

ETHNOMEDICINE AMONG THE MISING OF BOROLA AND URIAMGURI VILLAGES OF MINGMANG, DHEMAJI DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Ethnomedicine helps in bridging the gap between society and socialized views towards medicine and healing. The study helps wrap their head around the numerous and varied concepts of medicine, health, disease, that exist in different societies and their cultures around the world. This paper is an account based on an anthropological fieldwork conducted among the Mising community of the villages of Borola and Uriamguri, Mingmang, Dhemaji District of Assam. The Mising (pronounced mishing) were a hill dwelling Indo-Mongoloid group largely associated with the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh who migrated to Assam. This study is concerned with the traditional healing practices of the Mising, the healers, their concept of disease causation and health.

Ethnomedicine has been defined as ‘those beliefs and practices relating to disease which are the products of indigenous cultural development and are not explicitly derived from the conceptual framework of modern medicine’ (Pool and Geissler, 2005). Human beings have been treating illness and ailments since they first started walking the Earth. Nature met all their needs, including their pharmaceutical requirements. This culture specific healing system was termed, “folk medicine”, “traditional or tribal healing” or in more scientific terms – Ethnomedicine. Though it is studied under the sub-discipline of Medical anthropology, the truth is that, Ethnomedicine has been around much longer than Anthropology, as a subject, was even conceived in thought.

Anthropologists have collected information on illness ‘beliefs and practices’ in the societies they studied because they were part of the culture of the people and also because they were seen as closely related to the ‘exotic’ beliefs about witchcraft and sorcery (Pool and Geissler, 2005). Curiosity and a sense of unravelling the unknown, led scholars to explore the globe and encounter cultures of a great variety, within which traditional practices of healing and health appeared as a wondrous and intriguing subject of study. The association of non- western practices with the mysterious and exotic has created an image in the minds of people and a false concept of

societies which are “different” from their own, deeming them as unexplored wonders of the world which automatically creates a bias in studies conducted in these areas.

Ethnomedicine thus helps bridge the gap between societies and their socialized views towards what medicine and healing should be. The study helps one wrap their head around the numerous and varied concepts of medicine, health, disease and the like, that exist in different societies and their cultures around the world, through the combination of scientific inquiry and analyses of the medical systems, holistically, as well as being empathetic towards the society under study. Anthropologists undertake such a study with the objective of eradicating ethnocentrism and integrating indigenous knowledge and modern medicine to improve health delivery in all societies globally.

The following account is based on an anthropological fieldwork conducted among the Mising community of the villages of Borola and Uriamguri, Mingmang, Dhemaji District of Assam. The Mising (pronounced mishing) were a hill dwelling Indo-Mongoloid group largely associated with the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh who migrated to Assam in the 13th Century A.D., where they encountered waves of culture contact, and who are today especially influenced by Hinduism in

their religious aspects, language, and socio-political organization as well (Mipun, 1993). This study is concerned with the traditional healing practices of the Mising, the healers, their concept of disease causation and health.

Traditional healing methods have played a significant role in shaping the health culture of societies; not only in the medical systems generation but even in beliefs and rituals of communities around the globe. The influence of culture contact and major religions has brought changes to indigenous societies and caused significant positive changes in their cultural dynamics. Marsha B. Quinlan (2011) says, "Medicine – like language, music and politics – is a subset of culture which is situated locally", describing it as a part of the framework that makes a society, and this "subset" comes in varied forms in different societies which entails what she calls one's "culture of medicine" or "ethnomedicine". According to her, even modern biomedicine may be called an ethnomedicine because it is part of the urbanised society's culture of medicine and healing. Modern biomedicine has established a strong foothold in all societies thereby changing the indigenous make up of these societies and causing a run down in the institution of indigenous healers and thus pose a threat to the ancient knowledge of traditional health and healing. Even then, under such threats some traditional healers and their knowledge of various medicinal properties derived from plants, minerals and animals, still persist till date. The prevalent diseases treated by the Mising healers include, besides malaria - Jaundice, menstrual disorders, joint pains, skin diseases etc. The Mising healers are also of varied types, with different methods of diagnosis and healing and different specialization areas, namely - Herbalists, Diviners, Faith healers, Traditional birth attendants, Bone-setters, Veterinary specialists (Shankar, et al. 2012).

