

## **Ethno-medicinal uses of different ailments among the Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia, Goalpara District, Assam**

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### **Abstract**

Ethno-medicine is the study of traditional treatments, medicines, and cures passed down through generations. Every group has its own unique traditional method of treating various illnesses. The Koch-Rajbongshis have their own traditional disease-curing procedure. One of Assam's caste groups is the Koch-Rajbongshis. Tripura and West Bengal are also home to them. This paper aims to investigate the ethno-medicinal practices among Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia, Goalpara district, Assam. Data was gathered using a variety of methodologies, including observation, case study, and interview.

**Key words:** Ethno-medicine, Koch-Rajbongshi, Agia, Tradition.

### **Introduction**

Ethno-medicine is a belief system that has an impact on disease and health. Ethno-medicine is concerned with cultural healing system and the cognitive aspects of sickness. Ethno-medicine, which is one of the most important branches of medical anthropology, has long been acknowledged as a vital topic of study. Medical anthropologists are interested in the intricate interface between individual and social perceptions of illness, as well as the physiological manifestations of diseases. Medical anthropology investigates human health problems and healing systems in their broader social and cultural contexts, and conducts both basic and applied research in community public health initiatives to improve therapeutic care, disease prevention, and control. Ethno-medicine principally tries to investigate various aspects of folk disease taxonomy, magico-religious and other remedies, indigenous preventive measures, ethno-medicine men's roles, and the relationship between medical phenomena and socio-cultural environments. Natural ethno-medicine, one of the two divisions of ethno-medicine, reflects one of man's first reactions to his natural environment, and involves the search for solutions for his ills in natural herbs, plants, minerals, and animal compounds. The other is magico-religious ethno-medicine, often known as 'Occult' ethno-medicine, which tries to cure ailments using charms, holy words, and holy activities.

According to a survey of ethno-medicine literature, a significant amount of research has been conducted in many parts of India, including Assam, among numerous communities. In 1925,

Bodding began research on tribal medicine in India. Following that, researchers such as Marriot (1955), Lewis (1958), Opler (1963), Hasan (1967), Leslie (1968), Medhi (1994), Sarma (1995), and others studied ethno-medicine among India's many tribal and caste populations.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to investigate people's perceptions of sickness and ailments, as well as the applications of medicinal plants, materials, prescriptions, and pharmacology in the manufacture of therapeutic agents for the prevention and treatment of ailment and disease in the studied area.

The following factors have been considered in order to attain the major objectives:

- (i) Treatment in accordance with traditional medical methods in terms of disease, aetiology, and treatment.
- (ii) Herbal medicine and household remedies.

### **The People**

The Koch-Rajbongshi community (also known as Kochrajbongshi and Koch) is an indigenous people that live in sections of modern-day Nepal, as well as Assam, West Bengal, and Meghalaya in India, and Kishanganj in Bihar. Assam's most populous caste group is Koch-Rajbongshi. They are dispersed across Assam's Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, and Kamrup districts. Koch-Rajbongshi had a total population of 18,83,917 people according to the 1961 census.

### **Methodology**

The data for this study was gathered in Agia, Assam's Goalpara district. Data was gathered through interviews, observations, and case studies. The data on the local names of the plants, their usage in various diseases, and methods of medicine preparation, among other things, is gathered using the interview approach.

### **Causative factors of diseases in the Koch-Rajbongshi perception**

The employment of a folk medicine man or a medical practitioner is motivated by beliefs about the aetiology of illness. The oldest surviving records reveal a well-developed mythology that explains disease and suggests possible treatments. Because health is of universal interest and primary concern, illiterate people have devised and exploited their own way of life to overcome the problem of disease fatality in the absence of contemporary science.

Diseases and illnesses can be caused by biological, psychological, or spiritual factors. When there is a lack of healthy and sufficient nutrition, disease develops in the body. Any portion (organ) of the body that malfunctions might cause sickness or affliction in the human body. The stomach, for example, is an important body organ that aids digestion. When the stomach is unable to digest food owing to overeating or a lack of enzymes required for digestion, many maladies such as stomach ache, gas, and other symptoms might arise, making the person very sick. Human psychology is equally crucial in determining the causes of diseases. Certain diseases or maladies, such as jaundice and cholera, can be caused by microorganisms entering the body through water or air. Other illness manifestations include infections from cuts or bruising. Even if some individuals are naive about

things like infection, they can tell the difference between purported supernaturally induced diseases and diseases that occur naturally.

Although the Koch-Rajbongshis believe that diseases are caused by natural or biological elements, they also believe that supernatural or psychological factors can cause sickness. The supernatural is used to investigate the aetiology of certain ailments. The Koch-Rajbongshis believe that certain ailments are caused by supernatural beings' malevolent deeds. They also give prayers to help people overcome crises brought on by illness or disease.

