

# THE FOLK MEDICAL PRACTICES AMONG A TRIBE OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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## ABSTRACT

In the present paper on the folk medical practices among a hill Tribe of Ahobilam, which has a rich fauna and flora, an attempt has been made to know their indigenous beliefs, superstitious ideas and also causes for diseases. The authors also tried to know the traditional healing methods including magico-religious practices, which are the products of indigenous cultural development.

In the present study an attempt is made to know how the Chenchus of Ahobilam apply their medical knowledge in the treatment of various diseases.

### The Sample :

The Chenchus of Ahobilam, a village in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh, were selected for study. The village is situated at the foot of the Nallamalai Hills at a distance of 20 kms from a town, Allagadda. In this area the Nallamalai Hills are covered with dense and thick tract and has a rich fauna and flora. 70 percent of the Chenchus are specialists of folk medicine irrespective of sex and age.

The Chenchus believe that not only evil spirits and angry gods but also several natural, physical and psychological conditions, i.e. fright, excessive cold and heat, indigestion of food, excessive *bile*, dislocation of internal organs and changes in the weather and water etc are the causes of diseases.

The traditional healing methods, as practised by the Chenchus of Ahobilam are of two types :

- (1) Natural folk medicine, and
- (2) Magico-religious folk medicine.

Natural folk medicine consists of oral admixture of mixtures, pills and decoctions made of locally available medicinal plants and animal substances, dieting, cauterization, and application of oils, etc. It also consists of mine-

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rals, i.e. rocks, stones, mud, clay and salt etc. A majority number of the Chenchus i.e. nearly 75 percent are specialists of natural folk medicine. They know number of drugs and treatments, which differ basing upon the age of the patient, and concept of disease causation. They usually use less concentrated, less painful and delicate healing methods in the case of children.

The second branch of the folk medicine is the magico-religious type, which attempts to use charms, incantations, miracles, super naturalistic rituals, magical rituals and sacred oaths etc, to cure diseases. There are only five specialists or holy saints of magical treatment among the Chenchus. This type commonly involves a complicated pre-scientific world view.

It is observed that the Chenchus of Ahobilam are invariably used to natural folk-medicines in combination with some form of magico-religious folk medicines for the cure of several diseases such as partial headache, fever, vomiting, fits, stomachache, sprains, snake bite and scorpion bite etc. But in their view diseases caused by sorcery, witchcraft and the like are cured only by using magico-religious folk medicine.

#### *DISEASES AND CURATIVE METHODS :*

##### **Cold :**

Generally turmeric water, after heating is given to the patient. If it is severe, a powder, prepared by burning and grinding the legs of peacock is given mixed with hot water to the patient.

In the case of children, the juice, squeezed from the burnt leaves of *Calotropis gigantea* (*jilledu*) is poured into the nose.

##### **Headache :**

A paste, prepared by grinding the leaves of *Justicia paniculata* (*nelavemu*), mustard seeds, pepper and garlic having only one bulb (*ontithellapaya*) is applied to the forehead of the patient.

The leaves of *Delenix elata* (*sunkasaramu*) are placed on the head of the patient and covered with a *roti* (bread) made of *ragi* (*Eleusine corocana*) and tied with a cloth. This is kept for the whole night to cure severe headache.

##### **Partial Headache:**

Incantation is done by the magico healer for the cure of partial headache.

##### **Fever:**

Decoction, prepared by boiling margosa bark, leaves of *Justicia pani-*

culata (*nelavemu*) and *Sida carpinifolia* (*Vishaboddi*), is given thrice a day till the patient feels better. Powder, namely 'Sundi *bhasmam*' prepared by grinding the burnt horn of deer is also given mixed with hot water.

In case of children, liquid prepared by liquefying the blood crystals of rabbit is given.

If the fever is not cured by a long time, Chenchus believe that it is due to fright or sorcery of evil spirit. For this incantation is done by the magico-healer. Talisman is also tied to the patient.

#### **Stomachache:**

Pills prepared by grinding the leaves of *Abrus precatorius* (*guruvinde*) are given.

#### **Menstrual Pains**

Decoction prepared by boiling the leaves of *Sicstemma littorale* (*nelagodimi*) pepper, garlic having only one bulb (*ontithellapaya*) mixed with jaggery is given.

#### **Earache**

Juice extracted from the leaves of a medicinal plant (*Kamma ganjera*) is poured into the ears.

#### **Constipation**

Juice extracted from soap nuts-*Sapindus detergentus* (*Kumkudu Kayalu*) is given. A mixture of castor oil and cow urine is also given. In the case of children, paste prepared by grinding excretory products of rat is applied on and around the naval.

#### **Diarrhoea :**

Liquid prepared by grinding the bark of *Polyalthia longifolia* (*Naramamidi*), garlic and pepper is given.

In the case of children liquid prepared by grinding a wild grass (*Parpatakamu*) is given.

#### **Dysentery :**

Paste prepared by grinding the leaves of *Triumfetta rhomboidea* (*bankathuttara*) and *Cassia auriculata* (*Thangedu*) is given with curd.

#### **Vomiting :**

Powder prepared by grinding burnt feathers of peacock is given mixed with honey.

If it is not cured with natural folk medicines, charming ash is given mixed with freshly brought well water.

