
Indigenous Curative and Preventive Health Practices in the Punjab: An Anthropological Study of Perception, Illness and Healing

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Abstract:

The current paper is based on an empirical research conducted in a Punjabi village of Pakistan. It discusses the Health related indigenous practices of the people of the village in which both preventive and curative aspects have been covered and discussed in detail along with the particular practices that were still under use by the village community. The main thrust of research was to study indigenous knowledge system and its traditional wisdom attached with the traditional medicine which is called alternative medicine now a days. The study brings forth the worth of traditional medicine, its utilities and consumption practiced by the local and indigenous populations. The long ignorance of Cultural Factors regarding Health and Healing systems in Pakistan urges the need to understand

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indigenous mind and perceptions due to low performance at health index. This paper makes it possible to read out the health related beliefs and practices and moreover the low pricing and affordability of local and traditional medical practices. Local medical practices are deeply rooted into curative side due to which people have more faith in the centuries old repertoire.

Key words: Indigenous Knowledge, Traditional Medicine, Health Practices.

Introduction

An understanding of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is required and its role in community life from an integrated perspective that includes both social and cultural aspects of a society as well as the relation between them. At the same time, it is necessary to understand and to explore the potential contribution of IK towards local development. People of the developing world have been influenced and made to accept the western techniques and thoughts as something that can bring prosperity to their mother lands. But in fact these approaches turned out to be exploitative and serving the needs of wealthy groups and production of the colonial brain.

Unlike other academic disciplines, Anthropology talks about Health in a broader perspective and deals with it as a complete code held by any population including perception about wellbeing of population, notions on curative and preventive aspects of treatment, treatment patterns according to the severity of diseases and set of practices and associated faiths. Hahn (1984) has made a similar comment which is also supported by Mechanic (1962):

“Anthropologists generally see “health” as a broad construct, consisting of physical, psychological, and social well-being, including role functionality.” (Mechanic, 1962)²

According to Eisenberg (1977) stresses upon the distinction developed by the social scientists to understand disease and illness. The distinction is as below:

1. Doctors diagnose and treat disease – abnormalities in the structure and function of organs and body systems.
2. Patients suffer illness – experiences of malfunction in states of being and social function. (Eisenberg, 1977)³

Medical anthropology while focusing on socio-cultural systems is especially interested in seeing and studying the socio-cultural context of phenomenon of disease and its relative specificity with a given population. It also studies conceptualizing illness and its implications. Few reflections have to be understood in great deals of depth so that stepping in of anthropology is medical studies is made easier to understand. Chrisman (1978) referred to recognition of symptoms:

“The recognition of symptoms is generally the first step in what Noel Chrisman (1978) long ago termed “the health-seeking process.” (Chrisman, 1978)⁴

Loustaunau and Sobo (1997) say:

“Medical systems generally include a diverse array of practitioners, such as herbalists, chemists, surgeons, bone

² Mechanic, D. (1962). The Concept of Illness Behavior. *Journal of Chronic Diseases*, 15, 189–194.

³ Eisenberg, L. (1977). *Disease and Illness*. Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 1:9-23

⁴ Chrisman, N. J. (1978). The health-seeking process: An approach to the natural history of illness. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 1(4), 351–377.

setters or body workers, midwives, sorcerers, priests, and shamans (Loustaunau & Sobo, 1997)⁵.

The Social Science Encyclopedia (1989) favorably gives its remarks that:

“Anthropology of medicine has disclosed that the orthodox profession of Euro-American medicine is as pluralistic as folk healing; that certain of its categories and practices are as magical and ritualized as traditional therapies; that its system of manufacturing knowledge and passing it on to trainees is infiltrated with cultural norms, and that its diseases and clinical realities of practice are socially constituted and negotiated.” (Social Science Encyclopedia, 1989)⁶

Review of Literature

Hasan *et al.*, (2007) say that “the sophistication of herbal remedies used around the world varies with the technological advancement of countries that produce and use them. These remedies range from medicinal teas and crude tablets used in traditional medicine to concentrated, standardized extracts produced in modern pharmaceutical facilities and used in modern medical systems under a physician's supervision.”

Prajapati *et al.*, (2003) opined that “Medicinal plants are the local heritage with global importance. World is endowed with a rich wealth of medicinal plants. Herbs have always been the principal form of medicine in India and presently they are becoming popular throughout the developed world, as people strive to stay healthy in the face of chronic stress and pollution and to treat illness with medicine that work in concert with the

⁵ Loustaunau, M. O., & Sobo, E. J. (1997). *The cultural context of health, illness, and medicine*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

⁶ Kuper, A. & Kuper, J. 1989. *The Social Science Encyclopedia*. Lahore: Services Book Club.

body's own defenses; people in Europe, North America and Australia are consulting trained herbal professionals and are using the plant medicines. Medicinal plants also play an important role in the lives of rural people, particularly in remote parts of developing countries with few health facilities.”

Shinwari *et al.*, (2007) in their study say “An ethno botanical study conducted in Margalla Hills National Park (MHNP) revealed that more than hundreds of plants species have been used as folk medicine. Traditional knowledge concerning natural resource use has been documented in selected communities of MHNP. Contribution of medicinal flora and non timber forest product in socio-economic development of MHNP communities has also been documented.”

Kendall, (2005) is of the view that “Functionalist, Cultural Ecologists and Symbolic integrationist focus on different aspects of health and medicine; each provides us with significant insights on the problems associated with these pressing social concerns.”

Trivedi (2006) has surveyed that “the fascinating structural array of secondary metabolites Synthesized by plants in their nature's tiny laboratories has been an excellent source of traditional medicines since time immemorial. Primitive ethnic groups living in various colonies of the universe by trial and error made use of the plants in their regions for treating various ailments. In addition, clues regarding the medicinal properties of plants were obtained by the observation of unusual grazing of certain plants by ailing animals. This seems to be the beginning of the use of traditional medicines mankind started to use to treat the various diseases of man and animals.”