### **Diagnosis of disease and ailments**

The diagnosis of the aetiology of illness is an essential step in understanding how illness and how it is defined and treated by the Koch-Rajbongshis of the study areas have been analysed in light of social and cultural development. Furthermore, the implications of the observations that disease is interpreted as a normal; category are thoroughly investigated. The Koch-Rajbongshis have used a variety of traditional approaches to identify the aetiology of various ailments.

For the identification and diagnosis of disease and illness in their society, the Koch-Rajbongshi folk medicine men use a variety of various indigenous methods. The patient's eyes and tongue are evaluated in any case of disease. If the patient refuses to open his or her eyes properly, it is said to be a serious situation.

One of the most essential criteria for diagnosing disease and illness among the Koch-Rajbongshis is divination. It is a magical technique aimed at gaining beneficial information from a supernatural being. Spirits are sometimes blamed for causing problems and misfortunes. When a person is plagued by problems such as illness for an extended period of time, his or her family turns to a deity for help. Mantras (spells), mantric procedures, and other anciently constructed prayers are precious inviolable treasures of mankind that emanate from the depths of human hearts or brains. The words of mantras or incantations, according to Koch-Rajbongshi tradition, are spiritual words through which the invisible spirit of the soul abiding in flesh communicates directly with the intelligible invisible spirits of nature or with supernatural powers whose residence is not with the body. Sound characteristics and basic attributes are used to compose incantations.

When a Koch-Rajbongshi medicine man is asked to determine what bad spirit is bothering a sick person, he uses a sort of divination. All of the necessary incantations were passed down from generation to generation. The study area's well-known diviners use various forms of divination for both diagnosis and treatment of various diseases and afflictions, particularly those believed to be caused by supernatural influences.

Living in a pluralistic medical environment, the Koch-Rajbongshis use both indigenous or traditional and modern medical practitioners. Only a modern medical practitioner can establish the presence of certain disorders such as High Blood Pressure and Low Blood Pressure. Some symptoms, such as high fever, vomiting, and headache, are seen in a variety of diseases and illnesses. The Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia, District Goalpara, have both indigenous or traditional and modern medically oriented perceptions about various diseases and illnesses. The table below lists the various approaches for diagnosing disease and illness;

**Table 1: Different Method of Diagnosis of Disease and Ailments**

Sl. No.	Name of the Diseases	Symptoms of the Diseases		How it is Confirmed	
		Local Perception	Medical Perception	Indigenous Method	Modern Method
I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1.	Acidity	a. Severe stomach pain b. Suffer from indigestion c. Constipation	a. Abdominal pain (in relation to eating) b. Vomiting c. Indigestion	a. Tongue is examined b. By questioning the patient c. If the patient is found to be suffering from the given symptom	a. In severe cases X-Ray is taken to confirm chronic ulcer
2.	Bone Fracture	a. Extreme pain b. Swelling c. Inability to move the swollen part	a. Extreme pain b. Swelling c. Inability to move the swollen part	a. The area is examined by the naked eye and the presence of the symptoms confirm it as bone fracture. b. Touches the affected area and determines the point of fracture.	a. Examined thoroughly by the naked eye. b. X- Ray is taken.

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3.	Cough	<p>In Adults</p> <p>a. Chest Congestion</p> <p>b. Irritation in the throat</p> <p>c. Chest pain, throat pain</p> <p>d. Vomiting sometimes</p> <p>In babies</p> <p>a. Cough with vomiting</p> <p>b. Cries due to pain in chest</p> <p>c. Pain in abdomen</p>	<p>a. Dry cough</p> <p>b. Cough with expectorant (Sputum)</p> <p>c. Fever</p> <p>d. Throat pain and chest pain</p> <p>a. Cough with vomiting</p> <p>b. Deep breathing</p> <p>c. Nasal congestion</p> <p>d. Excessive crying with fever</p>	<p>a. Pulse is checked</p> <p>b. Tongue and eyes examined</p> <p>c. Breathing (chest) is examined.</p> <p>d. Body temperature is taken</p>	<p>a. Tongue and eyes are examined</p> <p>b. Pulse is examined</p> <p>c. Body temperature is examined by touching the forehead.</p>
4.	Heart Attack	<p>a. Difficulty in breathing</p> <p>b. Chest pain</p>	<p>a. Heart burn</p> <p>b. Chest pain</p>	<p>a. Eyes and pulse is examined</p> <p>b. Under the mantric process name of the patient is uttered with spiritual spells and the disease is observed</p>	<p>a. By checking the blood pressure in the sphygno-manometer</p> <p>b. ECG is taken</p>