Whether knowledge of indigenous healing systems still have a chance to be passed on to later

generations or not, and also if it can or cannot be integrated with biomedicine poses a question. The role of nature in the people's day to day life especially in health and healing and the extent of influence of biomedicine and other factors such as development in education, occupation, infrastructure etc., also leave something to be wondered. The traditional practice of healing among the Mising of Borola and Uriamguri is done through an in-depth knowledge of medicines by the use of herbs, different parts of plants and even animals and insects, to heal different diseases common in the world and those that exist only in the context of the Mising culture as well. The rituals and prayers, the concept of disease causation, concept of health and healing are also all part of this study of Ethno-medicinal practices in the Mising community of Borola and Uriamguri.

THE HEALERS

The first few days of data collection in the study area of Borola and Uriamguri were slow, it caused one to question if the practice of traditional medicine still existed or if it would turn out to be but a blind chase. The search for the villages' traditional healers did not go in vain; Traditional healing is well protected in the two villages, and by chance and design the layers started to unfold. Following is a brief account of some healers both living in Borola and Uriamguri who were alive and well and apparently still gave medicines and provided healing to the people.

The villages of Borola and Uriamguri both have healers of various specialties. No one healer was solely designated as a full-time traditional healer called a Mibu however, the ones encountered had their own roles in society as well as their special abilities to give healing to the people.

A type of amalgamation of healers exists in the two villages of Borola and Uriamguri in Mingmang, Dhemaji. The healers encountered may be divided into- single disease specialists, internal and external cancer healers, traditional bone setters, multi-disease specialist and diviners.

The first healer we encountered may be clubbed as a single-disease specialist who claimed to heal Jaundice. We met Ranjumoni in Borola; I was expecting an older woman who would exude some sort of an all-encompassing and an all-knowing aura. However, the woman we met was holding a baby in her arms still in the midst of blooming youth; she is a young woman in her twenties who welcomed us, a couple of strangers, into her home, without a strain of doubt or suspicion, except for a slight look of confusion as to why anyone would want to learn about her, as though what she does is something so natural and uninteresting it should not even be of interest to anybody, let alone have anyone want to study what she does.

We climbed up the small steps of five indentations cut into a log of wood, something very new to me evidently from the snail pace of my ascend and descend causing traffic in that small stairway; When inside, we were offered a bench but chose to sit instead on the bamboo floor like how everyone in the village usually did, generating some laughter and happy smiles in the process.

Ranjumoni starts making the jaundice medicine by collecting the leaves of the titigoss(a Mising term) tree which she boils for an hour to extract all the properties from the leaves maximally. The leaf extract is then consumable by a jaundice infected person, administered usually three times a day for three days after they wash their hair; however, it can also be consumed as much as water can be consumed. Certain restrictions apply regarding food, where meat and fish cannot be eaten while under medication. For women who are menstruating, they can only start taking the medicine after three days into their cycle. Regarding pregnant women, the women as well as their husbands are both prohibited from touching the medicine. In case they insist on taking the medicine, a prior consultation with a contemporary medical specialist is required before starting on the herbal medication provided by Ranjumoni.

It was later revealed that Ranjumoni had learnt how to treat jaundice from her grandmother, who is now too old to carry out the healing. We observed her sleeping nearby, unable to even attend to guests anymore. The key to starting anyone on the medicine though, lies first with the permission of her grandmother, without which no healing can begin, not even the plucking of the titigoss leaves. On contrary, the knowledge of what causes the disease and why it occurs is not known to Ranjumoni, she believes that only when her grandmother is about to pass will the knowledge and full permission be given onto her, as of now she is just an apprentice.

I met another healer who specializes in healing gastrointestinal problems, who also lives in the village of Borola, he is famously known as NorenPegu. He usually helped in the building and repairing of houses in nearby villages, a reason that delayed our meeting, and also did farming activities. When I finally met Noren he appeared small built, but possessed a very big personality which screamed out loud the very moment I met him. He was very kind and willing to tell us all that I wanted to know from him. He invited us to his home which, to my fortune, had bigger stairs. We took off our shoes before entering the house and started our interview almost immediately.