Bhattacharjee and DE, (2005) state that “the indigenous systems of medicines namely, *Ayurveda*, *Siddha* and *Unani* have been in existence here for several centuries. In traditional medicine, more than one thousand plants are regularly used which are mostly collected in their wild form. Traditional

herbal medicine plays an important role side by side with modern medicine in the health care of the people, particularly in poorer sections, as western medicine is unavailable to many for economic and other reasons.”

Joshi (2003) elaborated that “species of plants belonging to each family are also presented in alphabetical order of their botanical names. In dealing with each plant, after its botanical name, all available synonyms are mentioned. This is followed by names popularly used in English and Indian languages. Many of the plants have a number of different names in Sanskrit.”

Lewis and Lewis (2003) narrate that “nature has been a source of medicinal agents for thousands of years, and an impressive number of modern drugs have been isolated from natural sources, many based on their use in traditional medicine”. These plant-based traditional medicine systems continue to play an essential role in health care, with about 80% of the world's inhabitants relying mainly on traditional medicines for their primary health care. Plant products also have an important role in the health care systems of the remaining 20%, who reside in developed countries.”

Sapru (1989) says that “a great deal of sociological and anthropological literature exists on the bewildering variety of medical beliefs and practices in India. There is also some literature on ethno biology. Unfortunately, neither of these sources provides ample information about the users and practitioners of folk medicine.”

Wyk and Wink (2007) discuss that “African traditional medicine is the oldest and perhaps the most diverse of all medicine systems. The biological and cultural diversity of Africa that constitutes the cradle of mankind is reflected in the marked regional differences in healing practices. African traditional medicine in its varied forms is a holistic system involving both body and mind. The healer typically diagnoses

and treats the psychological basis of an illness before prescribing medicines to treat the symptoms.”

Srivastava (2000) said that “the medicinal plant is one used by people for medicinal purposes and to build or maintain health, stave off diseases or promote recovery from illness or misfortune. Traditions of healthcare must always be features of human societies and from the available evidences it is found that plants are playing a lead role in the therapy.”

Sharma (2004) concluded that “India enjoys the privilege of having time tested traditional systems of medicines based on the natural products. Plants based products have been in use for medicinal, therapeutic or other purposes right from the dawn of history. The traditional remedies of the ancient world were all based on natural products, *e.g.* .morphine from opium for use as narcotic and analgesic, latex exuded from the poppy seed for gout, cocaine from cocoa-leaf as potential local anesthetic, ergot for obstetric use, castor oil, senna etc. as laxatives, turmeric as an antiseptic, garlic for blood and heart remedies to mention just a few.”

Retnam and Martin (2006) observed that “Ethno medicinal plants are still used by all kinds of people to find cure for those diseases where modern synthetic medicines have failed. In ancient times, ethno medicinal practice was mixed with magic and superstition. Today many traditionally used herbs have been put to the scientific test and many have proven to possess remarkable curative powers. Ethno medicinal plants are often proving to be effective and safe alternatives to dangerous and costly drugs. The popularity of ethno medicinal plants all over the world in recent years is a significant contribution of ethno medicine.”

Kurian (2007) concluded in research that “plants have been major sources of therapeutic agents since time immemorial. The increasing acceptance of traditional herbal systems of medicine, like Ayurveda, within India and outside has resulted in the revival of ancient traditions of medicine.

Medicinal plants and their derivatives are thus looked upon not only as a source of affordable health care but also an important commodity item of international trade and commerce.”

Materials and Methods

Locale

The current study was conducted in the Union Council of *Sacha Soda* in the Tehsil and district of Sheikhpura district of the Punjab province. The life of this Union Council is characterised by big political players who acted as middlemen in the local power structure.

The village is located on the main Lahore to Sargodha road not being far way from Sheikhpura city and nearby town of Farooqabad.

Location

Sheikhpura District lies roughly between North latitudes 31.0 degree and 32.5 degree and East longitudes 73.5 and 74.42 degree. Its shape is roughly that of trapezoid with a triangular off-shoot to the west from the Southwest corner. The village *Sacha Soda* is 18 km from Sheikhpura city towards North West.

Methods

Data collection was done through the exploratory method while using main techniques of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and key informants.

Results and Discussion

Health Related IKS in *Sacha Soda*

During the stay in the village I came across many people still using traditional methods regarding their health, food patterns, etc. This section will throw light on few of the cases where

villagers mostly use traditional methods and techniques. WHO (2002) comments on the health practices of the people in the current day world that:

“Although many populations in developing countries are reported as depending heavily on TM to help meet their health care needs, precise data are lacking. Quantitative research to ascertain levels of existing access (both financial and geographic), and qualitative research to clarify constraints to extending such access, are called for. The focus should be on treatments for those diseases which represent the greatest burden for poor populations” (WHO, 2002)⁷.

The citation above favors my point of concern that despite the heavy shift towards the modern medicine, there is still a larger portion of world’s population that heavily relies on the traditional medicinal practices. Traditional medicine deals with the both aspects of health. Those are:

1. Preventive IKS
2. Curative IKS

Preventive IKS

The farmers in the village were very much familiar with the concept of preventive side of cure. The farming community straightly commented that prevention is far better than the cure while stating the examples from the routine life that if they are not healthy they will not be able to work properly that brings damage to their plans and futuristic vision with regards to their issues involved in daily life. The preventive side basically covered the principles of adopting strategies that prohibit the outbreak of diseases and further help in preventing the spread of diseases and germs.

⁷ WHO. (2002). WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002-2005. Traditional Medicine, Department of Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy, Geneva: World Health Organization

In the following lines, I have tried to present few important practices that only concerned the preventive IKS to discuss how much the farming community was aware of the utilities of the activities they were performing.