<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p>Jaundice</p>	<p>Three types (Haldia, Matia and Kola)</p> <p>a. Eyes become yellow</p> <p>b. Stomach- ache</p> <p>c. Person become yellowish</p>	<p>a. Eye colour become yellowish</p> <p>b. Stomach- ache</p> <p>c. The person become pale</p>	<p>a. Urine is examined by naked eye</p> <p>b. Eye is examined</p> <p>c. Tongue is examined</p>	<p>a. Blood test</p> <p>b. Urine test</p> <p>c. Sonography</p>
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p>Skin disease</p>	<p>a. Itching</p> <p>b. Can spread through contact</p>	<p>a. Varies with different types of skin disease</p> <p>b. Itching</p> <p>c. Certain eruptions in different parts of the body</p> <p>d. It is easily transferable in most cases</p>	<p>a. Examination of the affected area with the naked eye</p> <p>b. When the same type of itching is found to be present among many members of the same family</p>	<p>a. Blood test</p>

The information offered on the preceding pages reveals the Koch-Rajbongshis' perceptions of health and disease diagnosis, which are still based on traditional thinking. Health, in Koch-opinion, Rajbongshi's cannot be seen as a separate entity. Every facet of the Koch-Rajbongshi social structure

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is entwined with the concept of health and disease. Each of these factors has a significant impact on the Koch-Rajbongshi people's health and quality of life. As a result, Koch-Rajbongshi health perception relates to how they monitor their bodies, identify and understand their symptoms, and take remedial action as a result. Biological or natural forces produce diseases, while physiological or supernatural factors cause diseases, according to Koch-Rajbongshis.

**Therapeutical Use of Floral Parts:**

The Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia have a thorough understanding of the therapeutic properties of the flora in their surroundings. This is due to their long-term relationship with nature, which has given them valuable expertise.

Table 2 shows a list of medicinal plants known to the Koch-Rajbongshis in the study area: These plants' vernacular names, their English equivalents, species names, plant parts, and mode of application and quantity for the treatment of a certain disease were all discovered.

**Table 2: Ethno-medicinal use of plants by the Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia**

Sl. No	Name of Plant			Plant Part Used	Therapeutic Used
	English Name	Koch-Rajbongshi Name	Botanical Name		
I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1.	Banana	‘Kol’	Musa paradisiaca	Fruit	Fruit is eaten to relief dysentery
2.	Garlic	‘Nohoru’	Allium sativum	Fruit	Paste is massaged to the area to relief in insect bite.
3.	Ginger	‘Ada’	Gingiber officinale	Tuber	Tuber is eaten to cure cough and cold.
4.	Indian gooseberry	‘Amlokhi’	Phyllanthus embilica	Fruit	The powder of the fruit is eaten to relief constipation.
5.	Lemon	‘Lebu’	Citrus meica-var	Leaves	Leaves are eaten to stop vomiting.
6.	Mustard	‘Sariso’	Brassica juncea	Seed	Seed paste is massaged on chest to relief heart

					pain.
7.	Neem	‘Neem’	Media azadirachta	Leaves	Paste of leaves is put on the infected area to cure skin disease.
8.	Papaya	‘Amita’ ‘Pepe’	or Carica papyra	Fruit	The fruit is eaten to cure gastric and stomach ulcer.
9.	Sweet basil	‘Tuloshi’	Ocimum sanctum	Leaves	Leaves of sweet basil is eaten to relief cough and cold.
10.	Wood apple	‘Bel’	Aegele marmelos	Fruit	Baked unripe fruit is eaten to cure dysentery.

### Results and discussion

According to the findings of this study, the Koch-Rajbongshi people rely heavily on ethno-medical traditions as well as the modern medical system. The Koch-Rajbongshi people employ a variety of herbs to treat a variety of ailments. The majority of individuals in rural areas rely on local care, despite the fact that they are also reliant on contemporary medicine. They prefer to go to neighbouring hospitals in extreme cases because they are getting more informed and understand the importance of contemporary medical facilities in curing severe ailments.

However, certain remedies utilised by the Koch-Rajbongshi people for the treatment of various diseases are included in table I, and table II contains a list of local names, English names, and botanical names, as well as their therapeutical uses.

### Conclusion

To alleviate their ailments, the Koch-Rajbongshi of Agia rely on both traditional and modern treatments. They seek the assistance of a village medicine man in the instance of a disease thought to be caused by a supernatural force. In such instances, everyone in the community seeks the assistance of a village medicine man. The educated segment of the villagers is likewise unable to reduce their reliance on local medicine men in such circumstances. Colds and coughs, small wounds and burns, diarrhea, sprains, vomiting, and other diseases are first treated at home with traditional medicine. However, in other diseases, such as malaria and typhoid, people seek medical assistance right away. Village medicine men are an important aspect of the Koch-Rajbongshis of Agia's 'health culture.' He gives herbal medication, amulets, and other amulets, as well as casting spells to cure some of the ailment. When a person suffers from evil eye, he or she will always seek the help of the 'ojha.'



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The Koch-Rajbongshi of Agia have their own ideas on health, disease, and treatment options. Some of these are passed down through their predecessors, while others are acquired through other channels such as education, the weekly market, health organizations, the media, and so on.

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