NorenPegu started by telling me about the symptoms of a person suffering from gastric problems. The patient would experience insomnia, acidity, a lot of burping and the combination of lack of sleep and the acidity tends to make a person act erratic as though from madness. He starts by collecting around seventy to eighty herbs and plants that have different elements for healing the ailment; these include *Manimuni (Centellaasiatica)*, *Mohanimor neem (Azadirachtaindica)*, *Tulsi (Ocimumtenuiflorum)*, *jaiphalar nutmeg (Myristicafragrans)*, *Laungor clove (Syzygiumaromaticum)*, *mussambaror solidified aloe juice from the aloe vera plant, bhumuragutior bedda nuts (Terminaliabelerica Roxb.)*, *aamlokhior Indian gooseberry*

(*Phyllanthusemblica*), *jaluk* bon or wild pepper (*Oldenlandiadiiffusa*), *Bhedailotaor* skunk vine (*Paederiafoetida*), the dried fruit of *Haritaki* or *Silikha* (*Terminaliachebula*), which he brought out for us to have a look.

He prepares a drink out of all these herbs, which he also brought out to show us, a brownish kind of juice in a jug, that he advises patients to drink it in the morning after breakfast, in the afternoon after lunch and at night after dinner, but always after eating for it will create more acidity and hunger if taken on an empty stomach. Meat is prohibited except for pork, chicken and mutton. Milk, duck meat, black pepper, tamul (areca nut and paan), red tea, matima/ black bean, fish (Rohu, Koss, Bhorali, Puthi) are not to be consumed either. There is no ritual or any form of prayer involved in the healing process except for the healer's immense trust in the medicine he makes.

Noren came into healing when he himself suffered from a form of gastric and when the doctors could not heal him after several misdiagnoses, he turned to this medicine and has had no problems ever since. However, the history of the medicine goes back to his father, who healed people with it and took him on herb collecting ventures. His father did not teach him the knowledge of the medicine until later in life when he was ready to learn. His father also taught another boy during his training period, the boy now a man lives in another village and uses his knowledge as a means to generate income by selling the medicine. Noren disapproves of this person's methods saying that it was never his father's intention to teach another for their own benefit, but to heal selflessly without thinking first about profit. Therefore, this makes Noren apprehensive of passing on his knowledge to just anybody; he first has to make sure that the apprentice will be sincere and not abuse his knowledge.

Payment for the medicine takes the form of offerings for Noren, he does not demand anything but when people insist, he takes a sum of three hundred rupees just so that he can meet the cost

of travelling to distant places in search of the herbs for the medicine and other costs for its preparation.

Rita Pegu, a young twenty-six-year-old woman who heals typhoid lives in Borola. We encountered her by serendipity while we were venturing towards another lead on another healer. It was too good a chance to not grab. Seeing her eagerness to share, we sat down with her and talked. She is a woman who showed pride in her culture and a strong belief in its traditional medicine. She is also unmarried, who is rare to find in both villages, but she seemed unbothered, independent and proud of her healing abilities.

Rita starts by telling us about the symptoms of typhoid; head ache, body ache, stomach ache, fevers are some of the signs of a person suffering from typhoid. She uses a mix of what is called modhuriaam, kothalsaal; letaguti (Caesalpiniaabonduc) seeds are collected from the east side of tree, and silk worms. Five silk worms are used along with black pepper, lemon leaves, which are all ground up into a paste and brewed like tea, till it turns a reddish colour. She tells her patients to drink one cup of this medicine two times a day and to drink it on an empty stomach before breakfast in the morning, and before dinner at night. This is done for three days and also to avoid fried meat, milk, fish, chicken and eggs for one month. By this method of hers, Rita claims to have healed over fifty people in Borola.

Rita learnt how to heal typhoid from her maternal uncle. When asked if she would teach others, she replied that she would but whenever they would treat a person using this medicine, they would have to call upon her name "Rita Pegu" and give thanks for the knowledge in order to get her permission and blessings for the medicine to work on the patient.

Some healers have claimed to possess the knowledge and ability to heal cancer, so I embarked on a hunt to find at least one of the people who claim to be able to heal cancer. After two days of search, we finally came upon two

healers who actually practiced healing of cancers internally and externally.

I caught up to a man in Borola who practices the healing of cancers localized to the ear, the nose and the throat. We met Raja Doley at his small shop which he sits at in Borola village. He seemed like any other ordinary shopkeeper but held knowledge that could potentially revolutionize the world, which is easier said than done. He is a soft-spoken man in his fifties, who told us what he could from the window of his little shop. He told us that a few years ago, his uncle went for treatment at a hospital in Lakhimpur, after many tests were done on his uncle, and the diagnosis revealed that he had cancer. His uncle's first line of action after knowledge of the disease was to come home to his nephew, for healing, and he immediately started treatment by smoking Raja's herb mix and thereafter the cancer also was disappeared.