Fumigation and IKS

The seeds of *Hermal* were used twice a week for the sake of fumigation in the households in order to prevent the spread of mosquitoes in the house. The seeds of *Hermal* usually grow in arid or desert like conditions. It is famous for its antiseptic effects. Usually the herbalists use the oil extracted out of the seeds to freshen the air and the seeds are used control outbreak of the contagious germs of several diseases. I was told that in old days traditionally the villagers used to spread the seeds around the corners of the graveyards because of the myth that it protects a man from having the bad effects while visiting the graveyards. The herbalist of the village gave the justification that people die from several diseases and hundreds of reasons. So the human body is supposed to decompose under the soil in graveyard. The effects of the diseases remain there in the soil and thus contaminating the surrounding air, therefore the villagers were told to spread the *Hermal* seed around all corners and boundaries of the graveyard to control the effect. Usually the villagers take seed with them on their visit to graveyard on Thursdays or Fridays for benisons of the dead ones. They spread the seeds while coming back. It was also told that the herbalists taught the people to encourage sowing of *Hermal* in the graveyards to have a long lasting preventive effort to control bad effects.

Cow Dung

The cow dung is an essential part of a farmer's family in a number of ways. I saw many women pasting cow dung in their houses, living rooms, bed rooms, etc. The reason that was furnished with the use was very important like a simple paste

of mud is cracked and destroys the floor. The paste is made of the mud, cow dung and straws collected from the wheat and rice stalk. It was also told that the paste controlled the house flies that were a big issue in village life. Vet of the village commented that:

“Cow dung is antiseptic (that which destroys micro-organisms that cause disease, fermentation and putrefaction) and prophylactic (disease preventive). Experience Vets when treating cows do not use alcohol sterilization knowing the above two qualities. If they treat a horse the same way there is infection”.

The “*Hakeem*”⁸ also commented on the grandness of the dung as a source of curing the skin problems, like teen age pimple eruptions, itching, athlete foot, etc.

Notion of Hot and Cold

Just like food items, people are classified into different groups according to their nature. The basic four categories dividing the human’s are hot, cold, wet and dry. There are also sub-groups flatulent and phlegmatic. According to the nature of each person, certain foods are good while other have a bad effect on the body. The nature of people can be judged according to the characteristics of each category.

Table: Nature of People according to Personality Characteristics

Nature of People	Characteristics
Hot	Burning in stomach, burning in heart, trouble with hot things
Cold	Pain in the body, stomach ache, pain in the chest
Wet	Indigestion, but usually a healthy person
Dry	Dryness of skin, irritation on skin, desire to drink more water

⁸ Herbalist

Flatulent	Gas in the body, throat in closed while sleeping, swelling of hands with the use of cold water, if stay in cold there is swelling of hands and feet. If eat flatulent things, hand and feet swell
Phlegmatic	When rise in the morning, if eat cold or sweet things, there is pain in the throat.

This table shows each person having certain characteristics will have a particular nature of body. There is no proper way to precisely classify the nature of people. There is only the trial and error method and after sometime, parents know the nature of each child, which is followed almost the whole of his life. We see flatulent and phlegmatic people are more sensitive to cold things and cold effect. According to the nature of people, they must not eat these food items which have adverse effect of their body.

Table: Nature of People and Culturally Prescribed Food

Nature of People	Food that Should be Eaten	Food that Should not be Eaten
Cold	Hot things, dry fruit, <i>pakory</i> , <i>halwa</i>	Cold foods, <i>lassi</i> , <i>sharbat</i>
Hot	Sharbat, lot of water, <i>lassi</i> , cold vegetables specially raddish	Tea, fish, dry fruits, <i>pakory</i> , chilies
Dry	<i>Ghee</i> , butter, <i>lassi</i>	Dry fruits
Wet	Dry fruits, poppy seeds	<i>Lassi</i> , <i>sharbat</i>
Flatulent	Pumpkin, mutton etc	All flatulent things e.g. potato, <i>lassi</i> , beef etc.
Phlegmatic	Mutton, tea, grams etc	All cold and sweet things, seet meat, milk etc.

This table shows that the people are also classified in the same four main groups as the food is categorized according to their effect. Again there is a subgroup of flatulent and phlegmatic. People do not eat those items which are similar to their nature i.e. effect of food and nature of people cannot be same. There is

a binary opposition between the nature of people and effect of the food, they eat. It shows a balance prevails in the body between the nature of people and effect of food.

This is the most widely spread belief among the Punjabis. It is about the *Taseer*⁹ of specific food practices. Eating mangoes is very common practice in the village but the young are told to be taking "*Katchi Lassi*"¹⁰ afterwards to kill the hot effect of the mangoes. The same drink is believed to be cold in effect whereas the mangoes are hot; the drinking of *Katchi Lassi* equals the nutritional effect without harming the person. Drinking milk after eating fish is strictly prohibited as it causes skin problems. It is advised to take water after half an hour. Eating fish in summers is not welcomed by the elders as it is hot in its effect therefore it is desired to take fish in winters. Drinking water after eating watermelons is also discouraged as it may cause diarrhea. Eating nuts, almonds, pistachio, etc is not favored in summer as they belong to winter as they all are hot. It is very common to notice that the young males are rebuked by their mothers and elders sisters eating almonds in the summers by stating that take course book each time you use the washroom with nothing left except reading. This statement leads to the belief that over eating of almonds may cause constipation.

