

Magico-Religious Therapies of the Rath Region of Garhwal Himalaya

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Abstract: The present study was conducted on the magico religious therapies of the Rath region of Garhwal Himalaya. The study reveals that peoples of Rath region believe on magico religious therapies primarily to cure all type of disease. They believe their local god (Kul-Devta) to cure the diseases. They thought that when their local god (Kul Dewta) being angry then they suffer from illness. To happy their god they do different type of things like *Jagar*, *Thau-dham*, *Tantra-mantra* etc.

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1. Introduction

Himalayan people are simple, superstitious, god-fearing people with their own customs, traditions, and folklore. They believed in the supernatural world, which was imminent in all things, affecting one's health, livelihood, and social activities, but not all illnesses were thought to be religiously or magically generated. He often distinguished between ordinary conditions (such as old age, coughs and fatigue) and illnesses caused by spirits and evil forces that required the special services of a medicine man, shaman or witch doctor (Lyons et al 1987) They believe that diseases are caused by unhappiness of local gods. Thus they treat diseases through some magico-therapies.

Myth logically Central Himalayan Region is known as a land of gods. This region has the local gods like Gollu Devata, Lakiya Bhut, Nanda Devi, Bhola Nath, Bhaironath, Narsingh Mahadev, Binsar Mahadev etc. who were originally noble human beings. The local people deified them. These local gods are more powerful than Brahmanical gods. The Himalayan people believe that unhappiness of such local gods is causes of all diseases. In their medical system they use magico-religious therapies and natural therapies against diseases. Sometime folk therapies are associated with rituals and beliefs. Study on the natural therapies and folk therapies of Garhwal Himalaya were done by (Gaur 1999; Tiwari 1986; & Semwal 2010). A little attention has been paid by (Barua et al 1990 & Gaur 1985) on the magico religious therapies to cure the disease. Documentation of such practices is required in view of gradual disappearance of this knowledge in new generations. Therefore an attempt has been made to document the magico-religious therapies in remote areas of Rath region of Garhwal Himalaya.

2. Methodology

The present study was conducted in the four

Grampanchayat viz Masoun, Teela, Bereth and Kunur of Rath region of district Pauri Garhwal. Thalishain Block of district Pauri Garhwal is one of the largest block of the region generally known as Rath Region. This region is lies between 29° 35' -29° 47' N and 78° 39' -79° 15' E. The people of this region are known as Rathi due to their hard working and simple life style. The region is endowed with its scenic beauty and a hub of medicinal plants due to rich floristic diversity. The elder people of the region used these plants in the treatment of various disease besides this the magico religious therapies is also given in the region for the cure of various disease.

The study was on Interviewed based. A questionnaire was developed for the study. A total number of 500 interviewed were done in four selected Grampanchayat (Masoun, Teela, Bereth and Kunur) of Rath region. From each Grampanchayat 125 persons have been interviewed. The interviewed was done for the elder person of family. Vadiyas, Poochari and Elder superstitious person of Grampanchayat have been interviewed in detailed during the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The study was conducted in the Four biggest Grampanchayat (Masoun, Teela, Bereth and Kannur) of Rath region The study of these Grampanchayat revealed that in Rath region people believe on magico-religious therapies to cure the disease. Before any medical treatment they give magico-religious treatment to patient to cure the disease. Because they thought that when their local god (Kul Dewta) being angry then they suffer from illness. For this they give magico-religious treatment primarily to the patient. When the people of the region suffer any disease they go to the Mystic priest of Village for treatment. Mystic-priest (Poochari) is the magico-religious physician of villages. In magico-religious therapies they practices *Jaga*, *Tantra-mantra*, *Thau-dham* etc. to placate the local gods and

supernatural powers. The detailed of these therapies was also collected to interview that person who cures the various disease of the Rath region to apply this therapy. Description of the above mention therapies are given below:

Jagar

Jagar is one of the popular magico-religious ceremonies of Rath region, always held at night. A large room in the patient's house is cleaned and fitted with articles worship such as fruit, cereals, milk, curd, ghee, sweet, etc. It is decorated with various flowers and branches of some especial trees. The *Jagari* who is the hymn chanter and conductor of the ceremony, the *Dangaria* (the dancer who acts as a medium for the appearance of the god), and the relatives and friends are seated in ceremonial room. A crude drum (*doura*) and a Brass plate (Kans ki *thali*) are played, the *Jagari* chants hymns, and the *Dangaria* begins to dance. When the dance and the music reach their climax, the patient's household god speaks through the medium of the *Dangaria*. The relatives ask the god-in-medium the cause of his anger. He tells the cause, which may be, among other reasons, that the patient did not worship him properly or that he did not give him a sufficient share from his earnings. As a penalty the god may demand a simple *Khichari* (a mixture of uncooked rice, pulses, chillies, and salt); a sacrifice of a goat, pig, cock, or coconut; a continuous *Jagar* for 20 days or so; or simple worship at home or in a particular temple. Every Himalayan people fulfils the demands of the god because failure to do so may result in serious consequences not only to the patient but also to his family. One may witness such a magico-religious ceremony in any village of Himalaya, even among the learned classes.

Thau Dham

The meaning of Thau dham is for burning. It applied on that part of body which is pain continuously for long time. Thau dham applied on only on the pain of hand, legs, solider and Knees. Mustard oil and Ghee is used in Thau dham. Hot Ghee or Mustard oil applied at the place of pain. It is believed that dham relief in pain. The people also believed the reason of this pain is cold and dham is the better option to cure this pain. Thau dham therapies are prescribed by the elder and brave men of community. In present this therapies have been disappeared from the region.

Tantra Mantra

The concept of health diseases and treatment amongst the inhabitants varies with respect to their culture and settlements. The common theory of disease implies that every illness which is not connected with visible influence is caused by breach of some taboo or

hostile spirits (Tiwari et al 2010). Such beliefs become more conspicuous when the inhabitants feel that medicine used for certain ailments is not responding consequently they begin to depend on omens and totems under the belief that physical troubles in the normal system of life are due to effect of supernatural powers. On such occasions several peculiar psycho medicinal practices associated with specific hymns (Mantras) and apparatus (Tantras) are followed. Of these the formal is restricted to a selected band of practitioners the mystic men, who generally do not disclose the identity of plant or the process of activation, while the later is used in the form of household remedies. In the psycho- medicine the plant is activated by the Mantra process. A large number of plants were used by priest or spiritual healers of the region in Charms and amulets to cure the various ailments. Some of them are *Betula utilis*, *Artemisia nilagrica*, *Berberis aristata*, *Prunus cerasoides*, *Acorus calamus*, *Trachyspermum amni*, *Utrica ardens* *Zanthoxylum armatum* are used to cure various ailments of children. Typical practices in ethnopaediatrics in Garhwal Himalaya with the use of different plants in primary health care of children in different charms and amulets associated with the common ailments was studied by (Tiwari et al 2010).

4. Conclusion

The present study was based on the deep interviewed and their believed in magico religious therapies to cure the disease. Therefore the study is concluded that the people of Rath region rely more on the indigenous system of curing disease and on the herbal medicines that are easily available around their locality for treating many common disease due to the lack of modern health care facilities. From the present investigation it is also found that the people of Rath region believe supernatural forces for disease causation and seek remedies through magico-religious practices. 'Evil eye' is considered to be a cause for certain ailments particularly among the children. They offer prayers and sacrifices as per direction of the medicine-men to appease the supernatural being, which may be responsible for the disease. Finally the study is concluded that due to the lack of modern medical facilities expensive drugs and poor transportation, patients of these localities normally suffers a long and depend on local therapies either magico religious therapies or natural therapies provide by traditional herbal healers of this remote locality play a vital role to provide them as an alternate source of therapeutic facilities for their primary healthcare.

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