Raja said his knowledge of the herbs and healing was inherited from his father who taught him the intricate process of making the medicine. Raja collects a number of herbs which are not all available in the nearby surroundings but from far off places, which takes him two to three days to gather. The plants and herbs then have to be dried before being ground into a powder. The medicine in the form of the powder can only be smoked and not ingested. He prescribes it to be smoked three times a day for a month. While on this medication he prohibits the consumption of Milk, fish (Magur, Bhorali, Hingi and Puthi), matima or black bean lentils, okra, and all fried food.

While stopping by the market place at BorolaChariali one serendipitous evening, I was approached by a man who overheard me talking about my topic of research to some people at the vegetable shop and told us that his wife-KhirodaPegu, who is a traditional healer as well, after which we exchanged contact numbers and arranged for a meeting. Perhaps the meeting with KhirodaPegu is one of the most heartfelt experiences and one which created a bond more

than just of interviewer and respondent but one of friendship. We met Khiroda at her home in Uriamguri village, where we attracted a lot of other guests and onlookers, peeping and curious to see what this funny looking outsider wanted and brought with her. We introduced ourselves and our purpose, and after loads of questions, the crowd dispersed and we began our interview.

Khiroda explained that for external cancers, including wounds and boils, a paste of Jobaphool (Hibiscus), barbigooss, and 5 other herbs that she could not disclose is made by finely grounding the herbs into a paste which is applied over the wound or cancer, administered three times a day for a month in the case of a large injury, and fifteen days for smaller or less potent wounds or cancers. She always prays to her father's spirit before giving the treatment and offers guyé or tamul (areca nut), paan (betel leaf) and apong(rice beer) to honour his spirit. Besides external wounds and infestations, Khiroda also treats rib pains for which she prepares a paste from the root of a banana plant (small variety), which is collected from the east side of the tree along with nirkot, which are ground into a paste and boiled in about a half litre of filtered water until reduced to about one glass. She advises that the medicine is supposed to be taken after meals; once in the morning and once at night. Sour foods are to be avoided, also chilli peppers, meat, fish and oil. Khiroda knows what she does and is able to heal the afflicted due to the knowledge passed down to her from both her parents who are now no more. She said that the ability and knowledge to heal rib pain was revealed to her in a dream by her father.

Coming to the next type of healer, the bonesetter, we met one of them at Uriamguri, DulalPegu, and a well-known bone-setter. A knowledgeable man in his fifties, Dulal is the son of a divination healer named GunavatiPegu, about whom we will learn about further along in this paper. He tries hard to keep up the traditional method of bone setting in this age of contemporary medicine. He learnt the bone setting skills and knowledge of the vine from

an old man who also lived in the village once and tried teaching other people the secrets of bone setting but they were unable to understand how to set the displaced bones.

Dulal collects a special vine or lota from the forest called HarjuraLota or Bone-setter's vine. Before cutting the vine, he must always say a prayer giving thanks and asking for blessings and then only does he cut the vine. He says that the matured vines are not useful only the younger vines are cut. The availability of the vine is quite scarce at present says Dulal; this may be due to timber requirements or land clearing activities, that trees of this Bone-setter vine are being felled causing a shortage.

He prepares the medicine by grinding the vine a little but not till it becomes a paste after which he applies it on the reset bone area or area where the bone injury occurred. Bamboo and gauze are used as bandage and the medicine is regularly applied for fifteen days, then with one day gap then increases to two days, then three days and so on. However, the bandage must be changed and reapplied after three to four days when the vine becomes dry. Certain food is prohibited such as sour food, milk, alcohol, cold daal(soup of boiled pulses).

Another meeting led us to a bone-setter in Uriamguri, who would not be named but allowed a picture to be taken of himself and his wife, after being informed that they will be used in this study; he claims to have received his ability to heal and set bones through a dream. Similar to DulalPegu's case, the bone-setter collects a creeper or a vine from the forest, he does not know the name of the vine but due to the revelation in a dream he came to know what it looks like. The creeper is then crushed a bit to get the juices flowing and wrapped onto the affected bone area. The medicine is applied usually during the night from six in the evening till six in the morning; this is done for convenience as people usually move and work during day light hours, thus to avoid discomfort it is applied in the night hours. The

creeper must be changed daily. No prayer or any ritual is conducted before, during or after administering the medicine.