Curative IKS

Herbalist of the village told that there are two dimensions that provide the basis for curative medicine used throughout the world. Those are:

1. Disease is to be controlled by the opposite (Allopathic)
2. Like cures Like (Herbalist, Homeopathic)

⁹ Nutritional effect

¹⁰ A mixture of milk and water used as a favorite drink

The belief that during different ailments and diseases, there is always a misbalance of certain hormones, vitamins, etc that causes sickness. The traditional IKS medicine believes in the maxim of like curing the like. The IKS medicines are categorized according to the Hot and Cold temperaments of different foods. The certain foods that are absent from the diet may cause the specific deficiencies in the human body due to which the body suffers from illness. IKS medicines describe the human nature into four categories, which are determined by the herbalists by searching the beat under four of the fingers of the herbalist. The four fingers help the herbalist determine which one of the body temperaments is overwhelmed and which one is malfunctioning. Both of the notions help the healer in deciding the suitable method of cure for the patients. Another strong argument that could be associated with the use of traditional medicine may be the affordability of the same as these evolve from the same local source therefore the local people afford them on comparatively cheaper prices. The observation of WHO (2002) also goes in an agreement with this debate as WHO notes that:

“Since TM is a highly accessible and affordable form of health care in many low income countries, WHO is promoting its inclusion — where proven safe and effective — in plans for improving health status” (WHO, 2005).

In the below, I have tried to describe few of the traditional curative practices that were still under use of villagers. Instead of many of people using the allopathic medicines, one can find reasonable amount of people still using and believing in the herbal medicines. People have got their own reasons of practicing the traditional medicine like;

1. Firstly, they have more trust in the practitioner because he is somebody from their own community upon whom they can easily trust;

2. Secondly, the traditional medicine is cheaper and affordable for the people especially the poor families;
3. Thirdly, the traditional medical practitioner is very much aware of the family's medical history;
4. Fourthly, the practitioner is more like a family member as well as a counselor to all of the members therefore visiting a family means visiting them all.

The concerns raised above are also supported by the WHO's findings regarding the work of Ford Foundation in Africa where it narrates the importance of traditional medical healers in the following words:

“It is particularly concerned about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, and believes that the AIDS epidemic in Africa cannot be addressed without the active involvement of traditional healers and TM organizations.” (WHO, 2002).

During the stay in the village, I observed many of the traditional practices regarding the health issues out of which I am going to record few of the practices in the pages to follow.

***Haldi* (Turmeric)**

If somebody gets internal injury that does not cure easily, the females of the family, mix *Haldi* in boiled milk and suggest drinking. The faith underlying is that this practice has magical effects. It is commonly believed that the injuries of youth strike back when one is old. It may be because of the fact that when somebody is young he or she does not care much about the injuries because of the good health and high resistance against diseases in human body. Old people are in regular habit of be taking the same traditional tonic in cases of unknown pains in the body. It is because of the antiseptic effect in the *Haldi* due to which it seems working on the pains and internal injuries.

Shahed (Honey)

Honey is used among the villagers for eye injuries. If somebody gets an infection or any slight injury in the white portion of eye the elders advise to use the honey in the eye for cure. The method used for this cure is that honey is taken in a spoon and heated on the fire. After the honey is cold two to three drops are put in the effected eye for three to four days. Honey is also famous for the antiseptic effects due to which it is commonly used for aye ailments.

Podina ka Qehwa (Mint Tea)

Mint leaves were reported to be the best cure of stomachaches. Females of the family boil water in the pot. Once the water is boiled the mint leave are put in the water with the desirable quantity of salt into it. It is traditionally called the mint tea. The same method is effective in all aches related to stomach.

Neem Leaves

The boiled water of neem leaves is best known for the skin problems, like pimples, mumps, etc. the herbalist of village opined that during the raining season, frequent perspiration causes skin problems. The itching problems are usually common in the season of summers and are also cured by water in which neem leaves are boiled. The yellow fruit that grows on the neem tree is of great medicinal value as reported by majority of the villagers. The fruits can help in curing various complaints of stomach, lever, intestines, and nerves if eaten on daily basis. The neem leave are also known to be containing antiseptic effect in it. Therefore during the funerals, the dead bodies are also washed with the help of water in which neem leaves were mixed.

Shredded Ispaghool

In case of dysentery and constipation, the same is used for the cure. As it is of peculiar taste therefore the females mix the

sugar or brown sugar in glass of water in which one to two spoons are mixed and taken for immediate relief.

Qawarghandal (Aloe Vera)

The piece of aloe Vera is heated on the fire and sliced in to two equal portions and used as a dressing on to the blisters for fast and speedy recovery. The same is used among the girls for skin smoothing process and cure of teenage pimples.

Kaddo (Pumpkin)

It is commonly used in summers in almost all families. It is known for removing heat effects from stomach. The old people prefer eating pumpkin for arthritis related problems in summers. The seed of pumpkin are used for different purposes like the oil extracted from the seed is use for hair massage as it believed to be good source of fulfilling the nutritional requirements of hair and its growth. The same practice also helps in taking a peaceful and calm sleep. Pumpkin oil is suggested for use to those who use the mental calibers in their work like students, teachers, etc.

Anjeer (Figs)

Arthritis pains are usually more severe in the winter seasons therefore *anjeer* is also used along with honey coating for curing the same. A glass of milk is also desirable after eating *anjeer* in order to make the effect of medicine quicker.

Sheer-e-Buz (Goat's Milk)

Usually people prefer taking cow or buffalo milk for drinking but goat milk is recommended for acidity problems, loss of appetite, gastric problems, constipation, cold, etc. It is shared by the herbalists that the milk is best source of removing the acidity from blood and a best source of cleaning dangerous germs from the intestines. The respondents shared that during constipation, one glass of goat's milk half boiled is best. Using

the same for two to three days brings relief to patient. It is also told to be good for sleepless nights. The use shared by an old lady in village was to dip a piece of cloth in goat's milk and putting it over the head can resolve the issue of sleeplessness.