#### Sore Eyes :

Juice extracted from the leaves of *Coccinia indica* (*donda*) is poured into the eyes. Salt water is also poured. In the case of children, liquid prepared by mixing castor-oil, mother's milk and a small quantity of turmeric paste is poured into the eyes.

#### Cough :

Pepper and salt is given for chewing

Juice, extracted from the leaves of '*Ocimum sanctum*' (*tulasi*) mixed with turmeric powder after slightly heating, is given.

#### Whooping Cough :

Liquid, prepared by grinding musk, oxgall, leaves of *Ruta graveolens* (*sadapaku*), *Asclepias ethinata* (*juttapaku*) and cactus is given after slightly heating. Besides this incantation is also done and the magic healer ties the nut of *Pongamia pinnata* (*kanuga*) around the neck of the patient with the fibers of the same tree.

#### Jaundice :

Paste prepared by grinding the leaves of *Phyllanthus niruri* (*nelavusiri*) is given mixed with milk or butter-milk. Beside this, cauterizing the dorsal part of the wrist with a ring made of five metals (*panchaloha*) and copper sulphate (*Mailthutham*) is applied to that burning mark. It is locally known as '*Rakshaleyuta*'

#### Epilepsy and Fits :

In order to remove unconsciousness caused by epilepsy or fits and for the cure of the same, liquid prepared by grinding the leaves of *Amisomelos malabarica* (*Magabeera*) and pepper is dropped into one nostril while closing the other one. An ointment prepared by boiling gingelly oil with excretion of donkey is applied to the head. It is kept for half-day. The Chenchus believe that it is also due to evil spirit. So the incantation is done by the magic-healer.

#### Boils :

Paste prepared by grinding the leaves of *Erythrina variegata* (*badisa*), turmeric and salt is applied to the boils. Slightly heated clay is also placed on the boils and tied with a cloth.

**Wounds & burns :**

Applying turmeric paste is the general treatment. Paste prepared by rubbing the bark of *Lannea coromandelica* (*gumpena*) is applied.

**Bone fractures :**

Paste, prepared by grinding the bark of *Lannea coromandelica* (*gumpena*) *Trigonella foenum graecum* (*menthulu*) and turmeric is applied to the affected part and tied with bamboo ribs.

**Round worms and tapeworms :**

Powder prepared by pounding the seeds of *Butea monosperma* (*moduga*) is given to the patient to kill these worms.

**Itch and other skin diseases :**

Inner part of the *Citrullus colocynthis* (*chedu puchakaya*) is applied to the body and it is kept for half-a-day.

**Small-pox :**

The Chenchus believe that small-pox is caused by Poleramma. No medicine is given to the patient. A vow is taken by the elder woman of the family. When the blisters disappear, paste, prepared by grinding *neem* leaves, turmeric and salt is applied all over the body and headbath is given to the patient.

**Dog-bite :**

Mixture of crushed charcoal powder and *Vitis quadrangularis* (*alleru*) is applied to the wound. Paste of the *Artocarpus integrifolia* (*Panasa*) is also applied to the wound.

**Snake bite :**

Juice is extracted from the leaves of *Lucas aspera* (*thummi*) is poured into the nose. Paste prepared by rubbing the bark of a wild plant (*nagamusti*) is also given. Besides this incantation is done by the magic-healer. He also ties a thread prepared from a part of his cloth around the neck of the patient.

**Place of modern medicine among the Chenchus :**

There is one Ayurvedic hospital in the village managed by the Central Government. The Chenchus do not have scientific knowledge about the biological functions of the body and diseases. So they do not consult

doctors except under special and severe circumstances. Almost all the Chenchus are favouring traditional treatment, because their concept of disease causation is more effectively influenced by the superstition. Among the Chenchus, for the success of folk medicine certain factors like illiteracy, food gathering economy, free-availability of medicinal plants and animal substances and low income are found to be responsible.

### Conclusion :

Folk medicine, used by the Chenchus of Ahobilam has a dual nature in that it includes knowledge about definite medical procedure and a belief in some magic or religious power. The study of folk medicine gives some idea about faith, belief and superstitious attitude of the Chenchus. The knowledge of traditional healing methods is a great aid in establishing rapport between doctor and patient. Learning the indigenous beliefs and practices relative to the preservation of health is the insight into the world-view of the people. Concepts of disease causation are part of a society's total world-view. Since folk medicine is a culturally suitable way of tackling diseases, it still functions within the context of the values, attitudes and beliefs of the people who comprise that society.

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### सारांश

**बीमारी और उपचार : आन्ध्र प्रदेश के एक जनजाति में प्रचलित लोक चिकित्सा के अभ्यास**

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अहोबिलम के पहाड़ी जनजाति में प्रचलित लोक चिकित्सा के अभ्यास, जहाँ पर जीव-जंतुओं और पेड़-पौधों का वाह्य है, उनके अपने अनुभवों, अंधविश्वासी विचारों तथा बीमारियों के कारणों को जानने का प्रयास किया गया। लेखकों ने परम्परागत चिकित्सा उपाय जादुई-धार्मिक अभ्यास जो कि देशी सांस्कृतिक उपज हैं को जानने की कोशिश की।