to patent twice a day in empty stomach for three day. gradually fever reduce.	Andrographis paniculata
2	Dog bite	(kukurchabl)	"Parhi"	Root	The root of Parhi is grinded in to a fine paste. It applied on dog bitten spot and one cup juice was given to patent.	Pericampylus
3	Pain	(Bathha-pirha)	"Munjain"	Root	Grinding the root of Munjain and massaging three times on the place where there is pain, the pain gets cured.	Saccharum Munja
4	Diarrhea	(Disha Rasta)	Rampavan	Root	If any person suffer from loos motion, then grinding the root of Rampavan and feeding one cup twice a day on an empty stomach to the patient cures loose motion.	Convallaria Pseudo Majalis

*table cont....*

5	Bone fracture	(hadatutlk)	Turumkanda	Tubers	In case of bone fracture, crushed Turumkanda is applied to the fractured area, after which a bamboo stick is tied. In 15-20 days, the bone starts to join slowly.	Phoenix sylvestris
6	Stomach ach		Papaya	Root	If there is burning sensation in the stomach, the root of the papaya tree is crushed and mixed with two teaspoons of paste in water . A cup of remedy were given to the patient to drink.	Carica papaya
7	White eye	(Drka)	Erandi	Leaf	When a person faints then his eyes appears getting white, at that situation grinding castor leaves and giving two to three spoons of its juice, that person gets cured.	Ricinus Communis
8	Fainted		Munga	Root	Grinding the root of Drum stick (Munga) and feeding two spoons to the patient, he gets cured.	Moringa oleifera
9	Epilepsy		Moonjjhad	Root	Finely grind the Munjjhad and make powder. One teaspoon of powder is mixed with cup of water and give to sick person every morning. In one month epilepsy get cured.	Saccharum Munja
10	Eaching	Khasra	Neem	Leaf	Boiling Neem leaves and bath from this with water. In three days eaching get cured.	Azadirachta Indica
11	Paralysis	Lakva	Akvan	Root and leaf	Seven Acavan leaves and one forth of whey are heated together, after that taking it in a cotton cloth andfoment on the paralyzed place for a month, the paralysis starts to heal gradually.	Calotropis Gigantea
			Amrood	Bark	First of all, the bark of guava, coral and jackfruit is crushed well, after that mustard oil is heated and crushed herb is put in that oil and cooked well and it is filtered with a cotton cloth. After that, mixing Mahakali oil in it and massaging the diseased place every morning for one month, paralysis starts to be cured.	Psidium Guajava
			Munga	Bark		Moringa Oleifera
12	Diabetic		Chakod	Leaf	By eating sukti (dried Vegetable) of Chakod leaf two-three times every week, the level of sugar gradually becomes normal in a month.	Sennatoria
			Indian gooseberry	Fruit	By eating raw Indian gooseberry for a week, the sugar level gradually becomes normal.	Phyllanthus Emblica
13	Hydrocil	Sirha	Maghi tobacco	Leaf	First of all Maghi tobacco is burnt in the fire, after that some water is mixed in it, after that coating it on the place where it is swollen every evening for three to five days, such diseases can be cured.	Nicotiana tabacum
14	When menstruation does not stop	(Pair chutel)	Ban Karela	Tuber	If menstruation continuously for one or two months. At that situation grinding bitter gourd's tuber and mix it with half cup of Mahualiquar and give to patient in morning . it can be cure the disease.	Momordica Dioica
15	Tooth ach	(Dantbtha)	Shameplant	Leaf	Toothache is cured by burning the leaves of mimosa in the fire and brushing the teeth with its ashes.	Mimosa pudica

*table cont....*

16	Kidney stone		Kulthi dal	Seed	Consuming kurthi dal for a month cures kidney stone disease slowly.	Macrotyloma Uniflorum
17	Cold	Rangbaaj	Konair	Bark	Grinding the bark of Konair, mixing it with mustard oil and heating it slightly in the fire, massage on whole body.	Bauhinia Purpurea
18	Dysentery and vomiting	Jhrni-pokni	Dhnbo	Bark	If both dysentery and vomiting are happening together, then by grinding the bark of Dhanbo. Give it to patient twice a day. It can cure the problem.	Cassia Fistula
19	Mouth ulcer	Chapka	Lakra	Leaf	In mouth ulcer dried Lakra leaf eaten thrice in a day. It can cure mouth ulcer.	Hibiscus sabdariffa
20	Stomach ach	pet batha	Parhi	Root	Grinding the dry root of a Parhi. Two teaspoon of powderdParhiand mix it with water give it to patient thrice a day cures stomach ache.	Pericampylus