Arq-e-Piyaz (Onion Juice)

This mixture is obtained after crushing onion in some grinder. The same solution is used by the villagers for snake bites, diarrhea, heart palpitations, etc. It is also known for its antiseptic effects used by the herbalist to treat the diarrhea; the treatment strategy comprises the shredded onion with lemon water and mint. According to indigenous view, onion water was also used during the outbreaks of dysentery. The villagers told that dysentery is a disease which is highly contagious. It basically creates hurdles in digestion due to which the food's intake is thrown either through vomiting or loose motions. The traditional medicine they suggested was to cut onion and mixed with lemon and mint. Another traditional utility was shared by female respondents during nausea and vomiting. The treatment included obtaining onion juice along with mint and leaves of a local shrub called *naazbo*. These three ingredients were boiled together in half liter of water. Upon cooling, fifteen drops of the tonic were used in both of the symptoms discussed above. Onion is also known among the villagers for using in controlling the cholesterol.

Kalwanji (Seeds of Onion)

There is belief among the villagers that onion seeds are the best source of treating obesity, gastric problems, high blood pressure, etc. There is a sayings of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) cited by the elders that "Seeds of Onion contain cure for all diseases except Death". Soaring of lungs and breathing tract is also treated with onion seeds. The treatment includes boiling onion seeds along with two to three yellow figs. Upon boiling, sugar is added to the mixture. The respondents

reported that use of the same mixture for one to two days brings best results. Onion seeds are also used in frequent sneezing, running nose and nose blockade. The villagers use onion seeds along with olive oil and burn it in fire for two to three minutes. Two to three drops are inserted in nose to cure the problems discussed above. The herbalist informed that these seeds are also useful in arthritis, backaches, muscular stress and nervous fatigues. During headaches, the people of the village reported that they were used to grind the onion seeds along with water and put it on the forehead for an immediate relief. Regarding the treatment of flu, people used to put it in a piece of cloth and frequent smelling of the same provides relief. Onion seeds do possess another effect in the toothaches. The treatment comprises gurgles of a mixture prepared from grinding of seeds along with vinegar.

Pista (Pistachio)

A good resistant against the chillier effects of winters is widely used by the villagers for several other purposes like weak gums, yellow teeth, bad breath, nerve tensions, constipation, sleepless nights and urinary infections. Regarding, nerve tension, constipation and loss in sleep, the villagers shared their indigenous practice in which they used to eat twenty one nuts of pistachio or they shredded it and boiled in water. The use of this tonic was drinking this tonic with cold or light hot water daily for twenty one days.

Hermal Seeds

It is categorized among the family of hot items. Therefore, it is used for treating flam out of throat, gastric problems, and constipation and helps controlling uric acid. It has a relaxing effect onto the muscles and nerves. During the respiratory problems, usually the herbalist uses the seeds especially during bad cough when the flam makes it difficult to breathe. It is also known for its antiseptic effects. The seeds are thrown over the

embers in a vessel and moved in all corners of the home especially the dark and damp places. This fumigation is also done in the rooms of patients especially who caught contagious diseases. The purpose of fumigations is usually to disinfect the room of patient and stop probable spreading of diseases from the patient to healthy ones. It is usually grown in the graveyards under the traditional belief of removing the evil eye impressions from the people. This is also commonly known among females of village for its reliable use in stoppage of pregnancy usually observed after two to three child deliveries. This use shared by females is to grind the seeds in a vessel and eating the power obtained after grinding. Continual use of powder after a week is said to bring the results in enabling female for conceiving next baby. The symptoms are in form of vomiting after four to five days of usage.

Karboza (Melon)

Melon is categorized among the family of fruits know to be from the hot family. The elders advise the youth to take the melon along with cucumber which is cold in its effects. Eating melon along with cucumber is known to be the practice of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). It is famous for retaining the dampness in the body while preventing the dryness of body in summers. Older females of the family ask lactating mother to eat melon under the belief that more milk is produced when the mother takes melons in her diet. The same practice is used by the farmers by giving melons to their cows and buffalos to have more quantity of milk. The seeds of melon are used as a source of oil which is sometimes used as an alternate of other oils used for cooking. The same are used as a dressing over the desserts. The herbalists and few female respondents also revealed another utility of melon that it helps in removing the roughness of skin.

Lehsan (Garlic)

Villagers and Herbalist use garlic in various health related practices. It is believed to be from hot family. Its daily use is recommended by the people as it helps in swift growth of muscles. Its use in food is very much customary because of the notion that it helps controlling the obesity, high blood pressure, heart problems by helping control the cholesterol levels in bloods. The herbalists recommend use of one to seven pieces of garlic according to the age in controlling the fats within blood.

Muli (Reddish)

It is widely used in all households especially during the winter in various forms like salad, used in the traditional “*Muli Paratha*” (Carrot bread with oil), etc. It is best known in the treatment of gastric problems, removing the bad effects of uric acid from the body. It is also used in controlling the obesity in herbal medicines.

Mehndi (Henna)

It is widely used among the women especially the girls on several occasions like Eids, Marriages and engagements ceremonies, birthdays and other functions. The herbalist quote Avi Sena that he categorized it among the cold temperament. It is best known for controlling the body’s internal heat and imbalanced hormones. The oil extracted from henna is used as a tonic onto hair for helping the hair loss by providing nutrition to hair. The flowers of henna are advised to be used in pillow if there is problem of sleeplessness.

Narangi (Orange)

It is from cold family and used for source of removing harmful effect from blood. It is also used for the stomach problems and functions. Traditional herbalists and Faith healers use it to cure the Evil eye and hysteria effects from women. Its pulp is best source of fiber for the body. The juice of orange is also

referred in treating high body temperatures as well as heart palpitations. One of respondents provided the information of orange being very useful in controlling the acidity problems.