At present, the availability of the creeper is scarce and it has become quite difficult to acquire. He also tells us that he presently uses his gift to heal injured animals like cows, goats, dogs, and other domesticated species; according to the bone-setter, the reason he does not get many human patients anymore is because of the infiltration of modern medicine and medical professionals into the lives of the people and people have now flocked to hospitals for treatment.

The story of how the bone-setter acquired his abilities goes back to the days of his youth. It so happened that while he was playing football, he fell and dislocated his knee. Due to his injury he was unable to walk, and became bed ridden. While he was asleep one night, a divine revelation came to him in a dream, along with the image of the vine and he believes he was bestowed with the divine knowledge of how to fix broken and dislocated bones that night, something which is rather mysterious and it is difficult to wrap ones head around the phenomenon since it takes years to study Osteology, which is a separate discipline on its own.

When asked if he would be willing to teach others, the bone-setter replied that anyone can come learn under him but at present he was not willing to teach because it was difficult to put across to another person, the main problem being the person's inability to understand the feel of a dislocated bone and how it should be made right. Thus, he does not want to take the responsibility of teaching and also none are willing to take up the responsibility of learning.

Apart from meeting healers who inherited their knowledge from parents or others, we encountered a healer who claims to have been gifted her knowledge and ability to heal by God. GunavatiPegu is the eighty-five-year-old mother of DulalPegu the bone-setter who learnt his skill through apprenticeship. However, his mother

acquired her talents in healing like the other bone-setter in Uriamguri, by being called to heal and being given her gift and knowledge of healing through supernatural intervention in dreams.

After trotting through vast acres of agricultural land, we arrived at the home of GunavatiPegu, who welcomed us with very a warm smile. Despite being a very ripe age, she seemed like an active woman still. She told us that she healed several diseases such as- dog bites, menstrual cramps, and infertility, tonsillitis and throat problems.

Prior to the interview, Gunavati made it clear that she cannot speak of the herbs and medicines she uses or of the ritual involved, for if she did then she would lose her gifts of healing forever. However, a rather vague description of her methods may be briefly described as follow:

- Dog bites: For deep dog bite wounds, the seeds of black pepper, taken in odd numbers of three to five, are mixed with ash and locally applied to the wound. In case two teeth marks are seen to have broken the skin, the medicine is administered for four days; if four teeth marks are seen, the medicine is administered for eight days and so on. During this period, she prohibits the consumption of fish (Borali mas, matimadhekiya and urohi), duck, okra and kutkura.
- Menstrual cramps: A wild herb mix, whose components were not disclosed, is given to the woman suffering from menstrual cramps. However, oil and lemons are prohibited from consumption.
- Throat problems, Tonsillitis: a wild herb paste is applied orally onto the tonsils themselves. For two to three applications. During the course of treatment, smoked fish can be consumed but no other recipes of fish. Cold water should be avoided as well as okra, kawangand matima (black bean lentil).

Gunavati acquired her healing gifts from God, who came to her in dreams and taught her all that she knows. The knowledge is so sacred that she

cannot convey what she knows to just anybody otherwise all her gifts will be undone. She is currently teaching her eldest daughter in law the methods of healing but the daughter in law cannot practice without her prior permission and blessings. Even now, most of the secrets of healing have not been passed on to anybody in totality and it will not happen until and unless she is on her deathbed, will she then pass on her knowledge to the daughter in law.

TESTIMONIALS IN FAVOUR OF TRADITIONAL HEALING

In several cases, involving interviews with the local people besides the healers, the people have their own passed down knowledge of home remedies to which they go to as a first line of defence against milder illnesses. Some of these cases are mentioned below:

Case 1: In the household of PulenDoley, certain herbs are used to treat stomach problems as the first line of defence, which involves herbs such as Silikha (Terminaliachebula) also known as Myrobalan, MohaNim (neem), Sirota (Andrographispaniculata) also known as Green Chiretta or “King of bitters”, and for cough, they mix Krishna tulsian and honey.