## RESULT

Hundreds of species of medicinal plants are available in Jashpur district, here the tribal's making the use of medicines received from forests for primary treatment. Most part of Bagicha block is surrounded by forest and it is considered as a medicinal district of the state. Most of the cultures in the world, the ancient form of healing were based on Herbs. The medicinal plant collected from the forest were used for the treatment of various disease such as Fever, dog bite, pain, diarrhoea, stomach ach, epilepsy, eaching, paralysis, diabetes, hydrocil, kidney stone, Menstruation problem, and mouth ulcer etc. in this area provides an enormous range of indigenous medicinal plants that are used by the tribal and local communities in the treatment of various diseases and disorders. because lack of modern health facility in tribal area.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In today's modern era, medicine is fast moving towards scientific method, but in tribal areas various diseases are being treated by ancient method. There are many beliefs related to health in the hill Korwa tribe. In which reasons such as witch craft, evil ghosts, evil eye, wrath of the gods and goddesses of the house, etc. can be seen. For the treatment of which the people here first go to the Devair of the village and he tries to know the cause of that disease through his Bahan (Guru/Master) and cures that disease by exorcism. When that disease is cured, then in order to eliminate that disease from the root, in the name of his *excuse (guru)* and ghosts, deities, black, Ragua and Parsa one of the three colored cocks should be presented to them. That chicken is sacrificed. In this way, in the tribal

society, jaundice, smallpox, menstruation, pain, fever, snake bite are treated by blowing the broom. If the cause of the disease is due to nature, then the treatment of that disease is also done by the God of the village. Diseases caused by natural causes and other causes are treated by using medicines obtained from forests. For example, after a dog bite, the root of a creeper named Parhiis grind and fed to a sick patient, in the same way when a bone is broken the root of a creeper called Turum Kanda is grind and tied to a bamboo so that the bone heals within a week. Joints are made inside and to join the bone a hammer called Lata is also used. Sometimes they use both these methods together because they believe that when a disease is caused by evil spirits and witch craft, they use both forest medicine and exorcism, along with worship. If the disease is not cured by exorcism and forest medicine, then finally the people here go to the primary health center or government hospital.

Various diseases are treated in tribal areas through indigenous knowledge and traditional medicine, but due to globalization, modernization and increasing promotion of bio-medicine, now ancient medicine is now slowly reaching the verge of extinction. Has gone Apart from this due to the lack of conservation of medicinal plants and mistrust in this medical system among the youth, this knowledge is also hindered in the transfer from one generation to another, and today's young generation and civilized society consider tribal medicine as old or outdated. Calling it unscientific this method is being used sparingly. This indigenous knowledge and traditional knowledge is the heritage of the tribes, every possible effort should be made to preserve it and not to ignore it. Present investigation is an attempt to record medicinal property of the plant by the author with the help of traditional healers. Traditional healers who possess maximum knowledge on medicinal

plant. There is a good numbers of traditional healers in the Bagicha block who practice healing method and are willing to share their precious knowledge of herbal medicine and healing technique with the research scholar for the benefit of human being. Traditional healers collected medicine which are beneficial for human health from the forest and use them for primary treatment of disease. They do not have any side effect on the human body, as well as medicinal plant will be used continuously in the next generation.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors are thankful to hill Korwa tribes of the present study area who have provided their precious information.

### REFERENCES

1. Afsana,C., and Biswas, D. (2021). Traditional uses of Ethno- medicinal plant by tribal of Jashpur district Chhattisgarh. *Plant cell Biotechnology and Molecular Biology*, 22(13-14), 106-118.
2. Dwivedi, S. (2011). *Samudayik Chikitsa Aevam Jan Swasthya*. Publisher: New Royal Book Company. Lucknow.
3. World Health Organization (2018). *Traditional and Complementary Medicine in Primary Health Care*.WHO, Geneva. Retrived from: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo>. on 25/04/2023, 17:30.
4. Sahoo, P,P. (2021). *Indigenous Health Care Practices among the Oraon Tribe of Bisra Block Sundargarh*. *Society and culture development in India*, 1(1), 55-67.
5. Pandey, Gaya. (2017). *Medical Anthropology*. Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd.
6. Chhattisgar TRTI (2015-16). *CG State Center and Maintained By TRTI Chhattisgar*. Retrived from [www.tribal.nic.in](http://www.tribal.nic.in) on 25/04/2023, 17:30.
7. Dalton, E.T. (1872). *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chhattisgarh>. Access at- 24/04/2023, 11.30.
9. Yadav, S. and Sharma, L. (2020). *Ethno Botanical Uses of Some Medicinal Plants in Jashpur District Chhattisgarh*. *International Journal Of Botany and Research (IJBR)*, 11(1), 13-20.
10. PVTGs Survey. (2015-16). *Special Backward Tribes Hill Korwa and Birhor*. District:Jashpur.