Aloo Bokhara (Plums)

This fruit is commonly used in families especially during summers females of the family prepare a traditional tonic by boiling plum and adding sugar into it. This traditional squash is said to be best during the summer season especially during the day time to remove the effects of dehydration. It is told to be from cold family of fruits that is why it was thought best for the youth especially those who are hot tempered. It is also known to be reducing the mal-functioning of uterus, acidity of blood, heart palpitations and reducing the deposits of fats in to blood.

The villagers also told few of informative utilities of plums. They were also using plum as a vegetable. They used to cook it with meat which was thought to be good for lever soaring, loss of appetite, pimples and blisters and constipation. The pregnant women's vomiting, headaches were also told to be controlled with the soup of plums. Similarly, soil eating habits were also treated by the villager through use of plum.

One of the respondents told that during malaria fever plum is beneficial. The use that he narrated was to dip seven dried plums along with a local shrub called *gul-e-nilofer* and *anaab* in three quarters of water. Shredding all of these ingredients in water along with brown sugar can later be used as a medicine. The patient can use this tonic after half an hour depending on the body temperature. If temperature is high then the same tonic is suggested to be used after half an hour.

Roghan-e-Kadoo (Pumpkin Oil)

The oil of pumpkin is graded as good for sleeplessness. The oil is extracted from seeds of pumpkin. The oil is deemed helpful in removing the dryness of brain, cranky behavior, physical fatigues and headaches, etc. A common practice observed that the oil is applied on the head and a light massage is graded as a

good source of bringing sleep and removing the nervous stress. This oil was also used during the chest infections, running nose and blood mixed flam. The use in these problems is using one table spoon in half boiled milk. During depression, the elders of family recommend eating three to eleven pieces of figs after that three table spoons are mixed in either tea or milk. A continual practice after three to four weeks is reported to be useful in removing the depressive disorders along with enhancing the appetite.

Kanwal (Lotus Flowers)

Lotus flowers are easily available in village upon the surface of village pond. These flowers are usually available during July to September season. It is told to be belonging to cold family. Lotus flowers are used in treatment of thirst, infection of intestines or digestion related problems. A group of respondents shared their knowledge about the lotus flowers that it is beneficial in treating bladder related issues, watery stools and back aches. The elders of the village told that they cooked the soup of lotus flowers along with mutton or beef. This soup was used a food along with bread. According to the villagers, this soup was also gainful for treating soaring of stomach and intestines, etc.

Khopra (Coconut)

Though it is not an indigenous fruit yet it is used in many respects by village people. Coconut water was told to be an energizer especially to enhance the pleasure moments among married males. Coconut water is also famous for treating high fever among the village folk. It was deemed advantageous regarding dermatological problems. It is best thought to be helpful in digesting rice that is why the traditional dessert of *kheer* (rice cooked with milk and sugar) is dressed with coconut.

One of my old respondents added his personal experience about using coconut oil. He told that coconut oil is

best in hair loss and baldness. The same opinion was confirmed by a majority of the respondents including the herbalist of village. Coconut along with sugar and milk is also cooked in winters to be used as a highly precious sweet dish to be served to the closest family friends. Herbalist added that the coconut after being shredded is mixed with water and squeezed with a piece of cloth is good for flam cough, throat irritation, etc. Eating fresh coconut is referred to as providing extra strength to the teeth and gums.

Ganna (Sugar Cane)

Sugar cane is a typical feature of village cropping pattern. Its juice after crushing is used to make *gur* or *shaker* (brown sugar). The fresh juice of sugar cane is traditionally used for treatment of chronic constipation. The juice is known to be extracting toxic material through urination. Regarding the yellow teeth, it is usually is told to be chewed which is a common practice among the village people.

A traditional dessert of rice is also cooked in the sugar cane juice. It is also used as a tonic along with *lassi*. The people shared that they used sugar cane in treatment of acidity, removal of physical exertion and lessening the acidity in the stomach. The herbalist gave the information about sugar cane as helping in treating flam, level mal-functioning and blood deficiency anemia. Lactating mothers also use a traditional tonic of sugar cane. The medicine is prepared while a pint of sugar cane juice along with three table spoons of onion seeds. This tonic is reported to be best source of enhancing the milk production among the mothers.

Sirka (Vinegar)

According to the sayings of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) “vinegar is amongst best foods”. It is again attributed to Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) that “every household where there is vinegar shortage of food never occurs”. Vinegar holds

an important place in indigenous health practices. It is best known for suitable in constipation. Elders of village responded that it is helpful in high blood pressure.

The herbalist commented that it is a remedy to control motions. The treatment included boiling of vinegar along with *lassi*. Another practice was shared by an old lady who added that if vinegar is mixed with *Desi Ghee* (butter oil) is worthy of cure the fire bitten places of human body. It contains antiseptic effects therefore can be used to clean blisters, pimples, scars, etc. the villagers said that use of vinegar in food prevents the toxic effects. Another old may also informed that Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has graded “vinegar as master of all foods”. Its use in summers provides energizing effects to stomach. Most of villagers also recalled that during severe headaches, the massage of vinegar is supportive.

***Adrak* (Ginger)**

Imam of the Mosque reported that Holy Quran mentioned Ginger similarly Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) also highlighted the nutritional importance of ginger by grading it “an appetizer, best for dealing with gastric problems and beneficial in back problems”. Majority of respondents shared that during winters and especially in arthritis related pain they cook ginger in embers.

The herbalist informed that it is amongst the hot family. An old lady gave her experience about ginger being very useful in joints’ swellings due to arthritis. Another practice observed was that the villagers used to eat raw ginger before breakfast after which they take simple tea. This practice was reported to be good in gastric and stomach related problems. Another indigenous practice which was noticed in village was its use with goat’s milk to control hiccups.