Case 2: TileshwarPegu’s son is suffering from kidney stones, the family went to Lakhimpur for treatment but while on medication the boy is simultaneously being treated with the undiluted juice of a plant called Duportenga (Kalanchoepinnata) also known as “Air plant” or “Leaf of Life”. Kalanchoe is a medicinal plant used in folk medicine especially for the treatment of kidney stones, gastric ulcer, pulmonary infection, rheumatoid arthritis etc. The juice is consumed one to two times a day. The family will be going back to Lakhimpur for further check-up, however Tileshwar’s son was out roaming the village on the day of the interview, it is not conclusive whether his strength came from the Kalanchoe or not but it leaves something to be wondered.

Case 3: Anita Pegu’s daughter also suffered from kidney problems for 3 years. She fell ill from

kidney infection, their first response was to take her to Gogamukh, the nearest town, where there is a medical centre, when it didn't help they turned to homeopathy, the traditional healer, eventually the sickness was too much they had to take her to the hospital in Lakhimpur where she spent 7 months undergoing treatment and later they shifted to Dibrugarh where she was treated for 3 months before becoming fully healed.

Case 4: The wife of the Bone-setter (called through divine intervention) mentioned earlier in this dissertation is currently being treated for her skin disease by a traditional healer in nearby village – Ukhomati; small pimple like bumps appeared on her skin, which caused itching and pain, along with this her blood turned a lighter colour, possibly because of a lack of haemoglobin. After several visits to the hospital at Gogamukh, the doctors were unable to treat her; that was when she decided to turn to the traditional healer. She says that since she switched to traditional medicine, she has begun getting better and her blood is not light coloured anymore.

Some cases in Uriamguri, women claimed that they use the gel of the Earthworm to cool down the stomach. When the stomach gets upset and heated from acidity, they consume a teaspoon full of a gel substance that is secreted from the skin or rather lines the outside body of the earthworm which gives an instant cooling sensation.

Almost everyone we met knew about the benefits of Manimuni (*Centellaasiatica*) and silikha fruit and various other herbs that have benefits for one or the other health problem. The people have their own remedial “go to’s” which they learnt from the older generations and which they will pass on to their children. This speaks volumes about the role the environment and the surrounding forests play on the lives of the people.

CONCEPT OF HEALTH, HEALING AND DISEASE CAUSATION

Health is defined by World Health Organization as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease

or infirmity”; at first sight, the people of Borola and Uriamguri do not show immediate signs of having any concept of health. The surroundings are littered with plastics and various covers of eatables; there is no dearth of pig faeces, cow dung, and other unhealthy-looking substances along the roads and people’s yards. After some time spent with the people and conversing with them, observing their daily routines, a different story was revealed.

Roaming the entire expanse of the villages, day in and day out, one thing was noticeable; that there were hardly any obese persons around. Almost all the villagers had a lean physique, one that has been acquired through a lifestyle of hard work and good diet, for they did not look sickly either. This did not look like a people who did not possess health. They seemed to possess health to a certain extent; they also have their own concept of health, which was evident when they spoke about their food and drink.

During MaghBihu celebrations, a resident of Uriamguri first introduced us to “apong” a traditional rice beer, within which they usually add an herb mix containing a large number of herbs, about 150 or more types of herb species. The herb mix is said to be packed with medicinal properties that cleanse the human system of toxins and help in digestion and proper kidney function as well. The people also ate organic food; food that they grow themselves like rice, vegetables, and meat from the animals they reared, goats, pigs, ducks, chickens and eggs, which are all free from artificial chemical components.

The people have their own concept of health which lies in the food they eat, and their active way of life; but they lack awareness of keeping a healthy surrounding. Women did not know how to preserve personal hygiene especially during menstruation. The taboo that stigmatizes a menstruating woman causes her to adopt unhygienic methods of using the same cloth over and over again and those who can afford sanitary

pads resort to throwing the used sanitary napkins in ditches and inside the forests away from their homes thereby littering the environment, polluting the land and even cause harm to the animals. The awareness that animal faeces are loaded with disease causing bacteria and pathogens is also not known to them, which poses a certain level of threat to their health.

Healing is another concept in its own. The Mising have a peculiar religious belief system where they believe in the human soul and ancestral worship like Dobur, Dotgang etc. This form of worship is also seen in the procedures of some of the traditional healers where some form of prayer and offerings are given to appease the ancestral spirits and get their blessings before healing any patient. Also, prayer before cutting vines like the case of bone-setter DulalPegu, as though to give thanks to forest spirits or deities for the gift of the vine to heal people. Healing also to those who still believe relies on the blessings of the ancestors, and the appeasing of forest spirits.