The villagers also used ginger in the treatment of gums’ infection and pain by boiling it in plain water. The remedy includes simple application of water on the gum. An old man

gave his own personal experience regarding issues related to eye sight and handling flam. He described the use that crush the ginger in a grinder to release the juice out of it. The juice of ginger is mixed with honey and is eaten which immediately work for removing hazy eye sights and also work to improve the weak eye sight.

Munnaqa (Raisin)

It is commonly used to dress the sweet dishes. The traditional dessert of *Kheer* (rice cooked in milk along with sugar) is often dressed with coconut and raisins. The villagers shared that coughing is common among aged people due to which it is given to old people along with half boiled milk to control the chronic flam. Another use was highlighted that it speeds up process of digestion. Herbalist informed that leakage of drops of urine after urination is a common problem among people which is mainly because of the bladder's weakness and this issue is also treated through the use of raisins. A group of female respondents gave the information regarding muscular pains, temperature and cough. They referred to seven to twenty one pieces of raisins are recommended along with black pepper to be used with milk or tea.

Health, Traditional Medicine and IKS

UNESCO-MOST ¹¹(2006) vitally describes the IKS related health practices of people residing in Himalayas. In the Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh, the local people use a number of plants as food and medicine. The plants are either collected from the wild or cultivated.

The Himalayas are basically divided into two administrative regions: Kumaon, the region where *Kumaoni* dialect is spoken, and Garhwal, the region where *Garhwali* dialect is spoken. The same plants grow in both regions, but the

¹¹ UNESCO, 2006: <http://www.unesco.org/most/bpikpub.htm#preamble>

uses and the plant names differ. For example, *Urtica dioeca*¹² in Garhwal is known as "*kaldiya*" and it is not used for anything, while in Kumaon the plant is known as "*shishoona*" and it is used by the local people for relieving rheumatic pains. It is either applied topically to the painful joints, or its leaves are eaten like a vegetable.

Similarly, the people of Kumaon use *Glycine soja*¹³ in their diet as a pulse, while the people of Garhwal neither cultivate it nor eat it. Soya beans are very rich in protein, on a par with meat, and can help to correct the protein deficiency that results in the disease kwashiorkor. So the people of Garhwal, whenever they visit Kumaon for a fair or social event, are told about the usefulness of this nutritional food and medicine, and are shown how to prepare it. There are many plants, like the black variety of the Soya bean, which have been consumed for many generations in various dishes. But people are switching to other foods, unaware of the value of these pulses. Local people are therefore being told about the nutritional value of their own food, and how good it is for their health.

Efforts to raise awareness regarding the uses to which naturally growing local plants can be put are based on the knowledge that any group of people will be drawn to interesting information about plants growing in their region that they are familiar with. A person may want to report on a plant's nuisance value, but will wind up learning something about its usefulness. Campaigns to promote awareness begin with the selection of potentially useful plants that are known but unappreciated locally. Exhibitions of these plants and their uses are then held in various meeting places: government community centers block development offices, tea stalls and village fairs.

¹² Stinging nettle

¹³ Soya bean

At the same time, attention is being drawn to plants that have commercial potential. Based on a field survey and study of the plants growing in the two regions, the plants which are important to modern society have been chosen for special emphasis. Efforts are directed towards bringing these plants under cultivation or increasing their cultivation in a sustainable way for commercial purposes. In one of the regions, certain plants were already collected from the wild and sold to local manufacturers of pharmaceutical products and perfume, and to the cosmetics industry. Up to now the other region had not possessed this knowledge, but this situation is changing as a result of demonstrations similar to those showing the direct use of plants for food or medicine. These demonstrations seem to be the best way to raise awareness and to disseminate knowledge about the uses of plants from one region to other region (UNESCO: 2006).

In fact, the revival of herbal medicine and use of herbs in the cosmetics has been to some extent revitalized the importance of medicinal plant in current day urban life; whereas in *Sacha Soda* there were many occasions when the villagers referred to IKS related cure. But at the same time World Health Organization (2005) has worked on the importance of traditional medicine by defining it as:

“Traditional medicine” is a comprehensive term used to refer both to TM systems such as traditional Chinese medicine, Indian ayurveda and Arabic unani medicine, and to various forms of indigenous medicine. TM therapies include medication therapies — if they involve use of herbal medicines¹⁴ animal parts and/or minerals — and non-medication therapies — if they are carried out primarily without the use of medication, as in the case of acupuncture, manual therapies and spiritual therapies. In countries where

¹⁴ Herbal medicines include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products that contain as active ingredients parts of plants, or other plant materials, or combinations thereof.

the dominant health care system is based on allopathic medicine, or where TM has not been incorporated into the national health care system, TM is often termed “complementary”, “alternative” or “non-conventional” medicine¹⁵ [WHO, 2005:1]¹⁶.

Regarding the use of Traditional medicine, WHO recognizes that the use of traditional medicine is still a major portion of world’s healing practices especially in the continents of Africa and Asia. In this regard, WHO comments that:

TM is widely used and of rapidly growing health system and economic importance. In Africa up to 80% of the population uses TM to help meet their health care needs. In Asia and Latin America, populations continue to use TM as a result of historical circumstances and cultural beliefs. In China, TM accounts for around 40% of all health care delivered [WHO, 2005:1]¹⁷.

Preventive Medical Practices for the Animals

Simple Indigestion

Simple indigestion is caused by atony of the rumen, characterized clinically by constipation or diarrhea. Among its causes are dietary abnormalities of minor degree including indigestible roughages (straw bedding) fed during draft period or over heated and frosted feeds, over feeding of grains and concentrates. Less water and salt intake particularly during summer, lack of physical exercise and sudden change in fodder. The symptoms include reduction in appetite and then drop in

¹⁵ Accordingly, “traditional medicine” is used when referring to Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia, and/or the Western Pacific, whereas “complementary and alternative medicine” is used when referring to Europe and/or North America (and Australia). When referring in a general sense to all of these regions, the comprehensive TM/CAM is used.

¹⁶ WHO, 2005, WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005, World Health Organization, Geneva.

¹⁷ Ibid, 16 on page no 191

milk production. There is also mild depression and dullness. The farmers in such cases mix anise, ommun seeds, mustard, ginger, common salt and black salt together and give dose rate of 60 gram per day.

Allergy

It is skin eruption in the form of elevated, flat topped oedematous swelling due to ingestion, inhalation or skin contact of certain substances called allergens. The signs of disease are sudden appearance of swelling of various diameters on various parts of the body. There is also swelling on lips, eye lids, conjunctive and ears. Sometimes animal feels itching over these swelling and rub its body against some objects. Apart from these signs animal also suffer with loss of appetite. They also show uneasiness and discomfort. The treatments include the mixture of magnesium sulphate, ammonium chloride and Potassium nitrate and given orally to the animal.

Snake Bites

In sub-tropical region like village *Sacha Soda*, snakes are responsible for heavy losses of both of animals and human life. In animals, dogs are mostly killed by snake bites. Sheep, goats, cattle and horses come next in frequency. The reason for this appear to be that hunting dogs most often disturb snakes and that grazing herbivorous animals moving only slowly over the tract, disturb snake less. Two types of signs are commonly seen. In case of cobra species, the animal shows excitement first then gets normal and again nervous signs followed by depression signs and then death. Local reaction and pain in fatal cases are minimal. In case of vipers similar signs appear but there is severe local pain and considerable swelling at the site of bite. The first aid treatment includes immediate insertion of crystals of Potassium permanganate into the wound and bleeding from the wound is allowed in order to let the venom excrete from the body of the animal.

Wounds

Wounds are commonly observed among the animals as a break of the continuity of the tissue of the body. Among the wounds the punctured wounds and contused wounds are common among the animals. Punctured wounds are inflicted with a pointed instrument. These wounds are certainly the most dangerous for animal. The contused wounds are those accompanied by much bruising of the surrounding tissue as in case of blow from heavy articles, kicks, road accidents. In such cases, bleeding from the wound is less but the blood may be extravasated into the surrounded tissue. The treatment included clipping away the hair with the help of scissors with the precaution of avoiding the cut hair fall into the wound. The surfaced is cleaned by gentle application of a piece of cotton wool soaked in some antiseptic solution and covering the wound in order to prevent contamination and infection by flies. Before covering an antiseptic solution ointment is applied over the wound for example tincture iodine, spirit. The wound is cleaned and dressed daily so that the progress of healing can be observed.

Poisoning

The farmers believed that a poison is any substance in solid, liquid or gaseous form when applied to the body outwardly or inwardly can destroy life by its own inherent qualities without acting mechanically. The farmers reported that the causes of poisoning among animal is commonly due to the development and general use of synthetic insecticides or pesticides on the crops. The symptoms include toxic effects produced by these pesticides increase excitability and irritability followed by muscles tremors, weaknesses and paralysis. Vomiting and complete anorexia occurs constantly. The farmers though that there was difficulty in answering the question that what should be done if an animal appeared to have been poisoned. Though, the farmers thought that it was always wise to adopt the

general principles of treatment applicable to all sorts of poisoning. The recommendations included preventing more poison being taken by all animals and getting removed from contacting the dangerous poison substances. Another recommendation was to prevent absorption on skin or in stomach. Skin application dips were asked to wash off at once by warm soapy water. The stomach should be cleared by giving an emetic to the dogs, cats and by using a stomach tube for horses and cattle to introduce large quantities of a demulcent fluid such as rice gruel, barley water or even warm water only. These fluids dilute the poison and tend to soothe the irritated or inflamed areas. To stop absorption in horses, black tea is also used regarding the vegetable poison. In cattle and buffalos, when a rapidly acting poison has been taken, the immediate operating rumen and removing the ingested poison by hand becomes urgent. To neutralize the effect of poison taken and contract the effect of irritant, demulcents are used like rice gruel, barley water, olive oil and castor oil. Similarly, an oily purgative will often clear away un-absorbed material from the intestine and prevent further absorption. The administration of common salt in the food or water induces the thirst of animals and assists the elimination of absorbed poison by the kidneys of the animal.

Conclusion

Health related traditional practices were still dominant in the village because people had more faith in the herbalists as compared to the doctors in the village. The change factor observed in this field was that people took allopathic medicine as an alternative source of cure. It was found that health related beliefs and practices were very much practiced in the village. People used to rely on their traditional methods firstly at home, then the village herbalist and lastly the doctor. The negative and bad impacts of antibiotics were very much

understood by the villagers therefore they even preferred to consult a homeopath instead of straightly going to the doctors. Whereas among the rich class of the village, doctors were consulted frequently but this did not qualify that they only consulted doctors. The rich class of the village used all possible means in order to solve their health issues. Sickness and disease are a universal threat to survival. Thus every society has developed its own means to cope with the problems of this threat. The pattern of treatment however may be different in every society. In the village, there were different curers to help the villagers to cure the variety of disease that occur in the village. There were several diseases commonly found in the village. These diseases however were presented and described, by the local population, in their own way. They had their own concept of the disease i.e., physical or spiritual. The precautions and symptoms were also perceived according to their own belief system and thought pattern. Just as the villagers had their own understanding of the disease, so do they had their own treatment pattern also. There were different curers in the village. Beside domestic healers there were village religious guides, different shrines and faith healers, village herbalists and a village dispenser. There were also other local specialists such as bone setter, injector and mid-wife. All of them were skilled in their respective field of treatment, and play an important role in the treatment of the villagers. There were also qualified doctors who were consulted by the villagers. Thus, there were different practitioners available to the villagers. These practitioners are village-based, folk, religious and professional practitioners. These practitioners were consulted depending upon the nature of the disease and the personal belief.

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