The need to appease spirits and ancestral worship poses a question as to why they would do that in the first place is there was no belief in personalistic causes though the people do claim to not have such beliefs that is, disease and health causation as naturalistic in nature. There seems to be evident belief in keeping peaceful relations with spirits and ancestors to a certain extent, in order to keep themselves and their families safe from bad omens, catastrophic events and diseases. Thus, the Mising still have a link to their own concept of disease causation, unless education and contemporary medicine tells them otherwise.

CONCLUSION

The traditional medicine knowledge and practice of a community defines its culture and is one of the main institutions that a culture identifies itself with. With modern formal education and the awareness of health in terms of the scientific explanations of medical professionals, people have lost faith in the validity of traditional medicine. The pressure of the forces of contemporary

medicine is felt strongly by every traditional healer, they do not get to practice like in the olden days and people do not go to them very often anymore. This has also led the youth to have a diminishing interest in the traditional knowledge which poses a threat to the survival of the practice of ethno-medicine and one of the Mising culture's defining institutions.

Despite forces of the contemporary world acting upon traditional institutions such as traditional healing, the trade is still practiced and cherished, even protected as evident from the field study conducted where the difficulty faced during the initial stages of trying to get any information to reassure the existence of traditional healers, was almost enough to discourage the study. Though the Mising people have turned to medical professionals, the secrecy they try to keep about their traditional healing tells a different story and it is one that lies deeply rooted in the people's fear of possibly losing their cultural knowledge to benevolent outsiders who may exploit the knowledge for their own profit at a larger scale leaving nothing left for the original owners of the knowledge of tribal medicinal herbs.

The healers are all ordinary people living their lives like the rest of the villagers. Some are housewives, farmers, builders, labourers, NHPC workers etc.; some have talents that go beyond their special abilities to heal. These healers are not given any special status, but are respected for their abilities and knowledge. The knowledge of traditional healing is not restricted to the healers alone but also seems to trickle down to almost all the people in the form of home remedies. This shows the relationship of the people with their surroundings and with the forest. Nobody can just enter a forest and know where exactly to look for a medicine for stomach ache, it takes a certain level of knowledge about the flora and fauna of the forest to be able to identify the medicinal herbs and use the knowledge of their medicinal purpose to one's benefit.

The Mising people of Borola and Uriamguri have a concept of disease causation but it exists in subtle tones. They do not have any stories or folktales relating directly to spirits and disease causation but their actions do speak of a belief in the human soul, ancestral worship and spirit appeasing. Their funeral ceremonies do not look like a funeral in the western context where mourning and gloom hovers over the household, the Mising funeral looks, to a certain extent, hopeful; which may be ingrained in their belief of the soul still living on in the spirit realm. Also, their festivals like Tiloni, Dodgang are usually celebrated in honour of the dead, where they make offerings to ancestral spirits. The appeasing of the spirits is done in order to maintain good relations so that no evil befalls the people and their homes either in the form of loss, catastrophe or disease. The acts of offerings and prayers offered before starting the healing process also links healing to ancestral blessings and good energy. The practice of giving permission seals the continuation of ancestral worship whereby, in the case of the death of the original healer, their apprentice or successor will still have to seek permission from them in the form of offerings and prayer before carrying out the healing of the disease.

There is continuity in the practice of traditional healing though the rate is very slow and the interest is diminishing, however, an awareness of the cultural importance of keeping alive the tradition of this institution has to be made known to the younger generations and the secrecy has to let its reigns loose at least to the extent that allows the knowledge to be preserved in an informed manner and not blindly letting just anybody take away their traditional medicine knowledge. One of the major roles of medical anthropologists has been to explain medical beliefs and practices to health planners and to suggest how they can be integrated with the modern practices that characterize the formal health plans of all countries (Foster and Anderson, 1913). Therefore, initiatives should be taken in order to sustain and integrate the ethno-medicinal knowledge of the

Mising people with contemporary medicine, with proper precautionary measures in order to sustain and enrich knowledge that still lies deep within the Mising people and their culture. Perhaps further study into this sphere of the Mising culture may help bring much required and better insight into the future of medicine especially concerning the Mising people. As of today, the global quality of health has a space for improvement and ethno-medical integration may help with the cause. However, in order to achieve such integration and reach the goal of achieving quality health delivery to all societies globally, steps must be taken to understand the internal logic of medicine of the world's societies.

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